

# ENCOUNTERS IN THE SAVAGE UNDERDARK

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Expand your game with this collection of subterranean encounters and mini-adventures for the world's greatest roleplaying game

# ENCOUNTERS IN THE SAVAGE UNDERDARK

**Background:**

Nimgyu

**Cover Artist:**

Dante Ezio Cifaldi

**Internal Art:**

Matt DeMino, Liz Gist, Jean Lorber, Sadie Lowry, George Sutherland, Luiz Prado,  
Patrick E. Pullen, Ludovico Tellatin, Rick Hershey, Sinereous  
*Publisher's Choice Quality Stock Art © Rick Hershey / Fat Goblin Games*

**Cartography:**

CHGuise, Goose Prints, Peter Harris, Jean Lorber, Jeff C. Stevens,  
Dyson Logos, Tal Aviezer & Carolyn Fox

**Editor:**

Christopher Walz

**Produced By:**

Jeff C. Stevens

**Layouts:**

Jeff C. Stevens



[www.jeffstevensgames.com](http://www.jeffstevensgames.com)

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## ABOUT THIS SUPPLEMENT

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Welcome to *Encounters in the Savage Underdark* – a supplement containing encounters and mini-adventures for use in your Underdark or subterranean campaign, or when the party decides to explore that mysterious cave they just passed.

As with the other *Savage Encounters* supplements, I reached out to writers for encounter submissions. With these supplements, I want to give you a valuable resource for your gaming sessions, and I want to share the imagination, creativity, and the writing styles of various authors with you.

A huge **Thank You** goes out to all the writers, artists, cartographers, and everyone else who had a hand in making this product what it is.

Thanks for purchasing *Encounters in the Savage Underdark*. We hope you enjoy the encounters!

Now – go play D&D!

- Jeff C. Stevens

Questions or comments? Find me on Twitter: @jcorvinstevens or send me an email via my website [www.jeffstevensgames.com](http://www.jeffstevensgames.com)

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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Several Dungeon Masters Guild writers have created resources which I think you might find useful:

**AMARUNE'S ALMANAC: THE UNDERDARK:** gives an overview of Faerûn's "Realm Below"; and its flora, fauna, and some history.

**JOURNEY THROUGH THE CENTER OF THE UNDERDARK:** The product that inspired me both to start writing DMs Guild material, and to produce the *Savage Encounters* supplements. A must have!

**THE MINES OF CHULT:** A supplement which details the mines of Chult.

**STORM KING'S BARROWS: TOMBS AND CRYPTS OF THE NORTH:** Delve into abandoned chapels, beleaguered mines, haunted barrows and demon-infested crypts.

**JARLAXLE'S GUIDE TO TRAPS:** A collection of vicious traps, maddening hazards, terrifying hauntings, and general lethal nastiness intended to turn greedy dungeon delvers into puree.

**PUZZLES, RIDDLES, AND TRAPS SET 1:** This product is designed with no DCs or XP values purposely so that you can tweak the challenges to your specific needs for your game and campaign.

**TRINKETS OF THE UNDERDARK:** The Underdark is home to many cultures and the sheer volume of trinkets and curiosities to be found in the Underdark is massive. This supplement represents the merest fraction of what one can find while wandering the world below.



## USING THIS SUPPLEMENT

Although some encounters mention specific locations, with a little adjustment, each could be used in nearly every campaign and setting.

Text in these yellow boxes is to be read or summarized to players.

TEXT IN PURPLE BOXES REFERS TO COMBAT SCALING AND LOCATION FEATURES AND IS INTENDED ONLY FOR THE DM.

Text in these boxes is additional information for the DM, some of which may be shared with players.

Most of the creatures in these adventures are found in the 5<sup>th</sup> Edition *Monster Manual*. Page numbers have been included for easy reference but depending on the printing edition of your *Monster Manual*, they may not match.

This supplement uses creatures from:

*Out of the Abyss* (OotA)  
*Monster Manual* (MM)  
*Volo's Guide to Monsters* (VGtM)  
*Tomb of Annihilation* (ToA)  
*Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes* (MTof)

In addition, several new creatures have been created for this supplement. You can find these creature stat blocks at the end of the adventure in which they are mentioned.

Unless otherwise noted, all NPCs have the stats of a **commoner**.

## AVERAGE PARTY LEVEL

The **Average Party Level** (APL) can be used to calculate the appropriate challenge level for your party. To calculate the APL, add the total levels of all characters and divide the sum by the number of characters (rounding up for .5 or greater).

## SKILL CHECKS AND SAVING THROWS

Specific DCs are written for each of the encounters. You may wish to change these DCs based on the APL of the adventuring party. We suggest the below range:

APL	Check / Save DC
1 <sup>st</sup> thru 3 <sup>rd</sup>	11
4 <sup>th</sup> thru 6 <sup>th</sup>	13
7 <sup>th</sup> thru 9 <sup>th</sup>	16
10 <sup>th</sup> thru 12 <sup>th</sup>	19
13 <sup>th</sup> thru 15 <sup>th</sup>	22

In addition, if you feel a skill check or save is too low or too high, feel free to adjust the DC as you wish.

## MAPS

Unless otherwise noted, for all maps:  
1 square = 5 feet.

## YOU ARE EMPOWERED

As mentioned above, you do not have to run these encounters as written. You (as the DM) are empowered to make changes as you wish – adjusting the encounters as the game is played, if you like. You are part of the collaborative storytelling that is *Dungeons & Dragons* and you know best how to adjust the encounters so that your adventurers get the most out of the session and story.



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## ANNAREI'S GARDEN

By Tony Petrecca

Artist: Matt DeMinio & Luiz Prado

Cartography: CHGuise

Estimated run-time: 2 to 3 Hours

*Annarei's Garden* is a demiplane that wanders the Underdark seeking refugees and misfits. An Underdark settlement with a dark twist, Annarei's Garden can provide a welcome respite for open-minded adventurers of any level who are journeying through the center of the Underdark. Those with violent intent, however, should be powerful indeed — or have a fool proof escape plan — to have any hope of surviving an assault on the enclave.

### DMS NOTE:

Annarei and the Garden first appeared, in noticeably less powerful forms, in the *Out of the Abyss* supplement *Journey Through the Center of the Underdark*. Here, we explore what Annarei's Garden is like after the *Rage of Demons*.

### BACKGROUND

During the chaos of *The Rage of Demons*, the succubus Annarei established a colony of misfits amongst a gorgeous, crystal-infused fungal forest set within a large limestone gallery. The cavern, naturally lit by phosphorescent fungi, fire beetles, and glowing crystals, became known by its residents as Annarei's Garden, and attracted a menagerie of Underdark refugees. Unbeknownst to Annarei at the time, dark forces already infused the faerzress within the cavern, charging the crystals with wickedly chaotic energy. Furthermore, Annarei's pendant, *The Gift of Graz'zt*, brought with it the penetrating energy of The Dark Prince, while the power of Orcus crept into the ruins of the temple at the center of the cavern.

When a group of heroes drove the invading Demon Lords to destroy each other, chaotic forces surged throughout the Underdark and

into Annarei's pendant. From there, the surge flowed into and through the crystals of the garden, and the cavern broke loose from reality, with Annarei at its helm.

Tethers of reality remain, anchoring this demiplane to the Underdark... for now.

### THE GARDEN IS A DEMIPLANE

When the Demon Lords were banished, abyssal energy surged throughout the Underdark. The crystals within Annarei's Garden acted as foci for her pendant, *The Gift of Graz'zt*, and the explosive power of the Dark Prince tore the cavern and a 100-foot-thick layer of surrounding crystal-infused granite from the Material Plane, giving control of it to Annarei. Now a demiplane that serves as Annarei's native plane of existence, The Garden is tethered to the Material by its Welcoming Tunnel, its front door anchored to the Underdark.

Annarei, who is permanently attuned to the cavern, can move the Welcoming Tunnel's entrance from one Underdark point to another. To do so, she must sit atop her mushroom home and meditate. After one minute of concentration, the Welcoming Tunnel's current connection to the Underdark closes, and then reopens one minute later at a new location within the Underdark. This new location must be a cavern or tunnel wall of sufficient size to bear a 10-foot round hole but can otherwise be wherever Annarei chooses. If Annarei does not choose a suitable location within one minute, it reopens in its previous location.

In addition to the ability to move the Garden's entrance, Annarei can scry at will on any location within the Garden, and on any creature, regardless of location, who is attuned to one of *Annarei's Gifts*. Further, Annarei can cast *banishment* at will, expelling unwanted creatures from her garden. Note that for all inter planar purposes Annarei is now a native of the demiplane Annarei's Garden.



Annarei looks forward to a time when the Welcoming Tunnel permanently breaks its ties to the Underdark.

### **FAERZRESS**

Named by the drow, faerzress is a strange magical energy that can be found in pockets small and large throughout the Underdark. During the Rage of Demons, the faerzress was tainted by the chaotic energies of the demon lords. The faerzress that infused parts of Annarei's Garden was consumed by the chaotic forces that broke the Garden loose from reality.

For more information on faerzress, see *Out of the Abyss*.

### **DEATH AND THE CAPTURE OF SOULS IN THE GARDEN**

Any creature who dies within Annarei's Garden, must make a successful **DC 20 Charisma saving throw** or have their soul captured by the crystalline structures surrounding the garden. These souls become crystal wraiths (see below) who serve Annarei while fueling the growing power of the demiplane. When 666 souls have been captured, the plane's anchor to the Underdark will be severed. Annarei believes that when that happens, her Garden will be free to travel the multiverse, and her loyal followers celebrate that eventuality. How close she might be to that goal, and whether the end result is freedom or descent into the Abyss, remains a mystery for you to decide.

Souls can be rescued from this fate with the proper casting of *raise dead*, *reincarnate*, *resurrection*, *revivify* or *wish*. It should be noted, however, that longtime residents of the Garden are willing participants, eager to join Annarei in an eternity of pleasure seeking throughout the multiverse.

So why doesn't Annarei have her followers reap souls for her, moving from point to point in the Underdark and taking unwilling sacrifices wherever they might be found? Because Annarei refuses murder to advance her goals.

She is patient and quite comfortable using kindness and pleasure to gather willing participants to her side. To rule a plane of existence, she supposes, is to become a goddess... and she would prefer to be a goddess of pleasure, not pain. Of course, she shows no remorse for guests of the Garden who kill each other, or invaders who die while residents defend themselves.

### **WHO IS ANNAREI?**

Despite being both a succubus and a disciple of Graz'zt, Annarei is a genuinely kind matron to her residents and guests. A gregarious free spirit, she enjoys the company of others as much as she enjoys her wine, pipe weed, and mushrooms. Adored by her followers, the residents of the garden call her "Princess."

Though she's grown quite powerful since her attunement to the Garden, she uses that power sparingly. Graz'zt's explosive departure from the Material Plane gave Annarei the greater gift, her own plane of existence, which she rules in a laissez faire manner. People are free to do as they will within her garden, so long as they do no harm to any residents. Guests who do harm to the Garden or its residents face banishment from the demiplane or death and rebirth as a crystal wraith.

Her gorgeous, gargantuan mushroom home is her sanctuary. Residents respect her privacy and have rarely seen the inside of her home, while garden guests are never invited in.

### **THE RESIDENTS AND LIFE OF THE GARDEN**

At any given time Annarei's Garden is home to a wide array of willing souls all eager to partake of the plentiful food, drink, and bacchanalia.





While some long-time residents have created homes within the Garden, as detailed below, most are quite comfortable lounging about and lying their head wherever they might be when tired. With a thoroughly communal lifestyle, all the refreshments and pleasures of the Garden are shared freely amongst everyone.

At the moment, in addition to the NPCs detailed below, the guests include six goblins, five svirfneblin, eight orcs, four drow, three kuo-toa, and a more-or-less permanently passed out stone giant named Nivram. Many of these residents have happily accepted *Annarei's Gift* (see new magic item sidebar below). Of course,

you are free to add to or adjust that guest list as befits your campaign.

All the guests are free to come and go as they please, and are under no obligation nor coercion from Annarei, nor do any owe her a debt of any kind. Should they choose to die elsewhere, and not join Annarei in her future journeys, that is entirely up to them. All choose to stay and enjoy the slothful, intoxicating pleasures that abound within.

#### COMMERCE IN THE GARDEN

The storerooms beneath Area 4 have a significant assortment of goods that are shared freely within the Garden. Outsiders in need, however, must reasonably negotiate. Annarei





grants herself sole authority to discuss the buying and selling of goods the community relies upon. At your discretion, any manner of commonplace goods found in the *Players Handbook* might be available for sale at the listed price.

### GRESYL AND GRESYL WINE

Long ago, Annarei was bequeathed a simple recipe for creating a hallucinogenic intoxicant made from the distilled caps of otherwise poisonous Timmask mushrooms. The distillate, known as Gresyl, mixes well with wine or can be ingested directly. Though there's a nearly limitless supply of ingredients within the Garden, her recipe is fiercely guarded, thus the Gresyl supply to the outside world is tightly controlled. The Garden's most lucrative export, drow traders eagerly pay 10 gp per dose of Gresyl, and 50 gp per bottle of Gresyl wine.

A single dose of pure Gresyl, or a single glass of Gresyl wine, is mildly intoxicating for 1d3 hours. Consuming more can produce severe impairment, hallucinations, and potential madness, though the effects are quite exhilarating, and euphoria accompanies overindulgence.

Creatures who consume more than one dose of Gresyl in an hour must succeed on a **DC 10 Constitution** saving throw or become poisoned. The DC increases by one for every dose beyond the second. Any creature that consumes doses equal to their Constitution score falls unconscious, passing into a hallucinogenic dream state that lasts for 2d8 hours. At the end of such a trip the creature must make a successful **DC 10 Wisdom** saving throw or suffer a long-term madness effect. See pages 258-260 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide* for madness details.

### PROMINENT NPCs IN THE GARDEN

While many folks come and go, a few have carved out a permanent home and are steadfast disciples of Annarei. Each of the following NPCs has eagerly received *Annarei's Gift* and will die defending their mistress.

#### GIGGLES THE OGRE

An aberration of her kind, Giggles the Ogre is an exceptionally intelligent and exceptionally large ogre driven mad by the presence of the demon lords. Once a member of the Society of Brilliance, Giggles went mad when she came face to face with Demogorgon and has been giggling uncontrollably since. Regular indulgence in Gresyl hasn't done her mind any favors, and she spends most of her time chalking cryptic phrases and formulae in various languages on the walls of her cavern, or curled up on her bed ranting to herself. A nervous tick, an effect of the long-term madness she has suffered, causes her to giggle uncontrollably, often at inappropriate times.



She is a gentle giant but will defend herself or any residents of the garden with an unmitigated fury should the need arise. Soon after her encounter with Demogorgon she found herself imprisoned in an illithid asylum. Before she could be subjected to ceremorphosis or worse, she broke her chains and used them as weapons in her escape. She has kept them on since.

Given her massive size, represent Giggles with the stats of a **hill giant** (CR 5; MM, p 155), increasing her intelligence to 18, and add Abyssal, Common, Draconic, Infernal, Orcish, Primordial and Umber Hulk to her known languages, and re-flavor her greatclub as chains with the same in game statistics.

### THE SOCIETY OF BRILLIANCE

The Society of Brilliance are a group of remarkably intelligent monsters who have allied to investigate and solve problems in the Underdark. During the Rage of Demons, the society posited that the Underdark's demonic incursion and the tainting of the faerzress might be related. They were correct.

For more information on the Society, see *Out of the Abyss*.

### SUORTIN

The **umber hulk** (CR 5; MM, p 292) Suortin is Annarei's most loyal follower. Utterly and irrevocably smitten with Annarei, Suortin strives to please Annarei with his cooking, and will defend her with his life. Suortin enjoys amusing willing residents with its confusion ability, an effect Annarei is particularly fond of. With the utterance of a quick "Suortin, hit me!" the umber hulk obliges, hitting the willing participant with its Confusing Gaze and stepping back to watch the antics, stepping in to restrain anyone who might hurt themselves or others while so confused.

A spectacular gourmet, Suortin routinely prepares feasts for all the Garden. Suortin is also the Garden's chief Gresyl cook, and regularly spikes cases of wine with doses of the intoxicant.

### ZEKS AND EDSSEL

Primary scouts for the Garden, Zeks and Edsel are a pair of rebellious **elite duergar crawler commandos** (see below) who have gone AWOL from the armies of Gracklstugh. Kind, welcoming, and gregarious, they are polar opposites of typical dour grey dwarves. Frequently garbed in bright, colorful clothing that can best be described as hippy, the pair had no place in proper duergar society, and were welcomed in the Garden.

Routinely dispatched to scout the real world when the Welcoming Tunnel moves, Zeks and Edsel are often the first residents of the Garden that outsiders encounter. Note that the effects of *Annarei's Gift* are written in to Zeks and Edsel's stat blocks below.



## ANNAREI'S GIFT

*Wonderous item, very rare (requires attunement)*

Cut from the crystals of Annarei's Garden, this beautiful pendant belies a sinister fate.

You gain a +1 bonus to AC and saving throws while wearing this pendant.

Once per day while wearing this pendant, you can use an action to summon a crystal wraith. The wraith appears in an unoccupied space you choose within 120 feet of you. It remains with no concentration required for up to one hour, until it drops to 0 hit points, or until it is dismissed by you.

While summoned, the wraith is friendly to you and your companions. It obeys any commands you give it, no matter what language you use. If you fail to command it, the wraith defends itself against attackers but takes no other actions.

If you die while wearing Annarei's Gift, your soul is captured by the crystal and sent to rest in Annarei's Garden, reforming into a crystal wraith. Only *raise dead*, *reincarnate*, *resurrection*, *revivify*, or *wish* can rescue your soul from this fate.

**Annarei's Curse** Once attuned, you may not remove the gift. A *remove curse* or *wish* spell removes this effect from you if you received the gift directly from Annarei. If you stole the gift, or created your own, only a *wish* spell is powerful enough to remove this curse.

**SPECIAL NOTE** – Any creature with an Intelligence of 6 or greater can create Annarei's Gift. All they must do is to chisel out a small sample of the crystals within Annarei's Garden, set it as a pendant, and attune it. Of course, doing so might create an eternal commitment to Annarei.



## FUNGI OF THE GARDEN

The Underdark is home to a spectacular array of fungal growths, and many specimens have been cultivated within Annarei's Garden. Natives of the Underdark are typically familiar with Underdark flora, but for surface dwellers, a successful **DC 15 Intelligence (Nature)** check is required to properly identify a given shroom. Below is an incomplete list of fungi farmed and cultivated within the Garden.

### BLUECAP

Also known as the "grain of the Underdark," the spores of a bluecap can be ground into a nutritious flour. Bread made from bluecap flour is known as bluebread and is quite tasty when properly baked by a skilled chef such as Suortin.

### RIPPLEBARK

Resembling rotting flesh, this massive shelf fungus isn't particularly appetizing to look at, but its surprisingly tasty. Roasted ripplebark is a delicious treat.

### TIMMASK

These dangerous 2-foot-tall toadstools feature orange and red stripes across their beige caps. Timmask spores are poisonous and uprooting or destroying a timmask creates a dangerous 15-foot radius cloud of spores. Creatures in the area must succeed on a **DC 14 Constitution** saving throw or be poisoned. While poisoned in this way, the creature is under the effect of a *confusion* spell with a duration of 1 minute. When the spell effect ends, the poisoned condition ends as well.

Cultivated for the distillation of the intoxicant Gresyl, timmasks are abundant in Annarei's Garden.

### TRILLIMAC

These 4 to 5-foot-tall mushrooms feature broad gray-green caps above a light gray stalk. The caps are prized for their use as leathery parchment, and the stalks are quite edible with minimal prep.



## ZURKHWOOD

The giants of the Underdark, these mushrooms typically grow to a height of 30 to 40 feet, with some specimens growing significantly larger. Their large spores are edible, but zurkhwood's are most prized as the Underdark's primary source of hardwood timber.

Further information on these fungi can be found in various sources, including B Simon Smith's expansive *Plants and Fungi of the Realms* and James Houlcroft's gorgeously illustrated pay-what-you-want *Fungi of the Underdark: An Illustrated Guide*, both available on the DMs Guild.

## THE WELCOME WAGON

As mentioned above, the Welcoming Tunnel can be anywhere in the Underdark. At a time and place of your choosing, have the tunnel appear in front of the party. When this happens, read or summarize the following:

Without a sound, a 10-foot round opening suddenly appears in the cavern walls, revealing a new Underdark passageway. The newly formed tunnel is dimly lit with its own purple glow, and tiny crystalline formations shimmer in its walls.

The silence of the tunnel is broken as a voice speaks from within.

"Come on Zeks, let's go check out where she parked us," the voice says with a twang.

Two silhouettes darken the tunnel beyond, as a pair of large mounted creatures crawl along the tunnel walls. Carrion crawlers with duergar riders approach, addressing the characters:

"Well lookie here Edsel, looks like we got company. Howdy folks! How ya'll doin'? Don't suppose any of ya have seen any fire beetles around here, have ya?"

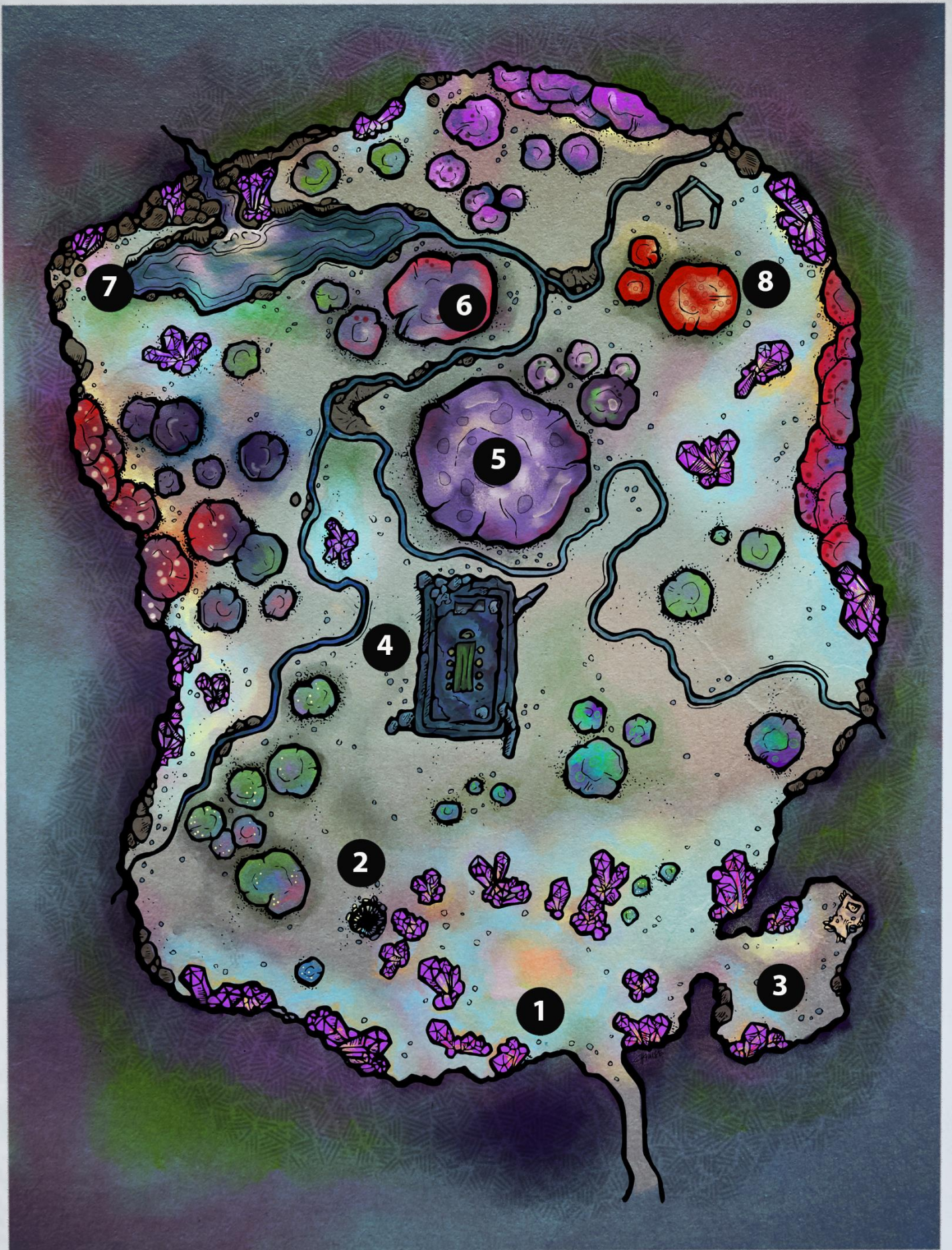
The two riders are Zeks and Edsel, **elite crawler commandos** (see below) and Annarei's best scouts. They each ride a trained **carrion crawler** (CR 2; MM, p 37) and are dispatched by Annarei to get the lay of the land. They are a friendly duo who happily engage in banter with the PCs if given the opportunity. Brightly dressed unlike typical duergar, Zeks wears a purple tie-dyed tunic over his armor, while Edsel clothes himself in a patterned serape over his. Both wear a pendant of unknown crystal around their necks.

If asked about the tunnel, they point out that it leads to Annarei's Garden, and that all are welcome.

"You're in luck, the party's about to begin. Go on in and enjoy the hospitality. Tell 'em Zeks and Edsel sent ya."

Should the party be aggressive toward the duergar, the pair and their mounts will turn invisible and retreat immediately to alert Annarei and the citizens that trouble is at the front door.





## GENERAL FEATURES OF THE DEMI-PLANE

**Terrain.** A foundation of crystal-encrusted limestone, stone, and dirt filled profusely with tended and wild gardens of beautiful fungal growth.

**Light.** Unless otherwise noted, Annarei's Garden is dimly lit by phosphorescent fungi, fire beetles, and glowing crystals, providing ever shifting, colorful light throughout. Likewise, collections of glowing crystals and caged fire beetles provide dim light within residences as well.

**Streams.** The streams within the Garden are roughly 10 feet wide and 1–3 feet deep. Easily fordable anywhere, there are ample spots where stones have been arranged to provide a dry crossing.

**Smells and Sounds.** Annarei's garden smells remarkably fresh and pleasant, with an ever-present hint of earthy wine and pipe smoke. The mouthwatering aroma of Suortin's meals permeates the cavern when the umber hulk cooks. The faint sound of a waterfall can be heard over the frequent sounds of party going reverie, and occasionally an ogre giggles.

## AREA 1 – THE GARDEN OF WELCOME

As the party enters Area 1, read or summarize the following:

Beyond the glittering tunnel is a wondrous cavern. Massive in size, the gallery is filled with glowing, multi-colored crystalline formations, phosphorescent fungi, and giant mushrooms. Fire beetles crawl upon the 150-foot-tall ceiling, the glow of their lights adding to that of the crystals and fungi to create an impressive light show.

Several formations of 15-foot-tall glowing crystals create a welcoming courtyard in the cavern's entry, while walling off much of the view beyond. A closer view of the crystalline formations reveals subtly fluctuating lighting and coloration emanating from within each.

Beyond the immediate crystalline walls can be seen a massive, 80-foot-tall purple mushroom, its cap every bit as wide as it is tall. Descending down from the ceiling above this mushroom is a dense formation of crystals that pulse with a greater intensity than others in the chamber.

Taking wing from the top of this mushroom is yet another surprising sight—a woman with magnificent leathery wings swoops down from on high and lands within the crystal court. Her wings tucked behind her, a long slender tail and two gleaming obsidian horns betray a pleasantly beautiful woman of timeless age. Kind, blue eyes greet beneath parted black locks that flow past lightly freckled cheeks. Garbed in a flowing black dress, a glorious obsidian pendant hangs from her neck.

Continued next page...



A massive beetle-like biped, with hulking carapace and confusing eyes, wearing a single crystal pendant, emerges from beyond the courtyard to stand by her side, and a purple worm emerges from a pit nearby to the west.

“I am Annarei. Welcome to my garden. Please, enjoy our hospitality, and join us for a meal.”

Annarei is warm and welcoming, offering her hospitality to all who treat her and her Garden residents with respect. After welcoming the characters, she bids them free to roam and enjoy her garden’s pleasures. She warns that they should not eat the timmask but points out that otherwise no harm should come within her garden to those who intend no ill will.

“Dinner will be ready soon. After you have settled, please join us atop the ruins for a marvelous feast!”

See Area 4 below for the evening’s exciting dinner activity.

#### WHAT IF MY PARTY GOES AGGRO?

So, you’ve got an underpowered party who takes one look at a succubus and gets aggressive, but you don’t want a TPK. No worries! Fight the fight, and have the defending residents of the Garden choose to knock the characters unconscious, drag them to the exit, and kick them to the curb. And remember, with paralyzing carrion crawlers, a confusing umber hulk, Annarei’s charms, *banishment*, and lair actions, there are ample non-lethal methods for the Garden to repel intruders.

Also note that lair actions do not require nor break concentration, and Annarei can scry anywhere in the Garden at will. Annarei needn’t be present to harass enemies in the Garden with lair actions.

## AREA 2 – PURPLE WORM LAIR

To the west of the Garden of Welcome is the lair of the **purple worm** (CR 15; MM, p 255) Ecnirp. Zeks and Edsel found the beast horribly wounded after a run in with several galeb duhr and rushed to its assistance. They fetched Annarei, who used healing potions and *Keoghtom’s ointment* to nurse it to health, and it followed them home.

Ecnirp has made itself a massive burrow in the 100-foot-thick crystal and granite crust of the demiplane, and the 30-foot-wide entrance to said burrow lies here. The worm’s tunnels twist in all directions and, somehow, occasionally pierce the edge of the demi-plane and scrape the Material.

Ecnirp is fiercely loyal to Annarei, Zeks, and Edsel, and would fight to the death defending them. Despite being a natural enemy of umber hulks, Suortin and Ecnirp get along quite well, and, on occasion, Ecnirp enjoys giving Suortin a ride.

## AREA 3 – GIGGLE’S LAIR

When it became clear that Giggles could use some semblance of privacy, Suortin gladly carved out this 20-foot-high cavern. The walls of the cavern are littered with the chalk scrawls of an insane genius. Eldritch symbols and unknown formulae in numerous languages fill the walls like graffiti. Should they be translated, they are naught but meaningless ramblings.

A large, unkempt bed is the only furnishing within the cavern.

#### TREASURE

Giggles is never quite far from her wine. A half-consumed case of Gresyl wine, holding six bottles worth 50 gp each, sets haphazardly at the foot of her bed.



## AREA 4 – THE RUINS

The center of the cavern features what was once a grand drow structure, an ancient ruin of chiseled black granite. Stairs on all four sides of the ruin ascend six feet to its rectangular black granite floor 40 feet wide and 70 feet long. Ruined obelisks carved in bas-relief sit at the four corners of the structure. The carvings depict a proud drow house at war with azer, salamanders, and fire elementals.

This ancient ruin has become the center of social life in the garden. Sitting atop the ruin is a zurkwood dinner table. At the head of the table is a grand zurkwood chair shaped like an inverted egg, while eight toad stool seats are arranged about the table.

### DINNER AND THE DANCE OF THE FALLEN

If the party has accepted Annarei’s dinner invitation, the feast is held here. The umber hulk Suortin is a master chef and serves a buffet style meal featuring roasted ripplebark, boiled fire beetles, blackened darklake bass, stir-fried mushrooms, and freshly baked bluebread. Intoxicating wine flows generously, and citizens of the garden join and depart the revelry as they see fit. Annarei sits at the head of the table, sipping her wine and enjoying small talk with her citizens and her guests, until she deems it the appropriate moment for a speech, and a spectacle.

When appropriate, read or summarize the following:

Annarei stands and clinks her fork to her wine glass, calling for silence. As the revelers calm, she raises her glass high and speaks:

“Welcome friends, old and new, and thank you for once again providing me with such a precious gift – the gift of friendships long lived! But, we cannot properly share this wonderful meal today without giving thanks to those who have fallen to provide our bounty, past, present, and future. Call them! Call them, my friends, to join us now as we raise our glasses in their honor!”

For just a moment all revelers fall silent, and the pendants upon their chests pulse. Suddenly, the air fills with shadowy swirls that flit to and fro. The shadows coalesce into a dozen or more beings, each appearing as an apparition dancing about the table. Around the massive cavern, dozens more flit about, seeming to emerge from the crystalline formations to join the macabre dance.

These apparitions are **crystal wraiths** (see below), summoned by the living members of the garden to join in the reverie. The wraiths will do no harm unless harm befalls any wraith or Garden resident. For an hour, the wraiths dance about as the Garden’s residents overindulge in Gresyl wine. And then, as suddenly as they appeared, they disappear, fading back into the crystals from which they came.

If asked, any resident or Annarei herself are open about what the wraiths are, and the existence they represent. All are thrilled at the prospect of someday breaking free from their tether to reality, to explore the multiverse with





their Princess Annarei at the helm.

### TREASURE

Beneath the ruin lies an ancient, formerly haunted four-chamber crypt that Annarei and her flock now use as storage. The entrance is a secret door at ground level on the northern face of the ruin. Frequently used, the secret door can be spotted with a successful **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception)** check. Inside, the tomb is packed with barrels of wine, kegs of ale, crates of dried goods and jerky, clothing, non-magical weapons and ammunition, and a myriad of other goods. A successful **DC 20 Intelligence (Investigation)** check reveals three cases of Gresyl wine, each containing 12 bottles worth 50 gp each, and a small crate whose lid is ajar. Within this crate are 12 *potions of superior healing*.

## AREA 5 – ANNAREI’S MUSHROOM HOME

Towering over the center of the cavern is Annarei’s mushroom home. A massive zurkwood mushroom 80 feet tall, with a mushroom cap 80 feet in diameter and 30 feet thick at the trunk, this glorious purple and grey fungus is truly a sight to behold.

The entrance to Annarei’s home is a door on the center stalk immediately beneath the mushroom cap, making flight almost a necessity for entrance. An intrepid adventurer bent on climbing the mushroom to gain access to her home must succeed on a **DC 20 Strength (Athletics)** check to scale the trunk of the mushroom. Annarei, who eagerly shares the garden’s bounty with citizens and guests alike, is fiercely private about her home, and always keeps the door locked. A successful **DC 20 Dexterity check using thieves’ tools** is required to pick the lock. Alternatively, the door can be forced with a successful **DC 20 Strength check**.

A flight of stairs leads up from the door to a large, open living room ideal for lounging about. Filled with plush sofas, overstuffed chairs and ottomans, several small tables, a wet bar, and

two large but mostly empty wine racks, the living room is clearly built for comfort. As Annarei never has company from this plane of existence in her abode, the places looks quite lived in, with empty wine bottles and used wine glasses often left strewn about.

A trap door in the 12-foot-tall ceiling of the living room leads to her plush, but often unkempt, bedchamber. Though the trap door can be closed and locked, requiring a successful **DC 20 Dexterity check with thieves’ tools** to open, Annarei tends to leave this door open. No stair or ladder ascends to the opening, leaving those who are flightless challenged to gain access.

Within the bedchamber is a massive, black, six post bed with an incredibly plush, pillow covered mattress dressed in sheets of purple silk and blankets of exotic furs. The six posts of the bedframe are carved to resemble fingers, and the entire bed, a shrine to the demon lord Graz’zt, appears to be an upturned six fingered hand cradling the mattress in its palm. Two beautiful black marble nightstands, worth 1,000 gp each, flank the bed, each adorned with a 1-foot-tall black sapphire statue of a six-fingered hand with nails filed to a sharp point. Each statue is worth 2,500 gp to the right collector.

### TREASURE

In addition to the nightstands and black sapphire statues, the many exotic furs upon the bed are worth 2,500 gp. Furthermore, A large secret compartment is hollowed out within the wrist like pedestal of the bed. Either a successful **DC 25 Wisdom (Perception)** or **Intelligence (Investigation)** check is required to notice the compartment’s door at the foot of the bed. Inside can be found 5,000 gp, 1,000 pp, a collection of precious jewelry worth 15,000 gp, a pair of *dimensional shackles*, two jars of *Keoghtum’s ointment*, an *immovable rod*, a *rope of entanglement*, a *ring of regeneration*, and four vials of *oil of slipperiness*.



## AREA 6 – SUORTIN’S PAD

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To the north of Annarei’s mushroom is the entrance to the **umber hulk** (CR 5; MM, p 292) Suortin’s home. Stocky and squat, this mushroom is 40-foot-tall with a 50-foot-diameter cap and a thick 30-foot-wide stalk.

The area surrounding Suortin’s home serves as the garden’s kitchen. Three fire pits have large roasting spits installed above them, with a fourth permanently dedicated to boiling timmask in a massive caldron for the distillation of Gresyl. Steel grills and massive stew pots sit nearby showing signs of regular use, and a case or two of wine are typically somewhere in the clutter, awaiting the added ingredient Gresyl. Smooth granite tables provide chopping surfaces, and the mushroom stalk’s exterior is riddled with niches Suortin has carved out to store pots, pans, cooking utensils, serving platters and the like.

A 10-foot round, south facing opening at the base of the stalk grants easy and unfettered access to Suortin’s sleeping chamber. This thirty-foot diameter cavity carved out by the umber hulk is a sparse affair. The beast has carved itself a large zurkhwood bed with a straw mattress, with two oversized chairs being the only other furniture within. Two bookshelves are filled with cookbooks, and a large wooden chest sits between the shelves.

### TREASURE

The chest is locked and is protected by a powerful gift from a former guest, a resetting *glyph of warding* etched under the lid of the chest. The lock can be picked with a successful **DC 20 Dexterity check using thieves’ tools**. However, any creature who isn’t Suortin that opens the chest triggers the glyph. Triggering the glyph sets off an *alarm* spell that alerts both Suortin and Annarei, and the creature opening the chest is targeted by *otto’s irresistible dance* (DC 17 spell save).

The chest contains Suortin’s most treasured possessions, an exotic spice collection worth 1,000 gp. The spices are kept in glass jars, thus smashing the chest open will ruin the collection, and undoubtedly incur Suortin’s wrath.

## AREA 7 – WATERFALL AND POND

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A stream flowing out of a fissure 80 feet off the floor of the cavern cascades down in a beautiful waterfall to provide the garden’s primary source of fresh water and humidity. The pool itself is 20 foot deep at its deepest depths, and is surprisingly well stocked with what seems to be an endless supply of fresh water game fish – bass, catfish, pike, salmon and the like somehow routinely find their way to this extra planar pond. Residents of the Garden can often be found fishing upon its banks, while Suortin is known to do the dishes near the mouth of the stream at the eastern edge of the pond.

Curious adventurers who attempt to climb the rocks to the top of the waterfall may do so with a successful **DC 15 Strength (Athletics)** check. They will discover that the stream appears to flow out of a solid wall of rock. No fissure nor crack can be found at the water’s source. Similarly, the streams flow out of the Garden through solid walls.

## AREA 8 – ZEKs AND EDSSEL’S PAD

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Zeks and Edsel, **elite duergar crawler commandos** (see below), reside in this red and brown giant zurkhwood mushroom. With Suortin’s help they have carved out a two-story townhome style structure in the stalk and cap of the 40-foot-high shroom.

A pleasant red zurkhwood door grants entrance to a furnished first floor sitting area, with a stair spiraling up the edge of the chamber to the bedroom above.

To the north of their home is an open-air pen where they tether eight trained **carriion crawlers** (CR 2; MM, p 37) that they use as mounts. The crawlers are well fed and well



cared for, understand and obey verbal commands from Zeks, Edsel, or Annarei, and are never aggressive toward other residents of the garden.

## CONCLUSION

The multiverse may be the limit to where Annarei's future lies. As for the characters, their future likely depends on their behavior within.

If they remained peaceful and respectful, they may have earned friends and allies whom they might call upon in a future time of need. Annarei has ways of knowing when her name is called and can steer her Garden to any place in the Underdark, after all. And if any character received *Annarei's Gift*, then they have a telepathic bond and she might come to the rescue in the Underdark when called.

If the characters misbehaved, if they stole valuables or turned violent, then hell truly hath no fury like a budding goddess scorned.

### CAN THE GARDEN BE DESTROYED?

As long as the Garden has willing souls contributing to its existence, the Garden itself shall continue to exist. However, if the characters are intent on doing so, destroying Annarei's Garden should involve purging it of all its captured souls and shattering every crystal, a challenging quest that is not in the purview of this adventure.

### HEY WAITAMINUTE TONY, WHERE'S THE ACTION?!?!

I know I know—my strong point as an author is typically action-packed tactical fights, and I've given you none in here. Well, Annarei's Garden is intended to be an interesting setting, or the lair of a powerful entity, but not necessarily a place for a fight. Besides, while only very powerful characters could survive an assault on the Garden itself, I've written this as a place suitable for adventurers of all levels to visit, which makes picking monsters intended for a

fight quite a challenge.

With that said, the possibility for armed conflict certainly exists, especially if actual enemies invade the Garden. Here's a few thoughts:

- An invading force enters the welcoming tunnel when most of the Garden's residents are passed out from excess drink. The characters must save the day. This force should be CR appropriate for your party. Some suggestions include duergar looking for their AWOL soldiers, drow intent on conquest, gnolls on a violent rampage, or my favorite: a mixed group of adventuring murder hobos. Use a level-appropriate mix of NPCs from the appendices of the *Monster Manual* and *Volo's Guide to Monsters* for the murder hobos.
- A level-appropriate group of xorn or similar elementals busting through an outer wall near the characters, having somehow been trapped within the crust of the Garden.
- A group of level-appropriate chuul or other water-based creatures get sucked into the waterfall from their own realm, and splash into the pond while the characters are nearby. They are angry, and no Garden residents are nearby to help the characters.
- The characters stumble upon an inquisitive arcanaloth while wandering the garden. Its mission is to gather as much information as possible of the phenomenon within the Garden without alerting Annarei. It attempts to interrogate the characters.

Do remember that Annarei prefers peace and hopes to make friends and recruit new residents. While she certainly appreciates any action taken to repel invaders, she's especially impressed if invaders are turned into friends.



## ANNAREI

Medium fiend (shapechanger), neutral evil

**Armor Class** 18 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 135 (18d8 + 54)

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

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)	20 (+5)

**Saving Throws** Dex +9, Con +8, Wis +8, Cha +10

**Skills** Deception +10, Insight +8, Perception +8, Persuasion +10, Stealth +9

**Damage Resistance** cold, fire, lightning, poison; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

**Senses** darkvision 120 ft., truesight 120 ft., (in the Garden only), passive Perception 18

**Languages** Abyssal, Common, Infernal, Undercommon, telepathy 60 ft. (unlimited range in the Garden)

**Challenge** 16 (15,000 XP)

**Innate Spellcasting.** Annarei's spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell attack +10, spell save DC 18). Annarei can innately cast the following spells, as if using 5th level spells slots, requiring no material components:

**At will:** *banishment*, *dispel magic*, *misty step*, *screaming* (limited to areas within the Garden or creatures attuned to Annarei's Gift), *tongues* (self only), *vicious mockery*

**3/day each:** *counter spell*, *cure wounds*, *hellish rebuke*, *hold person*, *mirror image*, *shield*, *witch bolt*

**1/day each:** *globe of invulnerability*, *greater restoration*, *time stop*

**Legendary Resistance (3/Day).** If Annarei fails a saving throw, she can choose to succeed instead.

**Rejuvenation.** If a single crystal exists within Annarei's Garden, Annarei cannot be destroyed. If Annarei is destroyed, she reforms in an unoccupied space within the Garden within 1d10 days, regaining all her hit points and becoming active again.

**Telepathic Bond.** Annarei ignores the range restriction on her telepathy when communicating with a creature she has charmed, or a creature attuned to an Annarei's Gift. The two don't even need to be on the same plane of existence.

**Shapechanger.** Annarei can use her action to polymorph into a Small or Medium humanoid, or back into its true form. Without wings, Annarei loses her flying speed. Other than her size and speed, her statistics are the same in each form. Any equipment she is wearing or carrying is transformed.

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** Annarei makes two attacks with her claws.

**Claw. Melee Weapon Attack:** +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 +3) slashing damage.

**Charm.** One humanoid Annarei can see within 30 feet of her must succeed on a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw or be magically charmed for 1 day. The charmed target obeys Annarei's verbal or telepathic commands. If the target suffers any harm or receives a suicidal command, it can repeat the saving throw, ending the effect on a success. Annarei can have up to three targets charmed at a time. If she charms a 4<sup>th</sup>, the effect on a previous target of her choice ends.

**Draining Kiss.** Annarei kisses a creature charmed by her or a willing creature. The target must make a DC 18 Constitution saving throw against this magic, taking 41 (6d10 + 8) psychic damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. The target's hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the damage taken. This reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0.

**Etherealness.** Annarei magically enters the Ethereal Plane from her Demi Plane or the Prime Material Plane, or vice versa.

**Gift of Graz'zt (1/Day).** Six summoned crystal wraiths appear in an unoccupied space within 60 feet of Annarei and act as an ally of Annarei for one hour, until they or Annarei dies, or until Annarei dismisses them as an action.

## LEGENDARY ACTIONS

Annarei can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Annarei regains spent legendary actions at the start of her turn.

**Innate Spellcasting.** Annarei casts her choice of available spell from her innate spellcasting list.

**Charm (Costs 2 Actions).** Annarei uses her Charm action.

## LAIR ACTIONS

On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), Annarei can take a lair action to cause one of the following magical effects; Annarei can't use the same effect two rounds in a row:

- The Garden shakes violently. Each creature on the ground in the Garden must make a DC 18



Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, the creature is knocked prone. Each creature on the ground that is concentrating must make a DC 18 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the creature loses concentration.

- Fungal spores burst in a 20-foot radius centered on any point in the Garden that Annarei chooses. Each creature in that area must make a DC 18 Constitution saving throw, taking 19 (3d8 + 5) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.
- Crystals emit a dizzying array of lighting effects in a 20-foot radius centered on any point in the Garden that Annarei chooses. Each creature in that area must make a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw or be Stunned for one minute. At the end of each of its turns, an affected target can make a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw. If it succeeds, this effect ends for that target.

### THE GREATER GIFT OF GRAZ'ZT

*Wonderous item, legendary (requires attunement)*

A beautiful onyx pendant gifted to Annarei by the Dark Prince himself, this item was altered by the eldritch forces that tore through it to create the demi-plane. Annarei never takes it off, and her stats above reflect its presence, but it is presented here in case a character foolishly steals it.

Once per day while wearing this pendant, you can use an action to summon 2d4 crystal wraiths. The wraiths appear in an unoccupied space you choose within 120 feet of you. They remain with no concentration required for up to one hour, until they drop to 0 hit points, or until dismissed by you.

While summoned, the wraiths are friendly to you and your companions. They obey any commands you give them, no matter what language you use. If you fail to command them, the wraiths defend themselves against attackers but take no other actions.

**The Curse of Graz'zt.** If you are not Annarei and you attune the Gift it becomes cursed. It cannot be removed by any means other than a *wish* or a cleric's Divine Intervention. Once per day, at midnight, the *Curse of Graz'zt* automatically summons 2d4 Crystal Wraiths, who are immediately hostile to the you. The wraiths remain for one hour, until they drop to 0 hit points, or until they have successfully slain you.



## ZEKS AND EDSSEL

### ELITE DUERGAR CRAWLER COMMANDO

Medium humanoid (dwarf), neutral

**Armor Class** 17 (Breastplate, Annarei's Gift)

**Hit Points** 39 (6d8 + 8)

**Speed** 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)

**Saving Throws** Str +4, Dex +6, Con +4, Int +3, Wis +4, Cha +6

**Skills** Animal Handling +6, Athletics +6, Perception +6, Stealth +5, Survival +6.

**Damage Immunity** paralysis

**Senses** darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 16

**Languages** Dwarvish, Common, Undercommon

**Challenge** 5 (1800 XP)

**Annarei's Gift (1/day).** A summoned crystal wraith appears in an unoccupied space within 60 feet of the duergar and acts as an ally of for one hour, until it the duergar dies, or until the duergar dismisses it as an action.

**Cavalry Training.** When the crawler commando hits a target with a melee attack while mounted on a carrion crawler, the crawler can make a melee attack against the same target as a reaction.

**Crawler Commando.** The duergar has advantage on Wisdom (Animal Handling) checks relating to carrion crawlers. Mounting carrion crawlers costs the commando 5 feet of movement, rather than half its speed. Special saddles and harnesses allow the duergar to guide the crawler without his hands, leaving his hands free for weapon and shield use. These harnesses keep the duergar mounted even if the crawler is upside down.

**Duergar Resilience.** The duergar has advantage on saving throws against poison, spells, and illusions, as well as to resist being charmed.

**Sunlight Sensitivity.** While in sunlight, the duergar has disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as on Wisdom (Perception) checks.

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The duergar makes two weapon attacks.

**Warhammer.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) bludgeoning damage or 12 (2d8 + 3) bludgeoning damage while enlarged.

**Javelin.** *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage or 9 (2d6 + 3) piercing damage while enlarged.

**Enlarge (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest).** For 1 minute, the Duergar and its mount magically increases in size, along with anything it is wearing or carrying. While enlarged, the duergar is Large, doubles its damage dice on Strength-based weapon attacks (included in the attacks), and makes Strength checks and Strength saving throws with advantage. If the duergar lacks the room to become large, it attains the maximum size possible in the space available.

**Invisibility (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest).** The duergar and its mount magically turn invisible until either attacks, casts a spell, or uses its Enlarge, or until its concentration is broken, up to 1 hour (as if concentrating on a spell). Any equipment the duergar wears or carries is invisible with it.

Annarei, Suortin, Zeks, Edsel, Giggles and the Garden first appeared, in noticeably less powerful forms, in *Journey Through the Center of the Underdark*.



## CRYSTAL WRAITH

Medium fiend, neutral evil

**Armor Class** 14

**Hit Points** 90 (12d8 + 36)

**Speed** 0 ft., fly 60 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
6 (-2)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)

**Damage Resistances** acid, cold, fire, lightning, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

**Damage Immunities** necrotic, poison

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

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

**Languages** Abyssal, Common, Infernal, Telepathy 60 ft.

**Challenge** 6 (2300 XP)

**Incorporeal Movement:** The wraith 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 wraith has disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

## ACTIONS

**Life Drain.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 30 (6d8 + 3) necrotic damage. The target must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or its hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the damage taken. This reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0.



## BREASTPLATE

By Jeff C. Stevens

Artist: George Sutherland

Estimated run-time: 15 minutes upwards

This encounter is designed for a party of any level and can occur randomly in any subterranean setting. It involves a magical breastplate infused with energy from the Far Realm: a realm beyond the known multiverse containing energy that warps and mutates life.

### BACKGROUND

Brianna Hammerfist, a dwarf cleric of Tymora, met with a horrible demise while traversing the Underdark with her adventuring comrades. Though her fellow adventurers fell prey to an aboleth many tunnels away, some may say they were better off than poor Brianna. The adventurers found a magical breastplate in a

mass of living vegetation several weeks ago; they all thought it to be a lucky find and gave the cleric the enhanced armor. Little did they know that the metal the item was fashioned from was infused with energy from the Far Realm, known to have adverse effects on the living.

It started slowly for Brianna, a wart here, a small sore there, and a little itch here. Eventually, these things grew into small appendages, unusable nubs, and gaping wounds. No healing magic could stave off these effects, and no one determined that the new armor was the cause. Poor Brianna, useless and too mutated to move, found herself rejected by the adventurers she had called family for nearly a year.

She died in the dark, alone.





## THE VEGETATION ATTACK

Mutated vegetation feeds off Brianna's remains. It began as a small algae, but mutated due to the Far Realm energy from Brianna's remains and the breastplate, which is now tangled within the mass of vines.

When the characters near the vegetation, read or summarize the following, adjusting as needed for where you place the encounter.

A mass of thick vines fills a corner of the tunnel. The glint of something metallic flashes from within the tangled mass.

Sensing a fresh food source, the vegetation doesn't move or attack until a creature comes within range.

As the party battles the vegetation (see *Scaling the Battle* below for statistics), Brianna's bones, now intermixed within the vines and mass, crack and break, with pieces and chunks flying about.

The breastplate is noticeable by any creature within 10 feet of the mass. It is clean and shiny and radiates enchantment magic if targeted by the *detect magic* spell. The mutating Far Realm energy is not detectable by any spell.

### SCALING THE BATTLE

In all cases, each creature's attack range is changed to 15 ft. reach.

**Levels 1-3:** The vegetation has the statistics of a mimic (CR 2; MM, p 220)

**Levels 4-6:** The vegetation has the statistics of a roper (CR 5; MM, p 261)

**Levels 7-8:** The vegetation mass is so large that it comprises two separate creatures: a mimic and a roper.

**Levels 9-10:** The vegetation mass is so large that it comprises two ropers, each with 130 hit points.

## THE REMAINS

Searching through the mass reveals several of Brianna's bones. A successful **DC 14 Wisdom (Medicine)** check reveals the bones to be abnormal, with a twist or bend, or too small for the body they were attached to.

If the party attempts to reassemble Brianna's skeleton, which requires a successful **DC 16 Wisdom (Medicine)** check, they see a dwarf skeleton with an extra arm protruding from her left hip, a left hand with seven fingers, a small leg growing from her right shoulder socket, and a second, smaller mouth forming along the right cheek.

## THE TREASURE

Though it takes a little work cutting vines away from the breastplate, the item is easily retrievable. In addition, a successful **DC 12 Wisdom (Perception)** check reveals more treasure in the vines: a holy symbol to Tymora and a small coin purse containing 40 gp and two small diamonds, each worth 50 gp.

### SCALING THE TREASURE

Feel free to make changes to the below suggestions.

**Levels 1-2:** breastplate with resistance to slashing damage

**Levels 3-4:** breastplate +1

**Levels 5-6:** breastplate +1 with resistance to slashing damage

**Levels 7-8:** breastplate +2

**Level 9-10:** breastplate +2 with resistance to fire damage

## THE BREASTPLATE

The Far Realm energy doesn't affect a healthy creature, but its strange effects manifest when the wearer is healed. When the wearer is injured, the energy mutates the healing, at first creating a small nub around the healing wound. The nub begins to grow over the course of hours or days, until finally becoming another appendage or orifice. These effects are irreversible while in the vicinity of the Far Realm energy (see below for ways to cure the effects), in this case, the breastplate.



## FAR REALM ENERGY EFFECTS

Whenever a creature wearing the breastplate, or a creature within 10 feet of the breastplate heals (rests, spends Hit Dice, is targeted by healing magic, and so forth) roll a d6. On a result of 1-5, the creature begins to mutate. On a result of 6, nothing happens this time.

## MUTATION SUGGESTIONS

A creature may have more than one mutation at a time. In all cases, these mutations begin as small nubs or warts and continue to grow over the course of 1d8 hours or 1d4 days, decided however you like.

The below table are only a few mutation suggestions. Feel free to come up with your own ideas. You have a better knowledge of what mutations will impact your table.

D8 RESULT	MUTATION
1	A second, smaller nose which might grant advantage to perception checks based on smell.
2	A toe with a toenail that grows an inch a day.
3	A second mouth that hangs open and drools profusely.
4	A lolling tongue hanging from somewhere on the body.
5	A smaller arm, perhaps growing from an elbow or thigh, that can be used to hold a simple item like a torch.
6	A long, useless leg that drags the ground.
7	Extra toes that make walking painful, especially if they are in a metal boot.
8	A finger that sporadically twitches.

## DEATH BY MUTATION

If the armor isn't removed and the mutations continue, a creature could die. Here's a mechanic if you'd like to use this option: While mutated, after each long rest the creature must succeed on a **DC 12 Constitution saving throw**. On a failed save, the creature loses one Hit Die. Once the creature loses all of its Hit Dice, it dies. If the armor is removed, the creature regains one lost Hit Die after completing a long rest, until all of the lost Hit Dice are recovered.

## REVERSING THE EFFECTS

Once the wearer removes the breastplate, the additional appendages and orifices begin to dissolve as the body's natural systems take over. This may incapacitate the creature for a period of time, leaving them bedridden for 1d4 + 1 days with body aches and fever. If a creature decides to forgo bedrest, they are considered to have 4 levels of exhaustion until the healing is complete, with one level of exhaustion being cured each day.

A creature recovering from the effects can benefit from the *greater restoration* spell once per day. Doing so removes 1 day of bedrest and 1 level of exhaustion.



## CAUSE & EFFECT

By Joshua Barbeau

Artist: Sinereous

Estimated run-time: 90 minutes upwards

*Cause & Effect* is a dynamic encounter that mixes combat, social, and puzzle elements. It is designed for characters of 6th level, but can easily be adjusted to accommodate higher or lower level parties. The run-time can vary greatly depending on how many times the sequence is repeated (see below), but it is designed to be played in a single session.

### BACKGROUND

In Faerûn, there are a handful of permanent portals through time, known as the *Time Gates*. Not much is known about these ancient artifacts, which predate even the coming of the dwarves. It is said that anyone who walks through one of these gates can step into the past, to a time of their choosing, but in truth few who live today know for sure. The only surviving knowledge of the gates is contained within ancient texts of Mystryl, the former god of magic, thrice dead, reborn as Mystra's current form.

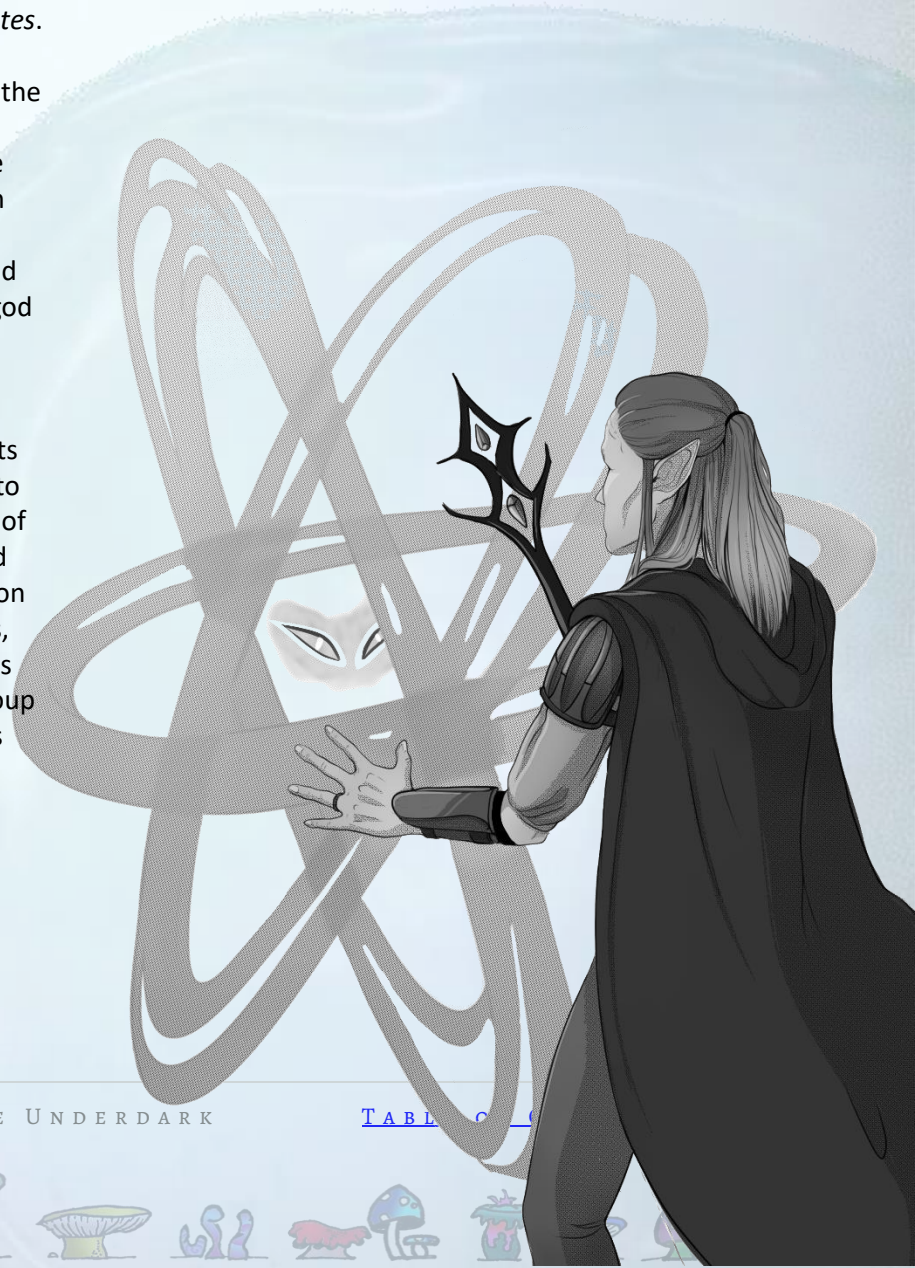
One such gate is located in the Underdark (its exact position can be wherever you need it to be). Nearly one thousand years ago a group of high elf mages went on an expedition to find the artifact, but became lost and disagreed on what path to pursue next. One of the mages, named Günther Liadon, was so convinced his way was right that he broke off from the group and ventured down a different path. He was never heard from again...

Until now.

### PLOT HOOK

This side-quest is designed to be dropped into your Underdark adventure anywhere you like as a random encounter. It doesn't require a plot hook; one is created by purview of the characters stumbling upon a lost elf in distress.

If you wish to provide outside motivation for getting involved, you can have an NPC in a nearby town mention that they saw a curious but dead elf lying in a tunnel while traveling. The NPC would have looted the corpse themselves, but they were too afraid that whatever killed the elf might still be nearby. The NPC can give the characters directions to where they saw the dead elf, so that finding their way is not difficult.



## A NOTE ON MYSTRYL

In the Forgotten Realms, Mystryl was the goddess of time and magic. When she died and was reborn as Mystra, goddess of magic, the portfolio of time was left behind. It is theorized by some scholars that Mystryl created the laws of time from the Weave itself and bound them to it, such that no god need hold sway over its dominion. The fact that her name isn't lost to time (as the names of some other dead gods have been) might stand as evidence of that.

If you aren't playing in the Forgotten Realms, any deity who governs time could be substituted for Mystryl in all the places she would be referenced here. If your campaign doesn't have a god of time, any deity with both the arcana and knowledge domains will do.

### ACCORDING TO LEGEND...

The ancient texts reference the location of three *Time Gates*. The first lies hidden upon the back of the mountains, where the ice and rocks touch the summer sky of Amaunator's belt. The second was said to be north of Novularond, shining bright upon Miskin's Peak at Highsummer. The third was atop Andrio's Peak near the Garden of Eldath. All of these locations are lost to the ravages of time, so the gates, thought to be indestructible, could turn up anywhere.

A fourth gate is spoken of in legend that was never mentioned in the ancient texts, and beyond that the exact number of gates are unknown. The one found in this adventure could be one of the four known gates, collapsed into the Underdark, or a new one never before discovered. That's up to you.

## RESETTING THE LOOP

Günther is trapped in a closed time loop because of an ancient curse. He is unaware of his predicament. To him it is still 404 D.R. (as opposed to whatever date you set your game in, likely 1,489 D.R. or later). No matter what he does, Günther is doomed to repeat the same four hours over and over again unless your players solve the puzzle of the loop.

When the characters become trapped by the same curse, they aren't unaware of the curse like Günther. They retain their memories from one loop to the next, and even their injuries and equipment show no signs of resetting to the state they were in four hours prior. They are not cursed in the way Günther is, they are merely stuck in his temporal bubble.

Each time you have to reset the loop, start the characters back at the moment they find Günther (see "Out of Time" below). To the characters there is no noticeable sensation of being displaced. They could be walking down a tunnel away from the action, and suddenly find they are right back in it. Going back in time is so disorienting that characters are unable to discern the moment it happens.

Resource management will likely be a problem for characters who end up repeating the loop too many times. Because each loop is no more than four hours, long rests are not an option. Even elves who only require four hours for a long rest don't have enough time because they are unable to pinpoint the exact moment a loop is reset. The players will have to rely on short rests and other means of recovery until they can break the curse.

### GENERAL FEATURES OF THE AREA

**Terrain.** The tunnels surrounding the *Time Gate* have all been warped by temporal magic. None of the traditional fungus from the Underdark grows here, and the walls, floors, and ceilings are all smooth as if blasted by sand for over a millenia. The rock is comprised of dark obsidian and the ceilings range in height from 20 to 30 feet.

**Light.** The caves are dark, illuminated only by the sources of light brought with those who enter them.

**Smells and Sounds.** The air is dry and utterly still. There is a faint smell of magnesium in the air.



## OUT OF TIME

When you are ready to have the party discover Günther, read or summarize:

The cave walls in this area are comprised of smooth obsidian. The illuminated fungus that has lit your path up to now recedes away. The tunnel ahead is dark save for an orange glow.

Round the bend you see an elven mage battling it out with something that at first you don't see, but after a moment the assailant, a swirling mass of green wind, appears. It has a pair of vaguely visible, menacing eyes. "Help," the elf cries. "This thing is trying to kill me!"

The victim is Günther Liadon (N high elf **mage** with History + 9 and Survival +6), an archaeologist who has been trapped down here for a thousand years, cursed to relive the same four hours over and over again for eternity. The creature attacking him is an angry **time elemental** (see below), that is drawn to Günther because of his displacement in time.

The elemental fights to the death or until Günther is slain. It prioritizes its attacks against Günther until others get in the way, causing it to attack them.

### ADJUSTING DIFFICULTY

For a weak party, reduce the time elemental's hit points to 86. For a strong party, use 2 time elementals. Do not reduce difficulty if NPCs are fighting alongside the characters.

### DEVELOPMENT

If the party defeats the elemental and saves Günther, he is grateful for them for the rescue. Günther rightly believes he would have been killed had they not intervened. Realizing the danger of these caves, he asks the party if they would accompany him on his quest to find a *Time Gate*, suggesting that the appearance of the time elemental must mean they are close. If altruism is not one of their strong suits, Günther can offer to pay the characters up to 5 pp each

for their trouble, with perhaps more later if they find the *Time Gate*.

If the party fails to rescue Günther from the elemental, reset the loop.

### ROLEPLAYING GÜNTHER

Günther is an overconfident high elf scholar with all of the usual trappings therein. He's sure of himself and more than just a little bit condescending, but not intentionally so or out of malice. He should strike the characters as odd being that he is a thousand years out of date with his patterns of speech, but perhaps not so odd that they might not mistake his unusual mannerisms for something other than just a cultural barrier. Feel free to have characters make a **DC 13 Wisdom (Insight)** check to pick up that something is not quite right about him (and maybe give high elf characters advantage on the check).

Günther would normally be suspicious about sharing his research but given his rescue, he is more trusting and answers questions honestly. He is a thoroughly educated (albeit outdated) archaeologist and a mage, and there is much knowledge he can impart to the players if you need him to (anything about Mystryl or the *Time Gates*, for starters, is easily within his repertoire). That said, he has no reason to suspect the characters aren't from his century, and likely doesn't bring up the current year (or rather, his interpretation of it) without prompting from the characters first.

Though Günther knows perhaps as much as anyone about Mystryl, the first goddess of magic, he has gaps in his knowledge where her replacements are concerned. He knows of Mystra, who replaced Mystryl following her sacrifice in -339 D.R., but not that Mystra herself has died twice since then, nor would he have knowledge of the Spellplague following her most recent death. These obvious gaps provide your players with clues to uncover the mystery in fewer resets.



## SEARCHING FOR THE GATE

Once the party is on board with helping Günther find his *Time Gate*, the next step is actually finding it. If the characters helped Günther find the gate in one of the previous loops, they can quickly lead him straight to it. If this is the first loop, or they haven't yet found the gate for one reason or another, they must help search for it.

Provided he has spell slots remaining, Günther judiciously casts *detect magic*, following the aura put off by the gate to its source. Characters wishing to help him track it down can make a **DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana) or Wisdom (Survival)** check, which they can do with advantage if they have access to the *detect magic* spell (they don't have to cast it, they just need to have access to it). A single success is necessary to find the gate before time runs out and the loop resets, but if two or more succeed allow it to be found quickly, resulting in enough time to both find the gate and take a short rest.

### SCHOOL OF CHRONOMANCY

Characters who cast *detect magic* themselves can sense the presence of strong magic permeating throughout the entire network of tunnels nearby. The aura is of a school they wouldn't likely recognize (chronomancy, a long forgotten school), but the sensation can be described as somewhere between conjuration and transmutation.

## GUARDIAN OF YESTERDAY

When the characters locate the *Time Gate* for the first time, read or summarize:

As you enter this chamber your senses are blasted with brilliant colorful light! On a raised dais the *Time Gate* stands more magnificent than even Günther imagined. Rainbow streams of energy flow across the portal within, shining outward and reflecting off the obsidian walls.

But you're not alone. In front of the gate stands a large, regal creature, with the head of a humanoid female, the body of a lion, and the wings of an eagle. It is adorned with ornate headdress that bears the markings of the goddess of magic.

The creature standing watch over the *Time Gate* is a **gynosphinx** (CR 11; MM, p 282) named Persemone. Mystryl directly appointed her as the gate's guardian, where she has been for over three thousand years.

The *Time Gate's* chamber acts as Persemone's lair, which grants her access to an assortment of time manipulation lair actions. A direct confrontation with the sphinx would likely end in failure for the party, but fortunately Persemone has no desire to kill. If your players decided to attack her, she'll simply reset the time loop forcing them to try again.

### ROLEPLAYING PERSEMONE

Persemone is friendly, coy, and supremely intelligent, but she has a soft spot for riddles and well-thought-out jokes which can make her giggle like a child. At first meeting them, she is excited at the prospect to make new friends. Despite her outward demeanor, Persemone is fiercely protective of her divine charge and allows no one to approach the gate. She is especially kind to Günther, who she treats almost like a favoured pet.



### RIDDLE ME THIS

Access to the *Time Gate* is strictly forbidden by the laws of Mystryl, but Persemone is allowed to let anyone through who can prove their worth by correctly answering a riddle.

Tell your players they can work together to solve the riddles, but they have to get one right for each character who wants to enter the gate. Furthermore, let your players make as many guesses as they like. After all, Persemone doesn't care how many times you answered incorrectly as long as you answered correctly at least once. That said, do keep track of how many attempts are made. After ten guesses, regardless of how many are right or wrong, their time is up and the loop resets. If they reached the gate quickly (see "Searching for the Gate"), but did not stop to take a short rest, let them make twenty guesses instead.

Persemone knows thousands of riddles and never repeats the same one twice. Even after resetting a loop and coming back, the riddles are different each time. You can find fantasy riddle generators online:

<https://www.fantasynamergenerators.com/riddle-generator.php>

### THE TRUTH ABOUT LOVE AND TIME TRAVEL

When the players first become aware of the time loop, it is likely they think the *Time Gate* is responsible. In fact, the gate has nothing to do with it. Persemone herself has kept Günther locked in a perpetual state of temporal dysplasia.

After two thousand years of nothing, the sphinx grew bored of her duties. Then, suddenly, along comes a charming young elf—the first companionship she has had in over a millenia. Finally, a chance for something fun, she thought. She parlayed with him and watched him struggle against her riddles with sublime amusement, but eventually he solved them all. Faced with the choice to go back to likely years of boredom, or break her one rule, she snapped

and placed Günther in a time loop where he has been ever since.

In her own weird way, Persemone is in love with Günther. And even though each time they meet he doesn't remember her, in her mind they have a thousand-year relationship between them. She isn't going to so easily give that up.

### DEVELOPMENT

Whether they overcome the riddles and pass through the gate or not, no amount of deviation from their course will break Persemone's hold over them. Eventually, the characters might realize it doesn't seem to matter what they do. If they don't figure it out on their own, after about four loops you can have them make a **DC 15 Wisdom (Insight)** check to tell them that Persemone is really attached to Günther, and might know more than she's letting on about their predicament. From there, any attempt to appeal to her that uses her love for Günther as an argument to why she shouldn't hold you captive is successful in getting her to come clean about the whole plot. What happens next is up to you.

### HAPPILY EVER-AFTER... OR NOT?

After coming clean, Persemone releases her hold on Günther and the characters, telling them they may all leave if they wish. Günther is conflicted, being that he has worked his whole life to get here and while he doesn't necessarily share Persemone's affections he does recognize he could learn much from her. He asks the characters what they think, and based on what they say he either stays with Persemone willingly, or leaves with them.

If the characters wish to use the *Time Gate*, Persemone asks them to what end. It is up to you if you want to let them use the gate or not, but make sure they understand that if they do it is a one-way trip. Regardless of the outcome, once they leave the characters are never able to find the *Time Gate* again.



## TIME ELEMENTAL

*Large elemental, neutral*

**Armor Class** 15

**Hit Points** 114 (12d10 + 48)

**Speed** 0 ft., fly 30 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	20 (+5)	18 (+4)	7 (-2)	10 (+0)	5 (-3)

**Skills** Stealth +8

**Damage Resistances** bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

**Damage Immunities** poison

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

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

**Languages** -

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

**Limited Invisibility.** The elemental is invisible to all creatures who are more than 30 feet away from it.

**Teleport.** The elemental teleports up to 30 feet to a space it can see

**Time Form.** The elemental can pass through solid objects as long as it doesn't end its turn in them. In addition, the elemental can enter a hostile creature's space and stop there. The first time it enters a creature's space on a turn, that creature takes 5 (1d10) radiant damage and ages 1d10 years.

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The elemental makes two touch attacks.

**Touch.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 5) radiant damage. If the target is a creature, it must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or suffer one level of exhaustion and be aged 2d10 years.

**Rewind.** The elemental regains 1d10 + 4 hit points and can take an additional reaction this round.

### REACTIONS

**Temporal Distortion Wave.** When the elemental is hit by a melee attack, it can use its reaction to unleash a wave of temporal feedback subjecting its attacker to a random magical effect (spell save DC 15) that lasts until the end of their next turn. Roll

1d10 and consult the below table. The attacker suffers all effects of the listed spell:

1-3: *haste*

4-6: *slow*

7-9: *hold person*

10: *time stop spell* (attacker only)





## CITY OF BLADES

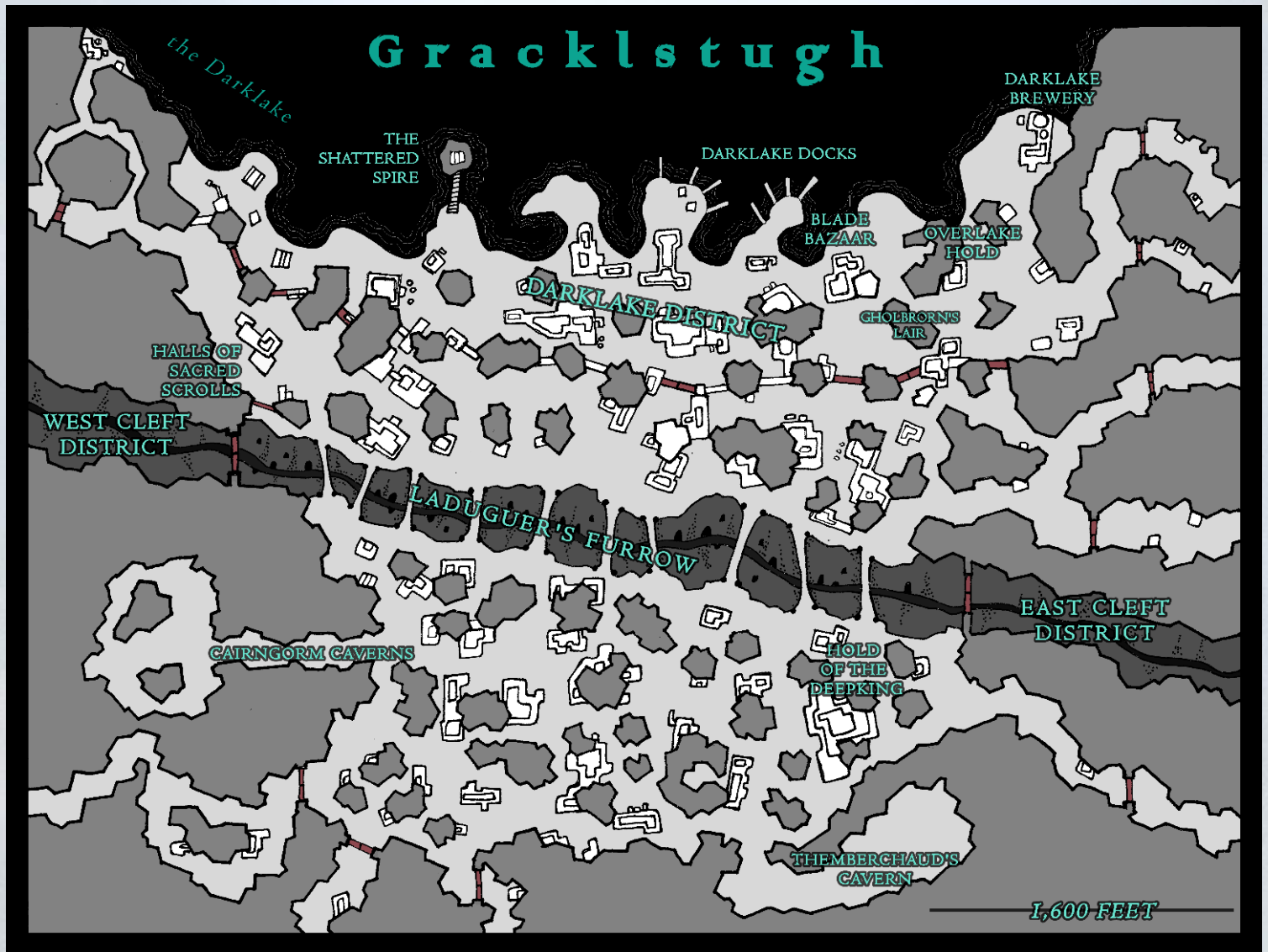
Designed by: *Hiten Dave*

Cartography: *Jean Lorber*

The following encounters take place in an Underdark city known as Gracklstugh (or “City of Blades”). This town features prominently in the Out of the Abyss campaign, however you do not need that adventure to run these encounters. The section below provides a brief overview of the city to help you set a suitable hook for the encounters and inspire further adventures. If you are running Out of the Abyss, you may find these encounters helpful in spicing up the characters’ visit to the City of Blades.

## GRACKLESTUGH OVERVIEW

Gracklstugh is famous for its blacksmithing and slave-driving, as well as the ruthlessly pragmatic work ethic and dour disposition of its inhabitants: the duergar (MM p 122). While not the friendliest of cities, it has the potential to be a safe haven from the rest of the Underdark. The myriad of trade caravans that go in and out of the city also provide the chance to re-stock lost supplies and potentially gain some allies for the remainder of an Underdark journey.



### REASONS THE PARTY IS IN GRACKLSTUGH:

**Enslaved Prisoners.** This can happen in several different ways. The simplest is a straight-forward encounter with duergar (either on the surface or in the Underdark), where the party loses and is knocked unconscious and taken captive. Alternatively, if the party faced a total-party-kill from another intelligent enemy, their unconscious bodies may have been traded to the duergar, who brought them to Gracklstugh.

**Diplomats or Traders.** The characters might be arriving in Gracklstugh as representatives of the Zhentarim—a well-known faction that frequently trades with the duergar. Alternatively, perhaps recent reports of demon lord sightings have put nearby settlements on high alert. The characters may receive a diplomatic mission from the deep gnomes of Blingdenstone, dwarves of Gauntlgrym, or drow of Menzoberranzan to join forces with Gracklstugh and repel the demonic incursion, lest the marauding demons destroy all their settlements.

**Seeking Refuge.** The characters might have found themselves in the Underdark for another reason and are now seeking a path back to the surface. They might have gone through a treacherous journey navigating the Underdark's tunnels or driving a canoe through the Darklake, hoping to find some assistance in Gracklstugh.

## ARRIVING IN GRACKLSTUGH

There are two primary methods to enter the City of Blades:

**Via the Darklake.** Characters who traversed the treacherous Darklake arrive at the city's docks. If the characters arrive here, refer to the Darklake Docks section below.

**Via City Gates.** If arriving by land, the characters may enter through one of the main gates built inside the numerous tunnels surrounding the city. The gates are manned at all times by two visible and  $1d4 + 3$  invisible duergar (CR 1; MM, p 122). Characters who arrive through the main gates must convince the guards that they are on a legitimate diplomatic or trade mission. Producing any sort of documentation (such as a letter of recommendation) or showcasing valuable trade

goods suffices. If the characters have neither but manage to come up with a convincing lie, have them make a **DC 20 Charisma (Deception)** check. On a failure, the guards attack and attempt to arrest the characters (see Overlake Hold below).

### GRACKLSTUGH: GENERAL FEATURES

**Light.** The hellish-red glow of Gracklstugh's forges illuminates most of the city in dim light.

**Noise.** The clang of metal on metal rings throughout the City of Blades. Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing are made with disadvantage.

**Buildings.** The duergar construct their buildings with utmost pragmatism, not wanting to waste any precious raw material just for vanity. Most buildings are made from stone and are  $1d4 \times 10$  feet high. A typical building has AC 18 and 100 hp per 5-foot square, with a damage threshold of 10 and immunity to poison and psychic damage.

## LOCATIONS IN GRACKLSTUGH

This section contains essential information for each location marked on the map. Knowing some of these details might help you run the encounters that follow more effectively, or it can serve as a template for further adventuring. If you are running *Out of the Abyss*, you might find this section useful as concise DM notes for chapter 4. For a more detailed overview, see chapter 4 of *Out of the Abyss*.

### THE DARKLAKE

The Darklake is a large, subterranean body of water that flows through many tunnels, canals, and caverns, extending over a hundred miles. It can be used for expeditious travel between the eastern and western parts of the Underdark. The cavern that houses Gracklstugh is located on its southwestern shore. See chapter 3 of *Out of the Abyss* for more details on the Darklake.

### DARKLAKE DISTRICT

This region is the hub of commercial activity in Gracklstugh, and the most populated. Among the duergar guards and merchants are traders



and slaves of various ethnicities: derro, drow, surface dwarves, goblinoids, orcs, svirfneblin, and so on.

The wide roads accommodate merchant caravans, and the air is thick with acrid smog. Below are some of the most prominent locations in the Darklake District.

### DARKLAKE BREWERY

This decrepit-looking building is where the duergar brew alcohol; more for commerce than pleasure. The most prominent export is a beverage called Darklake Stout, which is made from the petrified stems of Underdark mushrooms. Non-duergar are not welcome at the Darklake Brewery.

### DARKLAKE DOCKS

This is the most likely point of arrival for visitors, if they travelled by boat over the Darklake (a dangerous journey in and of itself, but quicker than navigating through the Underdark's tunnels). Visitor boats are docked at the easternmost inlet, close to *Ghohlbron's Lair*.

Multiple invisible **duergar** are stationed here to monitor incoming boats. When outsiders arrive, four duergar turn visible and approach to ask them their business in the city. If combat breaks out, 1d4 additional duergar join the fight each round as necessary, trying to subdue and arrest the insubordinates.

### OVERLAKE HOLD

This massive stalagmite doubles as both a center of government and a temple of Laduguer, the duergar god of magic and slavery. It also contains numerous cells to hold prisoners, before they are either executed or forced into slavery.

### THE SHATTERED SPIRE

This tavern is built from the stalks of fungi. It is connected to the mainland by a bridge woven out of rothé wool. The tavern welcomes

outsiders who want to enjoy a drink and interact with each other.

### GHOHLBRON'S LAIR

This inn is the only establishment where non-duergar are permitted to stay while not trading in the Blade Bazaar or lounging in the Shattered Spire. The rooms here are far from comfortable, as the duergar don't want outsiders making themselves too comfortable and lingering.

### LADUGUER'S FURROW

This 200-foot-deep, 500-foot-wide rift along the middle of the city is the remains of an earthquake that occurred long ago. Most of Gracklstugh's residential buildings are built along the top parts of either side of the chasm. This zone of the city and the areas south of it are beyond the Darklake District. As such, non-duergar are generally unwelcome here.

The rift extends beyond the cavern that houses the city, stretching into the walls that surround it. As a result, large, guarded gates have been built on either end to guard against intruders and threats coming from adjoining tunnels (such as tunneling derro or burrowing umber hulks, bulettes, and purple worms).

### WEST CLEFT AND EAST CLEFT DISTRICTS

These areas are where the derro of Gracklstugh reside. The West Cleft District has been a derro settlement for many years, while East Cleft was only more recently settled. Both are ramshackle and haphazardly arranged.

A treaty between the duergar Deepking and the derro Council of Savants forbids all duergar from entering this area.

### HALL OF SACRED SPELLS

This stalagmite has a central chamber that contains a temple of Diirinka, the derro god of magic and cruelty. Ordinary derro can only go as far as the temple, which can be accessed through smaller tunnels in the West Cleft District. Hidden in other parts of the structure



are luxurious quarters where the derro savants Council of Savants reside.

A treaty between the duergar Deepking and the Council of Savants forbids all duergar from entering this building, and ordinary derro have no means of accessing the savants' magically-warded quarters, even if they tried. Only teleportation magic, such as a *dimension door* spell, allows access into the quarters.

### THEMBERCHAUD'S LAIR

This structure contains the hold of the Deepking, the monarch of Gracklstugh. The current Deepking is Horgar Steelshadow V.

### CAIRNGORM CAVERN

This cavern is home to a tribe of stone giants known as Clan Cairngorm, who are bound by an ancestral oath that requires them to protect the duergar Deepking. They live in relative isolation, and only emerge if they have to help the city fight off a threat.

### THEMBERCHAUD'S LAIR

This large cavern is the lair of Themberchaud, an adult red dragon who keeps Gracklstugh's forges alight (thus earning him the nickname "Wyrmsmith").

A faction of duergar known as the Keepers of the Flame are assigned to keep Themberchaud satiated, but also to ensure that he is swiftly dispatched and replaced with a newborn wyrmling before he grows too powerful.



## CITY OF BLADES ENCOUNTER: THE DERRO DEVOURER

By Hiten Dave

This encounter is designed for four to six characters between levels 4 and 6 and features a new monster called a **cesspit ooze** (see Creatures and NPCs below). The default location presented here is the duergar city of Gracklstugh. However, the encounter can easily be adapted to any major city of your choice. Perhaps less spoken about is how a certain segment of the population, the derro, have been pushed to the fringes of the city and made to live in relative squalor.

Before running this encounter, consider reviewing the “Duergar” entry in the *Monster Manual* (MM, p 122), and the “Derro” entry in *Mordenkainen’s Tome of Foes* (MToF, p 158) to get a good sense of their outlook and lifestyle. Stat blocks for monsters not available in the *Monster Manual* are provided in the Creatures and NPCs section below.

### BACKGROUND

The derro are a shunned part of Gracklstugh’s population, dismissed as too volatile and mercurial to function in duergar society. As a result, they have been allotted their own land on the fringes of the city, where most of them live in squalor. Some derro are fortunate to be blessed with spellcasting powers and are the de facto rulers of the derro in the West Cleft and East Cleft Districts. These **derro savants** handle any necessary communication with their duergar neighbors.

An old treaty struck between the derro Council of Savants and the duergar Deepking states that the derro and duergar will never cross into each other’s territories. Part of this treaty requires the savants to do what they can to prevent an uprising from the ordinary derro populous. In

return, the Deepking bestows the savants with lavish gifts to adorn their luxurious quarters in the Hall of Sacred Spells.

The savants spend most of their days performing various arcane experiments to amuse themselves, frequently tinkering with Underdark mushrooms and other newly discovered flora from their excavations. Unfortunately, despite the savants’ arcane prowess, they aren’t actually smarter or wiser than common derro. They are driven more by a lust for novelty than a desire to discover something useful. As such, their experiments tend to be poorly curated and the by-products have warped the Weave around the West Cleft District.

This arcane pollution has given rise to an ooze with a sadistic sentience. It hides in a tunnel branching out from West Cleft, emerging occasionally to strike passing derro and magically rile them into a frenzied rage before retreating and letting the crazed humanoids slaughter one another.

### ENCOUNTER HOOK

The screams of the derro are filtering beyond their borders a lot more frequently now, drowning out the sounds of Gracklstugh’s forges. The duergar Stone Guard are worried that the derro may be close to launching a full-blown riot, which is not something that the guard wants to deal with. Their attempts to reach out to the derro Council of Savants have been futile, as the spoiled savants could not care less if the lesser derro slaughter one another. In addition, the Stone Guard are unwilling to risk diplomatic ties with the Council of Savants by mounting a raid into their territory, especially if this is just a temporary phase of peak madness in the derro. They are on the lookout for visiting adventurers to investigate the situation.



## PART 1: MEETING WITH CAPTAIN ERRDE BLACKSKULL

An ideal time to begin this encounter is a short time after the characters arrive in Gracklstugh, after having talked to the guards at a city gate or the Darklake Docks. If you are playing *Out of the Abyss*, this can occur after the Rampaging Giant encounter.

A squad of three **duergar stone guard** confront the adventurers and “request” that the captain wishes to speak with them. Putting up a fight is not likely to go well for the characters, as combat is will draw lots of back-up.”

The characters are escorted to Overlake Hold, where they are confronted by Captain Errde Blackskull, the commander of the Stone Guard. She states that the she has a task for them, with the only incentive being “it would be better for outsiders in Gracklstugh if the Stone Guard owes you one, rather than for you to risk owing us one.”

If the characters agree to the quest, Captain Blackskull shares the following information: “Our ‘friends’ on the fringes of the city, the despicable derro, are growing louder and louder by the day.”

“The sounds indicate that many of them are succumbing to a murderous frenzy; a new name is shouted in an each day. Our sages speculate that there may be some kind of sinister extraplanar entity at work here, preying upon the gullible and anger-prone minds of the derro.”

“We need you to enter derro territory and look for what might be instigating this behavior; a longstanding treaty prevents duergar from entering derro territory. In addition, the West Cleft District is warded against effects that allows our guards to conceal themselves. You will need to be skillful and resourceful when entering and navigating the district.”

Errde commissions five **duergar stone guards** to escort the party until they enter the West Cleft District. If the characters are in clear need of better equipment, Errde gives each a choice of 350 gp worth of armor, weapons, and equipment from the Stone Guard’s armory (see chapter 5 of the *Player’s Handbook*).

## INTO THE WEST CLEFT DISTRICT

### WEST CLEFT DISTRICT GENERAL FEATURES:

The West Cleft District has the following general features:

**Smell.** The air is extremely malodorous and reeks of squalor.

**Sounds.** The sound of the deranged muttering of the derro fills the streets. Occasionally, a group of rioting derro chanting expletives at the Council of Savants are heard as well.

**Buildings.** Houses here are hovels of crudely-carved rock or simply holes. There is no discernible order to their arrangement.

### NAVIGATING DERRO TERRITORY

The derro are too preoccupied with their own thoughts and ramblings to immediately take notice of newcomers. If the group moves slowly and succeeds on a group **DC 10 Dexterity (Stealth)** check every hour, they avoid a derro attack. The characters can also avoid detection by flying, climbing along the walls, or using any illusion magic other than an *invisibility* spell or effect (as Captain Blackskull explained).

If the characters do not take measures to avoid detection or fail their Stealth check, roll a d4 at the end of each hour. On a roll of 1, a group of 2d4 **derro** attack. The sounds of combat have a 50% chance of drawing an additional derro every time one is killed.

The party might also wish to approach the derro diplomatically to ask them about the monster. However, getting any useful information from these mad humanoids is incredibly difficult. A character talking to a derro must spend five



minutes and succeed on a **DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion)** check to obtain any useful information (revealed in broken Dwarvish or Undercommon). If the check fails by 5 or more, or if the characters use Intimidate, the derro screams (possibly attracting reinforcements) and attacks.

### FINDING THE OOZE'S TUNNEL

After one hour of searching the West Cleft District, have the characters make a group **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation)** or **Wisdom (Survival)** check. On a success, they notice a cluster of hovels with "MAGICKY SLIMY DOOM!" graffiti haphazardly scribbled on it using blood, written in Dwarvish and Undercommon. A character who succeeds on a **DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation)** check also spots some oddly placed scraps of clothes and moldy boxes between the cluster of hovels. Moving them aside reveals a narrow fissure in the chasm wall. The fissure is wide enough for a Medium creature to squeeze through the first 10 feet. The 5-foot-wide path continues in a downward sloping tunnel for another 50 feet. There are multiple 1-inch-diameter holes along the walls of the tunnel.

### THE CESSPIT OOZE ATTACKS

Once the characters have travelled 20 feet into the tunnel, the **cesspit ooze** emerges from one of the small holes and attacks.

### THE CESSPIT OOZE'S TACTICS

Unlike most other oozes, the cesspit ooze possesses a competent intellect and deep malice. It utilizes the 1-inch-diameter holes well, crawling out of one, trying to surprise the characters and crawling back into one after enraging an enemy within reach (see stat block). The holes connect to each other via small pathways in the walls of the main tunnel; the ooze can move through them freely, attacking hard-to-reach characters.

### AFTERMATH

Scattered along the tunnel are partially destroyed suits armor, weapons, and a heap of other mundane equipment. If you are running *Out of the Abyss*, the tunnel continues into Area 1 of the Whorlstone Tunnels. Otherwise, it ends at a dead-end.

If the characters return to Errde with the news of the ooze and their success, she waits a few days to see if the derro riots simmer down (which it does). She offers to replace any damaged equipment the characters have and permits them to leave Gracklstugh if they wish. She gives each character a **giant lizard** mount (CR 1/4; *MM* p 326; "Spider Climb" variant) complete with barding and 60 days of feed, and as many rations and waterskins as the party can carry. You can hold off on this reward if you wish to keep the players in Gracklstugh for a while, and she may have additional tasks for them (see *Out of the Abyss*).



## CESSPIT OOZE

A cesspit ooze is an amalgamation of urban sewage and warped arcane energies, possessing a sinister sentience that reinforces the despair and frustration of impoverished regions in large cities. Their touch can stoke a creature into a frenzied rage, which often turns an individual against their own, leading to exponential slaughter.

### CESSPIT OOZE

*Large ooze, chaotic evil*

**Armor Class** 9

**Hit Points** 161 (19d10 + 57)

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

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	13 (+1)	13 (+1)	7 (-2)	12 (+1)	8 (-1)

**Saving Throws** Con +7, Wis +4, Cha +4

**Skills** Perception +8

**Damage Immunities** acid, cold, lightning, poison, slashing

**Damage Vulnerabilities** radiant

**Condition Immunities** blinded, charmed, grappled, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned, prone, stunned, restrained, unconscious

**Senses** blindsight 60 ft., passive Perception 18

**Languages** understands Undercommon but can't speak

**Challenge** 9 (5,000 XP)

**Amorphous.** The ooze can move through a space as narrow as 1 inch wide without squeezing.

**Aura of Wild Magic.** The ooze magically warps the area around it with its presence. If a spell is cast within 30 feet of the ooze, roll a d20. On a result of 1, roll on the Wild Magic Surge table in chapter 2 of the *Player's Handbook* to trigger a random magical effect.

**Corrosive Form.** A creature that touches the ooze or hits it with a melee attack while within 5 feet of it takes 9 (2d8) acid damage. Any nonmagical weapon made of metal or wood that hits the ooze corrodes. After dealing damage, the weapon takes a permanent and cumulative -1 penalty to damage rolls. If its penalty drops to -5, the weapon is

destroyed. Nonmagical ammunition made of metal or wood that hits the pudding is destroyed after dealing damage.

The ooze can eat through 2-inch-thick, nonmagical wood or metal in 1 round.

**Death Burst.** When the ooze dies, it explodes in a burst of acid. Each creature within 5 feet of it must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 21 (6d6) acid damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

**Spider Climb.** The ooze can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

**Stench.** Any creature that starts its turn within 30 feet of the ooze must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned until the start of the creature's next turn. On a successful saving throw, the creature is immune to the ooze's stench for 1 hour.

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The ooze makes two attacks.

**Acidic Slam.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage plus 18 (4d8) acid damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or become enraged for 1 minute. While enraged, the target must use its action each turn to make as many melee weapon attacks as possible against a random target other than the ooze that it can see (moving as necessary to complete these attacks). A *lesser restoration* spell or similar magic removes this effect. On a successful save, the target is immune to this effect from any cesspit ooze for 24 hours'

In addition, nonmagical armor worn by the target is partly dissolved and takes a permanent and cumulative -1 penalty to the AC it offers. The armor is destroyed if the penalty reduces its AC to 10.  
Reactions

**Split.** When an ooze that is Medium or larger is subjected to lightning or slashing damage, it splits into two new oozes if it has at least 10 hit points. Each new ooze has hit points equal to half the original ooze's, rounded down. New oozes are one size smaller than the original ooze.





## CITY OF BLADES ENCOUNTER: GRACKLSTUGH'S ZEITGEIST

By Hiten Dave

Artist: Matt DeMino

This encounter is very multi-faceted and is likely to vary greatly according to the group and what you choose to emphasize. Only characters of 11th level or higher are likely to overcome the combat portion of this encounter without assistance. However, characters of 5th-10th level may survive if they avoid combat and focus on escaping.

*Gracklstugh's Zeitgesit* features a new monster called a **zeitgeist** (see Creatures and NPCs). The default location presented here is the duergar city of Gracklstugh in the Underdark, but can easily be adapted to any city of your choice. Gracklstugh is known for its blacksmithing and slave-driving, as well as the ruthlessly pragmatic work ethic and dour disposition of its duergar inhabitants. Before running this encounter, review the Duergar entry in the *Monster Manual* (MM p 122) to get a good sense of their outlook and lifestyle.

### BACKGROUND

The demon lords' presence in the Underdark has warped the landscape, sowing madness in intelligent creatures and wrecking havoc in their path. Gracklstugh has suffered many losses as a result of the spreading madness and demonic raids.

The duergar are taking extreme measures to keep their city protected. The forges of Gracklstugh now burn brighter than ever, their blacksmiths and slaves being made to toil endlessly to craft a mighty armory that can fend off any future incursions. Insubordination is met with twice the brutal punishments; the atmosphere is even more ruthless and dour than ever before.

### PLOT HOOK

Perhaps an unintended side effect of this, the gray dwarves are now more reluctant to leave their city in trade caravans, worried that demonic attacks on their merchants would further disrupt their economy. As such, they are welcoming outside merchants in even greater numbers. This could be how the characters find themselves here. However, they are still as xenophobic as ever, and are happy to lay waste to any outsider who abuses the privilege of getting to trade in the City of Blades.

### PART 1: SLAVE REVOLT

For this area's features, refer to the Gracklstugh: General Features box above. The characters are most likely to be in the vast marketplace known as the Blade Bazaar. While here, they come across 2d6 **duergar** (CR 1; MM, p 122) unloading a cart full of unarmed slaves, including other duergar; see Gracklstugh's Slaves below. Vile merchants, who would love more hands working their forges, unshackle the slaves, preparing to inspect them.

One of them, an aging unarmed duergar named **Drongar Steelshadow** (see Gracklstugh's Slaves), spits on one of the slavers and utters the following remark:

*"After putting in a good word for you lot with the Stone Guard, this is the thanks I get?"*

Drongar was once a prominent blacksmith in Gracklstugh with a strong reputation among all the duergar clans. He was recently framed for theft, and the madness corrupting the city's inhabitants resulted in him being unceremoniously stripped of his position and forced into a life of slavery.

His shackles have runes for an *antimagic field* cast on it, and as such he cannot use his Invisibility or Enlarge actions while restrained by the shackles.



As punishment for this insubordination, the duergar slavers begin beating the grizzled-looking slave. If the characters don't immediately intervene, the other slaves lash out.

## **PART 2: THE ZEITGEIST RISES**

When you are ready to begin the encounter, read or paraphrase the following:

The screams, clashing of blades, and hammering of the city's forges is drowned by the sounds of crumbling rock, and your noses are assailed by smog far more acrid than usual. You turn to look at a gathering of flames, smoke, steam, and scrap metal, coalescing into a single, towering figure of rolling smoke.



### THE ZEITGEIST

The rebellion has given rise to this living embodiment of Gracklstugh's pollution. It seeks to help placate the uprising, which it deems to be endangering the rigorous daily operations and productivity of the city.

Since the skirmish is taking place within the city walls and involves some duergar fighting against their own, it treats both sides as a threat to the city, attacking indiscriminately. While it is trying to act in the best interests of the city, the zeitgeist cares less for the damage it causes to specific buildings and people, so long as its destruction doesn't destroy the entire city.

### THE ZEITGEIST'S TACTICS

The zeitgeist is mainly looking to placate the fighting, it spends most of its time simply moving about the city and letting its Choking Presence and Living Pollution traits debilitate everyone around it. It occasionally uses Smoke Cloud on concentrated areas of fighting. It reserves its Fiery Slam and Suffocate for creatures that deal damage to it, or those who seem resistant to its other traits.

The zeitgeist might attack some buildings if people within it fire at it. Its Fiery Slam lights buildings on fire and potentially collapses them. A building that is set on fire takes 11 (2d10) fire damage at the start of each of the zeitgeist's turns, collapsing entirely if reduced to below half its hit points. Adjudicate the effects of fallen buildings and structures based on the *earthquake* spell.

To add more drama to the encounter, consider rolling a d100 whenever the characters are next to a burning building at the start of the zeitgeist's turns. On a roll of 1-50, the fire spreads to an adjacent building.

### THE CHARACTERS' ROLE

The characters might be inclined to help defeat the zeitgeist or rescue slaves while this destruction occurs. The options presented below are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

### OPTION 1: FIGHT THE ZEITGEIST

Direct combat with the zeitgeist is likely to be a deadly encounter. However, characters of this level tend to have several means to cure and prevent disease and poison. If the characters require more assistance, you can have one or more of them come across a gas mask (see sidebar) or have Themberchaud provide assistance (see Themberchaud to the Rescue below).

### GRACKLSTUGH'S DEFENCES

While the City of Blades is well equipped to deal with invading armies of drow, surface dwarves, and the monstrosities of the Underdark, they have never had to face an enigma quite like this.

The guards keep their distance and attack from range, while most are pre-occupied with stopping escaped slaves or suffering from the zeitgeist's Choking Presence. In addition, not all of them have access to magical ranged weapons. As such, their defenses progressively weaken over the course of combat. In order to simplify this, assume that the militia deals the following amount of flat damage to the zeitgeist, in order, at the end of each round: 20, 15, 10, 5, 0.



### THEMBERCHAUD, THE WYRMSMITH

Themberchaud is an **adult red dragon** (CR 17; MM, p 98) and the city's Wyrmsmith, who has long been used to light the city's forges in exchange for placating gifts of treasure and a cozy lair in the city. He suspects that the duergar are scheming to get rid of him and replace him with a new hatchling, lest he grow too powerful and claim the city as his own. Pick one of the following options for how he might come into play:

**Themberchaud's Freedom.** Themberchaud finally wants his freedom and uses this opportunity to add to the chaos before trying to fly away. He sets fire to all buildings and kills indiscriminately. He keeps his distance from the zeitgeist.

**Themberchaud to the Rescue.** Themberchaud still harbors some loyalty to the city and comes out to heroically defend Gracklstugh. He soon discovers that his attacks are ineffective against the zeitgeist, but might also notice that the characters are the only ones fighting bravely against it. To save his lair, he might begrudgingly allow a character to ride him, or just distracts the zeitgeist in other ways (via the Help action, for example).

### OPTION 2: RESCUE AND ESCAPE

The characters might choose to focus their attention on helping slaves escape the city. For simplicity, assume that it takes 10 rounds to navigate the city and facilitate egress either via boats on the Darklake, or through one of Gracklstugh's gates.

Below are some examples of obstacles the characters may face while attempting to ferry the slaves (or themselves) out of Gracklstugh:

- The battle between the duergar, rioting slaves, and deranged zeitgeist can result in residual damage. On initiative count 20 of each round, a creature of your choice within 30 feet of the zeitgeist must make a **DC 15 Dexterity saving**

- **throw** or take 10 (3d6) bludgeoning damage from a stray attack.
- A **DC 15 Dexterity (Acrobatics)** check is needed to dash across 60 feet of one of Gracklstugh's streets or open marketplaces without taking damage from stray attacks. On a failed save, a creature takes 10 (3d6) bludgeoning damage. One creature can make this check to lead a group of four others through such terrain, but does so with disadvantage. On a failed check, a random person in the sortie takes 10 (3d6) bludgeoning damage.
- Charismatic and compassionate characters might try to calm down a panicked group of slaves hiding in an alley or building. Without the *calm emotions* spell, a successful **DC 18 Charisma (Persuasion)** check is needed to calm them down. On a failed check, the slaves stay put and are unconvinced in the characters' ability to take them to freedom.
- The party comes across a creature trapped underneath some rubble. The creature that it limp or has an internal injury (see the Lingering Injuries table in chapter 9 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*). At your discretion, a character without magical healing can make a **DC 15 Wisdom (Medicine)** check to suppress the effects for 1 minute.
- The party comes across a section of the city that has been set on fire, resulting in random falling rubble. A **DC 15 Intelligence (Nature)** check is needed to accurately predict the nature of falling rubble and to circumvent any dangers.
- The party's escape is blocked by 3d6 invisible and enlarged **duergar** guards (CR 1; MM, p 122).
- If you own *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes* or *Out of the Abyss*, use the variant duergar statistics presented there to give the party a Hard encounter, according to the encounter design



guidelines in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* (p 81).

## GRACKLSTUGH'S SLAVES

Below are some slaves that the characters might come across. Feel free to come up with some of your own as well:

**Beliss Gemcutter** – a neutral female **deep gnome** (CR 1/2; MM, p 164) with immunity to poison damage and the poisoned condition. Beliss was apprehended many years ago during a trade mission to Mantil-Derith. The duergar slaughtered her companions but admired her knowledge of rare gems and enslaved her as a gemcutter for Gracklstugh's wealthy merchants. She has been made to travel in and out of the city, back-and-forth from nearby mines.

If kept alive and with the party during the escape, reduce the time it takes for the party to escape by one round for each round that she is not incapacitated (see Rescue and Escape above). If she escapes, she hopes to return home to Blingdenstone.

**Willow Wildheart** – a lawful good female shield dwarf **knight** (CR 3; MM, p 347) with dreadlocks and a scarred and worn face. Willow joined Gauntlgrym's armed services many years ago and led a fight against invading duergar forces until she was captured and forced into working the forges.

During an escape, she is able to rally other prisoners effectively and grants party members advantage on Charisma (Persuasion) checks made to convince other prisoners to take a risky course of action. If she escapes, she returns to her home in Gauntlgrym.

**Saabak Mur Talaan** – a lawful good **hobgoblin captain** (CR 3; MM, p 186) who was separated from his legion at a very young age. He has grown up a slave and has known no other life. However, he has formed strong friendships with some of his fellow slaves, especially Willow, and fights bravely during the rebellion.

He provides the same benefit to the party as Willow but concedes leadership to her as long as she is alive and with the group. If he escapes, he seeks to go to Gauntlgrym and pledges allegiance to King Bruenor Battlehammer.

**Toolooga** – a neutral **kuo-toa whip** (CR 1/4; MM, p 200) who was captured by a duergar patrol a few weeks ago after fleeing from Demogorgon, who had destroyed the kuo-toa city of Sloobludop. The duergar have been using his Otherworldly Perception trait to detect any signs of slacking or rebellious duergar blacksmiths, as well as invisible demons.

He is happy to tag along with any escape but does not put up much of a fight if cornered by enemies. If he escapes, he follows whoever was nicest to him, willing to serve them for eternity. If the characters turn him down, he seeks out the myconid settlement of Neverlight Grove, hoping to gain refuge there.

**Drongar Steelshadow** – a **duergar** (CR 1; MM, p 122). He is very familiar with the city and can prove quite useful in the escape.

If kept alive and with the party during the escape, reduce the time it takes for the party to escape by one round for each round that he is not incapacitated (see Rescue and Escape above).

**Karg** – an **orog** (CR 2; MM, p 247) who lost his tribe to the recent demonic incursion in the Underdark. While escaping the demons, he was apprehended by a wandering duergar patrol and forced to serve Gracklstugh's blacksmiths. During his time here, he has become infatuated with the military might and cunning of the duergar, as well as the efficiency of their forges.

During an escape, he feigns exhaustion and doesn't fight much, thinking that if the escape party gets swarmed by guards, he can use the opportunity to turn against the group and ingratiate himself with the duergar. Having lost his tribe, he aspires to join the mighty forces of Gracklstugh.



### OPTION 3: RAID ABANDONED MARKET STALLS

The City of Blades is a goldmine for all sorts of treasure. This encounter is likely to leave the marketplace in ruins, which damages some of its goods but still provides ample opportunities for someone to loot the remains.

For simplicity, assume that there are 2d20 abandoned market stalls available to loot. If a character searches the remains of an abandoned or destroyed market stall, roll a d6. On a roll of 1 or 2, the character finds no salvageable items. On a roll of 3 or 4, the character finds any weapon, armor, or adventuring gear mentioned in chapter 5 of the *Player's Handbook*. On a roll of 5 or 6, the character finds more valuable items and magical loot determined by a roll on the Treasure Hoard: Challenge 11 – 16 table in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* (p 138).

At your discretion, a character might uncover a gas mask, which could help them endure the encounter. See the Gas Mask sidebar below. Characters who choose this option must escape Gracklstugh as soon as possible, or risk having their theft discovered.

#### GAS MASK

This contraption was invented by skilled duergar who grew concerned that the pervasive smog around their city was hampering productivity. Gas masks haven't been fully developed to repel all bad air, but the models available can still come in handy.

A creature who wears this item has advantage on Constitution saving throws against smoke, smog, and other industrial pollution. This includes the zeitgeist's Choking Presence and Living Pollution traits.

#### AFTERMATH

##### SUCCESSFUL ESCAPE

If the characters escape, you can this opportunity to play out an Underdark journey similar to that outlined in chapter 2 of *Out of*

*the Abyss*, especially if they decide to escort the escaped slaves to their homes.

If it isn't stopped, the zeitgeist continues its rampage until it senses that the city has calmed down, after which it simply dissipates. Since the duergar have not faced such a threat before, their defense forces are unlikely to stop firing and the slaves are unlikely to stop rioting. The zeitgeist might "accidentally" destroy the entire city—and itself.

If you want to randomize the aftermath, roll a d100. On a roll of 1-50, the zeitgeist manages to lay the entire city unconscious within an hour and dissipates on its own without destroying the city. On a roll of 51-100, the zeitgeist manages to set fire to a sufficient number of buildings that spread through to the entire city after an hour.

#### ZEITGEIST DEFEATED

If the zeitgeist is defeated, Grackstugh's remaining forces make quick work of the slave riot and bring it back under control. The duergar laud the heroes for their efforts and monetarily incentivized to remain in the city to protect it from further incursions.

If Themberchaud turned against the city and is still alive, the remaining duergar forces turn their attention to slaughtering him. The dragon promptly escapes, if he can. In any case, a new **red dragon wyrmling** (CR 9; MM, p 98) hatches from a clutch of eggs in his lair and is appointed the new Wyrmsmith of Gracklstugh.

#### MIXED OUTCOME

The characters may defeat the zeitgeist and manage to escape the city with a contingent of slaves (either at the same time with ranged attacks while running away, or after the zeitgeist's defeat). If the escape occurs after the zeitgeist is defeated, there is a 30% chance each round that the escape party is confronted by 3d6 **duergar** guards.



## ZEITGEIST

*Huge fey, chaotic neutral*

**Armor Class** 16 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 340 (10d8 + 40)

**Speed** 0 ft., fly 60 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
23 (+6)	19 (+4)	23 (+6)	5 (-3)	21 (+5)	18 (+4)

**Saving Throws** Wis +12, Cha +11

**Skills** Perception +19

**Damage Immunities** acid, fire, poison; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

**Condition Immunities** blinded, deafened, exhaustion, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained, stunned, unconscious

**Senses** truesight (city-wide), passive Perception 29

**Languages** all languages that inhabitants of the city know, telepathy 5 miles (only within the city)

**Challenge** 23 (50,000 XP)

**Choking Presence.** Any creature that starts its turn in the same space as the zeitgeist or within 30 feet of it must make a DC 21 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the creature spends its action that turn retching and reeling. Creatures are affected even if they hold their breath or don't need to breathe. On a successful save, the creature is immune to the zeitgeist's Choking Presence for 24 hours.

**Flyby.** The zeitgeist does not provoke opportunity attacks when it flies out of an enemy's reach.

**Legendary Resistance 3/Day.** If the zeitgeist fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

**Living Pollution.** The zeitgeist is composed of a noxious combination of pollutants that is typical of an industrious city (fire, smoke, steam, and smog). The zeitgeist can enter a hostile creature's space and stop there, and can move through a space as narrow as 1 inch wide without squeezing.

Its presence in a city causes the entire city to be engulfed in smoke and smog, making the area lightly obscured. In addition, any breathing creature that starts its turn outdoors within the city walls must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw against disease. On a failed save, the creature gains one level of exhaustion. If a creature's exhaustion

level reaches 6 as a result of this trait, it is unconscious but stable.

**Siege Monster.** The zeitgeist deals double damage to objects and structures.

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The zeitgeist makes two attacks with its fiery slam and hurls one scrap metal ball.

**Fiery Slam.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +13 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 17 (3d6 + 7) bludgeoning damage plus 35 (10d6) fire damage. If the target is a nonmagical object that is not being worn or carried, the object is set on fire.

**Scrap Metal Ball.** The zeitgeist coalesces the scrap metal components within its form into a giant ball and hurls it a point it can see within 60 feet of it. Each creature within 10 feet of that point must succeed on a DC 19 Dexterity saving throw, taking 21 (6d6) bludgeoning damage and 21 (6d6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a success.

## LEGENDARY ACTIONS

The zeitgeist can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The zeitgeist regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

**Move.** The zeitgeist moves up to its speed.

**Smoke Cloud (Costs 2 Actions).** The zeitgeist discharges a billowing cloud of smoke and embers that fills a 60-foot cube. The cloud lasts until the end of the zeitgeist's next turn, and creatures within it other than the zeitgeist are blinded and cannot be seen. The cloud can be dispersed by a strong wind, such as the gust of wind spell.

**Suffocate (Costs 3 Actions).** The zeitgeist targets one creature of its choice within 120 feet of it, assailing it with choking smoke and steam. The target must make a DC 21 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the target drops to 0 hit points and is dying. On a successful save, the target can't breathe or speak until the start of its next turn.



## DARK DEALINGS

By Peter Harris

Artist: Matt DeMino

Cartography: Peter Harris

*Dark Dealings* is a short encounter designed for four to five characters of level 10 thru 12.

### BACKGROUND

Long ago, a cloister of flumphs was threatened by a behir. A party of adventurers heeded their call for aid, and defeated the behir in combat. Rather than kill it, they enslaved it, and since then it has been forced to defend the creatures it once attempted to consume.

Now, another evil creature has turned its attention to the flumph cloister. A night hag named Missy Dreamlurk has taken up residence nearby. For a time, she was content to set up a false identity for herself and lure in unsuspecting travelers. But since learning of the nearby cloister, she has been plotting ways to eliminate the behir and open the way to the tasty flumphs beyond its lair.

So far, Missy has been unsuccessful, but she has been keeping a wary eye for anybody who might tip the scales in her favor.

## PART 1 - MEETING MISSY

### DREAMLURK

This encounter begins when the characters come across a large cavern and hear the sound of weeping coming from within.

Read or summarize:

A large cavern opens up before you, glowing with the eerie diffuse light of faerzress. Patches of blue luminescence dot the ceiling like starlight, illuminating a plot of land about an acre in size. In the gloom you can make out a zurkwood cottage and shed, along with several neatly-laid-out fields of edible fungus. From a patch of ripplebark to your north, you can hear the soft sound of someone sobbing.

### GENERAL FEATURES

**Size.** The cavern is about an acre in size, with a 50-foot-high ceiling. There are tunnel entrances to the east and north.

**Light.** The entire cavern is suffused with faerzress. Additional pale blue light comes from lichen growing on the walls and ceiling of the cavern. This light glitters off natural formations of dark quartz that are half-buried in the rock.

**Cottage.** Missy Dreamlurk's home is a simple oblong building made of zurkwood. Its roof is made of wide, overlapping sheets of fungus that glow with a pale orange luminescence. Inside the spartan cottage is a cot, cooking fire, a small pantry containing food and cooking equipment, and a locked chest containing a few sets of clothes and personal items. There is a small shrine to Lolth in one corner of the room.

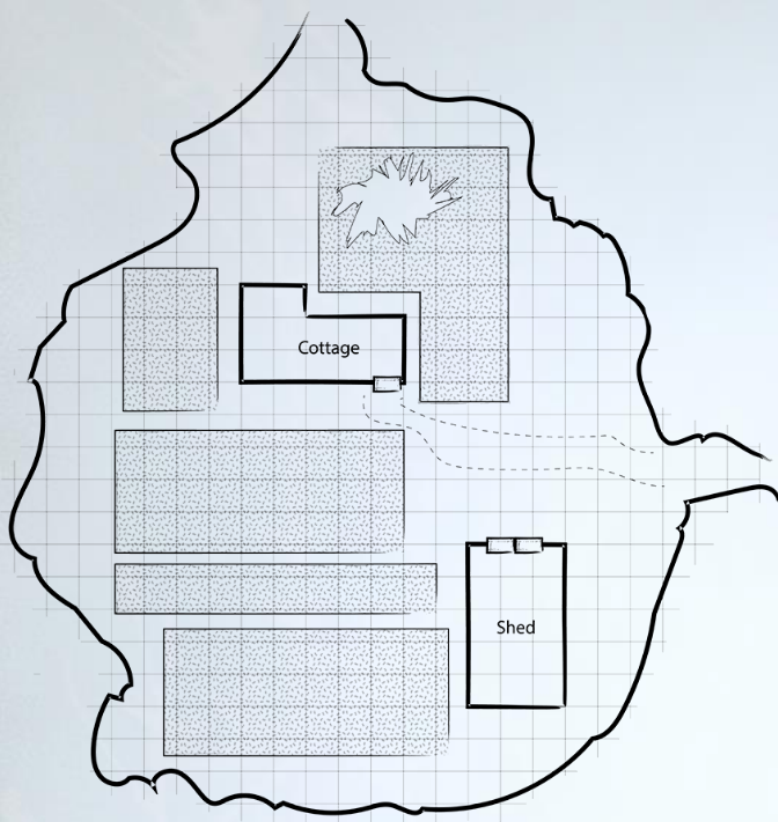
**Herd shed.** Behind the cottage is a simple shed, also made of zurkwood, that houses her herd of rothé. It has room for up to 12 of the beasts, but currently contains only 6. (Note that this number may change depending on party strength. See "Adjusting the Encounter" in Part 3 for more information).

**Fields.** The rest of the cavern is filled with a series of fields filled with cultivated barrelstalk, ripplebark, and bluecap. These areas count as difficult terrain.

A **night hag** called Missy Dreamlurk is kneeling in a ruined field of cultivated ripplebark, disguised as a drow woman. She introduces herself as **Miz'zi Dirztana**, a carefully crafted alter-ego that Missy uses to lure unsuspecting travelers to their doom.







Though “Miz’zi” immediately pulls herself together and puts on a haughty air, her puffy eyes make it clear that she has been crying. She invites the characters into her cottage for fungus tea and conversation.

- The reason for her distress is that her homestead has been under attack by a terrible monster. The creature has been sneaking into the cavern at night, stealing her rothé and trampling her crops.
- The rothé and her modest farm are her only means of livelihood—what she doesn’t eat herself, she trades to travelers for other necessities.
- She doesn’t have the strength to deal with such a monster on her own. But if the attacks continue, before long her herd and crop will be gone and she will be left to starve.

- The monster has the head of a dragon, but crawls along the ground like an insect.

### SCENE OF THE CRIME

At first glance, it appears that Missy’s livestock has been killed and eaten by a huge creature, and a wide area of her crops destroyed. In reality, Missy has carefully crafted this scene to trick travellers into assisting her. Characters who succeed at a **DC 20 ability check** (as indicated below) realize that there is more to the devastation than meets the eye. Characters who make these checks retroactively after killing the behir do so with advantage, as they are now familiar with the creature’s body and the kind of damage it can do.

- **Carcass (Investigation, Medicine, Nature, or Perception).** All that is left of Missy’s slain rothé are a few hunks of flesh, broken bones, and a lot of blood. A successful check reveals that despite the carnage, bite marks on the flesh and bones appear to have been made by a Medium-sized creature.
- **Trampled crops (Investigation, Perception, or Survival).** A wide swathe of ripplebark has been scattered and crushed as though by a huge creature, rendering it inedible. A successful check reveals that although the damage is widespread, each fungus seems to have been crushed individually, rather than en masse.
- **Behir tracks (Investigation, Nature, Perception, or Survival).** Huge tracks lead to and from the scene of the attack, clearly made by a creature with huge claws. A successful check reveals that the tracks are spaced in an inconsistent way, as though the creature has a strangely unnatural gait.
- After laying out the scope of her problem, Miz’zi begs for the characters’ assistance. If they slay the behir, she is eternally grateful to them. Though she



doesn't have much, she offers to supply them with a week's-worth of grain and meat. If further persuasion is needed, she speculates that a creature that resembles a dragon might also keep a horde of treasure.

### ROLEPLAYING MISSY DREAMLURK

Of late, Missy's all-consuming passion project has been to find a way to destroy a nearby cloister of flumphs. She believes that these flumphs will make the perfect, most succulent addition to her stew, and sees the characters as an opportunity to get rid of the behir that is magically bound to protect the cloister.

In her disguise as Miz'zi, the night hag is as haughty and proud as any drow noblewoman. She works hard to keep a dignified mask, despite her apparent distress, and avoids questions about her background in such a way that suggests she is living in exile or disgrace.

On a successful **DC 25 Wisdom (Insight)** check, characters realize that there is an additional layer of deception beneath this mask, and that her distress is itself an act. Otherwise, they believe her cover story and assume that her reticence is due to shame and pride.

Without her disguise, Missy Dreamlurk is hideous, cruel, and vain. She delights in the pain and suffering she has inflicted on both the characters and the behir, and is beside herself with glee at the prospect of feasting on the characters and the flumph cloister they have left defenseless.

In addition to the usual languages known by a night hag, Missy Dreamlurk speaks Undercommon.

### COTTAGE CLUES

Though Missy's disguise is robust, there are small discrepancies. A cursory look in the right places is enough to uncover the following hints of her true nature:

- A close inspection of the foodstuffs in Missy's pantry reveals that everything is stale or on the verge of rotting. She does not eat this food, preferring

instead to feast on unwary travelers and the occasional rothé.

- The shrine to Lolth in Missy's cottage seems like it hasn't been used in a long time, and the religious symbol is covered in a fine layer of dust.

If characters find themselves alone in Missy's cottage, they can search it more thoroughly:

- Missy's heartstone and *soul bag* are hidden in a secret compartment inside her locked chest. To find this compartment, characters must succeed at a **DC 18 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Investigation)** check while searching the open chest.
- Characters who succeed at a **DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Investigation)** check find a patch of flooring underneath her cot that sounds as though it's covering a hollow space. A successful **DC 15 Strength (Athletics)** check is required to break through the floorboards and access a 20-foot shaft leading to her secret hag lair (see "Missy's Lair" in Part 3).

If the characters see through Missy's deception before tackling the behir, or refuse to aid her, she drops her disguise and attacks them. For details of this combat, proceed directly to Part 3 - Confronting Missy.

## PART 2 - TO THE LAIR OF THE BEHIR

If the characters agree to help her, Missy points out the northern tunnel entrance, and says that the creature comes from that direction. Characters can follow the creature's tracks for half a mile before the surface gives way to bare rock and tracking becomes impossible.



### CORRUPTING DREAMS

Throughout this part of the adventure, Missy Dreamlurk follows the party in the Ethereal Plane. If the party stops to take a long rest, she uses her Nightmare Haunting ability on one of the characters. She fills their mind with visions of betrayal and carnage, hoping to get the character to turn on their fellow party members.

Fortunately, the tunnel continues with very few branches. You traverse wide, glittering caverns and claustrophobic passages, fording underground rivers and picking your way through mazes of stalagmites. Fortunately, the way ahead remains clear, and after six hours of travel you find the tunnel widening again. A deep pit opens up in front of you.

### GENERAL FEATURES

**Material.** The walls, floors, and ceilings of these areas are made of rock.

**Light.** A formation of luminescent crystals covers the ceiling unless otherwise specified, bathing the areas in dim light.

### AREA A: THE PIT

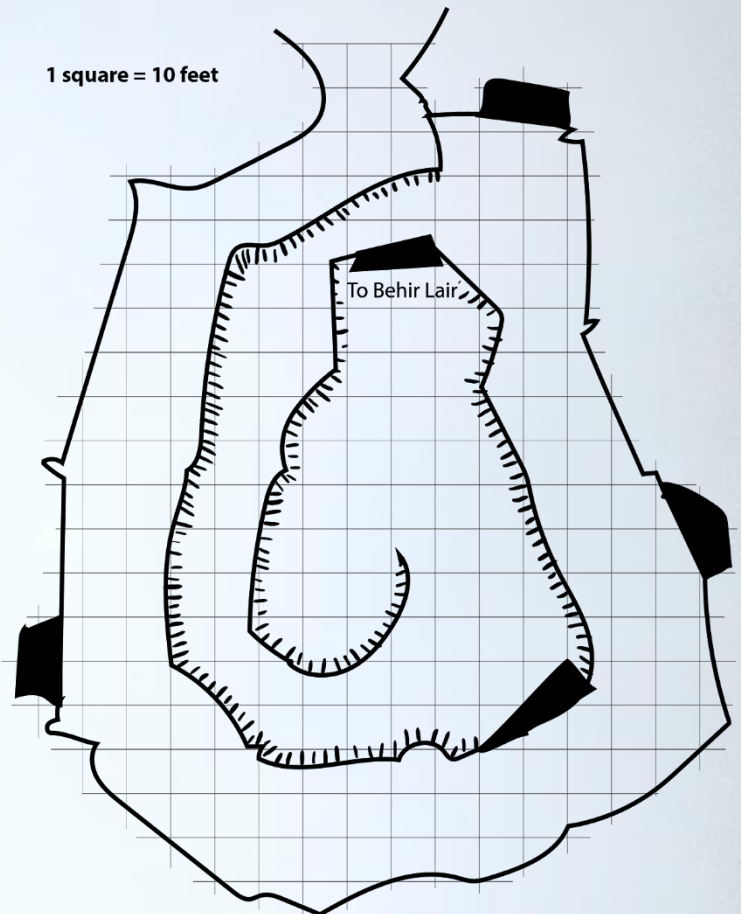
This area is a wide, deep pit 120 feet in diameter. From base to ceiling, the pit is 100 feet deep. A sloping path runs along the perimeter of the pit in a spiral, leading to the bottom. A wide entrance at the bottom leads to the behir's lair (Area B). The behir itself lies in wait in one of the many side tunnels that worm through the surrounding rock (see Tactics, below).

### PATH

Most of the pathway that descends into the pit is hard rock, worn smooth by centuries of use by the behir. The edges of the path that face the pit, however, are still lined with thick clusters of stalagmites. Characters must squeeze through them to reach the edge leading to the next-lower tier of the path

### LEDGES

The pit-facing edges of the path end in sheer 30-foot-tall cliff faces. To climb up or down, characters must succeed at a **DC 10 Strength (Athletics)** check or fall the remaining distance to the path below.



### TUNNELS

Lining the outer edge of the path are 20-foot-wide openings leading to a warren of completely dark tunnels. The behir uses these tunnels to stalk and ambush its prey. Inside, the rocky floor, walls, and ceiling have all been worn smooth by decades of the behir's passage.



### ADJUSTING THE ENCOUNTER

For strong parties, or for an additional challenge, increase the behir's hit points to 256 and add a flock of 4 stirges that are attracted by the sounds of battle and attack the characters after 1 round.

For weaker parties, reduce the behir's hit points to 80.

### TACTICS

Though the behir's lair is in a cave at the bottom of the pit, the creature itself lies in wait in any of the side tunnels, hiding and waiting for the characters to pass.

### INDENTURED PROTECTOR

The behir wears a thick iron collar around its neck. Long ago, it was defeated by a party of adventurers sent to protect the flumph cloister. Rather than kill the behir, they decided to spare its life and put it to work. The collar functions as a geas, forcing the behir to defend the cloister with its life (see the section Aftermath for a description of the collar). The behir is too hungry and hateful to attempt negotiating. However, if it is driven back to its lair in Area 5, it taunts the characters in Draconic, calling them hag-slaves and claiming that they are just as much puppets as the behir itself.

Characters attempting to parley with the behir must make a **DC 18 Charisma (Persuasion)** check. If the character or their allies have already attacked the behir, this check is made with disadvantage. On a success, the behir warily holds off attacking, and tells the characters of its duty. It can also reveal Missy Dreamlurk's true nature, as she has visited its lair several times trying to find a way past it. If the characters are persuaded to remove the behir's geas collar (see Appendix A), the behir attacks the characters before turning on the flumph cloister.

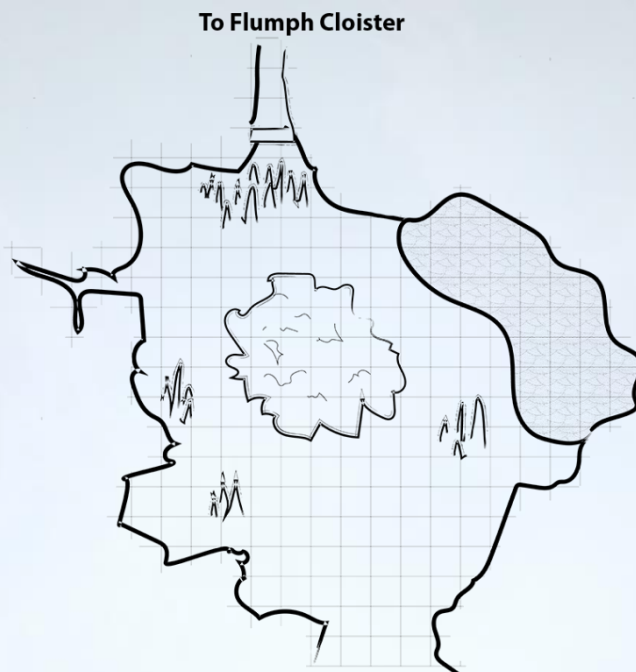
Once combat begins, the behir attempts to grapple a character and move back into the tunnels to devour them at its leisure. As a Huge creature, the behir can move up to its normal speed while grappling a creature of Medium size or smaller. If it encounters more resistance than expected, the behir retreats into the tunnels and moves around to another opening, hiding again for another ambush.

If the behir drops below 60 hp, it retreats to its lair (Area B).

### AREA B: THE LAIR

The majority of this large cave is taken up by a rancid pile of bones, packed earth, and discarded scraps of clothing and armor. The behir nests atop this detritus. Stalagmites and columns of rock are dotted around the floor; the ceiling is 30 feet high. To the east side of the cave is a pool of stagnant water.





### NEST PILE

This area counts as difficult terrain. Characters who succeed at a **DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Investigation)** check discover a leather pouch containing rare gems worth a total of 200 gp among the rotting scraps.

### POOL

This pool of stagnant water contains no treasure, but does carry the risk of disease. Any character making contact with the water must succeed at a **DC 11 Constitution saving throw** or contract sewer plague (see chapter 8 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*).

### PATHWAY

Hidden behind a cluster of tall stalagmites at the north end of the cave is an archway that leads to a 5-foot-wide passage. This leads to the flumph cloister in Area C. The archway and passage are clearly artificial, and are meant to prevent the behir from accessing the cloister.

### ARCANE PROTECTION

A *wall of force* blocks the archway leading to the cloister and the entire radius around the cloister itself. Characters who succeed at a **DC**

**12 Intelligence (Arcana)** check discern that it can be dispelled with a *disintegrate* spell. A successful **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception)** check also reveals a set of runes carved on the inside of the arch. If these runes are destroyed, the *wall of force* dissipates and the flumph colony is left defenseless.

### AREA C: THE CLOISTER

The flumph cloister is a huge, sealed network of caverns that glow brightly with luminescent gems and fungus. The flumphs' homes are open-air shelters made of woven nightlight mushroom stalks. When characters first enter the cloister, they are greeted by curious flumphs thrilled to meet the first visitors in centuries. They offer the characters every hospitality, and ask them how they were able to get past their protector.

### GRACIOUS HOSTS

If the characters admit that they killed the behir, the flumphs are troubled, but no less kind. They offer the characters a meal and the opportunity to spend the night in relative comfort.



### MISSY'S OPPORTUNITY

If the characters agree to stay overnight, Missy—having followed the characters in the Ethereal Plane—takes the opportunity to kidnap a flumph for her cooking pot. When the characters awaken, the flumphs are distressed that one of their number have gone missing. They ask the characters, politely but firmly, to leave before they bring further ruin to their home.

## PART 3 - CONFRONTING

### MISSY

After killing the behir, the characters are free to return to Missy. When they arrive, she eagerly asks whether the party were able to kill the creature attacking her herd. If the characters have not yet realized her true nature, she revels in the deception for a little longer before transforming and gloating about her victory.

When combat begins, Missy calls on her herd of six **rothé**, which attack the characters in a maddened frenzy.

### TACTICS

Missy Dreamlurk is familiar with the party's makeup and general tactics, having watched them battle the behir from the Ethereal Plane. She singles out the strongest character and targets them with *ray of enfeeblement* before attacking with her claws and *magic missile*. The rothé attack the characters indiscriminately.

If Missy drops below 40 hp, she enters the Ethereal Plane and retreats to her underground lair, stopping only to collect her *soul bag* from the chest in her cottage.

### ADJUSTING THE ENCOUNTER

For weaker parties, remove 2 rothé.

For strong parties, add 2 rothé and increase Missy's hit points to 165 hp.

For an even greater challenge, Missy can be working as part of a coven, instead of alone. As the fight begins, have her call on her sisters, Granny Brittletooth and Mammy Sewersip. They materialize from the ethereal plane during the first round of combat. Do not include the rothé in this combat if using the coven.

### MISSY'S LAIR

Underneath Missy's cottage is a space more true to her hag nature. The only physical entrance to this lair has long since been boarded over—Missy simply accesses it through the Ethereal Plane. The lair is a 40-foot-square room containing a cookfire and massive cauldron, shelves of alchemical reagents and potions, and a locked chest containing treasure collected from her victims. The floor is completely covered with the bones of creatures great and small, and the air smells of smoke and rotted blood.

### FLUMPH CAPTIVE

If Missy was able to kidnap a flumph from the cloister, the characters find it here in a small wooden cage, awaiting its demise. If it hears the characters searching the cottage above, it calls out for help telepathically.

### TREASURE

Two *potions of greater healing* and a *potion of poison* can be found on the shelves in this room. Missy herself carries her heartstone, *soul bag* (if she was able to recover it from the locked chest in the cottage), and a silver key.

### LOCKED CHEST

This chest can be unlocked with the silver key on Missy's person. If characters do not have the key, they must succeed at a **DC 20 Dexterity check using thieves' tools**. Inside the chest are 1d8 trinkets (PHB, p 160-161), 400 gp in assorted currency, and an *enduring spellbook*.



## DR. PLOPSCLOPSKI'S

### MONSTER MASH

By Drew Dawes

Artist: Matt DeMino

Cartography: Dyson Logos

Modified Gauntlet of Flintcrowned Ghouls  
Modified The Red Descent

Estimated run-time: 60 to 75 minutes

*Dr. Plopsclopski's Monster Mash* is a short Underdark adventure designed for four characters of 8<sup>th</sup> level. Scaling instructions are included to run the adventure for characters from 5<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> level.

#### BACKGROUND

A deranged-yet-brilliant kuo-toa called **Dr. Plopsclopski** is creating horrific monster mashups from Underdark creatures. Cast out from Slubludop as a heretic for his belief that the kuo-toan goddess Blibdoolpoolp is just a giant lobster surgically grafted to a human woman, he established a hidden laboratory deep in the Underdark.

In order to exact revenge on the whips that exiled him, the doctor is obsessed with creating new hybrid creatures to lay waste to Blibdoolpoolp's followers. The failed attempts from these experiments now wreak havoc in this corner of the Underdark. Worst yet, Dr. Plopsclopski's next experiment requires a humanoid test subject...

#### WHEN TO USE THIS ENCOUNTER

For maximum tension, use this encounter during an ongoing campaign on a week when a regular player cannot attend due to scheduling conflicts. The characters may be especially motivated to rescue their own adventuring party member. Be sure to ask the player for permission before using their character in the plot.

If your campaign does not have scheduling conflicts, use one of Dr. Plopsclopski's extra arms and pat yourself on the back.

#### PLOT HOOK

Ah! How convenient. Volunteers for Dr. Plopsclopski's greatest experiment yet! After camping for a long rest in the Underdark wilderness, the characters awake to find one of the party members missing. Choose one NPC humanoid travelling companion, or for added dramatic effect, one of the characters and read or summarize:

After another frigid rest deep in the inhospitable Underdark, something seems to be missing... (INSERT CHARACTER NAME!)

#### ANYWHERE IN THE UNDERDARK

This encounter can take place anywhere in the Underdark. As the characters explore Dr. Plopsclopski's laboratory and surrounding caves, keep in mind the following features.

#### GENERAL FEATURES

**Light.** Unless specified, the tunnels are completely dark, which doesn't hinder Dr. Plopsclopski or any of his creations.

**Rockfall.** The cavern itself is expanding as the umbercers (see below) burrow freely. This makes the entire area highly unstable. Rocks and fragments of stalactites are constantly falling from above.

Thunder damage or any other extraordinarily loud sound (such as the voice amplification of *thaumaturgy*) triggers a rockfall in a 10-foot-radius area of the cavern.

Each character must attempt three **DC 12 Dexterity** saving throws, taking 10 (3d6) bludgeoning damage on each failed save. Any incapacitated creature not moved out of the area is buried under rubble, taking an additional 1d6 bludgeoning damage at the end of each of its turns until the creature is dug out.

**Failed Experiments.** In addition to the monstrous mashups, the area is littered with discarded halves of underground beasts, such as bats, rats, and fish. The volume of carcass halves increases with proximity to the laboratory (Area 4). A successful **DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation or Medicine)** check reveals that these creatures were carefully dissected.



## AREA 1: CARRION CRAWLER TRAIL

Obvious tracks from the missing person's last known location lead into a nearby natural cavern. Any adventuring gear or equipment not worn during the long rest remains at camp. A successful **DC 12 Wisdom (Survival)** check reveals the tracks belong to a **carrion crawler** (CR 2; MM, p 37). The trail runs cold upon arriving at a three-pronged fork in the cavern tunnels.

## AREA 1A: UMBERCKER MIGRATION ROUTE

The trail was clearly headed southwest towards a wide cavern (Area 4), but the path is blocked with loose rubble from a recent cave in. Clearing the cave in by hand would take a group of four characters 40 hours. Cave ins are a common occurrence due to a pack of **umbercers** (CR 1/2; Appendix), mindless, slow creatures with the climbing instincts of a piercer and the burrowing abilities of an umber hulk.

A dozen fresh umbercker tunnels branch out above the cavern, leading nowhere. Two larger tunnels winding outward from this area are unaffected by the cave in (Areas 2 and 3).

## AREA 2: GRICKTATOR HUNTING GROUNDS

As the party enter Area 2, read or summarize:

Sounds of unnatural screams and monstrous growls echo from the western tunnel. As pebbles rain from the unstable cave, a chunk of sharp rock flies down directly ahead and hits the ground with a loud, sickening splat!

Judging by its putrid eyeball and elongated, curved pincers, this is no ordinary rock.

### DON'T LOOK UP!

A disgusting **umbercker** lies prone on the tunnel floor ahead. The lone creature was attempting to use its Drop attack on the characters and

missed. Any interaction with the creature causes it to attempt to burrow into the ground. A successful **DC 15 Intelligence (Nature)** check identifies both the umber hulk and piercer body parts.

### GENERAL FEATURES

**Gricktater Nest.** This mated pair of gricktaters made a nest from the entrails of Dr. Plopsclopski's failed experiments. They were literally made for each other.

**Uphill.** The entire area is a gradual uphill slope. The nest is 30 feet higher than the cave opening to Area 1a.

**Ceiling.** The rocky ceiling is roughly 60 feet high throughout the area, making the umbercker's *drop* attack less effective deeper into the cavern.

**Rock Plateau.** A stalagmite cluster in the center of the room forms a plateau ledge 20 feet high.

It is feeding time for the two **gricktators** (CR 3; Appendix) feasting on six umbercers on the far side of the natural rock plateau in the center of the cave. When the characters arrive, all creatures turn their attention towards the fresh meat.

### PLAYING THE PILLARS

Here are some suggestions for this encounter:

**Combat.** Gricktators use their *paralyzing ray* to move in for a bite to eat with their *beak* attack. They don't like fast food. Uumbercers immediately burrow after using a *drop* attack. Anytime one burrows below, another takes its place above.

**Exploration.** The characters could climb up on the rock plateau and attack from range... but so could the gricktators.

**Social.** Uumbercers are infesting the area, greatly increasing the chance of a rockfall. Characters need to use their indoor voices, or they may trigger a cave in.

Dim red light ripples off the walls of the cave mouth to the south, leading to Dr. Plopsclopski's Laboratory (Area 4). The faint





sound of repetitive music is heard in the distance.

### TREASURE

The gricktators have collected shiny items that caught their eyes. Their nest contains 2d6 sp, 1d8 gp, and 1d4 trinkets (PHB; p 160)

### SCALING THE BATTLE

**Levels 5-7:** Remove one gricktator and two of its *eye ray* options.

**Levels 9-10:** Add three umbercers and 30-feet to the ceiling height.

## AREA 3: CHUULOAKER CLIFF

Remains of assorted creatures litter the floor of this looming narrow chamber. This cave is now the territory of Dr. Plopsclopki's greatest creation to date: the **chuuloaker** (CR 6; Appendix).

The chuuloaker is still adjusting to its new life. As the brains of both creatures were left intact, its instincts are often at odds between flying or swimming. It can no longer walk. It feeds off the doctor's many failed experiments and has not yet devoured the hand that feeds. Or in Dr. Plopsclopki's case, hands.

### GENERAL FEATURES

**High Ceilings.** The ceiling ranges from 80 to 100 feet high. Large stalactites drip from the humidity of the area.

**Downhill.** The entire area is a gradual downhill slope. The base of the cliff wall is 30 feet lower than the cave opening to Area A1.

**Cliff Wall.** The chuuloaker's perch is at the top of an 80-foot smooth cliff wall of dense red rock. It has no footholds and is tough to pierce. It is difficult terrain for climbing.

**Bioluminescent Algae.** The floor is coated in colorful glowing algae. The algae provides 30 feet of dim light.

## AREA 3A: CHUULOAKER PERCH

A large nest of bones and dried entrails is perched upon a ledge high above the cave. Above the nest, the cave ceiling splits into an open-air ravine hundreds of feet high. This



allows the chuuloaker easy access to fly to a similar perch in Dr. Plopsclopki's laboratory (Area 4).

If the characters enter this area before entering Area 2, there is a 50% chance the chuuloaker is in its nest finishing off a fresh snack, and a 50% chance it is in the laboratory (Area 4). If the characters already engaged the creatures in Area 2, the chuuloaker hears the sounds of combat and retreats to the lab.

### PLAYING THE PILLARS

Here are some suggestions for this encounter:

**Combat.** The chuuloaker is a formidable foe for the characters, but it isn't looking for a fight. If its *Sense Magic* trait senses anything magic on the characters, it visibly retreats, flying through its passage to Area 4.

**Exploration.** Characters walking in the cave leave obvious footprints in the bioluminescent algae. Any characters with a **passive Perception of 14** or higher notice there are no other tracks on the ground.

**Social.** The chuuloaker lost much of the cloaker's intelligence, but still understands its languages. If a character attempts to communicate with it in *Deep Speech* or *Undercommon*, the chuuloaker allows the characters to leave the area peacefully with a successful **DC 18 Charisma (Persuasion)** or **Wisdom (Animal Handling)** check.



## TREASURE

There is nothing of intrinsic value in this area—only bones. A successful **DC 17 Intelligence (History)** check recalls that a noted osteologist in Waterdeep named Haitham Mosheyev pays 50 gp for interesting intact skulls. There are 1d12 intact skulls on the cave floor, and 1d12 more in the chuuloaker perch.

## SCALING THE BATTLE

**Levels 5-7:** The chuuloaker was recently wounded by a carrion crawler. The chuuloaker has half its total hit points.

**Levels 9-10:** The chuuloaker recently attacked a carrion crawler. The carrion crawler is present in the nest with half its total hit points.

## AREA 4: DR. PLOPSCLOPSKI'S LABORATORY

### DR. PLOPSCLOPSKI'S PLAN

A humanoid half will make a much more obedient creature than his past creations. Once the kuo-toa fools in Slubludop get their eyes on this specimen and the destruction it brings, they will have no choice but to believe in the doctor's brilliance. Forget Blibdoolpoolp. DR. PLOPSCLOPSKI will be their new god!

As the party enter Area 4, read or summarize:

Bright light shines from the depths of a blood-tainted pond, filling the cavern with an ominous red glow. The missing companion is lying motionless atop a rusted metal table on a small rock island, as is a giant crustacean. A silhouetted shadow with four arms dominates the cave walls. Repetitive off-key musical notes linger in the air.

*"The doctor will see you now..."*

Dr. Plopsclopski is a **kuo-toa archpriest** (CR 6, MM, p 200) with four arms, allowing him to attack or cast spells and continue operating at the same time; two of his arms were surgically attached. He welcomes his guests and is pleased to elaborate on his greatest creation

yet: combining their friend with a **giant crab** (CR ½; MM, p 324).

If the doctor shares his plan, a successful **DC 16 Intelligence (Religion)** check recalls information about the kuo-toan goddess Blibdoolpoolp.



### GENERAL FEATURES

**Pond.** The naturally warm pond is 20 feet deep. It is murky from discarded bits of former experiments and tinged red with blood. An underground creek flows just beneath the pond, keeping the water level perpetually full.

**Island.** A massive stalagmite plateau in the center of the pond forms an island in the center of the cave. This is the operating room for the doctor's creations.

**Light.** Four bright glass lights shine from the island walls. Underwater is bright light. The rest of the cavern is cast in dim light.

**Ascending Ledge.** A rock shelf lines the cavern gradually rising clockwise from the southwest. A chuuloaker nest (leading to Area 3a) is at the top of the ledge, 80 feet above the pond floor.

**Underwater Passage.** A passageway on the southern wall of the pond slopes up 15 feet to the doctor's office (Area 4a).



## THE LAB ASSISTANTS

A **carriion crawler** (CR 2; MM, p 37) is rummaging in the chuuloaker nest at the top of the ledge. It climbs the wall directly towards the characters once they enter the area. The doctor trained it to use its tentacles to paralyze creatures for experimentation.

Unless the characters already dealt with the **chuuloaker** in Area 3, it is present here. It can't decide if it would rather fly or swim. It takes some coercing by the doctor with the promise of a tasty meal for the chuuloaker to attack. Three **kuo-toa** (CR 1/4; MM; p 199) swim in the pond and attack on the doctor's command. Their heads were replaced with the heads of an eel, a giant sea horse, and oddly enough, a fish.

### PLAYING THE PILLARS

Here are some suggestions for this encounter:

**Combat.** Dr. Plopsclopki's main focus is completing the operation. He casts *sanctuary* and *shield of faith* on himself and calls for allies to deal with the characters. When the characters reach the operating room island, he casts *spirit guardians*.

**Exploration.** Characters attempting to remove their companion stuck to the operating table must succeed on two **DC 11 Strength** checks. A successful **DC 15 Intelligence (Nature)** check reveals this is the same substance kuo-toa use to coat their sticky shields.

**Social.** The doctor is more than happy to talk about his history or any of his creations. If characters attempt to negotiate for the release of their companion, Dr. Plopsclopki offers to return the head and one arm once the operation is complete.

## AREA 4A: DR. PLOPSCLOPSKI'S OFFICE

An underwater passage slopes upward from the pond and leads up to a locked metal door. The doctor carries the key stuck to his belly with sticky goo. The lock can be picked with a successful **DC 15 Dexterity check using thieves' tools**. The door's hinges can be knocked loose from the wall with a successful **DC 20 Strength (Athletics)** check.

The first room contains Dr. Plopsclopki's equipment and medical notes on all the creatures. Despite his mad demeanor, it appears to be a neatly-kept facility.

The far room is the doctor's living quarters, littered in a disarray of kuo-toa sticky goo and paranoid writings on the cave walls in blood.

A parchment written in Undercommon prominently displayed appears to be a wanted poster with sketch of Dr. Plopsclopki. A leather sack of valuables can be found among the chaos with a successful **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception)** check.

### TREASURE

Dr. Plopsclopki's scalpel is a rare magic weapon requiring attunement (see Appendix). He carries a small music box that plays the same discordant tune for eight hours before needing to be rewound.

A key adhered to his belly with sticky goo unlocks the metal door to Area 4a.

If the characters spend 10 minutes ransacking the research room in Area 4a, they find enough supplies to assemble five healer's kits.

The leather sack in the doctor's living quarters contains two *potions of healing* and one *potion of greater healing*.

If translated from Undercommon, the parchment reads:

"REWARD (5000 gp) for the capture, dead or alive, of the heretic known as Doctor Plopsclopki. For the crime of blasphemy against The Sea Mother Blibdoolpoolp. The reward will be paid in Slubludop for the capture or positive proof of his death. DEAD OR ALIVE! DR. PLOPSCLOPSKI"



## SCALING THE BATTLE

**Levels 5-7:** The chuuloaker does not listen to the doctor's orders to attack. It appears both heads are struggling internally for control of their body. It does not attack the characters unless provoked.

**Levels 9-10:** Three more kuo-toa arrive from Area 4a in a later round. Their heads were replaced with the heads of different species of anglerfish.

## DEVELOPMENT

Dr. Plopsclopki is criminally insane and has plenty of support from his monster mashups—and he's always looking for new interns! If the doctor defeats the characters, he stabilizes them and leaves their unconscious bodies in Area 4a stuck to each other with kuo-toa sticky goo. The metal door is locked from the outside. The doctor will return once he finds interesting new heads for them.

Overjoyed by his incredible success, Dr. Plopsclopki takes off in the direction of Slubludop, calling for his new creation to follow. The companion-giant crab mashup is no longer paralyzed after one hour.

The humanoid body now has the giant crab carapace fused with its torso. One humanoid arm was replaced with a dominant giant crab claw. Leftover body parts from both creatures are tossed into the pond. The humanoid's head was left intact and keeps all of its mental abilities and memories, including memories of this fateful day.

## CONCLUSION

Once the characters defeat Dr. Plopsclopki, a successful **DC 12 Charisma (Intimidation)** check causes the rest of the creatures to flee. The characters are then free to release their companion and the giant crab.

Perhaps the characters will travel through the Underdark to bring evidence of his death to Slubludop and claim the reward. Or perhaps they will sleep with one eye open from now on and never speak of this again.

## OPERATION COMPLETE!

In the event that Dr. Plopsclopki completes his operation, it could mean big changes for the missing character. If this is something you would like to include in your game, discuss the following new character options with the player prior to the session:

**Natural Armor.** Your AC is 15. You cannot gain the benefit of wearing any armor.

**Claw Attack.** You are proficient with your unarmed claw strike, which deals 1d6 bludgeoning damage on a hit, and the target is grappled. The escape DC is 8 + your Strength modifier + your proficiency bonus.

**One Good Hand.** You cannot be proficient with two-handed weapons.

**Monstrous Appearance.** You make all **Charisma (Persuasion)** checks with disadvantage. You make all **Charisma (Intimidation)** checks with advantage.

**Transplant Rejection.** Your body is constantly in turmoil in this unnatural state. Every day you do not receive magical healing, you suffer one level of exhaustion.

In the event that you and the player would both like to add these character options to your game, by the time Dr. Plopsclopki is defeated, the operation is complete.

If you would not like to use any new character options, the character suffers four levels of exhaustion until receiving the benefit of *greater restoration* or *similar magic*.

In the event that you and all players would like to add these character options to your game, Dr. Plopsclopki could be revived and would gladly accept new volunteer test subjects! Giant bats, giant spiders, giant toads..the Underdark is home to all kinds of giant beasts for new monster mashups!



## DR. PLOPSCLOPSKI'S LAIR

**Area 1:** Carrion Crawler Trail

**Area 1a:** Umbercer Migration Route

**Area 2:** Gricktator Hunting Grounds

**Area 3:** Chuuloaker Cliff

**Area 3a:** Chuuloaker Perch

**Area 4:** Dr. Plopsclopki's Laboratory

**Area 4a:** Dr. Plopsclopki's Office



## GRICKTATOR

Medium monstrosity, neutral

**Armor Class** 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)

**Skills** Perception +6

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

**Senses** darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 16

**Languages** --

**Challenge** 3 (700 XP)

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

## ACTIONS

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

**Tentacles.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (2d6 + 2) slashing damage.

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

**Eye Rays.** The gricktator shoots up to two of the following magical eye rays at one or two creatures it can see within 990 feet of it. It can use each ray only once a turn.

- **Confusion Ray.** The target must succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw, or it can't take reactions until the end of its next turn. On its turn, the target can't move, and uses its action to make a melee or ranged attack against a randomly determined creature within range. If the target can't attack, it does nothing on its turn.
- **Paralyzing Ray.** The target must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or be paralyzed for 1 minute. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.
- **Fear Ray.** The target must succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or be frightened for 1 minute. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, with

disadvantage if the gricktator is visible to the target, ending the effect on itself on a success.

- **Wounding Ray.** The target must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw, taking 16 (3d10) necrotic damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

## REACTIONS

**Spell Reflection.** If the gricktator makes a successful saving throw against a spell, or a spell attack misses it, the gricktator can choose another creature (including the spellcaster) it can see within 30 feet of it. The spell targets the chosen creature instead of the gricktator. If the spell forced a saving throw, the chosen creature makes its own save. If the spell was an attack, the attack roll is rerolled against the chosen creature.

## UMBERCER

Medium monstrosity, unaligned

**Armor Class** 15 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 22 (3d8 + 9)

**Speed** 5 ft., climb 5 ft., burrow 5 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	13 (+1)	16 (+3)	1 (-5)	7 (-2)	3 (-4)

**Skills** Stealth +5

**Senses** blindsight 30 ft., darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 8

**Languages** --

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

**False Appearance.** While the umbercer remains motionless on the ceiling, it is indistinguishable from a normal stalactite.

**Spider Climb.** The umbercer can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

**Tunneler.** The umbercer can burrow through solid rock at its full burrowing speed and leaves a 5-foot-wide, 5-foot-tall tunnel in its wake.

## ACTIONS

**Drop.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, one creature directly underneath the umbercer. *Hit:* 3 (1d6) piercing damage per 10 feet fallen, up to 21 (6d6). *Miss:* The umbercer takes half the normal falling damage for the distance fallen and immediately burrows away.



## CHUULOAKER

*Large aberration, chaotic neutral*

**Armor Class** 15 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 93 (11d10 + 33)

**Speed** fly 40 ft., swim 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	13 (+1)	16 (+3)	7 (-2)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)

**Skills** Perception +5

**Damage Immunities** Poison

**Condition Immunities** Poison

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

**Languages** understands Deep Speech and Undercommon but can't speak

**Challenge** 6 (2300 XP)

**Amphibious.** The chuuloaker can breathe air and water.

**Sense Magic.** The chuuloaker senses magic within 120 feet of it at will. This trait otherwise works like the *detect magic* spell isn't itself magical.

**Damage Transfer.** While attached to or grappling a creature, the chuuloaker takes only half damage dealt to it (rounded down), and that creature takes the other half.

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The chuuloaker makes two attacks: one with its bite and one with its pincer, or two with its pincers. If the chuuloaker is attached to or grappling a creature, the chuuloaker can also use its tentacles once.

**Bite.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) piercing damage. If the target is Large or smaller, the chuuloaker attaches to it. If the chuuloaker has advantage against the target, the chuuloaker attaches to the target's head, and the target is blinded and unable to breathe while the chuuloaker is attached. While attached, the chuuloaker can make this attack only against the target and has advantage on the attack roll. The chuuloaker can detach itself by spending 5 feet of its movement. A creature, including the target, can take its action to detach the chuuloaker by succeeding on a DC 16 Strength check.

**Pincer.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage. The target is grappled (escape DC 14) if it is a Large

or smaller creature and the chuuloaker doesn't have two other creatures grappled.

**Tentacles.** One creature grappled by the chuuloaker must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1 minute. Until this poison ends, the target is paralyzed. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

**Moan.** Each creature within 60 feet of the chuuloaker that can hear its moan and that isn't Dr. Plopsclopki or one of his monster mashups must succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened until the end of the chuuloaker's next turn. If a creature's saving throw is successful, the creature is immune to the chuuloaker's moan for the next 24 hours.



## FAR FROM MOONLIGHT

By Catherine Evans

Artist: Liz Gist

Estimated run-time: 90+ minutes

*Far from Moonlight* is a social encounter designed for characters between 6<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> level. The run-time of this adventure varies widely: a party who enjoys interacting in depth with NPCs could spend more than one game session on *Far from Moonlight*.

### BACKGROUND

The drow city of Faenar and the high elf settlement of Ilaamvir have been at war for generations. The conflict is ruining both societies, so they have finally, tentatively, agreed to a peace treaty. The details are to be agreed at a secret meeting, facilitated by Jaelryn Quarrym. As a drow priestess who left the Underdark years ago to serve a good-aligned goddess, Jaelryn is the only negotiator acceptable to both factions.

### NPCs

There many NPCs introduced in this encounter. Please familiarize yourself with the *Dramatis Personae* section at the end of this encounter.

### PLOT HOOK

Jaelryn hired the party to provide her with security during the meeting at the An-Tireth caves. She turned to the party, as reliable mercenaries, to help her keep the peace.

The characters have been paid handsomely in advance, but Jaelryn also appealed to their better nature: there are human, halfling, and gnomish villages in the area where the two factions wage war, and peace would allow them to prosper and live safely.

## JAE LRYN'S GODDESS

In the Forgotten Realms, Jaelryn's goddess is Eilistraee. Otherwise, a deity of the moon or stars works just as well.

### ORDER OF EVENTS

Several events can take place that threaten to disrupt the negotiation and have the meeting end in bloodshed.

Each event is detailed below, but in summary:

1. Jaelryn opens the negotiations.
2. Thais challenges Sylnafein to a duel to the death.
3. Heian has a premonition of doom, and the high elf delegation threatens to leave.
4. Ilisse poisons Jaelryn.
5. Human mercenaries hired by Ilisse attack.
6. Sylnafein attempts to sneak away.

### CIRCUMVENTING EVENTS

The characters can circumvent many events by learning what the NPCs know/want (see *Dramatis Personae*) through good roleplaying and/or appropriate ability checks.

- **Any NPC:** Tells the characters that Jaelryn is related to all of the drow present, and that they surely harbor some resentment towards her for leaving the Underdark.
- **Thais:** Characters can learn of her grievance against Sylnafein, and talk her out of acting on it (Event 2).
- **Heian:** Characters who enquire about Heian's role or practices can learn of the possibility that a powerful vision could do him harm, making it easier to help him (Event 3).
- **Sylnafein:** Characters who treat Sylnafein with respect and sympathy learn that he is eager to escape from his relatives and join Jaelryn on the surface; after Heian's vision (Event 3) he tells someone he trusts of Ilisse's plot (Event 4) in exchange for protection. If he does not trust any of the characters, he says





nothing, and he does not know how Ilisse plans to deliver the poison.

- **Ilisse:** Ilisse reveals nothing of her motives or plans without the use of magic.

Chaedi and Imrae have no information relevant to the events outlined below.

## AN-TIRETH CAVES

The meeting between drow and surface-elves takes place in a cluster of caves behind a waterfall. As the party descend into the caves, read or summarize:

However far you descend into these twisting passages, you can hear the whisper of the waterfall through which you entered. The caves echo oddly, sounds from above, below, and all around you carrying to your ears better than the footsteps of your companions.

The faint lavender glow of fungus on the walls lights your way, and there is no doubting that you are walking into the drow's domain.

### GENERAL FEATURES

**Terrain.** The caves have smooth floors, curved walls, and ceilings 20 to 30 feet high.

**Light.** The caves are dimly lit by the fungus on the walls and ceiling.

**Smells and Sounds.** The air is damp, the fungus emits a faint, sweet smell, and the sounds of underground rivers and the waterfall far above provide soothing background noise.

## EVENT 1: INAUGURAL ADDRESS

When the party arrives in the caves, read or summarize:

Clustered in the round, central cavern, two groups of elves await: one brown skinned and golden haired, the other a group of red-eyed drow. They keep as much distance from one another as they can, and all watch Jaelryn and yourselves as you enter.

Jaelryn bows deeply, and they exchange formal greetings in Elvish. And then she sings, in a low, sweet voice that makes the cave feel less enclosed and oppressive, and that surrounds her with faint, silvery moonlight. For a moment, there's hope: as they listen, both groups of elves momentarily lose their tension. But only for a moment.

After the hymn, Jaelryn gives a small speech on the importance of dignity, and how easily it is lost through hardship and conflict. She introduces each group present to the others, and announces that she, Chaedi, and Imrae will retreat to begin their discussions.

She takes one of the characters aside and asks them to break the ice with the others: nothing would ruin the negotiation faster than some quarrel between the two groups.

Initially, Ilisse goes with the trio to serve drinks and take notes but returns before any of the events below commence.





## EVENT 2: BAD DEBT

To start this event, read or summarize:

“Son of a hellhound’s rancid aunt!”

Thais’ voice rings out across the cave, rapidly followed by Sylnafein’s soft, musical laughter. The high elf woman slaps the drow hard across his cheek, and draws her rapier.

“Tonight you pay, Sylnafein Quarrym. You pay for the Moonweaver lives you cut short!”

### DUEL TO THE DEATH

Thais initiates a duel with Sylnafein, as vengeance for the death of many of her friends and loved ones, especially her sibling Anais, at the hands of Sylnafein’s soldiers.

### DEVELOPMENT

The characters either physically separate Thais and Sylnafein or talk them down with successful **DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion or Intimidation)** checks.

## EVENT 3: PREMONITION OF DOOM

To start this event, read or summarize:

The male surface-elf, Heian, is meditating quietly, in a nook where the sound of running water is stronger. In an instant, he goes from serene to wild, his eyes rolled back in his head and a seizure overtaking him.

### A VISION

Heian is doing his job: reading omens in the sound of running water to ensure that there is no danger to Chaedi. A successful **DC 15 Wisdom (Medicine)** check is needed to prevent him from passing out from the intensity of his latest vision. If Heian passes out, he regains consciousness in ten minutes.

Thais or Chaedi explain that visions sometimes overcome Heian. He comes around, but by then it may be too late to act on what he saw.

Heian awakes if magically healed for at least 1 hit point.

If a character is closely observing Heian, or even working with him, they can intervene and avert the seizure without a check.

### DEVELOPMENT

When Heian comes around, he declares that there is danger coming, arriving within the hour. He is referring, though he does not know it, to **Forgiveness** and his mercenaries, who have just entered the cave network through the waterfall.

Thais insists that the surface delegation leave unless the characters succeed on a **DC 17 Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion)** check or promise to interrogate the drow about the source of the danger.

Imrae is displeased by attempts to blame the drow for the impending danger, and the characters must defuse an argument between



Imrae and Chaedi to prevent the negotiation from collapsing.

If they can soothe Imrae's pride with a successful **DC 18 Charisma (Persuasion) check** and are allowed to question Ilisse, they may discover her plan with a successful **DC 16 Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion)**.

#### EVENT 4: BAD BLOOD

To start this event, read or summarize:

Jaelryn walks out of the meeting cave with her head high and her back stiff. She comes directly to you, and grasps one of your shoulders so hard you realize it's the only thing holding her upright.

"Help me," she whispers.

#### INTERVENTION

Jaelryn has been poisoned. Moments after speaking, she becomes poisoned and incapacitated (though still semi-conscious, she can neither speak coherently nor take any actions or reactions): she will die in 1d10 minutes if the poisoned condition is not removed via administering antitoxin or targeting Jaelryn with a spell such as *lesser restoration*.

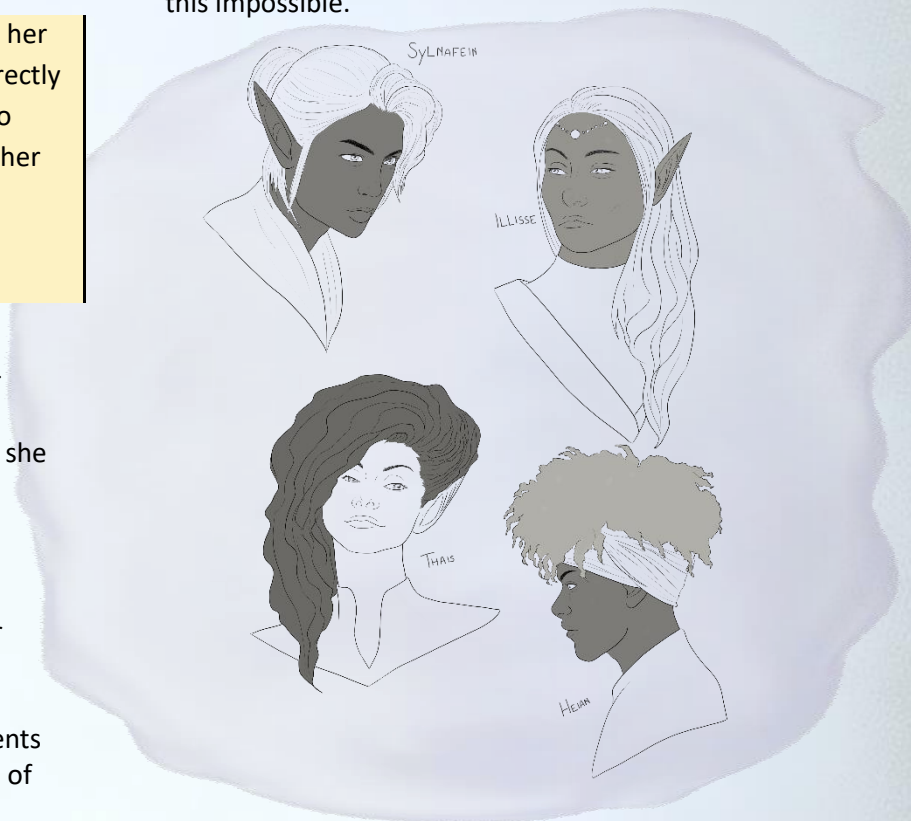
Both Chaedi and Imrae confirm that moments before she got ill, Jaelryn drank from a cup of water given to her by Chaedi.

Characters who succeed on a **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check** identify a faintly sour scent and traces of a shimmering substance on the rim of the cup. A successful **DC 14 Intelligence (Medicine or Nature) check** identifies it as a poison; a result of 18 or more identifies it as specifically made from the *rilithein* fungus, which grows only in the Underdark. If any of the characters have made a good impression on Sylnafein, he warns them in advance of Ilisse's plan.

#### DEVELOPMENT

Whether the party saves Jaelryn or not, she is too ill to continue facilitating the negotiations: the burden now falls on the characters to successfully conclude the meeting.

Chaedi and Imrae want the same outcome, and the characters' main duty is to get them to actually agree to the terms Jaelryn has proposed: a truce lasting one hundred-and-one years. However, Forgiveness' arrival may make this impossible.



#### EVENT 5: FORGIVENESS

To start this event, read or summarize:

It's hard to hide the sounds of a dozen creatures walking on a rock floor, but down here it's harder to tell where those sounds are coming from.

#### EARLY INTERVENTION

Characters who successfully interrogate Ilisse know that she has hired Forgiveness and his 'Angels of Mercy' mercenary company (2



master thieves, CR 5, VGtM, p 216; 2 archers, CR 3, VGtM, p 210). They may also explore the upper caves as a precaution after Heian's vision. Either way, they may stop Forgiveness before he and his team arrive in the deeper caves.

In this case, Forgiveness freely admits that he is working for Ilisse. Unless the characters offer to pay him off (half of the reward they have been promised), or can convince him with a **DC 14 Charisma (Persuasion)** check that his troops will take heavy losses if they attack the elves, Forgiveness attacks them. He and the Angels of Mercy fight until half their number are dead or incapacitated, or Forgiveness is reduced to fewer than 30 hit points.

### ADJUSTING DIFFICULTY

For a weak party, replace the master thieves with bandits and reduce Forgiveness' hit points to 100. For a strong party, use 3 archers and 3 master thieves. Do not reduce difficulty if NPCs are fighting alongside the characters.

### TOO LITTLE TOO LATE

If Forgiveness and his troops reach the main cavern, combat ensues. Following Ilisse's orders, the Angels of Mercy attack the drow. The elves and adventurers should deal with the mercenaries relatively easily (see above for when and why they retreat). The elves blame each other. Old enmities flare up and only the characters can prevent the two sides from fighting to the death.

### CONCLUSION

If the characters successfully avert the various crises and lead the negotiations to a successful conclusion, the surface-elves are grateful and the drow respectful. This leads to new surface-elf allies and safe passage in the Underdark.

If the characters are unsuccessful, war rages throughout the region more fiercely than ever. Characters might be employed to fight on one side or the other, or to defend settlements caught between warring factions of elves.

## DRAMATIS PERSONAE

**JAE LRYN QUARRYM** she/her, NG  
(drow priest\*, CR 2, MM, p 348), \*Charisma 18

**Who she is:** The appointed facilitator overseeing the negotiations.

**What she wants:** Peace between the elves.

**Roleplaying Jaelryn:** Soft-spoken, empathetic, in-charge.

**SYLNAFEIN QUARRYM** he/him; CN  
(drow house captain, CR 9, MToF, p 184)

**Who he is:** Jaelryn's brother; bodyguard to Imrae.

**What he wants:** To escape from his family. He knows Ilisse plans to poison Jaelryn and will use this secret to buy his freedom if he can.

**Roleplaying Sylnafein:** Cautious, dry-humored, deferential

**ILLISSE QUARRYM** she/her; CE  
(drow priestess of Lolth, CR 8, MM, p 129)

**Who she is:** Jaelryn's sister, and assistant to Imrae in the negotiations. Her official title is "Second Voice," which galls her greatly.

**What she wants:** To make her sister and aunt look like fools, and to cement her power by keeping the war going.

**Roleplaying Ilisse:** Businesslike, cold, short-tempered

**IMRAE QUARRYM** she/her; CE  
(drow priestess of Lolth, CR 8, MM, p 129)

**Who she is:** The appointed drow delegate and negotiator.

**What she wants:** Peace between the drow and the surface-elves; to gain as many concessions from Chaedi as possible.

**Roleplaying Imrae:** Powerful, commanding, intelligent



**CHAEDI RIVERRUN** they/them; NG  
(high elf war priest, CR 9, VGtM, p 218)

**Who they are:** Member of Ilaamvir's High Council, representative of the surface-elves.

**What she wants:** Peace; to ensure the surface-elves don't lose too much in the negotiation.

**Roleplaying Chaedi:** Reserved, condescending, dignified

**HEIAN MOONWEAVER** he/him; LG  
(high elf diviner, CR 8, VGtM, p 213)

**Who he is:** A member of Chaedi's security team. A century-long veteran of the fight against the drow.

**What he wants:** To ensure Chaedi, Thais, and he survive the meeting.

**Roleplaying Heian:** Suspicious, perceptive, considerate

**THAIS MOONWEAVER** she/her; CG  
(high elf champion, CR 9, VGtM, p 212)

**Who she is:** Bodyguard to the Chaedi, wife of Heian.

**What she wants:** To settle an old score with Synafein, who killed her brother—and many of her friends.

**Roleplaying Thais:** Brash, good-humored, impulsive

**FORGIVENESS** he/him; NE  
(tiefling champion, CR 9, VGtM, p 212)

**Who he is:** Mercenary secretly hired by Imrae to disrupt proceedings.

**What he wants:** To get paid. He's not picky about whose money it is: he will double cross Imrae in a heartbeat.

**Roleplaying Forgiveness:** Self-satisfied, cruel, selfish



## FEYDARK FILCH

By Jimmy Meritt

Cartography: Goose Prints

A river of gold flows through a kingdom where the Underdark meets the Feydark. A direct attack is suicide, but a clever crew pulling a daring heist can bring in quite the payday.

### DM'S NOTES

This adventure is a heist! One of the main differences between heist adventures and a more conventional encounter or dungeon crawl is a feeling of player empowerment. Players get all of the information they need up front to make a plan; when DMing this adventure, I strongly encourage a loose, improvisational style. Say “Yes” to players’ ideas, and create opportunities to let them be sneaky and feel like they are getting away with something.

Because the players are creating the plans and then following through, they may have narrative control than you are used to—that’s great! Let the players run the show, just stay aware of NPC motivations and location complications. In a conventional adventure, if things are going too smoothly for the characters, it’s often tempting to add another problem for the sake of boosting the challenge, but if the players have adequately accommodated for issues in the planning phase, let it be a huge success for them—a slick heist can create incredibly memorable games. Just make sure to hit them hard next session!

### BACKGROUND

A Fomorian Lord, the cruel **King Domill**, rules over the underground Kingdom of Inbharann, a crossroads where the Underdark crosses over with the Feywild, colloquially known as the Feydark. Inbharann is the wealthiest fomorian kingdom, primarily due to a river of gold that flows through it. This river is mined by duergar and overseen by **cyclops** guards before being

delivered to **eladrin** slaves. These eladrin, under heavy guard, deliver the gold to dwarven blacksmiths in exchange for weapons, armor, and mercenaries.

The kingdom is well defended. So, while a direct attack is inadvisable, stealth and trickery could be used to steal some of this liquid gold.

### THE PLAN

Characters are hired by **Dukar Coinborn** (NG dwarf noble, he/him), a former prisoner of King Domill. While serving as a slave, Dukar was able to observe the mining procedure and defenses. While he has no wish to re-enter Inbharann, he is willing to share what information he knows with the adventurers, and help them with a bit of planning, in exchange for a cut of the gold. However, his main motivation is to get one over on King Domill, as revenge for his enslavement.

To help keep the planning session focused, Coinborn proposes three broad approaches: the loud way, the quiet way, and the violent way.

#### THE LOUD WAY

Rival fomorian kingdoms are always on the lookout for any opportunity to invade. If Inbharann seems vulnerable, a rival army will invade. This attack would shift the guards and miners away from the river, as focus turns to repelling the invasion.

Dukar knows a rival kingdom will attack if the following two qualifications are met:

Inbharann’s primary defenses (aside from the hundreds of cyclopien guards sworn to its service) are a series of towers known as the Eyes Unblinking. The peak of each of these towers has a ritually enlarged eye from previous fomorian rulers. These eyes function as alarms, arcane weapons, and enchant the defenders. If these towers were sabotaged, rival kingdoms would see this as a sign of weakness. King Domill is obsessed with a prophecy of his death—oracles have predicted that he will die



by fire. If a large enough fire is started within his kingdom, King Domill will panic. Rival kingdoms know this, and will take advantage of any chaos caused by a blaze.

### THE QUIET WAY

Especially stealthy characters may be able to sneak into the kingdom towards the river of gold, abscond a fair bit of it, then sneak out. If characters are opting for a stealth-based approach, Coinborn encourages them to come up with the following contingencies:

The Eyes Unblinking will alert guards if intruders are spotted attempting to enter the kingdom. Coinborn encourages the characters to find ways to boost their odds of getting through—perhaps either by camouflaging themselves, or creating some sort of disguise that will convince guards they are supposed to be there. The liquid gold is usually taken out from the kingdom in a minecart, but sneaking out a large cart would be extraordinarily difficult. Coinborn suggests they find another way to smuggle out the liquid gold.

Once they reach the river, the characters will have to figure out a way to deal with the guards—bribery, trickery, or fast violence with an escape plan.

### THE VIOLENT WAY

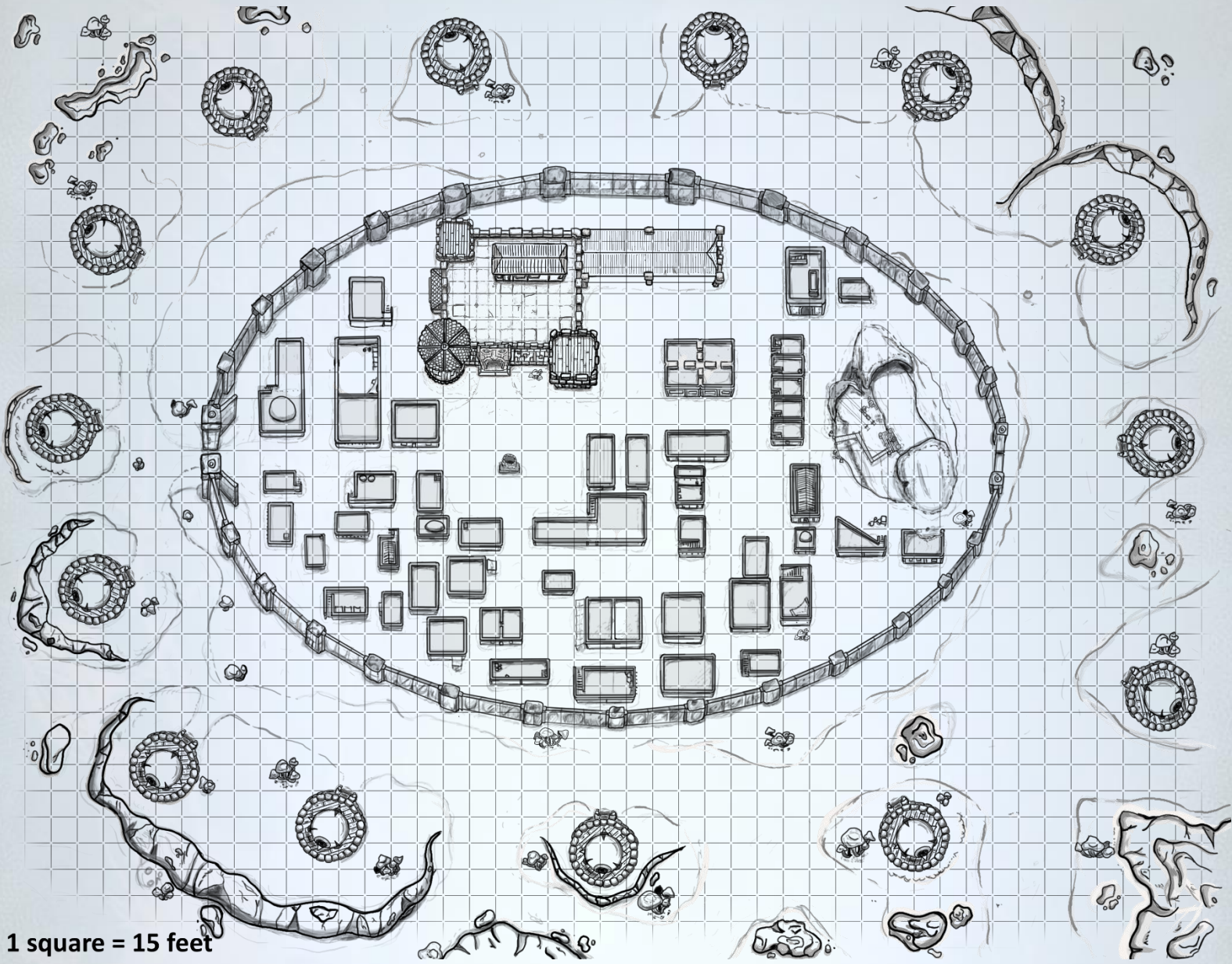
Once the gold leaves the kingdom and moves into the Underdark proper, it could be taken by force. The prize is heavily guarded, but a well-planned ambush could help things go in the characters' direction. To execute an ambush, the following needs to happen:

To prevent ambushes, the gold moves along one of three different routes every time it leaves the kingdom. Characters must find a way to push the gold along a prescribed route without creating suspicion. If the gold convoy gets “spooked,” they will return to Inbharann. Coinborn recommends one complex method: a cave in can block off one tunnel, but some form

of deception should be used to convince the convoy away from the second.

Allow the characters the time to make their plan. As they plot, remember that Coinborn's suggestions are just that—suggestions. The characters may decide to combine two ideas (using a distraction from a “Loud” method to assist in stealth, for instance). It is also possible (and likely!) they will come up with something completely out of left field! Err on the side of allowing the characters to have a fair shot, using the information given in the “Heist Encounters” section below to adjudicate.





1 square = 15 feet





## HEIST ENCOUNTERS

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While attempting their big score, the characters will likely come across some of the following locations and scenarios.

### THE TUNNELS OUTSIDE INBHARANN

Characters planning to ambush the delivery need to explore the tunnels outside of the city to find the best choke point. To keep the scenario fast and loose, this is abstracted through an ability check. Finding the best ambush point requires a successful **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation or Nature)** check.

Ambush Point Investigation Results:

- **Success by Ten or More:** The characters find the most advantageous ambush point. All opposing creatures are surprised, and characters have advantage on attack rolls for the first round of combat
- **Success:** The characters find a good ambush point. Opposing creatures are surprised on the first round of combat.
- **Failure:** The characters have found an adequate ambush point. Roll to determine surprise as normal (opposed Stealth and Perception checks).
- **Failure by Ten or more:** The characters have found a poor ambush point, and have disadvantage on all rolls for the first round of combat. They are not able to surprise their opponents.

Once the ambush spot has been determined, the characters must ensure the convoy picks the route leading towards it. Coinborn suggests two obvious methods: causing a tunnel collapse to seal off an alternate route, or using some form of deception to encourage the convoy away from the other. If the same method is used for both, the convoy may become suspicious.

The characters can cause a tunnel collapse with a successful **DC 13 Strength (Athletics)** check if using brute force, or **Intelligence (Nature)** check if using their knowledge of geology. Allow room for player creativity here—any justified skill or spell should have a chance of success.

If the characters re-route the convoy through deception, they must come up with a justifiable excuse as to why the convoy should switch tunnels, then succeed on a **DC 13 Charisma (Deception)** check. Grant advantage for especially clever ruses.

If the cave-in or deception checks fail, the convoy travels to a less-advantageous ambush point. Go down by one on the *Ambush Point Investigation Results* table. For example, if the characters succeeded by 10 or more, treat it as a normal success instead.

## THE CONVOY

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The convoy itself consists of a mine cart filled with liquid gold (worth 10,000 gp). The cart is guarded by five **cyclopes (CR 6; MM, p 45)**, one **duergar (CR 1; MM, p 122)** and three **winter eladrin (CR 10; MToF, p 197)**. In combat, the duergar flees if reduced to half of their hit points, not willing to die for the cause. The cyclopes fight to the death, having sworn an oath to their the fomorian king. The eladrin are slaves, overcome with despair at being captured. They do not attack the characters unless attacked first, or one eladrin attacks each time the duergar uses his action to make a successful **DC 13 Charisma (Intimidation)** check.

Once the duergar has been killed or has fled, a successful **DC 13 Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion)** check convinces the eladrin to fight for their freedom.



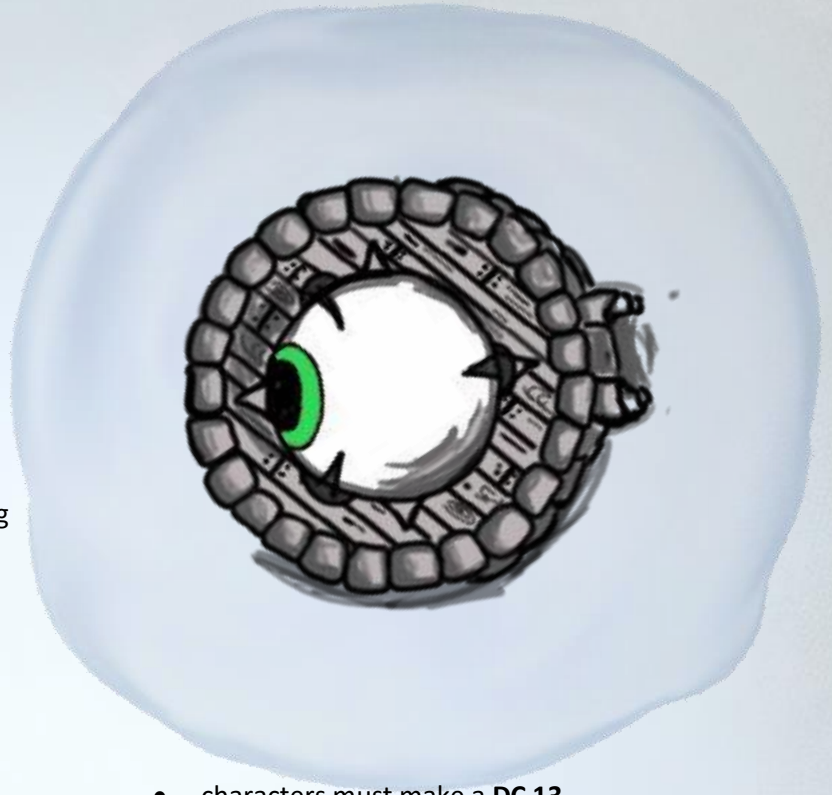
## EYES UNBLINKING

The massive kingdom of iron and rock is bordered by a series of fourteen towers. The peak of each tower contains a massive arcane fomorian eye, watching over the approach.

- Each tower is 20 feet high and can be climbed with a successful **DC 13 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics)** check.
- The eyes have a passive Perception of 15. If the characters have done anything to aid them in sneaking by, grant advantage on their Stealth checks.
- The Eyes themselves have an AC of 10 and 15 hp. If four Eyes are destroyed, word gets out to rival kingdoms. The Eyes do not observe each other.
- If an Eye spots an interloper approaching the kingdom, it triggers an *alarm* spell. This alarm summons one **duergar (CR 1; MM, p 122)** and two **cyclopes (CR 6; MM, p 45)**. The duergar's job is to inform the characters that borders are closed. If the characters have come up with a convincing ruse to allow them into the city, a successful **DC 10 Charisma (Deception)** check tricks the duergar, who allows them entrance. If combat begins, an additional *alarm* spell alerts another four cyclopes.

If combat begins near an *Eye Unblinking*, they perform one of the following lair actions on initiative count 20:

- The Eye triggers another *alarm* spell, alerting an additional four cyclopes to the battlefield.
- The Eye gives a blessing to defenders of Inbharann. All creatures defending Inbharann gain advantage on attack rolls and saving throws until the end of their next turn.
- The Eye targets all characters hostile to Inbharann with an arcane blast. The



- characters must make a **DC 13 Constitution saving throw**, taking 14 (4d6) necrotic damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

The cyclopes fight to the death, having sworn an oath to the Fomorian Kings, but do not attempt to kill the characters, assuming they have more value as slave labor.

## THE KINGDOM

- If the characters have bluffed their way through the guards, they are allowed free entrance into the kingdom.
- If the characters snuck by the gates, the most likely point of entrance is the large iron wall surrounding the kingdom, which can be climbed with a successful **DC 13 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics)** check. On a failure, there is a 10% chance of being spotted by an Eye Unblinking.

Due to the defenses on the outside of the kingdom, once inside most creatures assume the characters are supposed to be there, and do



not question them unless any suspicious behavior draws attention.

A massive iron fortress lies in the middle of the makeshift kingdom, with most other buildings constructed from carved rock. Iridescent mushrooms cover much of the surface and rock walls. A successful **DC 10 Intelligence (Nature)** check confirms the flammability of these mushrooms. Starting a fire is simple enough, although the characters should be encouraged to find a way to do so subtly.

### THE RIVER OF GOLD

A river of liquid gold flows through the kingdom of Inbharann—15 feet of river flows between two narrow tunnels. Six dwarf slaves (commoners) mine the river, watched over by six **cyclopes** and two **duergar**.

- Four cyclopes watch the slaves, while two others keep their eye on any who approach the river. The two duergar (Gremrick and Horace) are idly playing dice.
- If combat begins, the six cyclopes fight to the death. Gremrick runs to get additional help, returning in 2 rounds with 1d4 additional cyclopes. Horace fights until reduced to half hit points, at which point he flees. The slaves make a run for it.
- If a distraction has driven guards away, the river is instead watched by one duergar (Horace) and two cyclopes. Horace is susceptible to bribes. He allows the characters to steal gold in exchange for a magical item. If combat begins, the two cyclopes fight to the death while Horace attempts to get help—adjudicate on if any Cyclops are available based on how much chaos the characters have caused.

### CONCLUSION

The characters can have the mine carts of liquid gold valued at the nearest settlement, finding it worth 10,000 gp. Coinborne is satisfied after taking his cut, and may direct the characters to nearby merchants to spend their fortune, or perhaps recruit them for future jobs.



## FIRE FEST

By Jessica Marcrum

Artist: Luiz Prado

Cartography: Jeff C. Stevens

*Estimated run-time: 60 - 90 minutes*

*Fire Fest* is a short lair adventure designed for five characters of 3rd<sup>d</sup> level that can be played combat-free. Scaling instructions are included to run the adventure for characters from 1st to 5th level.

### BACKGROUND

The Underdark is a dangerous and vibrant place, full of terrifying creatures that both feed on fire and loathe the light. Some of these creatures have created a temporary peace, though the Underdark is rarely peaceful.

In the caverns below a bustling Underdark city, all ties of race and creed are cast aside each year in the month-long Festival of Fire. Initially started when a group of **nilbogs** (CR 1, VGtM, p 183) and a group of **firenewt warriors** (CR ½, VGtM, p 143) decided to drink to their shared prosperity, the celebration has grown to massive proportion, attracting travelers from around the continent and perhaps even further.

### PLOT HOOK

Vorstung Runnehimmel, a **duergar** (he/him, CR 1, MM, p 122) and his husband Wocket, a **svirfneblin** (he/him, CR ½, MM, p 164) ask adventurers to stop the noise below their home. Vorstung encourages them to kill everyone making the “racket,” and asks for evidence the deed is done. Wocket asks the adventurers not to kill anyone, noting “they have the good drugs.”

Neither Vorstung nor Wocket know of the Festival of Fire, though if questioned, Wocket reveals he is friendly with the occasional reveler. In return for stopping the noise, Vorstung offers any two items from his weapon

collection (any +1 weapons) plus 20 gp per adventurer.

### SET THE NIGHT ON FIRE

The Festival of Fire is crowded and loud. Any creature not resistant to fire or thunder damage must succeed on a **DC 12 Constitution saving throw** every hour or take 2 (1d4) fire damage and 2 (1d4) thunder damage. On a character’s third failed saving throw, or if they roll a natural 1 on any saving throw, they are deafened and suffer one level of exhaustion.

Deafness, exhaustion, and environmental damage taken can be alleviated by purchasing snacks, drinks, or substances, or by resting in designated areas at the festival.

### FIGHTING IN THE FESTIVAL

While the odd fistfight is known to break out at the festival, fights to the death are frowned upon. Attacking staff is grounds for expulsion by the bouncers.

Feel free to add additional combatants as needed throughout any fight, as the festival is crowded and revelers are constantly moving throughout the rooms.

### APPROACHING THE BOUNCERS

As the party approaches the festival, read or summarize:

The cavern beneath Vorstung and Wocket’s home extends much further than expected, opening into a large, roped-off area illuminated by fire beetles. Leaning against the stone walls and blocking the way are two tattoo-covered hobgoblins, laughing heartily.

Scraff (they/them) and Gronkles (she/her) are tattooed **hobgoblin** (CR ½, MM, p 186) bouncers collecting tickets for the festival. They accept bribes of 5 sp or higher for admittance without a ticket, though emphasize the festival is sold out. Flattering their strength and martial prowess or succeeding on a **DC 10 Charisma**



**(Persuasion)** check allows characters to enter the festival for free.

### GENERAL FEATURES

**Terrain.** Stone, dirt, and loose gravel.

**Weather.** Warm in the entrance and exceedingly hot by the massive fires.

**Light.** Unless otherwise noted, the festival is lit by **giant fire beetles** (CR 0, MM, p 325) wandering the caverns and scattered torches.

**Smells and Sounds.** The caverns pulsate with throbbing music and laughter. The air reeks of smoke, sulphur, and sweat from too many unwashed bodies crammed into a small space.

### AREA 1

As the party enters Area 1, read or summarize:

A small group of five firenewt warriors huddle around a sign written in multiple languages. They appear to be agitated by what they're reading.

The sign reads: *Drinks and Coat Check Ahead. VIP Balcony for VIPS ONLY!* in Draconic, Goblin, and Ignan.

Communicating with the firenewts clarifies they are annoyed by the existence of a VIP Lounge as it goes against the founding principles of the Festival of Fire.

### AREA 2

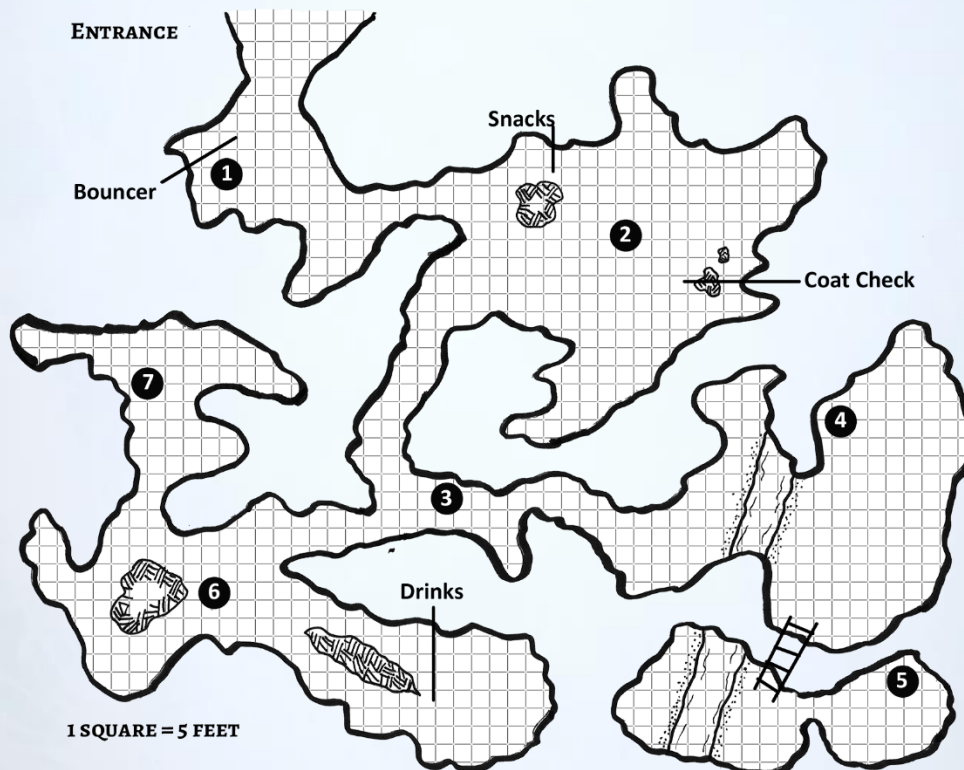
As the party enters Area 2, read or summarize:

The hall expands into a massive room bustling with firenewts and kobolds. A hobgoblin in a leather apron stands over a massive firepit, roasting meat. Across the room, a nilbog performs acrobatics while hanging up coats.

### FIERY FLAVOR

Graxundra the hobgoblin (she/her) sells smoked meats amply spiced for 5 sp, roasted nuts for 6 cp, and melting cinnamon toffee for 3 cp. Meat is served with bread, which can be used as earplugs providing resistance to thunder damage.

Eating any of her food cures deafness and one level of exhaustion. Eating smoked meat attunes the eater to a hot environment, making them resistant to fire damage for one hour.



### COAT CHECK

Recnad (they/them) the **nilbog** cracks jokes at passersby while collecting coats, weapons, and other gear. They charge 3 cp for small items (pack-sized) and 6 cp for large (large weaponry, mounts, etc.).

Recnad is a thief who steals from anyone who doesn't tip and has acquired a large collection of assorted items and illicit drugs. Those wishing to peruse Recnad's wares must succeed on a **DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion)** check.

Recnad offers small powders, herbs, and pilfered nonmagical jewelry, each for 5 sp. Substances provide the user with an additional 2 (1d4) to all Charisma checks for the next hour at the cost of a negative 2 (1d4) to all Wisdom checks.

### FIGHTING IN AREA 2

Anyone attacking Graxundra or Recnad must face both, as well as four **firenewt warriors** and one **firenewt warlock of Imix** (CR 1, VGtM, p 143).

If Graxundra or Recnad are killed, the characters can loot a few pieces of food or illegal substances from their areas.

### SCALING THE BATTLE

**Levels 1-2:** Remove the firenewt warlock of Imix

**Levels 4-5:** Add two additional hobgoblins, nilbogs, and firenewt warlocks of Imix

## AREA 3

As the party enters Area 3, read or summarize:

The cramped walkway becomes difficult to navigate and you struggle not to trip over the fire beetles. The music pounds and the heat increases, while all around you smiling creatures beckon you deeper into the cavern. They divide at a T-intersection, both groups calling to you to follow.

### DIVERGING PATHS

This area is snug and crammed to the gills with dancing creatures casting spells. Treat this area as difficult terrain.

Adventurers with a passive Perception of 12 or higher discern the music grows louder in one direction (Area 6) while the heat increases from the other (Area 4). Those with a passive Perception of 14 or higher additionally notice a rumbling from the direction of Area 4.

The characters see **firenewt warriors**, **kobold inventors** (CR ¼, VGtM, p166), and **nilbogs** heading in one direction while the **firenewt warlocks of Imix** and **kobold scale sorcerers** (CR 1, VGtM, p 167) go the other way.

### APPROACHING THE NONMAGICAL REVELERS

The group heading to Area 6 is interested in dancing and causing a ruckus. They encourage characters to come dance, have some drinks, break stuff, and go to the cuddle corner to rest before rejoining the festivities

### APPROACHING THE MAGICALLY INCLINED

The group heading to Area 4 is interested in the deeper magics of the festival. They purport to know the true meaning behind the festival and encourage characters to join them to see the future of the festival outside the VIP Lounge.

### FIGHTING IN AREA 3

Depending on when a fight breaks out, the adventurers may fight both groups simultaneously or one at a time.

Group 1 consists of: 2 **firenewt warriors**, 2 **kobold inventors**, and 2 **nilbogs**.

Group 2 consists of: 2 **firenewt warlocks of Imix** and 2 **kobold scale sorcerers**

### TREASURE

An acid flask and a vial of alchemist's fire can be looted from each kobold scale sorcerer.



## SCALING THE BATTLE

**Levels 1-2:** Remove one of each type of creature.

**Levels 4-5:** Add an additional kobold and firenewt to their respective groups.

## AREA 4

As the party enters Area 4, read or summarize:

The heat is almost unbearable and the smell of sulphur stings the senses. A rumble beneath the ground gives way to geysers of lava. The kobold sorcerers cheer from beside it, as the firenewts dive in, swimming to the other side. You see some ride the geyser, rising up in a shower of liquid flames. One kobold winks at you and approaches the lava confidently.

### CROSSING THE LAVA

**Hazard.** Lava is deadly. The lava flows are 10 feet across and may be crossed by succeeding on a **DC 25 Strength (Athletics)** check to leap across it or by fashioning a rope swing and succeeding on a **DC 15 Dexterity (Acrobatics)** check. Anyone wishing to cross the lava by foot must either have some form of fire immunity or take 55 (10d10) fire damage.

### BURNING EYES

Burning Eyes (she/her), a **kobold scale sorcerer watching the revelry**, has glowing yellow eyes and carries a pack full of glowing eggs. If asked, she explains they are unfertilized salamander eggs. By drinking one raw, she plans to make herself immune to fire for a few hours and finally go “upstairs.”

Adventurers who are interested in Burning Eyes’s eggs must succeed on a **DC 15 Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion)** check or pay Burning Eyes 30 gp per egg or 100 gp for five eggs. When cracked open and eaten, the eggs grant immunity to fire damage for 4 hours. The eggs can’t be cooked with heat, but acid can be used as a substitute, caustically frying them.

### HATCHING GROUND



Beyond the lava flow, firenewt warlocks frolic and tend to a clutch of **fire snakes** (CR 1, MM, p 265). Several obsidian eggs shake in a massive bonfire, as if more fire snakes are about to hatch. The walls in this cul-de-sac are smooth obsidian and impossible to climb.

Characters wishing to help with hatching must succeed on a **DC 12 Wisdom (Animal Handling)** or **DC 12 Intelligence (Arcana)** check. Those who assist with a hatching may find themselves “adopted” by a newborn fire snakelet.

### FIGHTING IN AREA 4

On one side of the lava: 4 **kobold scale sorcerers** and 2 **firenewt warlocks of Imix**.

On the other side: 2 **firenewt warlocks of Imix** and 3 **fire snakes**.

Both sides liberally utilize the lava as an environmental hazard against enemies.



## SCALING THE BATTLE

**Levels 1-2:** Remove the firenewts from the kobold side of the lava and 1 fire snake.

**Levels 4-5.** Add 1 kobold and 2 firenewts to one side and double the firenewts and fire snakes on the other side.

## AREA 5

As the party approaches Area 5, read or summarize:

The lava geyser is an unsteady elevator, as the ground world seems to whip away in a haze of golden heat. Reaching the top, the heat is oppressive. A loud voice bellows beside you in hissing and popping sounds that could be laughter.

## VIP LOUNGE

The lounge overlooks the hatching ground below. Characters with darkvision can also see occasional sparks from the bar in Area 6. The music is quieter here, though this is the hottest place in the entire area.

## SHAKASSHTA

Shakasshta (she/her), a massive **fire lizard** (use **salamander**; CR 5, MM, p 266), is relaxing beside the lava with three **firenewt warlocks of Imix**. Her mood depends on how the characters approached the area: if they took an egg from Burning Eyes, she applauds either their diplomacy or their violence. If any of the fire snakes below have been harmed, she is aggressive and demands to know why her children were slaughtered.

Shakasshta is called to this area by the annual fires. They strengthen her and she has chosen to raise her young in their midst. She has no desire to attack anyone and wants the festival to continue in peace. Only the firenewts and kobold scale sorcerers know of her and her brood's existence.

Shakasshta can be convinced the raucous partying is threatening the safety of her children. Those wishing her to reveal herself to the revelers and demand they continue the festival without music must succeed on a **DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion)** check. If the adventurers have killed her children, they have no bargaining chip. Attempting to intimidate Shakasshta turns her hostile.





## TREASURE

If Shakashta is killed, the characters can spend time to loot her spear and a handful of her scales worth 20 gp each. High-end substances can be looted from the bodies of the firenewt warlocks. They are twice as powerful as those sold by Reznad.

### SCALING THE BATTLE

**Levels 1-2.** It's honestly a bad idea to fight a salamander even at level 3, but to even the odds a bit, the firenewt warlocks are removed by diving down the lava geyser.

**Levels 4-5:** Add 2 additional firenewt warlocks.

## AREA 6

As the party enters Area 6, read or summarize:

The music is so loud here you can feel the beat deep in your body. On a massive stone stage, firenewts sing and a nilbog band plays to the cheering crowds. Across the room, a laughing kobold pours rows of fiery drinks along a bar.

### UNDERDARK BANDSTAND

The band consists of five **nilbogs** playing bagpipes, drums, a dulcimer, a lyre, and a shawm. At the same time, a quartet of **firenewt warriors** sings a completely different song in Draconic.

Cheering for the music and dancing are a number of **nilbogs**, **firenewt warriors**, and **kobold inventors** occasionally setting off the odd alchemical explosion in celebration.

### STOP THE NOISE, STOP THE FUNK

It is very difficult to get the musicians to stop. Characters who try must succeed on **DC 18 Charisma (Intimidation)** checks against both the band and the quartet. Failing that, they decide to redirect the celebration into something quieter. By succeeding on a **DC 15 Charisma (Performance)** check, the characters may convince revelers that quiet poetry or

unaccompanied dance is preferable to boisterous music.

Anyone who gets on stage and performs at all is cheered as a hero and receives 3 sp, thrown to them from the crowd.

### GET CRUNK

The bar is run by Kalama (she/her), a **kobold inventor** (CR ¼, VGM, p 166). She performs bar tricks and loves telling jokes. She sells flaming drinks for 2 sp, sparkling drinks for 5 sp, and fresh water for 2 cp.

Flaming drinks provide fire resistance for an hour, sparkling drinks provide the imbiber with fire resistance and +2 (1d4) to all Charisma checks for an hour, and water removes deafness, one level of exhaustion, and puts out fires.

If tipped over 20% and treated kindly, Kalama is willing to perform a favor for the characters, including demanding the musicians take a break for refreshments, selling the characters items from her "private stock," or giving them advice about how best to approach different sections of the festival.

Kalama's private stock includes top-shelf versions of her normal drinks, doubling the effects. She also sells substances that boost confidence and increase sensory effects. Characters who choose to partake get an additional 3 (1d6) on Constitution saving throws at the cost of -2 (1d4) on Dexterity saving throws.

### FIGHTING IN AREA 6

In addition to the performers, there are 5 **kobold inventors**, 3 **nilbogs**, and 4 **firenewt warriors** around the stage and the same around the bar.

**Levels 1-2:** Fighting here is a bad idea, but reduce the number of combatants in each section by 2 of each type.

**Levels 4-5:** When in doubt, add more kobolds.



## AREA 7

When the party enters Area 7, read or summarize:

The light ahead is dim. The torches are gone and the fire beetles mill about lazily. The passageway expands into a medium-sized room full of sleeping revelers, cuddled together on sleeping sacks. Awake in the far corner, a one-eyed creature blinks at you and puts a finger to their lips.

### CUDDLE CORNER

When anyone at the festival is too exhausted to party, they go or are taken to the Cuddle Corner to rest and recuperate. Sleeping for three hours here provides the benefits of a long rest and removes all negative conditions.

At this time, two **firenewt warlocks of Imix**, four **nilbogs**, three **kobold inventors**, and a **hobgoblin** are all curled up together peacefully.

### CHEKKET

Chekket (he/him), a **nothic** (CR 2, MM, p 236), is wide awake. He lives in this cavern full-time and while he doesn't particularly enjoy the festival, he does like to watch the revelers sleep so he can more easily learn their secrets. Chekket encourages the characters to sleep, promising to watch over them while they rest.

Chekket only becomes hostile if attacked.

### TREASURE

Anyone wishing to steal from the sleeping may do so by succeeding on a **DC 10 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand)** check. Chekket merely observes. Anyone successfully robbed has 1-2 doses of substances and a handful of coins (2d10 sp).

## FIGHTING IN AREA 7

The characters surprise all sleeping creatures.

**Levels 1-2:** Remove the **hobgoblin** and 1 **nilbog**.

**Levels 4-5:** Add 1 **hobgoblin** and 1 **kobold inventor**.

## CONCLUSION

Adventurers who navigate their way through all, or most, of the festival should have a memorable and unexpected experience. If they successfully convince the revelers to tone it down and be a bit quieter, Vorstung keeps his word and gives them the promised reward. If they provide Wocket with substances, they are given a bonus that Wocket has been working on: a *pole of collapsing* (XGtE).

Whether the festival is allowed to continue quietly or not, the adventurers have gained several friends in the Underdark. If they slaughtered everyone and survived, they gain Vorstung's gratitude but their names are spoken in hushed whispers by kobolds, firenewts, goblinoids, and salamanders alike. May they enjoy their infamy.



## FIRE SNAKELET

*Tiny elemental, neutral*

**Armor Class** 14 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 11 (3d6)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (0)	16 (+3)	10 (0)	5 (-3)	10 (0)	14 (+2)

**Damage Vulnerabilities** cold

**Damage Resistances** bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

**Damage Immunities** fire

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

**Languages** --

**Challenge** ½ (100 XP)

**Heated Body.** A creature that touches the snakelet or hits it with a melee attack while within 5 feet of it takes 2 (1d4) fire damage.

### ACTIONS

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

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

**Tail.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 2 (1d4) bludgeoning damage plus 2 (1d4) fire damage.



## THE FLEEING MARKET

By Andrew Bishkynski

Art: Publisher's Choice Quality Stock Art ©  
Rick Hershey / Fat Goblin Games

Map: Created by Andrew Bishkynski using  
Inkarnate Pro

Estimated run-time: variable

*The Fleeing Market* is a repeatable encounter featuring a traveling merchant caravan. The caravan has three key uses:

**Supply stop.** The caravan carries various goods and can be used to resupply the party during a longer Underdark campaign.

**Rumor mill.** The caravan can be used to provide the party with rumors about work or other encounters—including those in this very tome!

**Adventure!** Three short scenarios involving the caravan are included and can be used to make encountering it more interesting.



## BACKGROUND

**Zim von Zeam** (LN, human male, swashbuckler, VGtM, p 217) of ZVZ Caravans has made a name for himself in braving the untamed wilds of Thar with his merchant caravans. Presented with an opportunity to create an unprecedented trade route between the drow city of Zethlentyn and the surface, the old merchant jumped at the chance.

Having established connections with the drow merchants of House Quiltrin and hired drow guards from the Selvetarm-worshipping House Claddatar, trade began to flow.

## ALL ABOUT THE CARAVAN

### WHERE TO FIND THE CARAVAN

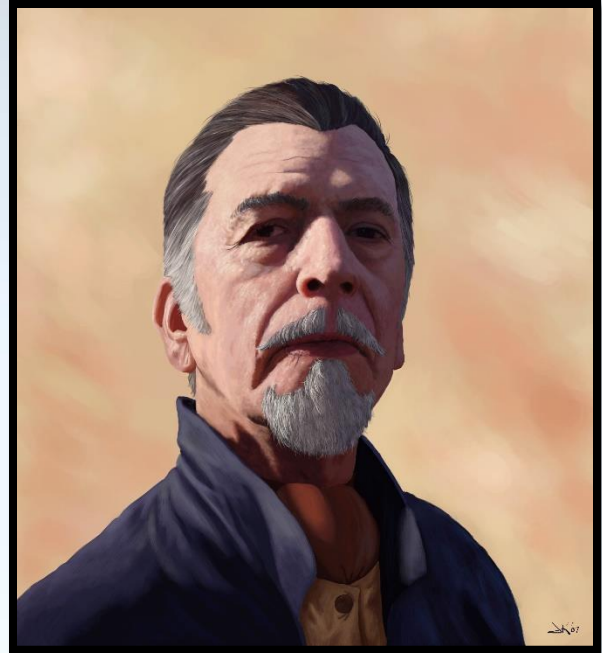
Zim von Zeam's original trade route connects a surface passage near the Moonsea city of Melvaunt to Zethlentyn, lying in the Deep Wastes, north of the Moondeep Sea.

Since founding the initial route, Zim's caravan can occasionally be found elsewhere in the Underdark, attempting to make further contacts.

### THE CARAVAN ITSELF

Always led by Zim von Zeam himself, the caravan typically consists of five wagons pulled by female **steeders** (MToF, p 238). The wagons are constructed for quick sealing or disassembly, should the need arise to travel through a tight cave passage or across a vertical surface. Zim purchases specially-bred steeders that are entirely docile and do not easily spook.

Typically accompanying Zim von Zeam are 2-4 **guards** of different surface races and 2 **drow elite warriors** of House Claddatar. While the Claddatar warriors are there to ensure the safety of any drow interests, Zim's guards have worked with him for years and also fulfill other duties. On any given trip, additional drow guards, surface adventurers, or passengers may be traveling along.



### ZIM VON ZEAM

Zim is an experienced trader and proprietor of the ZVZ Caravans company.

**Personality.** Zim's matter-of-fact personality and the philosophy of being "useful and neutral" have served him well in life, so he goes out of his way to make as many influential friends as possible. He knows that those he deals with usually have ulterior motives, but so long as these align with his goals, he is happy to go along.

**Objectives and Goals.** Zim's goal is ultimately profit, but he is also a bit of trailblazer and the challenge of carving out a brand-new route excites him.

**Ideal.** Commerce. The trade must flow.

**Bond.** I am a man of my word and care for those who work for me.

**Flaw.** I do business with just about anyone.

### TRADE GOODS AND SUPPLIES

At any given time, the caravan is travelling either from the surface to the Underdark or vice versa. The caravan always carries basic supplies. Depending on which direction it is going, it has either primarily surface goods or Underdark goods. Additionally, the caravan is constantly selling goods and as such, some of the goods may be sold out at any given time.



Please reference the Caravan Tables at the end of this encounter to see what the caravan may hold at any given time.

## RUMOR MILL

Zim von Zeam and his crew hear and see much on their journeys. Some information is passed for free, while other bits may be more difficult to obtain. Information available at the caravan fits one of 3 categories: Common, Valuable, or Confidential.

Common information is available free of charge, though it may sometimes require an inquiry from the characters.

Valuable information has a specific price, which can typically be negotiated down to half with a **DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion)** check.

Confidential information is not so easily shared. A **DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion)** check is required and the price is not negotiable.

Table 4. Rumors and Information	
Common Information (Free)	
Description	
1	Zim has heard of a mystical passage that appears out of thin air and leads to a paradise-like garden. (See: <i>Annarei's Garden</i> )
2	Zim knows of a location where the fun and festivities never seem to end (See: <i>Fire Fest</i> )
3	Zim can provide the party with a general description of, and directions to the City of Gracklstugh (See: any <i>Gackllestugh</i> encounter)
4	A traveler along with the caravan tells the party that they saw a scene of devastation as they passed a cavern with a homestead and ripplebark farm - there was a lot of recent blood and a rothe carcass. The traveler fled rather than investigating, but believes there may have been treasure or a monster there. (See: <i>Dark Dealings</i> )
Valuable Information (Price as Noted)	
1	Price 50 gp. As these things happen, Zim recently purchased a lead to a potential treasure location. A passing underdark adventures had seen what he described as a glorious magical Breastplate that looked to be protected by a plant creature. For a price, he is willing to sell the location. (See: <i>Breastplate</i> )
2	Price 40 gp. A passing derro merchant saw a dead elf lying in a tunnel while traveling. The derro had looted the corpse themselves, but they were too afraid that whatever killed the elf might still be nearby. He provided the directions to Zim. (See: <i>Cause &amp; Effect</i> )
3	Price 100 gp. Zim mentions that the Duergar of Gackstugh has been acting strange of late. He is unsure what is going on, but it's been very good for business and he's barely able to bring them enough stock of things. For a price, he is willing to tell them what goods are most needed there and they may be able to make some profit if they make the journey. (See: <i>Grackstugh's Zeitgeist</i> for city scenario, add goods and profits details as relevant).
4	Price 30 gp. One of the commoners travelling along with Zim conspirationally offers to tell the party where to buy goods cheaper than from Zim. For a small fee, she tell party of Fiddleplitz's Potions and Balms - another merchant with much more reasonable prices. (See: <i>Forgotten</i> )
Confidential Information (Check & Price)	
1	300 gp. One of the caravan guards overheard a pair of adventures talking about a "score of a lifetime". They had been on their way to the surface, to recruit additional allies before taking on the mission, and mentioned "that fool Coinborn" as their contact in the Underdark. He gives them directions to where to find Dukar Coinborn - giving them the chance to beat the others to the punch. (See: <i>Feydark Filch</i> )
2	200 gp. The drow house of K'gaust has accumulated great wealth by selling rare spell components. If you're lucky, you might be able to trade with them at their beautiful villa. (See: <i>The Itsy-Bitsy Spider</i> )
3	100 gp. A fortune teller travelling with the caravan offers to help divine where the party can find powerful magic items. "Red veins and red blades, a new king skitters where an old king crawled. Teeth of a smile and teeth of the earth. A tower at Torog's Teeth holds the key to your desires birth." (See: <i>The King's Highway</i> )
4	100 gp. A drow named Jhynn Maerdwivyn recently stopped by the caravan and asked for some very specific directions. While she was showing one of the guards a map from her journal to clarify directions, he noticed a note that read, "...transformed into gold!" The guard can provide them with those same directions. (See: <i>Lost Beauty</i> ).



## CARAVAN ENCOUNTERS

This section contains three brief encounters that can be used to make things interesting.

### A NOBLE STEEDER (ANY LEVEL)

Specially bred to be docile, one of the **female steeders** used to pull the caravan carts has become bored with the task, and broken free of her harness.

A colorful dim light shed by large phosphorescent mushrooms illuminates the strange scene found in this large cavern.

A circle of five caravan wagons stands camped in the cavern's center. Moving around it a clearly agitated state are a pair of drow and several humanoids.

The drow have their crossbows pointed up to the darkness of the cavern's ceiling, while an older human can be heard saying, "Careful, don't harm her!"

This scene may play out differently based on whether this is the characters' first encounter with Zim's caravan, so be prepared to adjust as necessary.

Once the characters have made contact with Zim, he explains the problem of the runaway **female steeder**, which is currently crawling around aimlessly 100 feet up on the cavern's domed ceiling. Zim offers the characters a safe place to rest and 100 gp in goods from the caravan if they are able to retrieve the steeder safely.

The cavern walls and ceiling are uneven; a character can climb up with 3 **DC 12 Strength (Athletics)** checks. A failed check results in a fall unless secured. Other creative methods of getting up should be encouraged. A special **DC 13 Charisma (Animal Handling)** check is required to coax the steeder into returning. Force can also be used. A **DC 12**

**Wisdom (Insight)** check also reveals that the steeder has become more self-aware that its behavior in acting out may continue unless it's allowed to periodically hunt or participate in other "exciting" activities.

When told about the latter development, Zim proclaims, "So you're telling me that my bored steeder wants to go adventuring? What's it gonna want next, a magic sword?"

If any of the characters were successful in interacting with the steeder, it becomes friendly to them. As a result, Zim offers to let them keep the steeder in lieu of payment, so long as they agree to help get the caravan to its next stop (while this is a trivial task, it can also be converted to lead into another encounter or a visit to a specific location).

Upon agreement and the fulfillment of these conditions, the steeder becomes a loyal pet or mount for one character.

### WHAT UNEARTHED?! (LEVELS 3-10)

The party comes upon Zim's caravan fending off burrowing monsters!

The sound of rumbling earth echoes from the next cavern, followed by an inhuman roar and chaotic shouts.

Upon investigation, the characters find a large, but low-ceilinged cavern. The caravan is in the cavern's far corner, set up in a defensive semi-circle. Several of the monster can be seen rushing it as the guards attempt to hold them off.

As the scene unfolds, two of the monsters can be seen diving into the ground itself and disappearing! Moments later screams from inside the caravan's defensive position can be heard—the beasts have breached!



### DEFENDING THE CARAVAN

In addition to Zim, the caravan's defense force is comprised of **guards** (CR 1/8; MM, p 347) and **drow elite warriors** (CR 5; MM, p 128). Their number varies depending on the encounter's strength. These eventually prevail over the monsters, but not without heavy casualties. There are also 4 non-drow passengers (commoners) traveling along and taking cover. As such, the characters are able to intervene and make a substantial difference in the fight.

### SCALING THE BATTLE

The battle is designed for five level 3-10 characters.

**Levels 3-4:** There are 5 **ankhegs** (CR 2; MM, p 121), of which 3 engage the characters. The caravan's defense force is 4 **guards** and 2 **drow elite warriors**.

**Levels 5-6:** As 3-4, but a **bulette** (CR 5; MM, p 34) also emerges and ambushes the characters.

**Levels 7-8:** There are 5 **bulettes** (CR 5; MM, p 34) of which 3 engage the characters. The caravan's defense force is 2 **guards** and 4 **drow elite warriors**.

**Levels 9-10:** As 7-8, but a **grick alpha** (CR 7; MM, p 173) also joins the fray, attacking the characters.

### TREASURE

If the characters succeed in helping the caravan, Zim offers them a total of 1,200 gp (levels 3-6) or 2,000 gp (levels 7-10) worth of credit at his shop. The reward offered is reduced by 100 gp for every civilian or guard casualty during the attack.

### INSPECTION (LEVELS 3-10)

While interacting with Zim's caravan, a drow patrol approaches. This encounter takes place when Zim's caravan is traveling toward the surface.

"Someone approaches," says one of the caravan's drow guards in heavily accented common. Zim visibly tenses up and his other guards reach to ready their weapons. The drow lifts her ear from the ground and continues, "Six or seven, by riding lizard. A patrol most likely. May not be hostile."

The approaching patrol consists of a **drow priestess of Lolth** (CR 8; MM, p 128) and several armed drow elite warriors, using **giant lizards** (CR 1/4; MM, p 326). They are from a nearby drow city and consider this to be their territory. As servants of Lolth, they despise non-drow and, were the caravan not under drow protection, they would likely have destroyed it and taken everyone for slaves. As it is, they are looking for any excuse to interfere or make life difficult.

The priestess Enteira Marlyth haughtily introduces herself and demands to inspect the caravan's goods.

The priestess oozes malice and corruption with every word and gesture. "This one is handsome for a human," she says as she runs her finger along the face of one of the guards, "he would make a splendid slave, if we cleaned him. Wouldn't you now?"

Ever-professional, Zim is happy to show off his merchandise, though he senses that these drow are not here to buy. As he makes his way through the caravan's third of the five wagons, he visibly slows his demonstration, taking extra time to focus on mundane items that clearly have no significance. A **DC 13 Wisdom (Insight)** check here reveals that he is stalling, hoping the drow would be satisfied and leave. A **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception)** check notes that a pair of his human guards are getting particularly nervous and are glancing over at the fifth wagon.

### THE HIDDEN CARGO

Hidden in secret compartments of a pair of weapon crates are two deep gnomes who had been liberated from drow slavery and are being smuggled out to start a new life on the surface. If they are found by worshippers of Lolth, they will be taken back at best.

While the characters are unaware of the cargo, once they pick up that something may be shifty about the fifth wagon, someone may





inconspicuously make their way there with a **DC 13 Dexterity (Stealth)** check and learn about it with a **DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation)** or **DC 13 Charisma (any appropriate)** check.

### GETTING OUT OF THE SITUATION

This scenario lends itself to many potential solutions based on character knowledge and capabilities. Creativity and shenanigans are encouraged! Some potential solutions include:

- Quietly moving the gnomes from the back wagon.
- Distracting the drow from inspecting the back wagon.
- Improving the disguise of the secret compartment or the gnomes.
- Fighting the drow.

### SCALING THE BATTLE

Combat is not a necessary outcome in this situation. If it comes to it, the battle is designed for five level 3-10 characters.

Zim's drow elite guards are conflicted about fighting other drow and may not participate in the combat – other than to protect Zim himself. This is reflected in the scaling below. The drow are considered to have dismounted and so their giant lizards do not participate in combat.

**Levels 3-4:** The drow priestess of Lolth is accompanied by 5 drow (CR; 1/4 MM, p 128). The caravan's entire defense force of 4 guards and 2 drow elite assist the party.

**Levels 5-6:** The drow priestess of Lolth is accompanied by 5 drow. Only the caravan's 4 guards assist the party.

**Levels 7-8:** The drow priestess of Lolth is accompanied by 3 drow and 2 drow elite warriors. Only the caravan's 4 guards assist the party.

**Levels 9-10:** The drow priestess of Lolth is accompanied by 2 drow and 3 drow elite warriors. Only the caravan's 4 guards assist the party.

### TREASURE

If the characters succeed in helping the gnomes avoid detection by the patrol or in protecting them from it, one of the gnomes gives the adventurers her only possession, a *stone of good luck* (DMG, p 205).



## CARAVAN TABLES

### TABLE ONE: BASIC SUPPLIES

The caravan's inventory is constantly changing as it trades during its trips back-and-forth from the Underdark to the surface. When encountered, roll a d6 and consult the top row of each table. This reflects what the caravan's current inventory of basic supplies, surface goods, and Underdark goods, which may change each time it is encountered.

	Item	1-2	3-4	5-6	Price
1	PHB 149 Simple Weapons (random type)	6 total	3 total	1 total	phbx2
2	PHB 149 Martial Melee Weapons (random type)	2 total	1 total	sold out	phbx2
3	PHB 150 Ammunition (In packs of standard quantity - 20/50, etc.)	3 of each	2 of each	1 of each	phbx2
4	PHB 150 Antitoxin	6	4	2	phbx2
5	PHB 150 Healer's Kit	4	2	1	phbx2
6	PHB 150 Holy Water	4	2	1	phbx2
7	PHB 150 Lantern (Hooded)	2	1	1	phbx2
8	PHB 150 Torch	10	6	4	phbx2
9	PHB 150 Grappling Hook	2	1	1	phbx2
10	PHB 150 Climber's Kit	2	1	1	phbx2
11	PHB 150 Rope, Hempen (50ft)	4	2	2	phbx2
12	PHB 150 Rations (1 day)	60	40	20	phbx2
13	PHB 150 Random Other Items from Adventuring Gear Table	8 items	4 items	2 items	phbx2

### TABLE TWO: SURFACE GOODS

	Item	1-2	3-4	5-6	Price
1	DMG258 Drow Poison	6	4	2	200g
2	PHB 154 Thieves Tools	2	1	1	phb
3	PHB 154 Dice Set	4	2	1	phb
4	n/a Braincap Mushroom (Reduces madness level to 0, no more than 1/day)	4	2	Sold Out	500g
5	PHB 158 Ale (Underdark)	12	6	4	phb
6	XGE 140 Magic Item (Minor Common)	2	1	1	200gp
7	XGE 141 Magic Item (Minor Uncommon)	2	1	1	1000gp
8	DMG258 Wyven Poison	2	1	1	1200g
9	dmg184 Oil of Slipperiness	2	1	1	500g
10	dmg187 Potion of Climbing	4	2	1	100g
11	dmg213 Hand Crossbow +1	2	1	1	1000gp
12	dmg213 Scimitar +1	2	1	1	1000gp



## TABLE THREE: UNDERDARK GOODS

	Item	1-2	3-4	5-6	Price	
1	PHB 150	Potion of Healing	6	4	2	phbx2
2	PHB 150	Spellbook	2	1	1	phbx2
3	PHB 154	Playing Card Set	4	2	1	phbx2
4	PHB 158	Wine, fine (surface)	12	6	4	phbx2
5	PHB 158	Ale (surface)	12	6	4	phbx2
6	XGE 140	Magic Item (Minor Common)	2	1	1	200gp
7	XGE 141	Magic Item (Minor Uncommon)	2	1	1	1000gp
8	DMG/PHB	Random Spell Scroll 1st level	3	2	1	100gp
9	DMG/PHB	Random Spell Scroll 2nd level	3	2	1	300g
10	DMG/PHB	Random Spell Scroll 3rd level	3	2	1	1000gp
11	dmg213	Random +1 weapon	1	1	Sold Out	1000gp
12	dmg213	Shield +1	1	1	Sold Out	1000gp



## FORGOTTEN

By Christopher Walz

Artist: Matt DeMino

Estimate run-time: 60 to 90 minutes

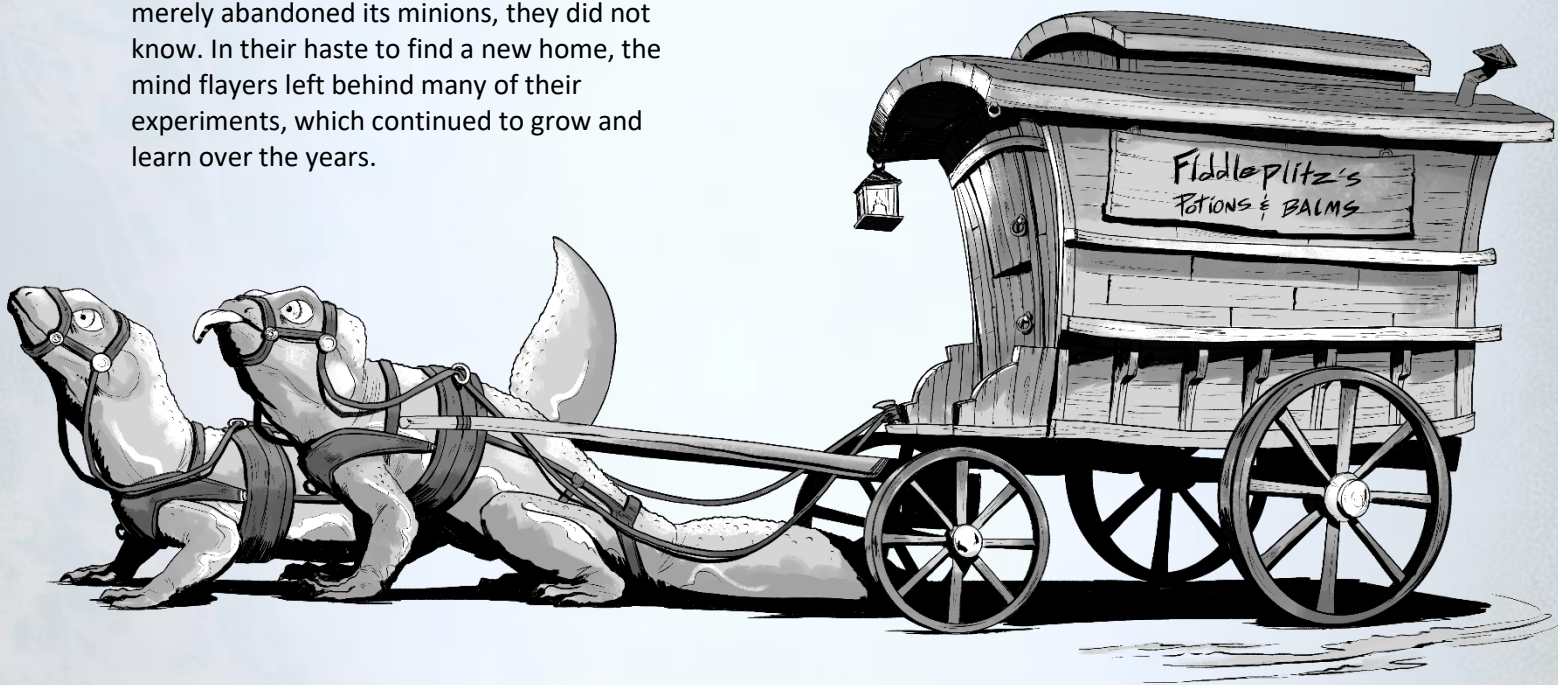
*This short adventure is designed for five 5th-level characters and features social interaction, exploration, and combat. Scaling options are provided for lower and higher-level parties.*

### BACKGROUND

The illithids have claimed large swathes of the Underdark as their domain for ages, well-hidden from the goodly surface races. Although each large colony answers to only a single elder brain, the mind flayers often build satellite stations to support their twisted research. One such outpost, dedicated to studying the Underdark's strange flora and fauna, was quickly abandoned by when the mind flayers felt their connection to the elder brain fade; whether the elder brain had been destroyed or merely abandoned its minions, they did not know. In their haste to find a new home, the mind flayers left behind many of their experiments, which continued to grow and learn over the years.

Now, the former illithid laboratory is inhabited by a giant swarm of cranium rats that refers to itself as Progeny and its oblex ally—a half-finished experiment the cranium rats were able to complete. The rats desperately want to reunite with their illithid creators, having been separated for several years. They believe that by showing the mind flayers the completed and loyal oblex they will be welcomed back. Progeny, however, has been unable to locate their creators and have resolved to capturing knowledgeable folk and forcing them to help—a party of hapless adventurers, perhaps.

The oblex recently stalked and killed a rock gnome alchemist called Fiddleplitz and is using its deceptive abilities to set a trap for any passersby. The oblex plans to use some of the deceased gnome's less savory goods—poisons hawked to the likes of drow and duergar—to overpower the party and bring them back to Progeny.



## PLOT HOOK

*Forgotten* is best introduced as the characters are traveling along a well-known Underdark road. Perhaps the characters are journeying between dwarven citadels or to-and-from an active mining operation or fungus farm—any high-traffic area is suitable.

To the side of the road the characters see a merchant's carriage pulled by two giant lizards, a wild-haired gnome frantically struggling with the wheel. This is, of course, just the bait for the swarm's plan.

## BUYER BEWARE

As the characters approach the carriage, read or paraphrase:

In the distance a large carriage is illuminated by a pair of fluttering tallow lanterns. The light catches a painted sign hanging from the side: Fiddleplitz's Potions and Balms. Two giant lizards flick their tongues anxiously in the air as a gnome fusses with a broken wheel, his thick apron covered in soot and sweat and white hair standing on end.

"Blasted thing! This'll be the end of ol' Fiddleplitz—eaten by some damned beastie in the dark!"

The gnome is a simulacrum created by an **adult oblex** (CR 5; MToF, p 218). The oblex is hiding 90 feet away from the carriage behind a stalagmite. It has total cover and is in complete darkness. The oblex can speak Common, Draconic, Elvish, Gnomish, and Sylvan. It is also proficient in Arcana, Persuasion, Sleight of Hand, and alchemist's supplies. A **psychic gray ooze** (CR 1/2; MM, p 243), another one of Progeny's experiments, lies in wait with the oblex. The gray ooze is loyal to the oblex and defends it at all costs.

## LIKE FLIES TO HONEY

The oblex, speaking through Fiddleplitz's simulacrum, asks the characters to help it lift the carriage and replace the broken wheel. After sorting out the carriage, the simulacrum thanks the characters profusely and offers them each a *potion of healing*, as well as to look over its wares, which are sold out of the cramped carriage. There are the following items for sale:

- Two additional *potions of healing*, each sold for 50 gp, but the oblex lets go of them for 30 gp, hoping to ingratiate itself to the characters.
- A *potion of climbing*, sold for 40 gp
- One *potion of resistance* for each of the following damage types: acid, fire, and poison, each sold for 60 gp—a price that is, the simulacrum remarks, quite below market value.
- A *spell scroll of Melf's acid arrow*, sold for 100 gp—another remarkably low price, thanks to the party's help.

Feel free to round out Fiddleplitz's carriage with other sundry goods, such as reagents used in alchemy and magic item creation.

## THE TRAP IS SPRUNG

After conversing for a while, or just as the characters seem about to leave, the simulacrum offers the party to enjoy some gnomish berry-bread and glasses of warm mulled cider. If the characters seem hesitant, the oblex casts *charm person* as a 5th-level spell on the party. Remember that the oblex can cast through its tethered simulacrum and does not require somatic or verbal components.

If the characters partake in the food and drink, they must pass a **DC 15 Constitution saving throw** or become poisoned and unconscious for 4d6 hours—they have been poisoned with torpor (see chapter 8 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*)!

At anytime while interacting with the simulacrum a suspicious character can make



one of the following ability checks. Each check can only be made once by each character.

- A **DC 16 Intelligence (Arcana)** check reveals that there is a faint odor of sulfur around the carriage, but none of the items inside are made with the substance.
- A **DC 18 Intelligence (Nature)** check uncovers that some of the items in Fiddleplitz's carriage are poisons.
- A **DC 15 Wisdom (Animal Handling)** check allows the character to notice that the giant lizards are uneasy around Fiddleplitz.
- A contested **Wisdom (Insight)** check against the oblex's Charisma (Deception) of +5 reveals that the gnome desperately wants the characters to stay for food and drink. They feel that something else is afoot.
- A **DC 20 Wisdom (Perception)** check reveals the thin, slimy tendril that extends from the bottom of the gnome's pants into the darkness.

If the characters question the simulacrum, it tries to assure them everything is fine, but quickly becomes frustrated and attacks.

### TACTICS

The adult oblex attacks through its tethered simulacrum, keeping its main body hidden 90 feet from the carriage. If it has not already cast *charm person*, it does not do so during combat, knowing that the spell would be easily resisted. Instead, it casts *hold person* on any characters that it has not charmed. After casting its spells, the oblex attacks from the simulacrum using its multiattack. Its goal is to knock the characters unconscious, either through damage or Eat Memories.

If the oblex is reduced to 30 or fewer hit points it severs the simulacrum's tether and seeps into a 1-inch-wide crevasse using its amorphous trait. Unless the characters have a means to follow, it escapes using the multilayered tunnels of the Underdark.

The psychic grey ooze remains near the oblex's main body and defends it from attackers. It stays behind to distract the characters if the oblex must escape.

At any point during the encounter, a character proficient in Arcana can make a **DC 18 Intelligence (Arcana)** check to identify Fiddleplitz as an oblex's simulacrum and know to follow the tether to the main body.

### SCALING THE ENCOUNTER

**Level 4:** Remove the psychic grey ooze.

**Level 5:** Add an additional psychic grey ooze

### TREASURE

If the characters defeat the oblex or it escapes, they can take any items remaining in Fiddleplitz's carriage and reclaim their gold. The poisoned food's potency fades in an hour and is likely not valuable to the characters.

Characters who pass a **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation)** check find a small lockbox containing 127 gp, 62 sp, and a single dose of drow poison (see chapter 8 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*). The key is on Fiddleplitz' body (see Developments) or the box can be unlocked with a successful **DC 15 Dexterity check using thieves' tools**.

### DEVELOPMENTS

If the characters conduct a thorough search of the area, they find the body of poor Fiddleplitz stuffed amongst a collection of stalagmites. If the characters defeat the oblex or it escapes, they can track it back to the abandoned illithid laboratory (see *A Trail of Slime*).

If the oblex succeeds in overpowering the characters, either through the poisoned food or combat, it creates a group of simulacra to assist it in transporting the characters back to Progeny. The characters will be at quite the disadvantage when meeting the swarm (see *One from Many*).



## A TRAIL OF SLIME

If the characters choose to track the oblex, they can attempt to follow the sulfuric blood-colored slime left along its trail. The characters must succeed on a total of three **DC 10 Wisdom (Survival)** checks. Each time the characters fail a check, the DC increases by 2 to a maximum of 18. If the characters fail 2 or more checks or choose to take a short rest, the oblex returns to Progeny. If the characters fail 4 or more checks, they gain a level exhaustion from the constant backtracking.

If you want to extend the length of this short adventure or feel your players would like more combat, roll on the Underdark Encounters (Levels 5-10) table (XGtE, p 107-108) for each failed Survival check.

As the characters approach the illithid outpost, read or paraphrase:

The trail suddenly turns cold at a wide cavern's wall. The area is faintly lit by nearby glowing fungi, casting the stalagmites and curtain-like flowstones in a calm purple light. The shadows dance about an opening in the wall above you, large enough for a human to fit through.

A character who succeeds on a **DC 16 Wisdom (Perception)** check notices thousands of tiny scratch marks along the floor and scattered droppings. A successful **DC 10 Intelligence (Nature)** check reveals they are rat droppings, but must be from hundreds of vermin.

### GAINING ENTRY

The tunnel leading into the outpost is 40 feet above the floor—its former illithid inhabitants levitated to the entrance. The oblex and Progeny use Tiny-sized cracks in the cavern wall to enter from ground level.

To climb up to the tunnel, the characters must succeed on a group **DC 12 Strength (Athletics)** check. If at least half of the characters succeed, they are able to make it to the tunnel safely. A

character with a climbing or flying speed may Help another character. If the party fails, there is at least one close call during the climb, creating enough noise to alert the creatures inside.

## ONE FROM MANY

### GENERAL FEATURES

The outpost has the following features:

**Lighting.** The area is completely dark. The only source of light is Progeny's Illumination trait, if they choose to use it.

**Sights, Sounds, and Smells.** Discarded mind flayer experiments are scattered about the room, ransacked by Progeny in days past. There is a constant low murmur accented by fervent chittering—Progeny clamoring in the distance. The area smells of old rat dung and rotting meat.

**Terrain.** The walls and floor are smooth, containing only an undulating wave pattern in the stone—aftereffects of the illithids's psionic carving.

As the characters enter the outpost through the tunnel, read or paraphrase:

As you step through the tunnel and onto a smooth staircase, the hairs on the back of your neck stand on end. The silence of the Underdark is quietly broken with a low, dull noise of something moving in the dark.

Progeny, a squirming, chittering **swarm of cranium rats** (CR 5; VGtM, p 133), is in the center of the room. Over the years, Progeny has grown to be a truly massive and learned swarm. They have the following changes:

- They are a Large swarm of Tiny beasts.
- They have 44 (4d10) hit points.
- They are proficient in Arcana, Insight, and Intimidation.
- Their telepathy is increased to 90 feet.

If the adult oblex escaped the previous encounter and the characters were delayed discovering the outpost, it is nearby Progeny.



Unless the characters have taken many hours to reach the laboratory, it has the same current hit points as when it fled the previous encounter.

### SHOW OF FORCE

If Progeny is aware of the characters, they immediately cast *dominate monster* on a particularly strong and brutish-looking character. If the spell succeeds, they force the dominated character to draw their weapons and threaten an ally, preferably a spellcaster. Regardless of if the spell succeeds, Progeny telepathically communicates to the characters. “We do not need to shed blood today. Help us return to our creators and no harm will be done.” See **Parley with Progeny** below.

If the characters were brought here by the oblex, they awake a few hours later, unharmed but stripped of their weapons and spellcasting foci.

As the characters awake read or paraphrase:

You quickly awaken as you feel something invade you, as if you were being attacked, but nothing is within reach. You feel your arms and legs strapped to a hard table. Hundreds of red, beady eyes appear in the darkness, a dim light rising from a writhing mass of creatures. The presence inside of you speaks: “We are Progeny. Help us find our makers and you will live. Now, speak.”

Any weapons that were not well-hidden on the characters are piled 20 feet away from the exam tables; the oblex guards them, standing within 5 feet of the weapons. A character can attempt to free themselves from their poorly-maintained bonds with a **DC 13 Strength** or **Dexterity** check. The characters are restrained while strapped to the tables.

### PARLEY WITH PROGENY

No matter how Progeny comes to meet the characters, they first ask for help finding and returning to their illithid creators. The cranium

rats state that they have found no trace of the mind flayers in the surrounding area and believe they simply vanished from the outpost, leaving behind what they could not carry. Progeny is truthful in their promise to not harm the characters if they help the cranium rats.

If the characters choose to help Progeny (or deceive the swarm), they must succeed on either a group **DC 12 Charisma (Persuasion)** check or **Charisma (Deception)** check opposed by Progeny’s Wisdom (Insight) of +3. If half of the characters succeed, Progeny releases any dominated character and allows the party to search the outpost. See **Left Behind** below.

The oblex is a gift Progeny hopes to give to its illithid creators as a sign of respect. If it is clear the characters killed the oblex, the party makes all Charisma checks against Progeny with disadvantage.

### PLAYING PROGENY

When playing Progeny, note that its telepathic voice sounds like a single shout rising from the low murmur of a crowd. The voice itself often changes tone and inflection.

Progeny’s goal is to be reunited with its illithid makers, which they have come to view as both a parent and godlike figure. Progeny is calculating and brutal, but willing to make and sustain alliances that work toward its goal.

### TACTICS

If the characters attack Progeny, the swarm tries to dominate a strong martial character, if it has not already. It uses the dominated character to attack spellcasters, fearing spells like *fireball*. If they are unable to dominate a character or lose concentration on the spell, they cast *confusion*.

If the adult oblex is present, it casts *hold person* on targets nearest Progeny, providing an easy meal for the swarm.

Both Progeny and the oblex fight to the death.





## TREASURE

The mind flayers slept in elevated alcoves carved out of the walls. In one of them is an unadorned hardwood box containing a *ring of animal influence* the illithids used to study animals and a *dagger +2* with a pitch-black blade and silver spider pommel. The dagger, taken from a drow captain, loses its magical enchantment if brought into sunlight.

## LEFT BEHIND

Progeny is correct that the mind flayers simply vanished—they used *plane shift* to travel to the Astral Plane, fearing they were being hunted. The mind flayers that created Progeny are long gone and care nothing for their little experiment. Unless the characters have access to magic or resources far outside of their personal abilities, even leading Progeny to the Astral Plane is impossible.

How you introduce this revelation is up to you. Perhaps the characters find a hidden tablet carved in Qualith, the psionically-resonate illithid language (Progeny can decipher this with *comprehend languages*), detailing an agreed escape plan. A scholarly character might understand that mind flayers can plane shift and come to realize Progeny was nothing more than an experiment. After some investigation, however, it should become clear that Progeny will not be reunited with their creators.

If the characters are not tactful in delivering the news, Progeny becomes angry and attacks (see Tactics above). If the characters succeed on a **DC 18 Charisma (Persuasion)** check, they are able to inform Progeny without angering them.

If the party proposes that Progeny is now free of their masters and can pursue their own ambitions, or a similar idea, they make the check with advantage.

## DEVELOPMENTS

If the characters allow Progeny to live, they tell the party of the treasure hidden in the alcove—the swarm has little use for it. The cranium rats are true to their word and allow the characters to leave without harm.

## CONCLUSION

If Progeny still lives, they begin to experiment on creatures near their lair and eventually learn how to create thralls similar to mind flayers. Should the characters have prolonged contact with the Underdark's inhabitants, they may hear tales of an entity beginning to amass a loyal group of minions—it calls itself “Genesis.”



# HAUTSPORE HOLLOW

By JVC Parry

Estimate run-time: 60 to 90 minutes

While traveling to their destination, the characters must traverse Hauntspore Hollow, a death-riddled valley filled with a forest of necrotizing fungus and the undead denizens that lair there.

Written for 10<sup>th</sup> level characters

## DMS NOTES

A necrotizing fungus, called **Spookstalk**, has entirely infested this valley. Spookstalk is a mushroom that grows to a height of five to seven feet, has a black stalk, and a shaggy, turquoise cap. Spookstalks constantly produce a 15-foot radius cloud of spores. Humanoids that breathe in the area must succeed on a **DC 18 Constitution saving throw** or have their Constitution score reduced by 1d4. This reduction lasts until the creature finishes a short or long rest. The creature dies if this reduces its Constitution to 0. Its soul rises 1d4 hours later as a **ghost (CR 4; MM, p 147)** unless it has been revived, and its body as a **greater zombie** unless it has been destroyed.

The creature must repeat the saving throw at the start of each of its turns as long as it remains in the area. On a successful save, the target is immune to the Spookstalk spores for 24 hours.

Spookstalks can be recognized with a successful **DC 20 Intelligence (Nature)** check. The check is made with advantage by characters who have spent significant time in, or studying, the Underdark.

The valley is several miles wide and long, roughly oval in shape, but is extremely shallow, with a maximum depth of 30 feet. The valley gets its name from the enormous cloud of

bioluminescent turquoise spores that fills the airspace.

The zombies created by the Spookstalks roam throughout the cavern, unable to escape, searching for food. The ghosts created by the Spookstalks have split into factions and rogue agents, see below.

Characters might have the option to avoid the valley, though circumnavigating should seriously slow their progress.

## THE ENCOUNTER

### ENTER THE VALLEY

The encounter begins when the characters emerge into the dimly lit hollow.

The tunnel in which you have been traveling opens up ahead of you, revealing a ghostly vista of a shallow hollow, which you are at the top of. The floor, roughly thirty feet below, is covered with patches of fungi, most notably a black-stalked, turquoise-capped mushroom around the height of an adult human. Filling the air are clouds of dimly glowing spores.

Characters with a passive Perception of 15 or higher notice that in places the mushrooms seem to tremble and shake as if something is moving through them.

## INSIDE HAUTSPORE HOLLOW

### GENERAL FEATURES

The environment of Hauntspore Hollow is as follows.

**Sights & Sounds.** The air is cold and damp. The only sound is the rustling of mushrooms as the zombies pass through them.

**Light.** The hollow is dimly lit by the spore clouds.

**Walls and Floors.** The walls, floor, and ceiling of the valley are made of jagged stone. Creatures can climb the walls with a successful DC 12 Strength (Athletics) check.

### ZOMBIE ATTACK!

While travelling through the forest of fungi, the characters are attacked by 2d4 + 2 **greater zombies**. Characters with a passive Perception



of 15 or higher hear the zombies approaching them, and can avoid the encounter with a successful **DC 16 Wisdom (Survival)** check. If the encounter occurs, read or paraphrase the following:

Lurching toward you from behind a wall of black-stalked fungi is a decaying humanoid figure. Black fluid pours from its open maw onto its hollow chest, falling onto the exposed ribs with a sickening splatter.

These zombies are the remnants of humanoids killed by the Spookstalks. Characters who succeed on a **DC 16 Wisdom (Medicine)** check can ascertain this information by discovering spores growing in the corpses' lungs.

### GHOSTLY CONGREGATIONS

For each zombie in hauntspore hollow, there is a ghost—a spirit trapped on the Ethereal and Prime Material Planes by the spores of the Spookstalks. Some of these ghosts view their existence as a curse for the misdeeds they committed in life, others believe they have been wronged and seek vengeance, some have been driven insane by their centuries of undeath.

Characters moving through Hauntspore Hollow should encounter at least one ghost. Roll on or pick from the following table to determine who they encounter.

D6	GHOSTS
1	Insane ghost
2-3	Vengeful ghosts
4-5	Mournful ghosts
6	Benevolent ghost

**Insane Ghost.** An insane **ghost**, who is entirely unintelligible and unpredictable, tries to possess one of the characters. If the possession attempt is successful, the character instantly begins

acting irrationally, perhaps manifesting a new phobia, paranoia, or multiple personalities.

**Vengeful Ghosts.** A group of 2d4 **ghosts** attack the characters in a fit of spiteful rage. They feel wronged by their curse of undeath and, united, wish to spread it to others. Characters might be able to convince the ghosts to let them pass with a successful **DC 18 Charisma (Persuasion)** check. The check is made with advantage if the characters promise to help the ghosts (not covered in this encounter).

**Mournful Ghosts.** A group of 2d4 **ghosts** across paths with the characters while enraptured by a melancholy languor. They drift pass wailing mournfully and despairing about their current condition. Characters who hear the wailing must succeed on a **DC 18 Charisma** saving throw or suffer a level of exhaustion.

**Benevolent Ghost.** The characters are approached by a **ghost** who has come to peace with their undeath, but wishes to help others avoid the same fate. The ghost can bestow a temporary boon upon the characters that removes their need to breathe for 24 hours. The experience of receiving the boon is unpleasant, a feeling of stale dampness overwhelms them, sending shivers down their spine and causing their hair to stand on end.

The boon requires the characters to make a **DC 18 Constitution saving throw**. If they fail, either by choice or roll, they no longer need to breathe for 24 hours. If the character resists the boon and succeeds on the saving throw, they are unaffected.

### OTHER ENCOUNTERS

Continue to check for random encounters as usual while the characters traverse Hauntspore Hollow. When humanoids are encountered, make sure either to give them a ghostly boon (see above), some method of avoid breathing the spores such as filtering masks (a hand or cloth across the mouth is not enough), or have them appear as undead versions of their previous selves.



# THE ITSY-BITSY SPIDER

By Michelle Churchill

Cartography: Jean Lorber

Estimated run-time: 1-2 hours.

*The Itsy-Bitsy Spider* is a short Underdark travel adventure for five characters of 5<sup>th</sup> level. Suggestions are provided for scaling for characters of higher levels. While there are opportunities for combat, these encounters are predominantly roleplaying based giving opportunities to further develop the player characters.

This adventure can be added as part of a larger Underdark campaign, or used as a single session adventure.

## BACKGROUND

The drow house of K'gaust have accumulated great wealth and established their position among drow nobility through their profitable trade of spell components.

When not engaged in business back in their home city (choose any drow city or settlement that best suits the setting), Matron Elaries and her family holiday at their beautiful villa located in a remote mushroom forest.

The tunnels leading to the villa are laid with traps and obstacles put in place by Elaries' consort J'rienz.

On the journey to the holiday villa, brothers Grinlari and Helberl are put in charge of protecting their little sister Wilenet. Both become bored with the task quickly, and suggest to Wilenet that they play hide-and-seek. Their sister hides in a narrow tunnel that leads upward towards the surface. Without warning run-off rainwater pours down the tunnel, washing Wilenet away from the rest of her family. Grinlari and Helberl continue traveling to the holiday villa, assuming Wilenet

is hiding among the carts, house guards, and giant lizards that make up the convoy.

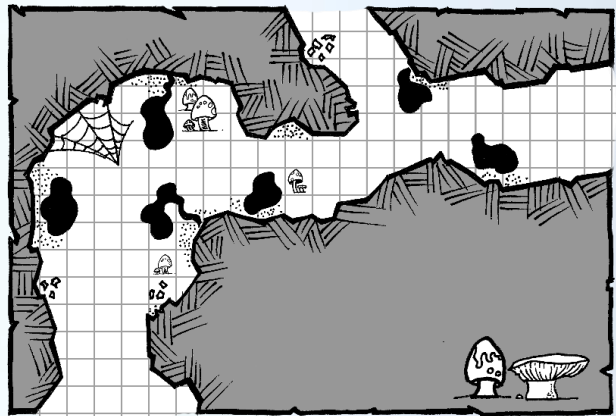
## PLOT HOOK

While exploring tunnels in the Underdark, characters quickly encounter Wilenet, the youngest child of House K'gaust. She is tangled up in a **giant spider's** (CR; 1 MM, p 328) web. The spider is asleep in the far corner of the web and hasn't noticed her. Though Wilenet is not in any danger, she politely asks the characters for assistance.

As the tunnel bends there is a large spider web. On the ground below the web is an open jar of strawberry preserve, five highly polished copper coins, and a bowl filled with red wine.

Tangled up in the web is a young drow girl, dressed in fine traveling clothes. She smiles with a slightly embarrassed look upon her face.

"I don't suppose you would be able to offer a little help getting me out of here?"



## UNTANGLING WILENET

Untangling Wilenet from the webbing requires a **DC 17 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand)** check or the **giant spider** (CR; 1 MM, p 328) awakens. The spider is hostile towards anyone near the webbing, but shows no interest in harming Wilenet or any drow character.

If the spider awakes, characters can attempt to calm it with a successful **DC 12 Wisdom (Animal Handling)** check. This can be made with



advantage if the characters are drow, offer food, or get Wilenet to help calm the spider.

A **DC 10 Intelligence (History or Nature)** check made by drow characters or characters from the Underdark reveals that this spider poses little threat to drow. The open jar of strawberry preserves, bowl of wine, and coins have been purposely placed near the spider web to help lure food into the web. Some drow merchants make similar offerings to spiders they encounter in the hopes Lolth will favor them as they travel through the Underdark. This spider has become accustomed to drow leaving it food or sweets near its web that attracts prey. If any character leaves sweets or coins near the web, the spider assumes the characters are trying to help it and ignores them.

If the giant spider is provoked it attacks the characters with the exception of Wilenet and any other drow. If the **giant spider** takes damage in the first round of combat, it is joined by five other **giant spiders** during the next round.

### SCALING THE BATTLE

**Levels 6-10:** Add 1-3 **phase spiders** (CR; 3 MM, p 334).

**Levels 11-15:** The spider in the web is really a **yochlol** (CR; 10 MM, p 65).

If the characters choose not to rescue Wilenet, she eventually untangles herself and rejoins the characters in Part 2.

### TO THE HOLIDAY VILLA

If the characters free Wilenet, read or summarize:

Fixing her hair, the young drow smiles. "Oh, thank you for your assistance, I really must be going—Matron will be ever so worried when she realizes I'm missing. I don't suppose I might get all of you to accompany me, just in case I get a little tangled up along the way."

If the player characters choose not to free Wilenet, read or summarize:

The young drow sighs heavily wriggling in the webbing. "Well, thank you anyway. Best of luck navigating the tunnels. Be careful, papa has put lots of traps to keep tourists at bay."

### GENERAL FEATURES

**Terrain.** Stone, mushroom, and lichen patches, and loose gravel.

**Weather.** Warm and comfortable in the tunnels getting warmer the closer to the K'gaust holiday villa.

**Light.** Some dim glowing mushrooms where noted, otherwise total darkness.

**Smells and Sounds.** Smell of lichen and mushroom growths. Quiet except for occasional sounds of spiders and other Underdark wildlife.

### PART 1

Wilenet is a talkative young drow and asks the characters about their past adventures. She's eager to share the things she's overheard about the surface world, and get the characters' opinions.

### SMALL TALK BY CLASS

**Barbarian:** "I heard you folks are just really angry people who just need a good hug. Do you need a hug?"

**Bard:** "Matron says that bards never got enough attention as children, so they spend their lives making up for it."

**Cleric:** "Do you get to cut hearts out of people?"

**Druid:** "If I was a druid I would be a spider all the time. A big wolf spider like the ones papa takes hunting cave bears."

**Fighter:** "My brothers are warriors and blademasters. They have really neat crossbows. Do you have a crossbow?"

**Monk:** "So you lost your weapon? Do we need to go find it?"

**Paladin:** "Wait you can be a cleric and a warrior? That's neat!"

**Ranger:** "You would like my papa, when we holiday, he goes hunting cave bears with his wolf spiders."

**Rogue:** "Matron says when I grow up, I should never officially associate with your type, but unofficially I should hire you as often as I can."

**Sorcerer:** "But where is your spellbook?"

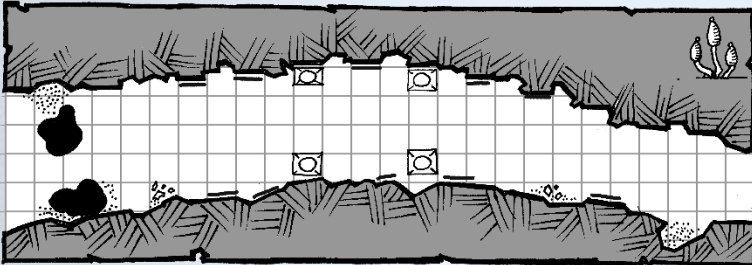
**Warlock:** "Papa says warlocks are too lazy to become wizards and rely on other people to get magic."

**Wizards:** "My papa is a wizard. What's the coolest spell you know?"



If Wilenet is accompanying the characters when they enter Area 1, read or summarize:

Wilenet wanders ahead of the group. “We’re going the right way. I know this tunnel. Papa says this is his favorite tunnel.”



### WATCH YOUR STEP!

Wilenet’s father has set a number of *glyphs of warding* (spell save DC 14) on the ground. If asked, Wilenet explains that when they travel this way her father usually leads the way.

Wilenet has seen strange marks on the ground, but she does not know what they are.

The *glyphs of warding* do not affect anyone from House K’gaust.

There are six glyphs spaced throughout the tunnel. A successful **DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation)** check is required to detect each glyph. Roll a d6 and consult the below table to determine the type of glyph encountered.

D6 RESULT	GLYPH EFFECT
1	Explosive Rune: <i>Acid</i>
2	Spell Glyph: <i>Fireball</i>
3	Explosive Rune: lightning
4	Spell Glyph: <i>Evard’s black tentacles</i>
5	Explosive Rune: <i>Acid</i>
6	Spell Glyph: <i>Banishment</i>

### SCALING SUGGESTIONS

**Levels 6-10:** The spell save DC is 17 and the *fireball* is 4th level and *banishment* is 6<sup>th</sup> level.

**Levels 14-15:** The spell save DC is 18 and the *fireball* is 5th level and *banishment* is 6th level.

### HAPPY ANNIVERSARY

Lining the walls of this tunnel are stone statues, each representing the adult members of House K’gaust. Ten carved reliefs on the wall are enchanted with a permanent illusion to appear animated. One depicts the day that J’rienz and Elaries first met, another their wedding day, while others depict the celebrations that followed the birth of each of their children, including Wilenet. The final reliefs depict when their children went to school. A **DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation)** check reveals that, unlike many couples in drow nobility, J’rienz and Elaries are truly in love with one another. They are also devoted parents and care deeply for their children.

Wilenet shares that when she is all grown up there will be a statue of her as well. She is very proud of the stone images that depict her.

The statue of Wilenet’s mother is a **stone golem** (CR 10; MM, p 170). The construct will not harm Wilenet and attacks anyone not wearing the house crest.

A **DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana)** check reveals that a verbal password or phrase will cause the stone golem to stop attacking.

Wilenet does not know the statue is a golem. However, if asked she reveals the following:

“Whenever we passed by the statue papa would always say the most strange mushy things to Matron. Sometimes he would even sing or give her gifts. He always said ‘Happy Animosity’ or something like that. Matron always said he outdid himself each year.



The phrase to halt the stone golem is “Happy Anniversary.” When the phrase is said the golem returns to its post and stops attacking the characters.

### SCALING THE SCENE

**Levels 6-10:** Add 4 iron cobras (CR 4; MToF, p 125).

**Levels 11-15:** Add a stone golem in the shape of Wilenet’s father.

## PART 2

### GENERAL FEATURES

**Terrain.** Stone covered in lichen and mushrooms. Larger mushrooms spout up as tall as trees while others clump together in patches all around the cave. There is a shallow stream dividing the cave.

**Weather.** Warm and humid.

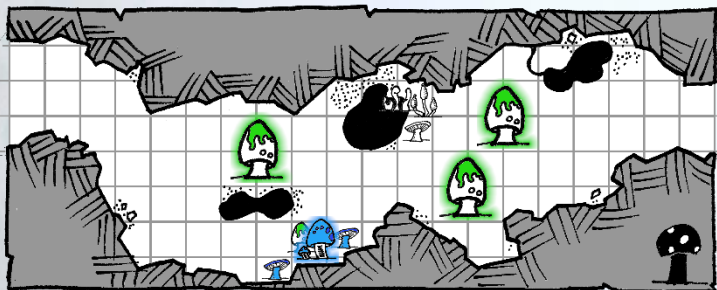
**Light.** Patches of glowing mushrooms illuminate the cave in blue and green.

**Smells and Sounds.** The cave smells damp and sweet but not unpleasant. There is a soft echo of water dripping from the cave walls.

### GROVE OF TRICKS

If Wilenet is not accompanying the characters, she catches up now, having escaped the spider web.

The tricks in the grove do not affect Wilenet. She is oblivious to any potential dangers here, beyond warning the characters not to eat the glowing mushrooms as they are toxic. Instead she bombards the characters with questions about where they are from and why they are in the Underdark. A **DC 10 Wisdom (Insight)** check reveals the young drow has no other motives for asking so many questions beyond her genuine curiosity.



### WILENET’S QUESTIONS

- 1: Do you have houses where you’re from?
- 2: What do flowers smell like?
- 3: Is it true the sun burns you if you stand out in it too long and your skin falls off?
- 4: I bet you’re much happier here in the Underdark. It is so pretty here isn’t it?
- 5: Is it true that on the surface the riding lizards have fur?
- 6: What’s the best spell you know?
- 7: What’s the scariest monster you’ve fought?
- 8: If you were going to poison a member of the party who would you pick?

If characters ask Wilenet questions, she is happy to reveal that she is turning ten years old in a tenday; she has asked her matron for her own hand crossbow. She also reveals her family trades in magic components and they live in a large drow city most of the year.

### TRICKSTERS IN THE GROVE

*Walking through mushrooms sets off Tricks.*

**Trigger.** A living creature enters and area with mushrooms to trigger the effect.

**Effect.** A creature within the trap area must succeed on a **DC 16 Intelligence saving throw** or be affected by the trick. Roll a d4 and consult the below table for a random effect.

**Countermeasures.** A successful **DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana)** check identifies the affected area and reveals its effects. A *dispel magic* (DC 16) or similar magic removes the field for 8 hours.

#### D4 Result:

- 1: 1d6 illusory displacer beasts appear. They cannot harm the characters, but try to scare them off.
- 2: The mushrooms cast *suggestion* (spell save DC 16) with the phrase “Those glowing mushrooms are safe and delicious.” If the characters eat a mushroom, they must succeed on a **DC 17 Constitution saving throw** or be poisoned for 1 hour.
- 3: Small mechanical spiders emerge from the ground. These mechanical spiders are hostile to the characters. Use the statistics for a **swarm of spiders** (CR ½; MM, p 338).
- 4: One character in the area must make a **DC 16 Wisdom saving throw** or take on the physical appearance of a **kobold** for 1 hour. The character retains all of their abilities, spells, hit points, armor class, class features, feats, and other defining characteristics for the duration. The effect only impacts outward appearance.



### TREASURE

The glowing mushrooms are worth 1 gp each to any merchant dealing with poisons. There are 100 intact mushrooms growing in the area.

### PART 3

As the characters enter, read or summarize:

Wilenet looks down the tunnel anxiously whispering, "I don't like this next part."

### GENERAL FEATURES

**Terrain.** Jagged rocks and rubble from the destroyed farmhouse fill much of this cavern, making it difficult terrain.

**Weather.** Uncomfortably cold compared to the rest of the caves and tunnels

**Light.** The area is in complete darkness.

**Smells and Sounds.** The cave smells musty and faintly of ash and sulfur. Whispers, cries for help, and the occasional singing of nursery rhymes echoes throughout the cavern.

### CRUSHED FARMHOUSE

Centuries ago, there was a farm on the surface above this section of tunnel run by peaceful halflings. A failed magical experiment caused the farmhouse to be pulled into the Underdark,

killing everyone who was inside. Bits and pieces of the destroyed farmhouse are scattered about the area. The area is haunted by two **specters** (CR; 1 MM, p 279) and a **ghost** (CR; 4 MM, p 147). House K'gaust haven't driven them out of the area as they provide good cover for their holiday villa.

The specters and ghost attack the moment the characters enter the area. Wilenet is afraid of the undead and hides until the combat is over.

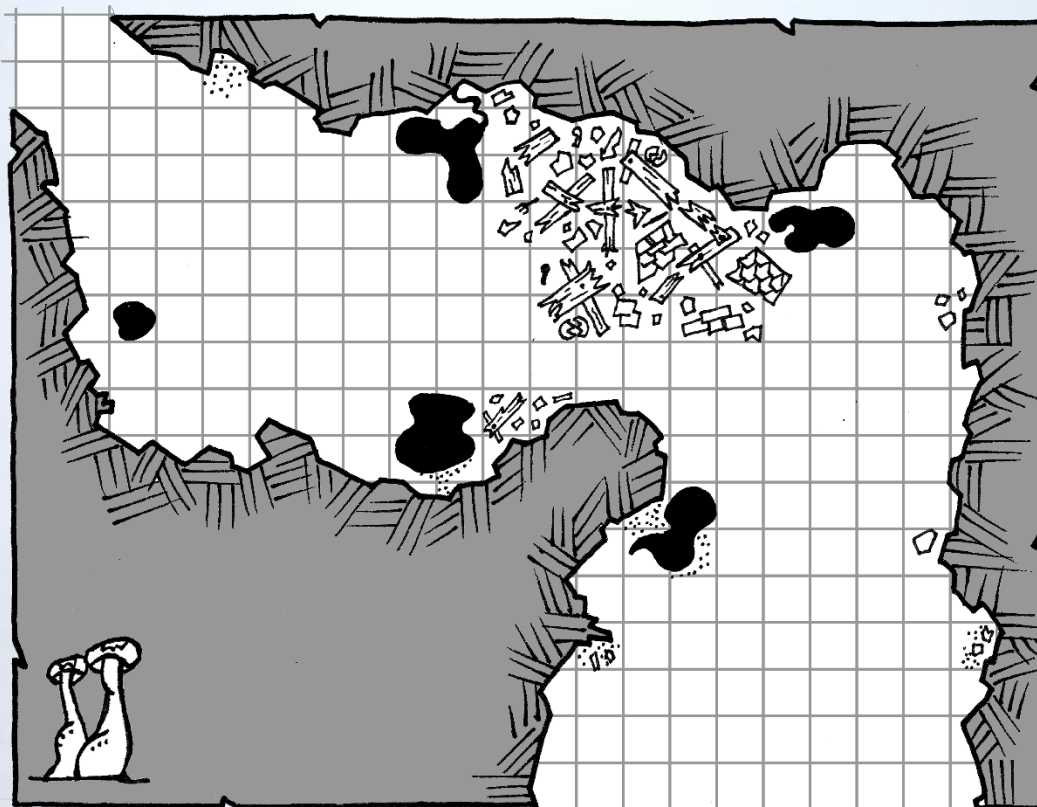
### SCALING THE SCENE

**Levels 6-10:** Add 1-3 ghosts.

**Levels 11-15:** Replace the ghost with a **boneclaw** (CR; 12 MToF, p 121) reduce hit points by half if needed.

### SPELLCASTING TROUBLES

The experiment that collapsed the halfling farm also caused magic to behave strangely in the area. Any time a cantrip or spell is cast roll to determine the effect.





D20 Result	Effect
1	The spell doesn't work, and the spell cannot be cast again by any member of the party while in the area.
2	The spell doesn't work, instead <i>ray of sickness</i> is cast at 2nd level targeting the caster.
3	The spell targets the caster.
4	The spell targets the nearest party member (but not Wilenet).
5	The spell works, but the caster is knocked prone.
6	The spell does not work, instead <i>fear</i> is cast targeting the nearest party member (but not Wilenet).
7	The spell does not work, instead a hostile <b>manes</b> (CR 1/8; MM, p 60) is summoned for 1 minute.
8	The spell does not work, instead <i>commune</i> is cast putting the spellcaster in contact with an agent of Lolth.
9	The spell works, however the caster switches places with the nearest enemy. If the spell was a targeted spell, the caster switches places with the target.
10	The spell works, however there is an unsettling smell of sulfur surrounding the caster.
11	The spell works but the caster can only speak, read, and understand Undercommon for 1 minute.
12	The spell does not work, but no spell slot is expended.
13	The spell does not work, instead <i>banishment</i> is cast on the caster, using the casters spell save DC.
14	The spell does not work, instead the caster swaps facial features with the nearest ally for 1 minute.
15	The spell works, and an apple pie appears at the caster's feet.
16	The spell works but the caster takes 1 level of exhaustion.
17	The spell does not work, and the caster swaps spell casting focuses or spellbooks with the nearest party member.
18	The spell works and the caster regains the spent spell slot.
19	The spell works normally.
20	The spell works and the caster gains advantage on their next saving throw.

## SEARCH PARTY

Wilenet's father J'rienz K'gaust and her brothers Grinlari and Helberl have been searching for Wilenet most of the day. The drow are mounted on giant lizards and they have found Wilenet's lizard, named Webber. The beast is tethered to the lizard J'rienz is riding. They are joined by giant wolf spiders the family keeps as pets.

As the characters enter the area read or summarize:

Ahead faint blue dancing lights can be seen partly illuminating four giant lizards and three drow males. As they draw closer it is easy to see a familiar resemblance between them and Wilenet. The eldest of the group shouts angrily at the other two in Elvish.

J'rienz is very angry that his sons have been playing tricks on their little sister. Not worrying about who might be in ear shot yells at his two sons. If any of the characters understand Elvish, they hear:

"By the eight legs of Lolth you're lucky the pair of you are more valuable to this house alive than dead. What were you thinking playing tricks on your little sister like that? You won't be laughing when she goes off to school and becomes a priestess, oh no then you'll be sorry you picked on her so."

## INTERACTING WITH THE SEARCH PARTY

The drow are suspicious of anyone that isn't part of their house. They are hostile even if they see Wilenet, and assume the party are keeping her hostage. J'rienz is a **mage** (CR; 6 MM, p 347)



and the brothers are **drow** (CR; ¼ MM, p 128) The three **giant lizards** (CR; ¼ MM, p 326) and three **giant wolf spiders** (CR; ¼ MM, p 330) travel with the drow.

### SCALING THE SCENE

**Levels 6-10:** J'rienz is a **drow mage** (CR; 7 MM, p 129) and the brothers are **veterans** (CR; 3 MM, p 350).

**Levels 11-15:** J'rienz is a **drow mage** (CR; 7 MM, p 129) and the brothers are **drow elite warriors** (CR; 5 MM, p 128).

Wilenet is a non-combatant. On her turn in the initiative order, roll a d6 to determine what action she takes.

### WILENET'S REACTION

- 1: Wilenet takes cover and hides until the combat is over.
- 2: If any characters try to persuade J'rienz not to fight, Wilenet assists them.
- 3: Wilenet runs to her giant lizard and ignores the fighting.
- 4: Wilenet takes a seat a safe distance away, takes out a snack from her pouch, and cheers anytime anyone makes a successful attack.
- 5: Wilenet starts a shouting match with her brothers about them not looking for her.
- 6: Wilenet grins wickedly and tells her father that she has led the party right to him to be their prisoners.

### A FAMILY REUNITED

J'rienz is very protective of his children, Wilenet especially, however he is on holiday and would prefer to be relaxing in the hot springs or hunting cave bears than fighting adventurers. He can be convinced to end combat with a successful **DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion)** check. The check is made with advantage if Wilenet vouches for the characters.

If the party defeats the drow, Wilenet retreats off in the tunnel not to be seen again. The party is left alone in the tunnel.

If the party does not fight the drow, or successfully persuade the drow they mean no harm, J'rienz welcomes the party back to their holiday villa, dispelling any traps and guiding them through the correct tunnels.

### ARE WE THERE YET?

Additional optional encounters for the journey to the holiday villa:

- 1: A **grick alpha** (CR 7; MM, p 173) attacks.
- 2: The wolf spiders catch the scent of a cave bear. Use the **polar bear** statistics (CR 2; MM, p 256).
- 3: Wilenet runs ahead, setting off a *glyph of warding* that casts *Tasha's hideous laughter*.
- 4: Three **flumphs** (CR 1/8; MM, p 135) arrive, much to the delight of Wilenet.
- 5: A band of ten travelling merchant **goblins** (CR; ¼ MM, p 166) have run into trouble with their wagon.
- 6: A **giant fire beetle** (CR 0; MM, p 256) starts following Wilenet. She begs her father to let her keep it.

### CONCLUSION

Arriving at the holiday villa, the characters are met by a very anxious Matron.

"J'rienz, what took you so long? You said you would be back in time for dinner... who in all the Underdark are these people?"

Matron Elaries, when informed of Wilenet's misadventures, welcomes the party to stay in their holiday villa for a time.

The luxurious estate houses the five members of the house plus their servants and guards. The characters are welcomed to relax in the hot springs. The rich mineral baths have healing properties, restoring 1d8 hit points for every 10 minutes spent in the water. If the characters spend more than ten minutes in the hot springs, they must succeed on a **DC 10 Constitution saving throw** or suffer 1 level of exhaustion.

For keeping Wilenet safe, the family offers 100gp to each character.



# THE KING'S HIGHWAY

By Paul Bimler

Artist & Cartography: CHGuise

*Estimated run-time: 120-180 minutes*

*The King's Highway* is a short side quest designed for 4 characters of levels 6 to 8.

## BACKGROUND

The god Torog, the King that Crawls, carved out much of the Underdark in his rampage while imprisoned underground. Smashing sideways, here and there, creating wide passages as he violently thrashed his way through the bedrock of the world, Torog carved out the passages which became known as the King's Highway. Torog's rampage left a psychic residue in these passages. Creatures passing along these wide corridors can detect an echo of his internal agony which still imbues the very rock of the Underdark, reverberating with his mental anguish. This pale red stone is known as Godsdream and is imbued with mighty power. The residual energy provides the certainty of one incredible blow against a foe, but it comes with a price.

## PLOT HOOK

Draenoss the Exiled (**drow mage**; CR 7; MM, p 129) is a renegade drow who keeps a tower in the depths of the Underdark, far from his home city (you can make this city Menzoberranzan, or any drow settlement you desire). Sentenced to become a drider for his unorthodox practices, Draenoss escaped his home, and now practices his dark magic far from the watchful eyes of his former masters.

The mage has been known to take apprentices—younger drow who may have escaped. He has one apprentice currently, a female drow known as **Marwenye of House Kazzath**, although the party never learns of her existence, not initially anyway. Marwenye

remains hidden from the characters in the early stages of the adventure. Draenoss has already formulated a plan with Marwenye which involves hoodwinking the characters and gaining their trust. At a crucial moment, she will emerge to help Draenoss realize his dastardly plan.

Draenoss is obsessed with obtaining the mineral known as Godsdream, but up until now has been unable to find any. However, Draenoss has come into possession of an ancient tome that details the exact location of a huge vein of Godsdream, within a network of caverns known as Torog's Teeth. This area, however, is said to be fraught with deadly peril. When the adventurers appear, Draenoss is eager to enlist their help in accompanying him to Torog's Teeth to secure the Godsdream.



## APPROACHING DRAENOSS'S TOWER

The party may happen upon the cavern containing Draenoss's tower during their wanderings through the Underdark, entering from the western side. When they happen upon this immense space, read or summarize:

You enter a cavern, so vast that you find it hard to make out the contours of the far wall, some three hundred feet away. But the object that immediately captures your eye is a thick, towering stalagmite in the center of the cavern, reaching almost to the ceiling.

Are those lights coming from within? It takes you a few moments to fully take in this natural tower, but it seems someone has carved windows into this stalagmite from within, and presumably passages and rooms as well. The stalagmite is almost as tall as the cavern is wide.

Scanning to the base of the stalagmite, you see that a large door has been cut into the stone. The door itself is composed of the same material as the rest of the tower. There appears to be a huge obsidian knocker at its center.

The floor of the cavern is fairly rough, but certain areas have been cultivated. A large garden sports rows of myconid sprouts and strange, gnarled root vegetables that subsist on phosphorescent light: a subterranean vegetable garden. Rothe graze here, and a small underground stream runs through the northern half of the cavern.

## GENERAL FEATURES

**Terrain.** Rock floor, walls and ceiling. A nearby stream, and some areas of cultivated earth.

**Weather.** Cool and peaceful.

**Light.** Only provided by the phosphorescence around the walls.

**Smells and Sounds.** The rothe make a mooing sound occasionally, very cattle-like. The nearby brook babbling through the cavern provides a restful sound. Draenoss calls the brook "The Deepwater," and tells the party that later on it is joined by several other streams, becoming a raging underground river.

## ROLEPLAYING DRAENOSS

Draenoss goes out of his way to make the party feel at home in his tower, lulling them into a sense of security. His goal is to gain the party's trust so they are willing to help him in his mission. Be sure to include the story of Draenoss's exile from the drow city of his birth. This is important in establishing him as a victim in the characters' eyes, which will (hopefully) cause them to be less suspicious of him. As is shortly revealed, Draenoss's motives are anything but friendly.

You could even have Draenoss be openly suspicious of the characters when they first appear, accusing them of being spies from his home city, sent to assassinate him—whatever you need to do to keep the mage's motives secret.

## DRAENOSS PHRASES

Here are some potential bits of dialogue that you could have Draenoss speak. The last phrase is a phrase that you must have him speak at some stage.

*Some people resent skill, excellence. They envy it and seek to crush it. Or, if it goes against their methods or way of thinking, they simply cast it out, banish it.*

*Be careful who you share your secrets with. They can get you killed. Or worse.*

*I've learnt to trust few and be downright afraid of some.*

*It pains me to say it, but if I was to give you one bit of advice, it would be this: never trust a drow. Especially one from (insert name of home city here).*



## THE MAGE'S TRUE MOTIVE

In return for accompanying him to Torog's Teeth, Draenoss offers to forge each member of the party a blade or some ammunition using the Godsdream mineral. He asks various members of the party about what weapons they prefer and uses this information to tempt them with promises of the enchanted weapons he intends to craft using Godsdream.

However, Draenoss has no intention of creating these weapons, or for rewarding the characters at all. Once he is escorted safely to Torog's Teeth, he ambushes the party with the help of his apprentice Marwenye, attempting to kill them all.

### INSIGHT CHECKS

The players may ask for Insight checks. The crafty DM should do everything in their power to lull the players into thinking Draenoss is a victim who was wronged by his fellow drow and escaped from the cruel place of his birth. If a player does attempt an Insight check and succeeds, you could report that "You sense that the mage is not telling you everything." When pressed, Draenoss reveals that the real reason he wants to retrieve the Godsdream is to exact revenge on his former masters, but he could not be sure whether the party were agents of those masters, and so he was being timid around them.

## BEGINNING THE EXPEDITION

Over a sumptuous breakfast (sautéed mushrooms on toast) Draenoss shows the party a map of the route to Torog's Teeth. The deadly route takes the party through caverns full of acid pools, across natural stone bridges, a duergar settlement, and through several other treacherous environments. Finally, the expedition concludes at a conjunction of several vast chambers where Godsdream is present in abundance. This is where Draenoss, with the help of his apprentice Marwenye, will attempt to ambush and kill the party.

## WE'VE GOT A TAIL!

Draenoss's apprentice Marwenye is tailing the party. She knows the route to Torog's Teeth and keeps her distance, but she is never too far behind. Use your discretion for the amount and nature of clues the characters might find, but err on the side of not revealing anything until it is too late!

### A NOTE ON ENCOUNTERS

Draenoss participates in every combat encounter during this scenario, initially helping the characters. For the last encounter, however, he turns against them.

## AREA 1 – CHASM BRIDGE

After the party has traveled through the Underdark for about an hour, they come to a dramatic stone bridge spanning a huge chasm. This is a good opportunity for you to bring some tension to the quest. Will they be attacked while crossing the bridge? At this stage, they don't know. Read or summarize:

A thin tendril of stone stretches across the black abyss, which seems to have no bottom. From below, a deep rumbling is ever-present, perhaps the sound of the earth itself, or of some slumbering god. The bridge is only wide enough to cross in single file, and in places it appears even narrower than that. Every now and then you fancy you can hear other noises from below. Falling stones, displaced by some unseen creature, perhaps?

Perhaps Draenoss could make some remark here about Torog and his rampage through the earth, creating the Underdark.

To really put the party on edge, start an initiative order based on what order the party is crossing the bridge, and judge how many rounds it will take them to cross. The bridge is about 150 feet long, so using the Dash action



they can theoretically get across within three rounds. You may choose to make the bridge difficult terrain.

However, party members may want to stop on the bridge to see what they can discern in the abyss below. Halfway across the bridge, have the party make a **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception)** check. If any succeed, tell them they can hear noises coming from somewhere below: flapping of wings and gnashing of teeth. There are definitely creatures down there.

If the party takes more than three rounds to cross the bridge, spawn 1d10 **stirges** and have them bother the players, requiring **DC 10 Dexterity saving throws** to stay on the bridge. A good chance to put your AC 21 plate armored paladin on edge! A level 7 PC toppled into a bottomless abyss by a CR 1/8 creature? Nice to remind the party who's boss every now and then.

## AREA 2 – STALAGMITE SURPRISE

After the bridge, the party enters a series of winding passages. Little do they know, there is a colony of monstrosities ahead that preys on unwary travelers.

Read or summarize the following:

You enter another large cavern, a labyrinthine maze of stalagmites that protrude from the floor. The floor is marked here and there with strange prints. Something has been passing through here recently.

A ranger or any character with tracking abilities can attempt a **DC 15 Wisdom (Survival)** check to discern that a strange creature has been moving through this area. A successful **DC 20 Intelligence (Nature)** check reveals that it is a monstrosity. At your discretion, you can reveal that the creature is a **roper** (CR 5; MM, p 271).

As the characters move through the stalagmites, they are surprised by three **gricks** (CR 2; MM, p 173). Make Stealth checks with advantage for the gricks (they have advantage to hide in rocky terrain).

Suddenly, from out of nowhere, three horrific-looking creatures appear! Snake-like, but with a head comprised of grotesque tentacles, these creatures snap at you with their bird-like beaks.

The gricks are luring the characters towards a specific stalagmite—the **roper**, waiting in disguise. The roper also gains surprise on its first attack due to its False Appearance trait.

Then, to your horror, one of the stalagmites begins to move! From its sides, impossibly long tentacles shoot out towards you, attempting to wrap you in their deadly grasp!

When the encounter is over, Draenoss is full of praise for the party and their prowess, telling them how it would be impossible for him to attempt this expedition without them.

"I am indebted to you, friends. Now that I have seen your prowess, I am confident that putting my trust in you will prove to be the right choice... I've only known you a short while, but I trust you with my life!"

Draenoss then helps the party out by distributing three *potions of supreme healing*.

"It's all I have... hopefully we won't need more!"

### SCALING THE BATTLE

**Level 6:** Remove one grick.

**Level 8:** Add one grick.



## AREA 3 – POISON POOLS

As the party enter Area 3, read or summarize:

You enter a cavern thick with noxious fumes. Green pools of poison dominate this area, with narrow interconnecting walkways between them.

“Take care here, friends,” Draenoss breathes. “I believe creatures lurk in these pools. We must be very careful not to lose our footing.”

### NARROW WALKWAYS

At your discretion, call for **DC 10 Dexterity** checks here to determine whether the PCs keep their footing as they cross the narrow walkways. The characters must each pass three Dexterity checks to cross. If they fail one check, they slip and a foot or leg might drop into the poison causing 1d4 poison damage. If they fail two of the checks, they slip in but get quickly out, causing 1d6 damage. If they fail all three, then they are submerged (see the paragraph after “Scaling the Battle”). These walkways count as difficult terrain as they are only a foot or so wide and take time to cross.

Read or summarize:

As you enter the network of walkways that thread dangerously around the pools, you have to cover your mouth to avoid gagging on the poisonous fumes which burn your lungs with every breath. Rising from the pools like smoke, a thick green fog hangs everywhere. On the far side of the cavern you can see an exit, and you fix your sights on it.

To really up the ante, have two **chuuls** (CR 4; MM, p 40) assault the party by grabbing at the PCs with their pincers, which have a reach of 10 feet. As the chuul is immune to poison, it can lurk within the pools. If you are feeling nasty, can even pull a character into the pool!

### SCALING THE BATTLE

**Level 6:** Remove one chuul.

**Level 8:** Add one chuul.

For every round a character spends in the pool, whether they fall or are dragged in by a chuul, they take 1d6 poison damage.

Keep in mind the chuul are optional. But regardless, you should always hint at their presence, just to keep the party on edge.

### GATHERING POISON

If a player possesses empty vials, they may spend an action, and attempt a **DC 15 Dexterity** check to gather poison. For poison stats, refer to **Pale Tincture** on p 258 of the DMG.

You must put a limit on this, however. The character can only gather as many doses of poison as they possess empty vials.

## AREA 4 – EMERALD POOLS / KITA STOUTSKULL

As the party enter Area 4, read or summarize:

This serene cavern looks like the scene of volcanic activity at some stage in the past. Multiple terraces of colored stone form natural steps throughout the cavern, and in three places, natural depressions hold pools of crystal-clear water, usually where the rock has taken on an emerald color which makes the pools look incredibly inviting.

### HEALING PROPERTIES

Any characters adventurous enough to take a dip in the emerald pools gains the benefits of a short rest, as well as inspiration (if you desire). This can be a good way for you to bolster a party who has taken some hits from the roper or chuuls.



## KITA STOUTSKULL

As the characters are gathering themselves in this idyllic cave, a minotaur bounty hunter named **Kita Stoutskull** introduces herself.

A voice from above gives you a start!

“Enjoying your dip, I take it?”

Looking up in alarm, you see a strange-looking creature sitting on a high ledge in the upper part of the wall, which gives her a vantage point over the whole cavern. She appears to be like a bull in humanoid form, clad in leather armor and wearing a greataxe strapped across her back.

**Kita** (see below) informs the players that she is a bounty hunter on the trail of a party of duergar who assassinated a high-ranking member of her settlement, a military commander named Master Ivilynn. Ivilynn had always been defiant against the duergar, and the drow, who they have had to share this area of the Underdark with for many decades. The slaying of Master Ivilynn was a case of a routine minotaur patrol running into a guarded duergar mining expedition and being outnumbered.

The leaders of the minotaur settlement dispatched Kita in order to “exact any revenge possible” on the duergar.

“Who is this drow scum?” the minotaur snaps when she lays eyes on Draenoss. “I will not share the same air as him! The drow are a scourge, a disease, who see fit to murder anyone who crosses their path!”

Kita initially views Draenoss with suspicion and hatred, but after Draenoss explains that he is an exile from the drow settlement, she may mellow in her opinion of him.

This scenario does three things:

- It helps create sympathy for Draenoss prior to his treachery.

- It provides a possible NPC that the players can befriend if they are having a hard time dealing with encounters.
- It sets up the coming duergar encounter and provides it with a bit of emotional resonance.

## AREA 5 – WHAT FOLLOWS?

After leaving Area 4, have the characters traverse the passages of the Underdark for an hour or so. Then, Draenoss discovers small traces of Godsdream in the rock.

“Ah, look!” Draenoss exclaims. The drow directs your attention to the rock, where little flecks of a red mineral are scattered through the rough natural walls. “Godsdream! We are getting close!”

The drow bends close to the rock. “Hmmm... beautiful. Still, not enough to be worth harvesting. The real wealth awaits us at Torog’s Teeth!”

### MARWENYE SLIP-UP

As Draenoss says this, call for a **DC 16 Wisdom (Perception)** check. If they succeed, they hear a sound coming from some way behind. This is Marwenye, whose foot has slipped on some rubble and given a clue to her position. However, she instantly realizes her mistake and quickly flees backwards, away from the area. By the time the characters reach the spot where she was, she is long gone.

If Kita is with the party, have her suggest that they are being trailed by duergar scouts, as she knows that they are nearing the duergar settlement.

If you want to confuse the players a little, have Draenoss act a little shifty. But be *very careful* with this, as you don’t want to give the game away.





The ideal outcome of this is that the characters, and maybe even the players, become a little more on edge, suspecting that they are being tailed by something. If this suspicion gets to be too much, have Draenoss become suspicious as well.

## AREA 6 – DUERGAR MINERS

As the characters pass through these passages, they notice signs of mining on the walls. Read or summarize:

It is clear that much mining activity has gone on here. Neatly arranged piles of rubble are spaced regularly down these passages, and the walls have been worked systematically to harvest any minerals. Pickaxe marks are seen everywhere on the walls.

Traveling a bit further, you find a cache of tools arranged inside a mining cart.

“There’s no way around,” Draenoss informs you. “We must pass through these tunnels in order to reach Torog’s Teeth.”

Then, after a short while...

A sound comes to your ears then... a metallic ringing, almost melodic as it reverberates down the tunnels. It is the sound of pick on rock. It sounds like many workers, although this could be the effect of the tunnel multiplying echoes.

A successful **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception)** check reveals that some of these picking noises are from humanoid workers, while others are very regular, machine-like even. This is the sound of a **duergar hammerer** (CR 2; MToF, p 188), a construct that the duergar have employed to assist them in mining.

## DUERGAR MINING PARTY

The mining site is guarded by two **duergar stone guards** (CR 2; MToF, p 191), and a **duergar mind master** (CR 2; MToF, p 189). They watch over four **duergar** miners (CR 1; MM, p 122).

The guards are very perceptive; the characters must succeed on a **DC 18 Dexterity (Stealth)** check to approach unnoticed.

## POSSIBLE DUERGAR TACTICS

The miners all possess javelins and initially hold back, throwing their javelins at the party while the duergar stone guards and the hammerer hold the front line.

The duergar mind master also holds back, making his magical attacks from afar. The tunnel is only 20 feet wide, so the party must get past the stone guards and the hammerer in order to make melee attacks on the mind master.

After one round, the stone guards use their **Enlarge** trait to further block the characters from making their way towards the miners and mind master.

## TREASURE

After the adventurers defeat the duergar, a quick search reveals 10 uncut gemstones worth 50 gp each.

## SCALING THE BATTLE

**Level 6:** No scaling necessary

**Levels 8:** Add one duergar miner and one duergar stone guard.



## AREA 7 – TOROG’S TEETH / THE BETRAYAL!

As the party enter Area 6, read or summarize:

“We’ve arrived,” Draenoss says under his breath. “This is it, Torog’s Teeth!”

The passage widens into a cavern so vast that the far side is blurred in the distance, and a haze distorts the light slightly. Huge stalagmites stand like columns throughout the chamber, giving the chamber the appearance of a pillared hall. Swathes of green and blue phosphorescence are painted across the wall, and clearly visible reflecting their light are several wide seams of a red mineral—Godsdream. It arcs over your head and all the way down to the floor of the cavern, thick and pinkish-red in color.

Marwenye is nearby and enters the chamber, staying in the shadows. She has the same map that Draenoss showed to the characters and knows that this is the place where her master plans to ambush the characters.

### MARWENYE’S APPEARANCE

When the time is right, Draenoss turns towards the party, casting *mage armor* on himself as he does so. Read or summarize:

“I thank you, truly, for leading me here my friends. This mineral will allow me to craft some truly incredible magical artifacts. But, I must correct something I said previously. I will not be sharing any of this with you. You foolish children! So trusting... but now, arm yourselves!”

At this, Draenoss’s apprentice prepares for attack, casting *mage armor* on herself also.

“I apologize friends,” Draenoss says as he moves his hands, preparing a spell. “You’ve been very helpful, but as I told you when we first met, never trust a drow!”

### GODSDREAM EFFECTS

The nature of Godsdream, a potent psychic energy, imbues all characters with power. Certain areas of the encounter map allow the characters and enemies to take advantage of the following effect:

When a creature is standing in an affected square, they score a critical hit on an attack roll of 17-20. Only one creature can take advantage of this during a combat round. If a character scores a critical, then no other creature can use that effect **in that square** for the remainder of the round.

### ENCOUNTER IDEAS

Keep Marwenye hidden at first, attacking from the cover of stalagmites around the edge of the cavern. Do not have Draenoss reveal her presence until it becomes obvious he has help.

“Yes, my apprentice Marwenye!” Draenoss laughs triumphantly. “She has been shadowing us since we left my tower. Throw down your weapons now, friends, and we may spare your lives!”

Although hidden, Marwenye may get as close as 90 feet to cast *sleep*. The *thunderwave* spell she keeps in reserve until a character comes near, or until she is within melee range of several characters. She also has two uses of *misty step* to get her out of trouble, as well as a *potion of healing*.

In general, however, Marwenye keeps her distance and uses the *fire bolt* cantrip to attack the party from afar.



Run Draenoss (**drow mage**; CR 7; MM, p 129) as you see fit. Combined with Marwenye should give the party a good fight. There's even a chance someone may die!

### SCALING THE BATTLE

**Level 6:** Reduce Draenoss's hp by 10.

**Level 8:** Increase Marwenye's hp to 35.

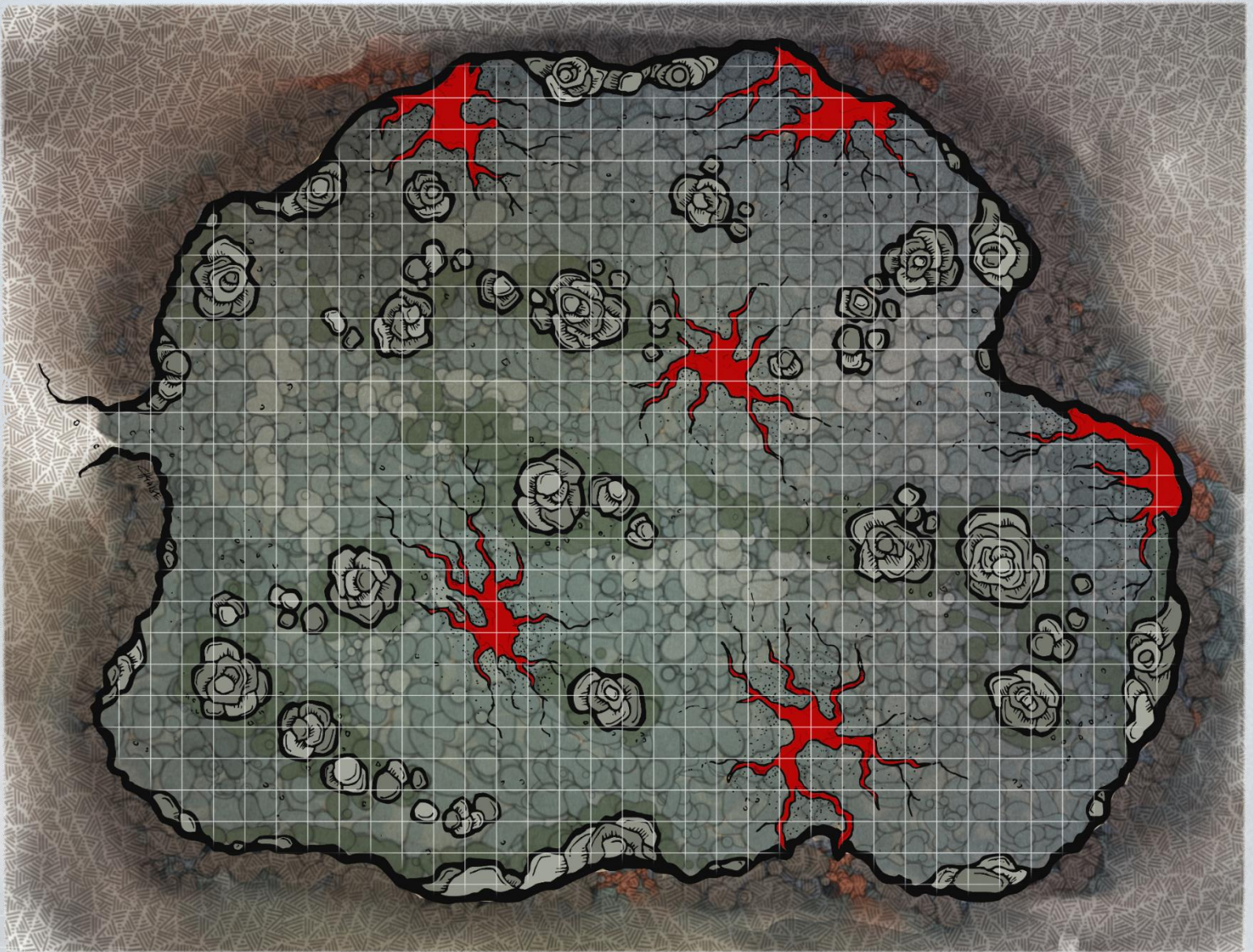
### TREASURE

After the encounter, the adventurers will find the following loot on Draenoss and Marwenye.

- 2 *potions of supreme healing* (Draenoss was keeping these hidden).
- 458 gp

### MINING GODSDREAM

A generous DM may allow the players to mine some Godsdream, which they can craft into a magical weapon with improved critical. They need a pickaxe to achieve this, which they may be able to retrieve from Area 6. However, more duergar might have appeared in that area since the players passed through.



## KITA STOUTSKULL (NPC)

Medium humanoid (minotaur), neutral

**Armor Class** 14 (leather armor)

**Hit Points** 33 (5d8 + 10)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	17 (+3)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)

**Saving Throws** Dex +5, Int +3

**Skills** Athletics +2, Insight +2, Perception +2, Religion +3,

Sleight of Hand +8, Stealth +8

**Senses** passive Perception 12

**Languages** Common, Dwarvish, Infernal, Thieves' Cant

**Challenge** 2 (450 XP)

**Assassinate.** Kita has advantage on attack rolls against any creature that hasn't taken a turn in the combat yet. In addition, any hit she scores against a creature that is surprised is a critical hit.

**Cunning Action.** Kita can take a bonus action on each of her turns in combat. This action can be used only to take the Dash, Disengage, or Hide action.

**Goring Rush.** Whenever Kita uses dash as an action, she may make a melee attack with horns as a bonus action.

**Hammering Horns.** When Kita makes a melee attack, she may attempt to shove a creature with her horns as a bonus action. She cannot use this shove attempt to knock a creature prone.

**Horns.** Proficient as a melee weapon that deals 1d10 piercing damage, also granting advantage on checks to shove.

**Labyrinthine Recall.** Kita can perfectly recall any path she has travelled.

**Sneak Attack.** Once per turn, Kita deals an extra 3d6 damage when she hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 ft. of an ally of Kita that isn't incapacitated and the assassin doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

**Uncanny Dodge.** When an attacker that Kita can see hits her with an attack, she can use her reaction to halve the attack's damage against her.

### Actions

**Multiattack.** Kita makes two attacks: one with her rapier and one with her dagger.

**Rapier.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage.

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

**Shortbow.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage.

## MARWENYE OF HOUSE KAZZATH

Medium humanoid (drow), lawful evil

**Armor Class** 12 (15 with *mage armor*)

**Hit Points** 20 (3d6 + 10)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)

**Saving Throws** Int +4, Wis +3

**Skills** Arcana +4, Deception +2, Insight +3, Perception +3, Stealth +4

**Senses** darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 13

**Languages** Common, Elvish, Undercommon

**Challenge** 1 (200 XP)

**Fey Ancestry.** The drow has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put the drow to sleep

**Sunlight Sensitivity.** While in sunlight, the drow has disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

**Spellcasting.** Marwenye is a 3<sup>rd</sup>-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is intelligence (spell save DC 12, +4 to hit with spell attacks). The drow has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *fire bolt, friends, minor illusion.*

1<sup>st</sup> level (4 slots): *mage armor, sleep, false life, thunderwave*

2<sup>nd</sup> level (2 slots): *misty step.*

### Actions

**Quarterstaff.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +1 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d8) bludgeoning damage.



## LARRY, THE INSANE ABOLETH

By Joshua Barbeau

Artist: Matt DeMino

Cartography: CHGuise

Estimated run-time: 120 minutes upwards

*Larry, the Insane Aboleth* is a social encounter that can become a deadly combat if things go sideways. It is designed for characters of 7th level, but with some care it can be adjusted to accommodate higher or lower level parties. The run-time can vary depending on how much time the players spend getting to know the town, but it is designed to be played in a single session.

### BACKGROUND

If a human were to start living in an underwater cave, and claim to use their “psychic powers” to brainwash a nearby town while demanding sacrifices, you’d probably think that human has gone insane. Rightly so! But what might be insane for a human happens to be normal day-to-day affairs for an aboleth. Then, by that logic, if an alien aberration were to lose its mind, would it start behaving like a human? You might find it unlikely, but that’s exactly what happened!

For nearly two decades now, the small Underdark hamlet of Durhlong has been under the sway of an aboleth they call Lliar’riyathoss. At first, the aboleth enslaved them (as aboleths are wont to do), but over time the people of Durhlong learned to appreciate the sense of order subservience has brought to their lives. Now they willingly serve Lliar’riyathoss and worship the aboleth as their god.

There’s only one problem: “Larry”, as it now insists on being called, no longer wants to be a god. Larry has developed a conscience and wants to release the willing slaves back to their former lives.

### PLOT HOOK

This side-quest can be dropped in to your Underdark adventure as a strange town not on your player’s maps that they chance to find. Or, you can use one of these two plot hooks:

**Missing parent.** A merchant named Denise Howitz from a surface town nearby is willing to hire a party of adventurers to go looking for her missing father. Following a trail of clues leads the party to Durhlong, where the dad in question has been offered to Larry as tribute. He can be rescued, with some doing.

**A psychic call for help.** While traveling the Underdark, the party receives a telepathic message from Larry, calling for their aid. It simply says, “Many lives are at stake; find me in Durhlong; come help,” and includes directions imprinted in their minds.

### THE HAMLET OF DURHLONG

Forty years ago, the Zhentarim wanted to establish an outpost in the Underdark. They were successful, and for a time they maintained a foothold there. The walled stronghold filled with mercenaries was a safe haven for many Underdark travelers, and it wasn’t long before denizens would arrive seeking refuge from the dark. Over time, new buildings were constructed as more people decided to make this outpost their home, they eventually founded the hamlet of Durhlong.

The Zhentarim kept the hamlet well supplied with mercenaries and weapons from the surface world, but eventually the supply runs stopped. That’s when the aboleth found Durhlong; or maybe Durhlong found the aboleth? It’s unclear how the relationship began, but however it did, it only took a few months before everyone in Durhlong worshipped the aboleth called Lliar’riyathoss as a god.





1 square = 10 feet



## SECURITY

Durhlong employs 24 armed mercenaries who police and protect the town. Though the hamlet with him in a fight for the town. Just about everyone else in Durhlong is a **cultist** (CR 1/8, MM, p 345), and generally fights to protect Cirederill to death as long as she lives.

## DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Durhlong has a population of about 120 people of mixed races, with both surface and Underdark-dwelling denizens among them. Some key characters are detailed here:

**JAQUELINE PIERCE** (human bandit captain, CR 2, MM, p 344), she/her, LE). She has a Charisma of 18.

**Who she is.** The appointed leader of Durhlong.

**What she wants.** Her goal is to remain in power by any means necessary. She abuses her position liberally, knowing that as long as she supports the continued worship of Lliar'riyathoss, the people will abide her.

**Roleplaying Jaqueline.** Pierce is sharp-spoken, stern, and in-charge.

**CIREDERILL QUIN** (drow cult fanatic, CR 2, MM, p 345), she/her, CE)

**Who she is.** The spiritual leader and real power of Durhlong. She communes with Larry daily (in fact, the only one in Durhlong to do so), and all the cultists revere her as the voice of Lliar'riyathoss.

**What she wants.** Her goal is for all to worship Lliar'riyathoss, and for those who refuse to perish as sacrifices to the aboleth god. Cirederill is relentlessly zealous in her devotion to her ideology, and even Larry has been thus far unable to dissuade her from continued worship.

**Roleplaying Cirederill.** The drow is insane, sadistic, and ruthless.

coffers pays their wages, these glorified **thugs** (CR 1/2, MM, p 350; they wear ring mail and have AC 14) report directly to Rufus and side

**RUFUS** (half-orc veteran, CR 3, MM, p 350), he/him, LN)

**Who he is.** The captain of the guard.

**What he wants.** Rufus wants to maintain order. He doesn't much care for the worship of anything, let alone an aboleth, but what's good for keeping the peace is good for him. If a schism develops between the two leaders of Durhlong, he sides with Jaqueline.

**Roleplaying Rufus.** Rufus is cautious, deferential, and humorless.

**IKE TEMPLETON** (deep gnome, CR 1/2, MM, p 164), he/him, N) Rufus has a Deception of +3 and advantage on Deception checks made to convince others he worships the aboleth.

**Who he is.** The innkeeper of the Durhlong Way Inn.

**What he wants.** Ike just wants to tend bar and avoid trouble. If pressed, he claims he worships Lliar'riyathoss, a lie he is quite good at.

**Roleplaying Ike.** Ike has a dry-wit and is reserved and untrusting.

**GOROG SILVERTOOTH** (duergar\*, CR 1, MM, p 122, he/him, NE) Gorog uses a warhammer.

**Who he is.** The town blacksmith. As the only smith in town, he gets away with charging a premium for his wares, which he does happily.

**What he wants.** Gorog wants to serve the great aboleth god Lliar'riyathoss by supplying those who guard the holy hamlet with armor and weapons. Also, to profit off travelers as much as he can.

**Roleplaying Gorog.** The smith is conniving, greedy, and zealous.



## APPROACHING DURHLONG

Durhlong is located in a large cavern atop a cliff overlooking a lake. Visitors must climb a steep, rocky road to reach its gates.

### GENERAL FEATURES OF THE AREA

**Terrain.** The terrain is rough stone. Entering the cavern from the south side requires a walk along a rocky beach before ascending the cliff pass. Entering from the north side requires traversing the lake. A small wooden boat is moored on the north side, but who knows what lurks below the surface of the water...

**Light.** The cavern is illuminated by fungus that glows a dim blue at night, and a bright purple during the day, simulating a strange sort of day/night cycle.

**Smells and Sounds.** The air is cool and smells of lavender, a scent put off by the fungus.

**Bailey.** A 15-foot-tall wooden palisade surrounds the hamlet on all sides. Two gates break the wall, one at the entrance to the town, and the other leading out to the cliff, where sacrifices go to die.

When your players climb the rocky path to reach Durhlong's gates, read or summarize:

After a long climb you've reached the top of the cliff to come face-to-face with a small grouping of buildings surrounded by a wooden palisade. A pair of guards, one a half-orc, the other a drow, sit out front of the gate playing cards on a stool. When they notice you, they stand.

"Hold!" the drow guard shouts. "State your business in the holy hamlet of Lliar'riyathoss' chosen. Be you peaceful, you will be allowed entry. Seek you trouble, and you will," the guard hesitates, and smiles sadistically before finishing. "...also be allowed entry..."

The "guards" are a pair of **thugs** dressed in military armor. The half-orc is named Vimy, and the drow is Sildarene Lironasee. They aren't looking for a fight, but will give one if challenged.

If asked what the guard was implying, he responds with "Just that I pity anyone who

comes to Durhlong seeking trouble," and does not elaborate further.

If asked about Lliar'riyathoss, one of them says "If you wish to learn more about the lord of the deep, he who has blessed this town, visit the temple."

### DEVELOPMENT

The guards don't stop the party from entering Durhlong, but if anyone causes trouble at the gate, they report it to Rufus later, which might make their lives difficult (see "Convince the People" below).

### PLACES OF INTEREST

Once inside hamlet's walls, the party might visit any of the following areas.

#### AREA A: CLIFFWATCH

At the far side of the town is a second gate that opens up to the cliff overlooking the lake. It is a 45-foot drop to the water below. This is where the town offers up sacrifices to their god.

#### AREA B: BARRACKS

A modest barracks houses the town guards. Rufus can usually be found here, along with 3d6 **thugs** (AC 14, ring mail).

In addition to the bunkhouse, there's a training area, an armory, and an office that Rufus hardly ever uses. If the armory is raided, the party can find several sets of ring mail, maces, and heavy crossbows (with bolts). If the office is raided, a **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Investigation)** check uncovers a journal written by Rufus that reveals his misgivings about worshiping the aboleth.

#### AREA C: BLACKSMITH

There is a single blacksmith in town, owned and operated by the duergar Gorog Silvertooth. Gorog is about as devoutly brainwashed as they come, and will do anything in service to the great aboleth god. He supplies weapons and armor to the barracks at cost, and spends an





hour at the temple no less than four times a tenday.

Gorog happily charges a premium to travelers to make up for the lack of profit he makes from the township. He can make any set of armor or weapons that ordinarily costs 100 gp or less, but charges double their standard price. If, after doubling an item's price, it would still cost less than 1 gp, he rounds up to 1 gp.

If Gorog becomes aware of a plot against the aboleth god or the church in service to it, he quickly reports it to Cirederill.

#### AREA D: DURHLONG WAY INN

This modest two-story inn is the only place where travelers can get a decent night's sleep in town. The owner, Ike, mostly keeps to himself. He charges average prices, and is happy to put up anyone who doesn't draw the attention or ire of the church to his simple establishment.

#### AREA E: JAQUELINE PIERCE'S RESIDENCE

Jaqueline resides in a modest single-story home all by herself. She has converted the front half of the house into an office open to the public.

#### AREA F: TEMPLE OF LLIAR'RIYATHOSS

The lavish temple is the only lavish building in town. All over the sides are murals depicting a great tentacled creature, shining light down on a bunch of people below who pay fealty to it. The interior is not much better, covered in exquisite tapestries depicting a sad and broken group of people finding the tentacled god and being elevated by it to live happy prosperous lives. At the front of the building an altar stands in front of a large statue of an aboleth.

### MEETING CIREDERILL

Cirederill can usually be found in the Temple of Lliar'riyathoss with 2d4 **cultists**. Cirederill is pleasant at first with anyone new, albeit aggressive in her admiration for the "Lord of the Deep, Lliar'riyathoss," and in her insistence that all should worship him. If she can convince the

party to become acolytes of the tentacled god, she tells them they must undergo an initiation into their order. If she can't, she bids them farewell while planning to sacrifice them later.

Either way, meeting Cirederill puts the characters on a collision course with Larry. Cirederill is absolutely crazy in her devotion to her cult religion, but she's also pretty persuasive at getting others to listen to her ideals. If you want to give the characters extra motivation to sign-up, she can offer them some or all of the following in return for surviving the jump into the deep:

- A common magic item for each of them.
- A single rare magic item for the party.
- A blessing that gives them the effects of a *bless* spell once per day while in the Underdark.
- Untold power (imply they will level up).

### MEETING THE TENTACLED GOD

If their meeting with Cirederill goes well, she insists the party be initiated into their order—a process that requires their willing dive off Cliffwatch into the lake below. If they survive, it is considered a blessing from Lliar'riyathoss.

If their meeting did not go well, Cirederill arranges to have the newcomers offered up as sacrifices to Lliar'riyathoss—which involves throwing them off Cliffwatch into the lake below.

Volunteering for the initiation makes your job easy: have the characters escorted to the cliff. If, on the other hand, they want nothing to do with the cult, throwing them off the cliff is a little trickier. You don't want to have the entire town rise up against them (yet), because that will end in a bloodbath. Instead, allow them to continue to explore the town peacefully, and when they retire to the inn for a long rest, tell them they wake up bound and gagged, about to be thrown off the cliff. Cultists are incredibly



adept at tying people up while they are sleeping, didn't you know?

The fall deals 4d6 falling damage, unless the character succeeds on a **DC 20 Strength (Athletics)** check to do a perfect swan dive into the water.

When the characters jump (or are thrown) off the cliff, read or summarize:

You fall nearly fifty feet to the dark waters below. At this height, you might as well be landing on solid ground. Still, the impact is not so scary as what awaits you below the waves. As you sink beneath the surface, large tentacles reach up and grasp you gently, pulling you deeper into the dark. Before you can get your bearings and react, you are lifted out of the water and safely deposited onto dry ground. You're in some sort of deeper cave, accessible only through an underwater tunnel beneath the lake. The moss provides dim illumination all around. In front of you... Something from out of your nightmares. A large, tentacled, fish-like beast floats on top of the pool, staring at you with its three red eyes!

The abomination in the water is Larry, an **aboleth** (MM, p 13) who the people above worship as a god.

### ROLEPLAYING LARRY

Larry is not your typical aboleth. It has recently gone insane, developing a conscience and starting to care about the creatures it has enslaved. It speaks (such that it does, by beaming its thoughts telepathically directly into a creature's brain) in a friendly demeanor. It expresses genuine concern for the people it has hurt, and wants to make amends.

Unfortunately, Cirederill has rejected all attempts to release Durhlong from its worship. Larry begs the party to help free the people of Durhlong from their self-imposed captivity, and to convince them that Larry is not a god.

Larry is disgusted by its past monstrous behavior. It has chosen its new name to start it on the path to a peaceful life. The aboleth insists to only be addressed as Larry, and anyone who speaks its true name upsets it. Saying the name Lliar'riyathoss too many times in front of Larry can set the aboleth off into a rage.

### OUTCOMES

Once they've met with Larry, the party is faced with a difficult choice: to try and save Durhlong, or to leave well enough alone. Depending on what they choose, there's a number of different ways this story could end.

### CONVINCE THE PEOPLE

If the party tries to talk the people of Durhlong out of their cult-induced stupor, it is an uphill battle. The first step is getting both Jaqueline Pierce and Rufus on board with their plan. Neither are particularly zealous about worshipping Larry, but the threat of an all-out civil war in the streets of Durhlong is enough to dissuade them. The party can convince them by making a successful **DC 18 Charisma (Persuasion)** check, which is made with disadvantage if the party caused trouble for Rufus previously.

Once Jaqueline and Rufus are on board, the party must take out Cirederill before the rest of the town will listen to reason. See "Fighting Cirederill" below.

### KILL THE BEAST

The party might decide the best way to free the people of Durhlong from their false god is to rid them of it. Killing Larry is no easy task, but even if the party should prove successful, they are in for a rude awakening as the entire town of



Durhlong labels them as heretics and god-killers, chasing them out of town for good.

### WAR ON DURHLONG

If the party decides to wage war on Durhlong, they may quickly find they have bitten off more than they can chew. Nobody in town is above a CR 3, but a hundred-some angry cultists is a lot of bodies to cut through and any one of them can get lucky. Fortunately, the party need not defeat them all. Taking out the leaders, Cirederill, Jaqueline, and Rufus, is enough discouragement to make the rest of Durhlong surrender.

### FIGHTING CIREDERILL

Cirederill is no match for a party of level 7 characters, but she's canny and has an army of cultists willing to throw themselves in the line of fire to protect her. If a fight breaks out, she retreats to a private chamber within the temple, as seemingly endless wave after wave of cultists throw themselves at the party trying to stop them from reaching her. If they do reach her, she surrenders, but taking her alive might prove to be a bad idea. As long as they have Cirederill in captivity, the rest of the cultists in town continue to assault the party, trying to rescue her; they only surrender if she is dead.

### CONCLUSION

At the end of the adventure, award the party with 1,000 gp worth of assorted art objects and gems, and 1d4 rolls on **Magic Item Table C** (DMG, Chapter 7). If they rescued the town, this is a gift. If they slaughtered the town, this is what they looted.

### ADJUSTING DIFFICULTY

For a weak party, reduce the total population of the town to about 80 people. For a strong party, double the population, and add an **assassin** (CR 8, MM, p 343) in Cirederill's employ. You do not need to adjust Larry's difficulty, since the encounter with it is optional. Do not reduce difficulty if NPCs are fighting alongside the characters.



## THE LONG SALT TAVERN

By *DropTheDie*

Artist: *Ludovico Tellatin*

Cartography: *Dyson Logos*

*The Long Salt Tavern* is a location guide designed for four to five characters of 1<sup>st</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> level. The suggested encounter is not mandatory and should be considered completely optional, as it is no threat to the party.

### THE TAVERN

The Long Salt Tavern is a surprisingly warm and inviting establishment built into the hollowed-out core of a massive cluster of clear quartz crystal nearly 100 feet long and over 30 feet high at the tallest spire.

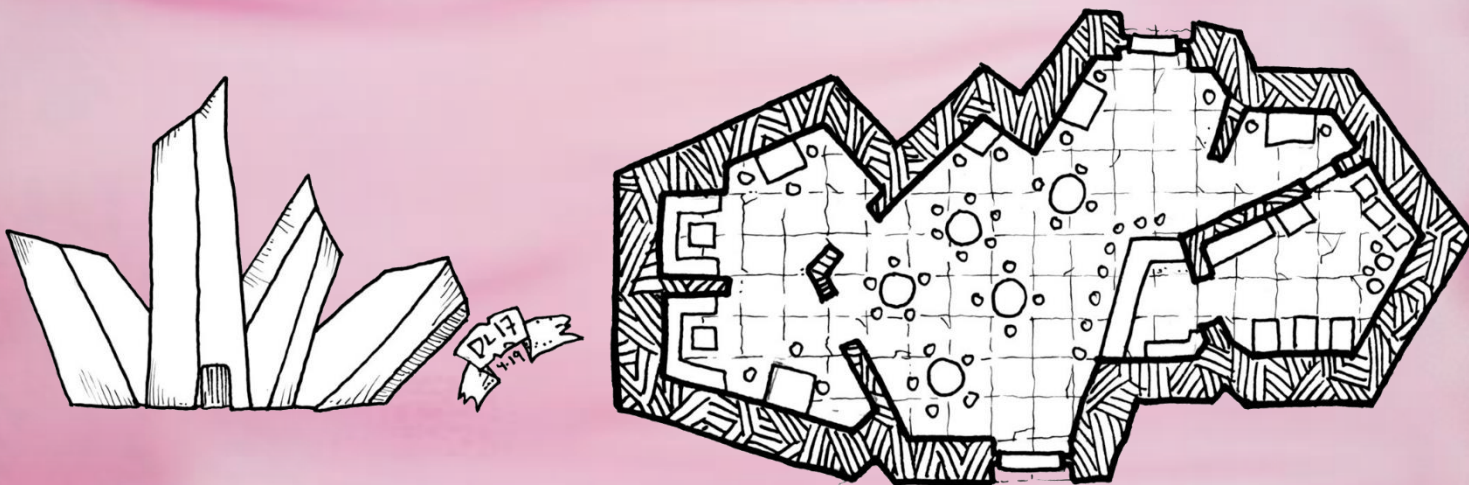
It may actually prove difficult for travelers to miss the Long Salt, as not only do a queue of floating **flumphs** (CR 1/8; MM, p 135) stream into and out of the tavern at all hours, but their collective amusement within the place causes the crystal walls to shimmer and pulse with a warm, pink light visible from several miles away.

Past the wide, swinging zurkhwood doors, the tavern sprawls out in both directions for another 50 feet.

To the right, a short bar made of dark, stained zurkhwood is lined by eight simple-yet-sturdy iron stools topped with hunks of spongy mushroom. Behind the bar, shelves are lined with various alcoholic concoctions from Black Jagger, a deep gnome specialty, to a luminescent wine made from rockvine berries and the tangy grubs that eat them.

Small tables and booths sit scattered among the tavern, each one busy with deep gnomes, duergar, and flumphs playing cards, dice, or a keen game of insight and knowledge called “Liar’s Gauntlet.”

To the left, a small back room glows brightly with the pink shimmer of joyous flumphs. Overhead, a wrought iron mobile spins slowly as polished steel mirrors orbit a single brazier that burns with a soft pink flame. Five or more flumphs undulate wildly at various heights to a strange mathematical music being played by a gnomish woman at the room’s center, beating on an arrangement of moving pipes with two wooden dowels. A bright pink flumph tirelessly makes adjustments to each pipe’s height and length, altering their sound and tone into a hypnotic melody.



## BACKGROUND

Four years ago, Odarin Deepshackle (CN male **duergar despot**; CR 12; MToF, p 188) was sent by his clan to demolish this massive cluster of crystals and free an **aboleth** (CR 10; MM, p 13) trapped in the yet unexposed crystal.

During the crystal's excavation, Odarin drew the attention of a wounded flumph named Lolmulmit. Drawn to the psychic engine that made up Odarin's brain and the echoes of energy from the aboleth that fills the tavern even today, Lolmulmit kept the duergar miner company for months, feeding from both the crystal and the duergar.

As time passed, Odarin began to think less and less about his clan or the task they imparted to him and more about the peculiarly peaceful feeling he had while in this place. The mechanical parts of him vibrated with a pleasant energy hitherto unknown to him or his insane kinsmen.

Eventually, the excavation of crystal led to the furnishing of a place to live. More flumphs came to feed and socialize, which led to more travelers resting in the area, comforted by the small, oddly alert creatures. Thus, the Long Salt Tavern was formed.

## THE DUERGAR

Odarin Deepshackle hails from a clan of duergar near the mithril mine of Lustrum. Greedy, fanatical, and constantly warring with the drow of Menzoberranzan, the Deepshackle duergar would stop at nothing to eek out even a small advantage in their constant struggle for control of the earth's riches, even going so far as to surgically implant mechanical augmentations into their bodies to harness their psychic abilities or strengthen themselves for combat and the perpetual search for buried riches.

Odarin was dispatched to free the aboleth trapped by the Deepshackle duergar ages ago with no other suggested outcome than to "cause more problems for the damned elves."

Only now that his mind has settled and the overload of psychic energy of his people has been stymied does Odarin realize how mad his clan has truly become. He does not wish to return, and tries not to question why no duergar have been sent to find him in the years since his departure.

### THE RAGE OF DEMONS

Unbeknownst to Odarin, his clan was all but destroyed by the demon invasion that plagued the Underdark in *Out of the Abyss*. The few remaining clanspeople that remain in Lustrum are completely mad and excavate, forge, and augment themselves endlessly. When one drops dead from exhaustion, their fellows strip them for parts and continue their endless work without a single thought of regret or sadness.



### AUGMENTED BODY

The duergar proprietor stands a hand's breadth over 3 feet tall. His smooth, shaven head gives way to a gleaming gold plate that stretches from his eye to the back of his skull. The eye on that side of his wide face has also been removed and replaced with a mechanical



optical focus far more attuned to light and darkness than his own. One arm has been replaced with a pneumatic hammer and both legs have been cut away to be replaced by crushing implements. A gold nozzle juts from his chest that can spray his choice of acid or fire, each of which are stored in containers inside his mostly mechanical chest cavity.

## THE FLUMPH

Lolmulmit is a precocious flumph with a head rounder than most of his kin. He has a keen mind for philosophy, mathematics, and geography, often prattling on endlessly about the direction and distance to common landmarks on both the surface and the Underdark.

When not playing the "tuberphone," an instrument he helped design, Lolmulmit dances, socializes, and converses with the endless stream of flumphs that come to the Long Salt Tavern each day.

Once only drawn to Odarin and the tavern from hunger and curiosity, Lolmulmit has since grown to love them both and stops at nothing, including giving his own life, to keep them safe.

## ENDLESS REVELER

Keen eyed adventurers may realize that Lolmulmit never seems to tire or rest. If asked about it, he divulges that only he is allowed to freely feed from not only the tavern, but Odarin. Only by feeding from his incredible psychic energy does his duergar friend hold onto the sanity the Long Salt Tavern has brought to him.

## AMENITIES

The Long Salt Tavern has most of the amenities travelers may have grown accustomed to: plumbing, food, drink, and enough room in the storage closet to sleep 6 should the omnipresent light not keep travelers awake. In addition to the common accouterments, the following is a list of other amenities on offer:

## THE STABLES

A small stable, run by Weebnamf (CN non-binary derro **druid**; CR 2; MM, p 346), is situated a stone's throw from the tavern. Big enough to house eight beasts of burden, the stable caters to riding lizards and giant spider mounts. Weebnamf, while quite insane and taken to flights of fancy, has a noticeable love for animals and takes great care to ensure they remain safe and tended to at all hours.

## THE MUSICIAN

For several hours each day, Noomeel (NG female rock gnome **commoner**; CR 0; MM, p 345) plays the huge wall-mounted tuberphone. Her bright blue hair, vibrant eyes, and warm demeanor make her a beloved figure at the Long Salt Tavern, and her performances draw as many as 2d6 **flumphs** to the cramped room with her to dance and sometimes sing in harmony to the peculiar sounding instrument she plays.

## SUGGESTED ENCOUNTER

During the party's stay at The Long Salt Tavern, many of the flumphs outside may turn a vibrant shade of purple (fear), that ripples through the entire crowd and into the tavern. Immediately, flumphs begin to flee and any patrons capable of combat draw weapons or ready spells at whatever the coming threat may be.

A **mind flayer** (CR 7; MM, p 222) appears from the swinging doors holding aloft a white flag, swinging it delicately from upraised arms.

The mind flayer's name is Grazilaxx, a cordial and scholarly lawful good member of the Society of Brilliance. On their travels, Grazilaxx came across the strange tavern and thought the population density of flumphs to be astronomically high for the region.

In their curiosity, Grazilaxx asks to the cause of the potent psychic energy emanating from the crystalline walls of the tavern. Odarin, intent to keep the aboleth buried inside the crystal a



secret from the illithid, becomes hostile and demands that the mind flayer leave at once.

Convincing Odarin to divulge the aboleth's presence requires four successful **DC 14 Charisma (Deception, Persuasion, or Intimidation)** checks. Should the party fail three or more checks, they are told to leave as well and forcibly removed.

If the party is successful, Grazilaxx promises to keep the secret, shared only with the Order of

Brilliance, and offers their personal protection should Odarin ever require it.

Regardless of the outcome, Grazilaxx offers any useful information they possess to the party to aid in their journey, including the direction, distance, location, and hazards of their next stop. The mind flayer might even choose to accompany the party for a short while, should their quest be to the benefit of the denizens of the Underdark.



## LOST BEAUTY

**By:** Rae Pietrzak

**Art:** Patrick E. Pullen

**Cartography:** Jean Lorber

This encounter is created to present a challenge to a group of players with an average party level of 7. It presents both traps and combat, as well as a few rewards if the characters are successful in completing their task.

### DMS NOTES

The environment for this encounter is in complete nonmagical darkness unless otherwise stated. Players must keep an eye out, and be quite perceptive if they are to aid a sorcerer in saving a princess, who doesn't look to be a princess at all.

### BACKGROUND

**Jhynn Maerdwivyn** is a drow sorceress studying in a nearby city. Previously in her studies she had come across an old tale of a former drow matron, named Gueldra Do'Ristuan, who was *true polymorphed* (PHB, p 283) into a great monster. Her monstrous new form, known formally as a **grick alpha** (CR 7; MM, p 173), was Gueldra's punishment for falling in love with a surface elf. It is said that Gueldra's love was so pure, that it turned her talons into gold once she transformed. No one has seen her since.

Jhynn found the tale fascinating and dove deeper, discovering that the matron was locked away after transformation, sealing her from prying eyes while her house sought a cure. After all of her research, Jhynn was led to this section of the Underdark and is convinced she is closing in on her target.

When the party stumbles upon the chamber she is in, Jhynn is finishing up a ritual circle in the middle of the room. She enlists the party to assist her and promises to give them whatever they find in the lair once the ritual is completed. In order to complete the ritual, the characters must help her knock the grick alpha unconscious, then carry it all the way back to the ritual circle to aid her in a chant.





## 1. THE RITUAL CHAMBER

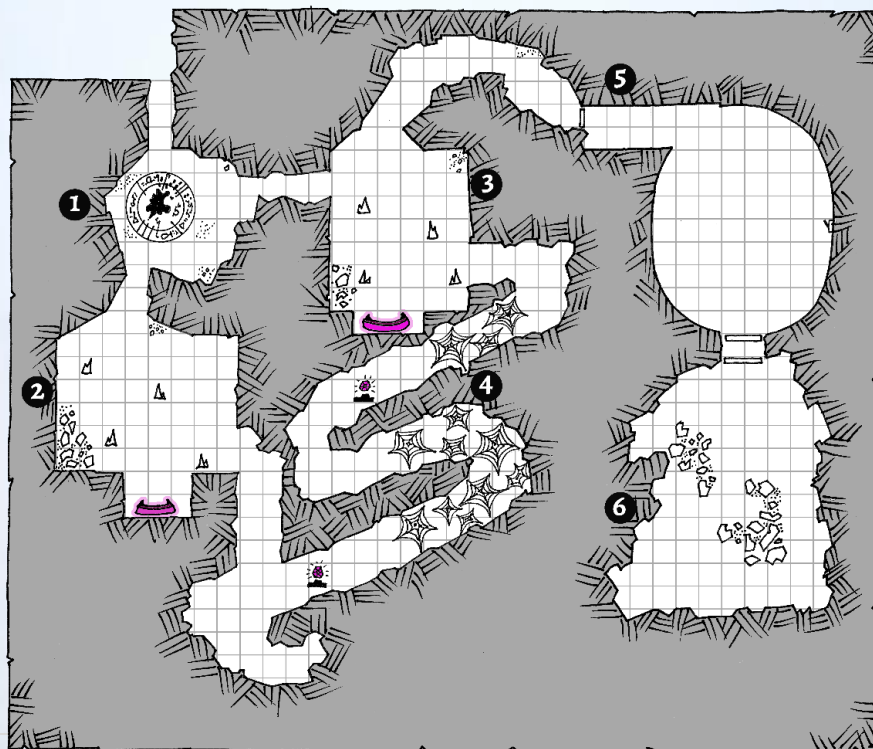
Upon entering the chamber, the party is met by Jhynn Maerdwivyn. The chamber is simple, with nothing but the ritual circle, candles, and those alive inside of it. The ceiling is lower than the rest of the cavern spaces that are included, this one about 12 feet from the ground. The walls are irregular and look to be carved unnaturally; there is an overwhelming feeling that something just isn't quite right. There is a silence that feels natural, although unnerving.

A drow woman, adorned in ornamental robes of purple and gray kneels on the ground. Five candles surround a ritual circle, and the dim light given off lights the cavern room in an off-putting way. As she finishes the last few details of the circle, her face turns towards the party and she smiles. Getting up from her position, she dusts off her legs and begins to speak.

Read or summarize:

"Hello there, travelers. Please, don't be wary. My name is Jhynn Maerdwivyn and I mean absolutely no harm. I'm honestly quite surprised you all managed to find this little corner in the region since it's taken me a while to find this special section. You see, I'm looking for a specific monster and even more so... a specific one of a specific monster. And now that you all have just stumbled into my doings, I could probably use your help in finding it if you all feel up to the task?"

"You see, I'm studying to further my magical abilities and during my studies came across a rather unusual tale. A former drow matron, Guedra Do'Ristuan, was turned into a beast for loving a surface elf, and thereafter punished gruesomely for such treachery. A powerful mage turned her into a grick alpha and then locked her away near here. I believe I can turn her back. I know my abilities are up for the task."



## REWARD

The adventurers may keep whatever riches they find in the lair. Grick alphas usually have some sort of treasures that are left behind from adventurers not lucky enough to escape their beaks.

## 2. SOUTH CHAMBER

Immediately beyond the hall is a collapsing roof mechanical trap (DMG, p 122). Besides this, the chamber is empty and can serve any purpose the characters wish.

Towards the southern-most part of the chamber the characters see a very dim purple and pink hue emitting from an archway. Stalactites and stalagmites glitter throughout the room, creating an eerie sight. It's completely silent, save the sounds created by the characters, which are amplified in the space. The ceiling is 25 feet high and the dirt on the ground is compacted and moist. This chamber also appears to be man-made instead of naturally carved out.

## 3. EAST CHAMBER

This room is made to resemble the South Chamber, just smaller. Characters who succeed on a **DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check** in either chamber realize the similarities with the other. There is also a faint purple and pink hue emitting from the archway in the far corner of the room.

## 4. TRAPPED CORRIDOR

At the end of each side of the hallway is a purple-pink crystal the size of a human hand raised on a small pedestal. The pedestal itself is simple and made of stone, but the crystal looks out of place sitting on top. Players who attempt to touch the crystal must succeed on a **DC 15 Wisdom saving throw** or be transported to the other crystal across the hall. After failing the check and being transported, the player must then make a **DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check** to see if they realize they are at the other end of the hallway. Failing the check results in the player thinking they are exactly where they were when they had originally touched the crystal. This works from both sides of the hallway and can occur any number of times.

If the players bypass the crystal without any interest, they must then traverse through extremely thick and sticky spider webs. These webs are milky white in color, and very thick and mucus-like to the touch. The webs have AC 12 and 20 hit points.

Each creature that starts its turn in the webs or that enters them during its turn must make a **DC 12 Dexterity saving throw**. On a failed save, the creature is restrained as long as it remains in the webs or until it breaks free.

A creature restrained by the webs can use its action to make a **DC 12 Strength check**. If it succeeds, it is no longer restrained.

The webs are flammable. Any 5-foot cube of webs exposed to fire burns away in 1 round, dealing 2d4 fire damage to any creature that starts its turn in the fire.

If a player wishes to move past these without cutting through, they must succeed on a **DC 11 Dexterity (Acrobatics) or Strength (Athletics) check** to maneuver through the webs without becoming stuck.



## 5. LEVER ROOM

The door to this room is locked and fitted with a poison needle trap (DMG, p 123). The key is not in this area but the lock can be picked with a successful **DC 12 Dexterity check using thieves' tools**.

After dismantling or setting off the trap, the characters enter the room to find that there are large, looming stalactites that hang from the ceiling. The walls in the room are smoother than the others, and the ground is almost entirely free of debris; it is much cleaner than other chambers.

On far end of the area is a large, obvious lever. A character must succeed on a **DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation)** check to see an inscription on the lever's handle that reads, "Only one who is truly pure of heart."

Good-aligned characters may attempt to move the lever, which releases the door to the next room. If none of the characters are 'Good' aligned, you may choose to have the lever read "Only one who is most wicked of heart."

Once the characters pull the lever, the door to the next room shifts open, and does not close again unless the lever is pulled by the same person in the opposite direction.

## 6. THE GRICK ALPHA LAIR

Characters with darkvision see two large figures looming in the back of the chamber but are unable to make them out completely unless they succeed on a **DC 18 Wisdom (Perception)** check.

Once the room is lit up in some way, the party quickly realizes that this lair is not home to just one grick alpha, but two. Players must succeed on a **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception)** check in order to tell which monster is Gueldra, and which one is just a monster.

However the characters decide to approach this combat scenario, it is important to remember that they should not outright kill the former drow matron, but rather knock her unconscious so they can carry her back to the ritual circle.

Once all the characters and Jhynn are back in the ritual chamber, she instructs that the body must be placed inside the circle. Jhynn asks one member to stand behind each of the candles that are encircling the area, instructing everyone to be silent, other than the chat she asks them to recite.

### TREASURE

The characters can search the lair at any time. A **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception)** check reveals the following in the lair:

500 gp scattered about, a *scroll of protection (undead)*, *shortsword +1*, *shield +2*



## CONCLUSION

Jhynn kneels at the grick's head and removes a small vial of amber liquid from under her robes. The concoction swirls in the glass and seems to emanate its own light, matching the glow of the small flames dancing wildly around. She drinks half of the potion and then pours the rest into the matron's monstrous beak. As she positions herself to kneel above the creature, she looks up to lock eyes with every member of your party.

Read or summarize:

"The only way this will work is if everyone does not break concentration, and repeats only the chant I am about to speak aloud. Does everyone understand?"

"Repeat after me,

Come forth for now we gather round,  
To free you from your shackles bound.  
Reveal the truth that lurks inside,  
For beauty did hath lost her eyes.  
Unbind you from your monstrous prison,  
Be once again a matron risen."

As the chant continues, the body of the grick as well as the body of Jhynn Maerdwivyn begin to glow a familiar amber and rise from the floor. Suspended only a few small inches above the dirt floor, Jhynn moves her hands and fingers in precarious ways, drawing symbols in the air that linger with that amber glow for only a moment and then fade into oblivion.

As her voice becomes louder, the grick's body begins to slowly transform, as if it has now turned to an amorphous liquid substance. Still lingering in the air, the material fluctuates, bends, and contorts into shapes not familiar to any living being before there is a sudden burst of white light.

Read or summarize:

The blast blows out the candles, leaving you all now in utter darkness. The chanting has ceased, and Jhynn now knocked five feet backwards into a nearby wall. Quickly she scrambles on her knees towards the circle and places her hands upon the figure now inside of it.

A petite drow female, with long silver hair the color of the moon, now lays exactly where a monstrous beast once lay before. Jhynn's eyes widen in almost disbelief before catching herself in her confidence once again. The matron Guedra Do'Ristuan is now once again in her drow form, still unconscious in the center of the ritual circle.

Jhynn moves away from the woman and ushers you all towards the hallway heading in the direction of the East chamber.

Read or summarize:

"I will stay here with her until she wakes, since she will most likely have lots of questions and be extremely confused. Please, head back into the lair and anything you find worth of value is yours for the taking. Just please do not wake or disturb the matron."



# THE MUTATED DRIDER

By Christian Eichhorn

Artist: George Sutherland

Estimated run-time: 20 to 40 minutes

The *Mutated Drider* is an Underdark encounter designed for five characters of 5<sup>th</sup> level. Scaling instructions are included to run the adventure for characters from 4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> level.

## BACKGROUND

Ghaundar is a **mutated drider** who lives in a tainted faerzress well. Years of exposure to the well's strange magic have changed Ghaundar's body, and new powers have awoken over time. Many Underdark travelers pass by Ghaundar's lair, most of which do not survive the encounter with the depraved aberration. Comparable to an otyugh, Ghaundar seduces creatures with pleas for help or promise of riches. The only difference being that the mutated drider is more intelligent and several times more devious.

## THE ENCOUNTER

When you are ready to begin the encounter, read or summarize:

You enter a small cavern, overgrown with bright lichen. Blue light emanates all around you, eliminating the shadows in this space. From a large hole in the center of the cavern rise blue sparks, which float to the ceiling and die out soon after. A faint chime accompanies the glittering lights, which infrequently wells up, and returns to a silent hum in the background soon after.

## GENERAL FEATURES

The cavern is a natural void in the ground. Its general features are summarized here.

**Dimensions and Layout.** The cavern the characters arrive in is circular, with a diameter of 200 feet and a height of 20 feet (flattening towards the walls). The hole in the ground is a shaft that leads further below. The shaft is 10 feet wide, and 100 feet deep. It connects to a spherical cavern with a diameter of 100 feet—Ghaundar's lair.

**Terrain.** The ground is solid rock, covered in lichen. There are no stones or gravel. The ceiling is irregular but features no stalactites.

**Light.** The area is bathed in bright light.

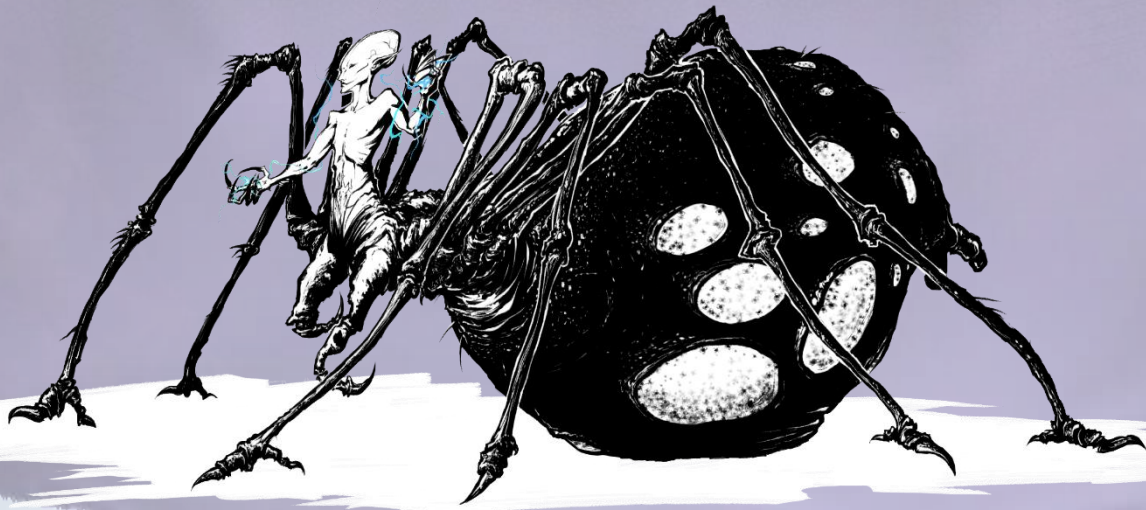
**Smells and sounds.** The faerzress well produces a faint chime. It smells vaguely of brimstone mixed with a faint musky smell produced by Ghaundar's pheromones.

**Silent Hunter.** When the characters arrive, Ghaundar is invisible per the *invisibility* spell and hangs from the ceiling. Make a Dexterity (Stealth) check for Ghaundar contested by the characters' passive Perception scores to determine if they notice the threat. Ghaundar observes the characters, and if they do not attempt to climb down into the hole, the drider contacts one of them telepathically:

"Who might you be? Wanderers? I sense that you are no threat, neither drow nor duergar. I am an old dwarf hermit, living in this hole for decades. A perfect place to hide from those who seek you by magic means! Are you searching for a safe place to rest, or food and drink?"

The drider pretends to be a magically gifted hermit, who hides in the faerzress well from divination magic. Ghaundar's goal is to lure the characters into the shaft and ambush them.





## THE FIGHT

### TACTICS

If the characters fall for the trap, Ghaundar follows them and opens combat with a *slow* spell.

If the characters do not fall for the trap, Ghaundar picks the weakest-looking character, makes a bite attack, and carries the character down into its lair after successfully grappling it.

### SPELLCASTING

In the cavern, a caster rolls a d20 whenever they cast a spell. On the roll of a 1, the spell produces an additional effect determined by a roll on the Wild Magic Surge table in chapter 3 of the *Player's Handbook*. This rule does not apply to innate spellcasting.

### SCALING THE BATTLE

**Level 4:** The mutated drider has 100 hit points and an AC of 18.

**Level 6:** The mutated drider has 180 hit points.

## THE LAIR

Blue lights dance all around this cave, and the chime rings loud and clear in your ears. Your skin tingles, a strange sensation. The whole cave is covered in webbing, making it hard to tell how large it is. At its lowest point, a shallow pool of glowing fluid bubbles up from the ground.

Ghaundar's lair is covered in webbing as per the *web* spell.

### TREASURES

Ghaundar has collected many bodies and items in its lair. If the characters search the cave for 8 hours, roll on the Treasure Hoard: Challenge 11-16 table in chapter 7 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, but reroll results higher than 50. If the characters want to press on instead, but have a quick look around, they must succeed on a **DC 18 Wisdom (Perception)** check to find one random item from the Magic Item Table B.

### FAERZRESS WELL

A character who drinks from the well takes 9 (2d8) necrotic damage, suffers one level of exhaustion, and is affected by the *nondetection* spell. A character who attempts to bottle the fluid must succeed on a **DC 18 Wisdom check using alchemist's supplies**. The potion has the same effects as if drinking the fluid directly. A character can repeat the check after 8 hours after the well has replenished.



## MUTATED DRIDER

*Large aberration, chaotic evil*

**Armor Class** 19 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 147 (14d10 + 70)

**Speed** 40 ft., climb 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	20 (+5)	21 (+5)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)

**Saving Throws** Dex +9, Con +9

**Skills** Perception +7, Stealth +9

**Damage Immunities** poison

**Damage Resistances** bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks that aren't adamantine

**Senses** darkvision 120ft., passive Perception 17

**Languages** Elvish, Undercommon, telepathy 120 ft.

**Challenge** 10 (5,900 XP)

**Fey Ancestry.** The mutated drider has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put the drider to sleep.

**Innate Spellcasting.** The mutated drider's innate spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks). The drider can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *dancing lights*, *darkness*

3/day each: *faerie fire*, *invisibility*, *web*

2/day each: *counterspell*, *slow*

**Spider Climb.** The mutated drider can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

**Web Walker.** The mutated drider ignores movement restrictions caused by regular and magical webbing.

### Actions

**Multiattack.** The mutated drider makes one bite and one necrotic touch attack or two necrotic ray attacks.

**Bite.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) piercing damage plus 10 (3d6) poison damage. If the target is a creature, it is grappled (escape DC 16). Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained. At the beginning of its turn, if the mutated drider has a creature grappled, it spins it into a sack. The mutated drider puts the sack on the ground or hangs it from the ceiling, depending on its location. The creature can escape the sack by succeeding on a DC 16 Strength (Athletics) check, or a different creature can use its action to cut the sack open.

**Necrotic Touch.** *Melee Spell Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 21 (6d6) necrotic damage.

**Necrotic Ray.** *Ranged Spell Attack:* +7 to hit, range 300 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (4d6) necrotic damage.

**Spawn Children (Recharge 6).** The mutated drider spawns 7 (1d6 + 4) **swarms of spiders** (CR ½; MM 338) from its sac. The spawned creatures act as a group immediately after the mutated drider's turn.



# ONE THING ABOUT THE UNDERDARK...

By Jimmy Meritt

Artist: Matt DeMino

Estimated run-time: 60 minutes upwards

*A clan of vampires have established a small colony within the Underdark—the locals want them gone, but the Vampires may have another deal to offer...*

## DM NOTES:

In this adventure, the characters are sent on a mission to slay vampires. This can be run as a fairly straightforward combat scenario, although it is worth noting that the vampires are open to negotiation—finding ways to encourage players to indulge this impulse could be an excellent way to help contrast the Underdark with a more conventional surface adventure location. Vampires would never be allowed to prosper in a civilized society, but can we consider the Underdark civilized?

## BACKGROUND

A month ago, dwarves sent out an expedition from the mining colony of Forgehome in an attempt to find a new area ripe for mining. When the dwarves didn't return, a second group was sent to investigate—their assumption being that either the expedition found treasure and kept it to themselves, or they were somehow lost. Now that the second group has not reported in for several days, Forgehome has put out a call for adventurers.

## HOOK 'EM IN:

There are several ways characters can catch wind of this call for mercenaries: postings are carved into cave walls, and traveling mining expeditions and merchants spread the word. Once characters are aware of the bounty, they are instructed to travel to Forgehome for more information.

## ARRIVING AT FORGEHOME

When the characters arrive at Forgehome, read or summarize the following:

Turning a corner, you find yourself on the approach to Forgehome. Nearly a dozen dwarves, wearing makeshift armor and wielding mining equipment as weapons, stand ready. Seeing you approach, two dwarves begin pushing shut a large stone valve, blocking off access to the city.

## FUN FACTS ABOUT FORGEHOME:

Forgehome is a massive city of miners, existing as a focal point and safe haven where a variety of mining expeditions can disembark from, and return to.

All entrances to Forgehome are well defended and easily sealed behind huge stone valves—this makes Forgehome valuable as one of the few places in the Underdark for safe rest and shelter.

Forgehome's population is made up almost entirely of dwarves who are incredibly skeptical of outsiders—only adventuring parties on official business may enter.

## MEETING THE MAYOR

Once welcomed into Forgehome, characters are brought to its current mayor (dwarves believe only places meant to last should have a king), Gloris Leadshaper (dwarf **noble**, she/her). Gloris conveys the following information to the characters:





- Rumors persisted of an untapped vein of mithral ore a four day's journey away. A small expedition party was sent to simply scout the area, confirm the presence of mithral, then return so that a larger mining company could be formed.
- After two tendays had passed, a second search party was sent to see what happened to the scouts. When the second party also didn't return, Mayor Leadshaper decided to hire outside help. The dwarves here are primarily miners, not fighters.
- In exchange for investigating and resolving the problem, the characters earn the following awards: 2,000 gp worth of gems, a 10% stake in the new mine should it be formed, and an open invitation for lodging and meals in Forgehome forever.

Characters who accept this offer are given a map to the alleged mithral vein. Characters who refuse are escorted from town unless a dwarf is in the party, in which case they are invited to rest overnight and then sent out in the morning.

## TRAVELING THROUGH THE UNDERDARK

It is a four-day journey towards the mithral vein. This travel time gives an excellent opportunity to drop in another encounter (or several) from this supplement or run random encounters. The primary motivation of both Mayor Gloris and the vampires is to create a safe home for their people, adding to the danger of the Underdark helps solidify this concern and build the theme.

## THIS DIDN'T GO GREAT FOR HIM

As the party travels the Underdark, read or summarize the following:

Moving through the dim tunnels, you hear a labored, slow breathing. A pale dwarf lies huddled against a cavern wall, clinging to life.

The dwarf will die if not treated with a successful **DC 14 Wisdom (Medicine)** check, or healing magic. If the dwarf dies, he raises as a **vampire spawn** (CR 5; MM, p 298) and attacks the nearest character, desperate for blood.

If healed and roused awake, the dwarf reveals his name as Jolon Mithralfeet (dwarf, he/him). If questioned, Jolon reveals the following information:

- Jolon was part of the second rescue expedition. When they neared the suspected mithral site, they were confronted by what they thought were two drow, and were ordered to turn back.
- Rather than turning back, Jolon and his fellow dwarves pressed the attack. "During the battle, they didn't move like drow at all. They clung to the ceiling and walls, dropping down to bite at us with fangs."
- After one drow vampire was slain, a third vampire spawn joined the fight. "This one was dwarven— I knew him well. 'Was Hasdrol Warfeet, but he wasn't himself. They'd changed him, made him into one of their foul spawn."

Jolon retreated from battle, hoping to return to Forgehome for more aid, but passed out from lack of blood during the journey.

If the characters return to Forgehome with Jolon and tell Mayor Leadshaper about the vampires, she is insistent on putting them down for good, seeing a nearby vampire enclave as a





threat to Forgehome. Characters can attempt to negotiate a higher rate—Leadshaper is willing to increase the stake in the mining company by another 5% if pressed.

### THE CIMMERIAN CITADEL

Read or summarize:

Ahead of you is what appears to be a makeshift shanty town. Two dozen crude dwellings have been hastily assembled. A flag bears an ominous mark: a single fang.

Two **vampire spawn** and one **vampire** (CR 13; MM, p 297) guard the approach. A successful **DC 19 Wisdom (Perception)** check can spot four additional vampire spawn clinging to the ceiling of the cavern, 40 feet up. The spawn are a combination of drow, dwarf, and duergar.

The vampire is a former human named Perseus. He and the spawn approach the characters and ask them to turn back. He only attacks if

attacked first. If questioned, he reveals the following information:

- He is attempting to start a vampire colony in the Underdark. He believes that the lack of sunlight means they will be more comfortable here, and they are less likely to be hunted in the Underdark than they are above ground. “We seem to be a better fit here.”
- The previous dwarves were killed because they insisted on attacking. Perseus claims he would have been open to negotiation, but he will actively defend his borders. A successful **DC 12 Wisdom (Insight)** check determines he is telling the truth.
- If the characters are not native to the Underdark, Perseus attempts to convince them that the vampires should be allowed to remain in the Underdark. “Wouldn’t you rather have us all down here than up there?” Although the colony is small now, he intends to spread the word among the



surface once things are better established.

- Perseus is aware of the mithral vein, but has no mining equipment or knowledge.

### COMBAT, MURDER, MAYHEM:

If combat begins, the vampire spawn fight to the death or until Perseus retreats. Perseus' primary motive is self-preservation. If he is reduced to 60 hit points, he attempts to negotiate with characters (See "Let's Work This Out"). If the characters are unwilling to talk, he flees using his Shapechanger feature to become mist. If Perseus escapes, he stalks the characters for revenge, attacking them in a future adventure at an opportune moment.

### DRIVE THEM OFF

Perseus can be persuaded or tricked into abandoning the citadel. His primary motivations are self-survival and establishing a vampire colony in the Underdark. Any attempts at persuasion or deception that plays on those motivations have a chance of success. A successful **DC 14 Wisdom (Insight)** check uncovers these motivations.

If the characters persuasion or deception attempt plays on Perseus' desire for survival or establishing a colony, a successful **DC 13 Charisma (Deception or Persuasion)** check convinces Perseus to move on, opening the Cimmerian Citadel for dwarven mining. Allow the players freedom here, but in general persuasion checks should be focused around finding a better place to settle, and deception checks should be focused around convincing Perseus that this region is somehow unsafe.

### LET'S WORK THIS OUT

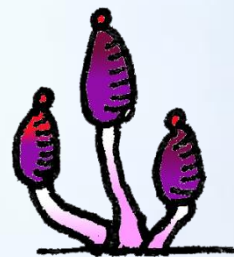
Perseus is open to negotiation with Mayor Leadshaper, if the negotiation is lead by the characters. Allow freedom in whatever deal the characters come up with, keeping the following character motivations in mind:

- Perseus' main motivation is safety for the vampire colony. He is willing to allow the dwarves to mine if Mayor Leadshaper makes any accommodations that keeps the vampires safe.
- Mayor Leadshaper is motivated by dwarven greed for the mithral mine, and safety for her dwarves. She hears out any ideas that get her to the mithral mine, as long as the accommodations don't put Forgehome at risk.
- One of Mayor Leadshapers' advisors, Thron Flintheart, wants revenge against the vampires—his sister was on the initial mining crew. The vampires state that the mining crew were only killed because they attacked first, Calming Thron makes negotiations run more smoothly.

### CONCLUSION

Characters who give Mayor Leadshaper access to the mithral vein are rewarded as promised. The mine stake pays out 200 gp monthly, to be given to the characters whenever they visit Forgehome.

If Perseus is satisfied with the accommodations given to his colony, he gives the characters a *Flag of the Cimmerian Citadel*. If shown to vampires in the Underdark, they treat the characters with a friendly disposition.



## SAPRICOT'S CARAVAN

By Christian Eichhorn

*Estimated run-time: 40 to 60 minutes*

*Sapricot's Caravan* is an Underdark encounter designed for five characters of 2<sup>nd</sup> level. Scaling instructions are included for characters from 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> level.

### BACKGROUND

**Sapricot** (lawful neutral male **deep gnome**, CR ½; MM, p 164) is a svirfneblin merchant who runs a caravan between the city of Blingdenstone and various minor settlements in the region. When the characters encounter the caravan, it is under the impending threat of a duergar assault unit. The deep gnomes threw back one reckless gray dwarf attack, allowing them to attempt an escape. However, according to the deep gnome rearguard, the duergar reformed their unit and quickly caught up to the caravan. In response, Sapricot brought the caravan to a halt. The deep gnomes are preparing for their last stand. The characters have 1 hour to help the defending svirfneblin prepare their defenses and fend off the attack.

### THE ENCOUNTER

Read or summarize:

Following the sheer endless meandering tunnels of the Underdark, you set foot into a large cavern—a welcome change of scenery. The smells of mushrooms, water, and guano fill your nostrils. But what's this? From somewhere farther inside, you hear muffled voices and the sound of many boots.

### HASTY PREPARATION

The deep gnomes throw all caution to the wind and hurriedly prepare the caravan for the duergar attack. They do not attempt to hide, and the characters spot them as soon as they continue their way further into the cavern.

### PLEAD FOR HELP

When the deep gnomes notice the characters, Sapricot shouts out to them in Undercommon: "Friend or foe?" If the characters attack, the six **deep gnomes** (CR ½; MM 164) answer in kind. Otherwise, Sapricot explains the situation:

"I hate to be the bearer of bad news my friends, but several duergar are on their way here to kill or enslave us. They are abominable dwarves of the deep, should you not have heard of them. If you continue your way, you will walk right into their arms! Run, or stay here with us, to defend our livelihoods. I'll make sure to reward you if we survive."

### GENERAL FEATURES

The cavern is a natural void in the ground. Its general features are summarized here.

**Dimensions.** The cavern is rectangular, with a height of 30 feet (flattening towards the walls), a length of 600 feet, and a width of 200 feet.

**Entry and Exit.** The two corridors leading into the cavern are 10 feet wide and 5 feet high.

**Terrain.** Shallow pools of water collect in small basins among tall stalagmites. Large rocks and gravel litter the ground, but a pathway, connecting the two corridors leading in and out of the cavern, is cleared of debris. Among the stones lie pieces of broken and rusted equipment: the remains of past battles, mixed with ancient bones.

**Light.** Phosphorescent mushrooms grow on large stalactites. When the characters enter without an open light source, the mushrooms don't shed light. When a source of light flares up, like a torch or a spell, the cavern is bathed in dim light after 1 minute. Otherwise, the cavern lies in complete darkness.

**Smells and Sounds.** It smells of mushrooms, minerals, water, and guano. Bats screech frequently, and the sound of splashing water, produced by small animals plunging into the pools, echoes through the cavern now and then.



## PREPARING THE DEFENSE

### THE PREPARATION

Sapricot explains his plan to the characters. He arranges the caravan in the center of the cavern, looking as though it was abandoned. Meanwhile, the deep gnomes prepare an ambush in the immediate surroundings, camouflaging advantageous positions with rocks. Sapricot urges the characters to do the same, or check the carts for anything useful that they can use in the defense.

The characters have the opportunity to build traps and contraptions using the wares as detailed below. Start a 1-hour countdown after the characters have assessed the materials; different tasks have varying time costs associated with them.

### THE ENEMY

A character who succeeds on a **DC 14 Intelligence (History or Nature)** check knows that duergar have abilities that allow them to alter their size or make themselves invisible. Sapricot explains the same if asked about duergar.

## THE CARAVAN

Read or summarize:

You see five wooden carts, covered with black tarps. Two deep gnomes lean against the dank wood, talking among themselves, meanwhile bandaging their wounds. A different creature, large, bulky, and red, lies next to the gnomes, perching on a stone.

The caravan is made up of five zurkhwood carts, each 10 feet long, 3 feet wide, 6 feet high, and normally drawn by a **giant lizard** (CR ¼; MM 326). They stand in a line in the center of the cave.

### DEEP GNOMES

The names of the six deep gnomes are Sapricot, Dukthut, Zheecku, Frisa, Yersidd, and Lantera. Zheecku and Frisa, the rearguard, rest by the carts and dress their wounds. Both have only 5 hit points remaining and require healing.

### WOUNDED XORN

The caravan's heavy hitter, a **xorn** (CR 5, MM 304), is gravely wounded. It has only 3 hit points remaining and sluggishly nibbles on a broken off stalagmite to slowly heal. If asked, a deep gnome explains that it cannot be healed by magic or potions: it needs to feed on precious metals or gems to regenerate in a timely manner. The caravan is out of those, unfortunately.

If the characters feed it with silver, gold, platinum, or gems, the xorn heals 1 hp for every 5 gp worth of precious metals or gems consumed.

### GIANT LIZARDS

The deep gnomes cut the five giant lizards loose, which now rest and drink from the pools not far from the caravan. A character can attempt to mount a lizard to ride it into combat. This requires a successful **DC 16 Wisdom (Animal Handling)** check, made with disadvantage since there are no saddles. A character who succeeds on a **DC 12 Dexterity check using leatherworker's tools** can fashion a makeshift saddle in 20 minutes, using wares from the caravan.

### WARES

Inside the carts, the characters find valuable trade goods that aren't immediately useful like spider silk garments, books, instruments, and mining tools. Useful items are listed below.

**Building Material.** The caravan carries different metal parts, leathers, chains, and types of wood. These might be used to create barricades or traps; allow the players to be as creative as possible.



**Assorted Equipment.** Two 50-foot ropes, two bags of 1,000 ball bearings, two flasks of alchemist's fire, two vials of acid, ten small barrels of oil, and a pulley.

### EXAMPLE CONTRAPTIONS

The goal of this encounter is to allow the players to come up with inventive ideas and contraptions to defeat the duergar. The following paragraphs contain examples of ideas the players might have. If the players do not catch on to the possibilities, allow the most intelligent character of the group to make a **DC 10 Intelligence** check. On a success, choose one of the following examples as an inspiration for the character.

Feel free to add more goods and materials to the caravan, to use in whatever contraption the players come up with.

#### BURNING BALL BEARING TRAP

Combining an oil-covered ground with ball bearings makes for an excellent trap. Spreading the oil and ball bearings on the ground requires no skill check but takes one character 5 minutes per barrel.

#### BATTERING RAM TRAP

Using the pulley and rope, the characters can hoist one of the carts up to the cavern's ceiling and use it as a battering ram. It takes 10 minutes to set up correctly and the characters must succeed on a DC 12 Dexterity check. Creatures in a 15-foot-long 5-foot-wide line on the ram's path must make a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw. A target takes 4d6 bludgeoning damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

#### EXPLODING BARREL CATAPULT

Two characters working together, one succeeding on a DC 14 Intelligence check, the other on a DC 12 Dexterity check using carpenter's tools, can construct a makeshift catapult in 40 minutes. It takes one action to load and aim the catapult and one action to fire it.

**Burning Barrel.** Choose a point within 400 feet. Each creature in a 10-foot-radius sphere centered on that point must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw. A target has advantage on the saving throw if the point is beyond 100 feet. A target takes 1d6 fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

**Stone.** Ranged Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, range 100/400 ft. (can't hit targets within 30 feet of it), one target. Hit: 2d6 bludgeoning damage.

**Shrapnel Barrel.** The characters can rig exploding barrels with ball bearings. Each explosion deals an additional 1d6 piercing damage with the modification. Affixing the ball bearings to one barrel takes a character 5 minutes.

#### TENSION PLANK TRAP

A character can prepare a trap where a long plank under tension swings around and hits an enemy in the gut or face. Setting up such a trap requires a successful DC 14 Dexterity check using carpenter's tools and takes 10 minutes. The affected area depends on the plank's length. The damage dealt depends on the type of attached material.

**Spikes.** A target hit with spikes must succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or take 1d6 piercing damage.

**Acid Vial.** A target hit with acid must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw or take 2d6 acid damage.

**Alchemist's Fire.** A target hit with alchemist's fire must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw or take 1d4 fire damage at the start of each of its turns. A creature can end this damage by using its action to make a DC 10 Dexterity check to extinguish the flames.





## SERPENT KINGS

By **Sadie Lowry**

Artist: **Sadie Lowry**

Cartography: **Jeff C. Stevens**

Estimated run-time: 45 to 75 minutes

*Serpent Kings* is a chilling lair adventure designed for five characters of 5th level. Scaling suggestions are included for parties up to 10th level.

### BACKGROUND

The Avonnach Hollow is a well-traveled route through the Underdark known for the running water along its sheen walls. It is favored not only for its directness from city to city, but also for the scenic wonder of its reflective walls and troves of jewels hidden beneath the mirrored surfaces. However, travelers who have recently gone through the trails have not returned.

Two **basilisks** (CR 3; MM, p 24) now claim these caverns, and strangely, they do not eat their prey. The serpent kings hide on opposing sides of the caverns, confusing travelers with echoes and reflections. They store their prizes in the pit—a deep grave for many travelers, frozen over time. For parties between levels 7 and 10, the basilisks may be in service of the **basilisk king** (see below).

### PLOT HOOK

**Jardha Vahl**, dwarven merchant and owner of The Laden Satchel general goods store, asks the adventurers to see why one of her shipments hasn't been delivered. She received word that a caravan helmed by **Maxwell Pendleton** and his crew was heading into the Avonnach Hollow several days before. They have not arrived.

If the adventurers investigate the caverns, clear out any dangers there, and bring her goods back to her, Jardha offers a substantial reward of 1,500 gp (or a more appropriate amount at the DM's discretion, especially for high-level

parties). Alternatively, this encounter can easily be run without a hook if the players are traversing the Underdark.

### MISSING COURIERS

The couriers have been turned to stone by the basilisks. They, along with the other prisoners, can be retrieved at the end of the adventure and healed with the *greater restoration* spell or similar magic.

If characters find the *bottle of griffin tears* (Area 2) but do not use it against the basilisks, the characters, local clerics, or clever alchemists may use it to synthesize a mass cure for the petrification.

### PENDLETON'S POST AND PACKAGES

Wealthy young noble Maxwell Pendleton started his caravan company to snub his parents and make some quick gold. Thinking himself clever, he brought on people he thought were easy to swindle. Six years later, the company contained his closest and only friends.

**Maxwell Pendleton (neutral human male), leader.** Wavy blonde hair, pale, grey eyes, and loose clothes that hint at nobility. Years of rebellious escapades made Maxwell a surprisingly effective postman. Who'd have thought?

**Pietra Vitrin (neutral good female earth genasi), operations.** Dark braids, brown-grey skin, and dancing slate eyes over layers of clothes and a cloak. Pietra was the brains—and the brawn, half the time. Firm covered the other half.

**Novis Yinfir. (lawful good nonbinary elf), accountant.** Thin silvery hair, tanned skin, foggy green eyes, and refined silks that spoke to a different nation. Novis traded in coin as much as they traded in hidden blades, yet still managed to remain the most logical voice of the group—which is somewhat worrying.

**Firm Greydigger (chaotic good male dwarf), security.** Red hair knotted and woven intricately, ruddy skin, subdued blue eyes, and practical armor. Firm nearly always had a pocketful of tea leaves and a disarming grin.





## THE GAZE OF THE BASILISK

Time in these caverns has made the basilisks far more intelligent. They have adapted to the reflective wet stone surfaces and use them to catch eyes with enemies while avoiding looking at themselves.

You are encouraged to play them cleverly to heighten the fear and thrill of exploration; players should be wary of looking at the walls, looking down dark passageways, and looking at the creatures themselves.

## ENTERING THE CAVERNS

As the party enters the caverns, read or summarize:

The glint off the walls ahead is the first sign that you have reached the Avonnach Hollow. The smooth stones, slick with trickling water, catch the last fading light from behind you, as well as the darkness from within.

The descent into to Area 1 slopes gently downward. While the slick surfaces are not necessarily dangerous, you might choose to enforce difficult terrain for combat.

### GENERAL FEATURES

**Terrain.** Slick, smooth stone and loose gravel.

**Weather.** Warm and damp.

**Light.** Unless otherwise noted, the caverns are dark and require darkvision or a light source.

**Smells and Sounds.** The sharp mineral scents are dampened by the trickling water. Other than the whisper of the water's movement, the caves are silent.

## AREA 1

As the party enters Area 1, read or summarize:

The drips of water are the only familiar comfort of this descent, as the torches that normally dance along the mirroring walls behind them are snuffed out. You see a trail of stray, ripped cloth, scattered rations, and spilled ink leading you into the dark.

## AREA 2

As the party enters Area 2, read or summarize:

The trail of belongings leads you to a pile—what can barely be called a pile, given the violent disarray. A tattered bag lies beside a splintered shield, and journal pages are scattered about the floor, damp and smudged. More wreckage leads off a path down to the right. The whole scene sits at the feet of a statue of a startled man—a human male.

### ABANDONED BELONGINGS

The items belong to **Maxwell Pendleton**, and a successful **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation)** check confirms his identity from his features and belongings—the statue is Maxwell succumb to petrification.

Amidst the remaining rubble, the characters find a *potion of healing*, a traveler's journal, a deck of ornate tarot cards, and a *bottle of griffin tears*, identified with a **DC 17 Intelligence (Arcana or Nature)** check.



### BOTTLE OF GRIFFIN TEARS

*Wondrous item, rare*

*A sizable bottle of silver-blue liquid that seems to shimmer when turned over in the light.*

This corked bottle has enough remaining for three uses. A basilisk subjected to griffin tears must succeed on a **DC 15 Constitution** saving throw or become poisoned for 1 hour. The poisoned basilisk is blinded while poisoned in this way.

The griffin tears may also be used to concoct a serum to remove petrification.

### JOURNAL PAGES

The following journal pages are the only legible ones among water-blotted wreckage:

#### FROM THE TRAVELS OF MAXWELL PENDLETON

*When Pietra started tossing stones, I assumed it was because we were headed away from Marigold. But Firim was antsy last night—after tea. Novis is being quiet. This scares them. More than they're willing to admit aloud.*

*I've reminded them that rumors are often overblown—everyone loves dramatics, and I'm certain that bard was four tankards into his evening—but it isn't easing them. I'm loathe to spend 250 gold on a potion, but if it will soothe them, I will go to the vendor at dawn.*

### AREA 3

As the party enters Area 3, read or summarize:

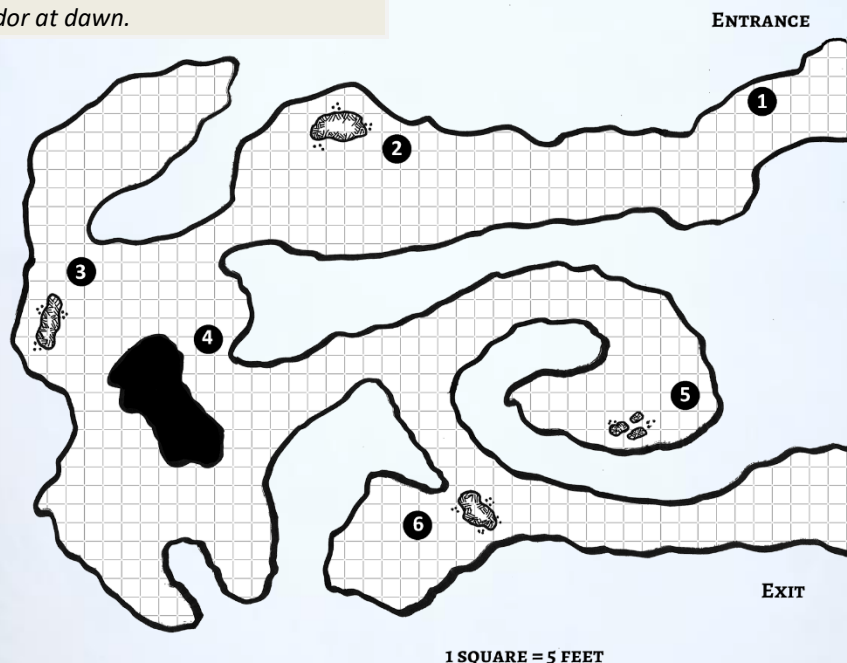
This small offshoot of the main caverns holds less wreckage than the rest, though scattered stones sit atop a split rucksack, its contents spilling out around the rocks. This statue is far more in motion than the first—the female genasi has an outstretched hand, braids frozen in an array around her, and wide, defiant eyes.

### STREWN BELONGINGS

This statue is **Pietra Vitrin**, Maxwell's trusted right hand and leader of operations. Her belongings hold a bloodstained mirror, a silk handkerchief, 105 gp, and a sealed envelope.

### THE MIRROR AND THE GRIFFIN TEARS

The bloodstained mirror and the *bottle of griffin tears*, along with the statues, should hint to the players the nature of what awaits them. The players should be encouraged to use these resources wisely by coating their characters' weapons with the griffin tears—or saving them for a serum to cure the petrification—and using the mirror to turn the basilisks' gaze on themselves.



Unwise uses of the bloodstained mirror should heighten the risk of catching a stray basilisk gaze through the dark.

### SEALED LETTER

Pietra's envelope contains an unsent letter to her girlfriend, Marigold.

#### PIETRA'S LETTER

*Mari,*

*My thoughts this morning are entrapped wholly by you. If they are not on your honeyed eyes, they are on the cottage we may have together, the dewdrop sound of your laughter, and the unspoken things resounding in our farewells when we parted last.*

*I have so many things buried in my chest. When I see you next, I will not leave them unspoken. Maxwell insists we will return soon. I am practicing my words—over and over—and they will be ready for you. They will be practiced, confident, and sure.*

*Pietra*

### AREA 4

As the party enters Area 4, read or summarize:

The darkest part of Avonnach Hollow is the Echoes, where cascading walls and a gaping pit are known to catch wanderers and whispers alike. This area is normally kept dutifully lit to keep travelers away from the pit—but in the darkness, the chasm sprawls out before you, looming and deep.

#### THE PIT

The pit is 35 feet long and spreads 20 feet at its widest point. Nearly 50 feet deep, the pit is difficult to see into without a torch—and even then, what lies at the bottom is just barely within torchlight. A successful **DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation)** check reveals the curated mass of stones heaped at the bottom: dozens of petrified bodies.

Deep gouges around the mouth of the pit indicate the scraping of stone against stone. A successful **DC 16 Wisdom (Survival)** check indicates that some of these scratches are very

recent, and a successful **DC 16 Intelligence (Investigation)** check reveals that two of the statues near the top seem to be the remaining members of Maxwell Pendleton's crew. An elf, **Novis Yinfir**, and a dwarf, **Firim Greydigger**, have been dropped atop this cruel mass of frozen bodies.

**Hazard.** Getting close to the pit during combat is dangerous, as the basilisks know how to corner their prey. They will attempt to push the party into the pit, requiring the characters to succeed on a **DC 14 Dexterity saving throw** to catch themselves on the ledge. On a failure, the character is thrown down atop the statues, taking 4d6 bludgeoning damage from the fall.

#### THE BASILISK ENCOUNTER

The two **basilisks** (CR 3; MM, p 24) reside in Area 5 and Area 6. Use your discretion for initiating the combat encounter and begin when it feels most appropriate. Below are a few suggested setups.

**The Pit.** The characters, panicked by the bodies, hear sounds behind them as the basilisks close in to trap them in the pit.

**The Hall.** Letting the characters move into the caverns allows the basilisks to trap them in the hall between Area 4 and Area 5.

**The Hunt.** If you want a tense exploration scene, the basilisk's gaze can appear in the walls, the water, and the mirror far earlier, forcing the party to make Constitution saves before the creatures disappear back into the dark. This is particularly effective for parties without darkvision.

To heighten the fear, ask for a **DC 14 Intelligence (Nature)** check. A success reveals that basilisks normally eat their prey immediately—the statues are an indication of a terrifying intelligence and foresight. This can be used to foreshadow the **basilisk king** encounter, if you choose to use it.



## AREA 5

As the party enters Area 5, read or summarize:

This is where the basilisks seem to have done the majority of their feasting—wrecked carts and shattered stone reveal numerous beasts of burden that have met their end.

### TREASURE

The party may find rations, supplies, and traveling gear here at your discretion.

## AREA 6

As the party enters Area 6, read or summarize:

The bloodied weapons and wreckage tell the tale of a few brave souls who made their last stand here. Traces of violent spells scar the wall, deep gouges lie left behind by claws, and the trickling water fails to wash away crimson stains.

### TREASURE

If the adventurers search the wreckage, a successful **DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation)** check reveals a statue desperately gripping a *longsword +2* and five scattered *acid arrows*.

### ACID ARROWS

*Wondrous item, rare*

*Slim arrows that are tinted a putrid purple at the tip.*

On hit, the target takes 2d8 acid damage and must pass a **DC 16 Constitution** saving throw. Upon a failure, the target takes an additional 1d6 acid damage and has disadvantage on Constitution saving throws for 3 rounds.

### OPTIONAL ENCOUNTER: BASILISK KING

For high-level parties, the **basilisk king** may rise, crashing through the caverns to feast on the statues that the basilisks have gathered for it. The stat block for the basilisk king is found at the end of this encounter.

A deafening crashing quakes the caverns as a monstrosity arrives to the din of battle. A far larger basilisk, scarred and hardened, barrels through the twisting caverns, its jagged spikes keening in shrieks against the stone. Trailing teal eyes fixate on its prey.

The basilisk king may try to consume the statues in the pit, or any party member petrified throughout the battle, forcing the characters to act in defense.

### SCALING THE BATTLE

**Levels 5-6:** The party faces two basilisks.

**Levels 7-8:** The party faces two basilisks, then the basilisk king as a separate encounter.

**Levels 9-10:** The party faces two basilisks and the basilisk king together.

### CONCLUSION

If the adventurers defeat the basilisks and clear the Avonnach Hollow, Jardha Vahl gives them the promised reward. Below are ways to tie off the adventure.

**Petrification.** The party may take the griffin tears to local clerics, alchemists, or other magically inclined NPCs to start brewing a serum to remove petrification. A similar effect can be achieved by harvesting fluid from a basilisk's gullet.

**Pendleton's Post and Packages.** If the party saves Maxwell Pendleton's crew, he gives them 500 gp and thanks them earnestly. Maxwell is well traveled and a good person to spread a rumor that hints at the next adventure.

**Pietra's Letter.** If the party does not save the statues, they may deliver Pietra's letter to a heartbroken Marigold, a young half-elf with dusty gold hair and freckles. She tearfully gives them 100 gp in exchange.



## BASILISK KING

*Large monstrosity, unaligned*

**Armor Class** 17 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 127 (15d10 + 45)

**Speed** 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	15 (+2)	17 (+3)	17 (+3)	15 (+2)	10 (0)

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

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

**Challenge** 7 (2,900 XP)

**Petrifying Glare.** If a creature starts its turn within 30 ft. of the basilisk king and the two of them can see each other, the basilisk king can force the creature to make a **DC 14 Constitution** saving throw if the basilisk king isn't incapacitated. On a failed save, the creature is petrified until freed by the greater restoration spell or other magic.

A creature that isn't surprised can avert its eyes to avoid the saving throw at the start of its turn. If it does so, it can't see the basilisk king until the start of its next turn, when it can avert its eyes again. If it looks at the basilisk king in the meantime, it must immediately make the save.

**Magic Resistance.** The basilisk king has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

## Actions

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

**Bite.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage plus 10 (3d6) acid damage.

**Claws.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 22 (4d8 + 4) slashing damage.



# THROUGH THE DEVIL'S VEINS

By **Tal Aviezer**

Artist: **Matt DeMino**

Cartography: **Tal Aviezer & Carolyn Fox**

Adventurers encounter a svirfneblin druid on a mission to save her dying brother. The only way to reach him in time is by taking a desperate shortcut through deadly, forbidden caverns. Can the heroes help her pass through the Devil's Veins?

This encounter is optimized for four 4th-level characters.

## ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Earlier today, a messenger bat from the Pickshaft Mines reached apprentice svirfneblin druid Nomi Pathshutter at her enclave, Stoneheart Quarry. The bat bore a message for Nomi: her brother Norbo has been terribly injured in a mining disaster. Norbo has only one chance to survive: he needs a new heart, and he needs it now. Stoneheart's high druid can magically create transplant organs from precious gems and metals, but she is currently away in Mantol Derith and can't be reached in time. Nomi had no choice—she seized the one lifestone in stock and set off herself for the mines, accompanied only by Bill, her mud mephit companion. The journey from Stoneheart to Pickshaft normally takes half a day, but Norbo won't survive that long. To reach Norbo in time, Nomi needs to take a shortcut through forbidden caverns known as the Devil's Veins. Years ago, this route was no more or less safe than any other Underdark passage, but recently something terrible has taken up residence there—and no gnome who entered in the past five years has ever emerged alive.

In fact, the Devil's Veins are now the lair of a drider, Allinestro Varnix, who wandered here five years ago in mad despair after failing Lolth's

tests in the Demonweb Pits and being driven from the drow city of Menzoberranzan. He dens here in secret, feeding off gnome stragglers and other unfortunate creatures. He has learned to navigate the cavern's natural hazards and relies on them to discourage intruders.

In the official adventure *Out of the Abyss*, the Pickshaft Mines and Stoneheart Quarry are both located on the outskirts of the ancient svirfneblin city of Blingdenstone, but you can place these deep gnome outposts anywhere in the Underdark.

## ADVENTURE HOOKS

The adventurers could become involved with Nomi Pathshutter through any of the following means:

- The party is traveling through the Underdark and comes across a frightened Nomi at the entrance to the Devil's Veins. She implores them for aid in reaching her brother, promising to create a magical gem for them as a reward if they succeed.
- The party is in Blingdenstone or Stoneheart when news arrives of the mining disaster; gnomes there hire or beseech the adventurers to help Nomi reach her brother.
- The party is seeking entrance to Blingdenstone or another svirfneblin settlement. The gnome gate guards are distrustful and won't allow the adventurers to enter until they have proven themselves. The gnomes have heard of the mining disaster and Nomi's



plight, and send the adventurers to rendezvous with her at the entrance to the Devil's Veins. If the party succeeds in helping her, miners at Pickshaft send word via messenger bat to vouch for them.

Regardless of which hooks are used, the encounter begins as the party meets Nomi at the entrance to the Devil's Veins.

### GENERAL FEATURES

**Light.** The Devil's Veins are pitch black. Unless otherwise indicated, characters need to provide their own light sources. Area descriptions assume the characters have a light source or darkvision.

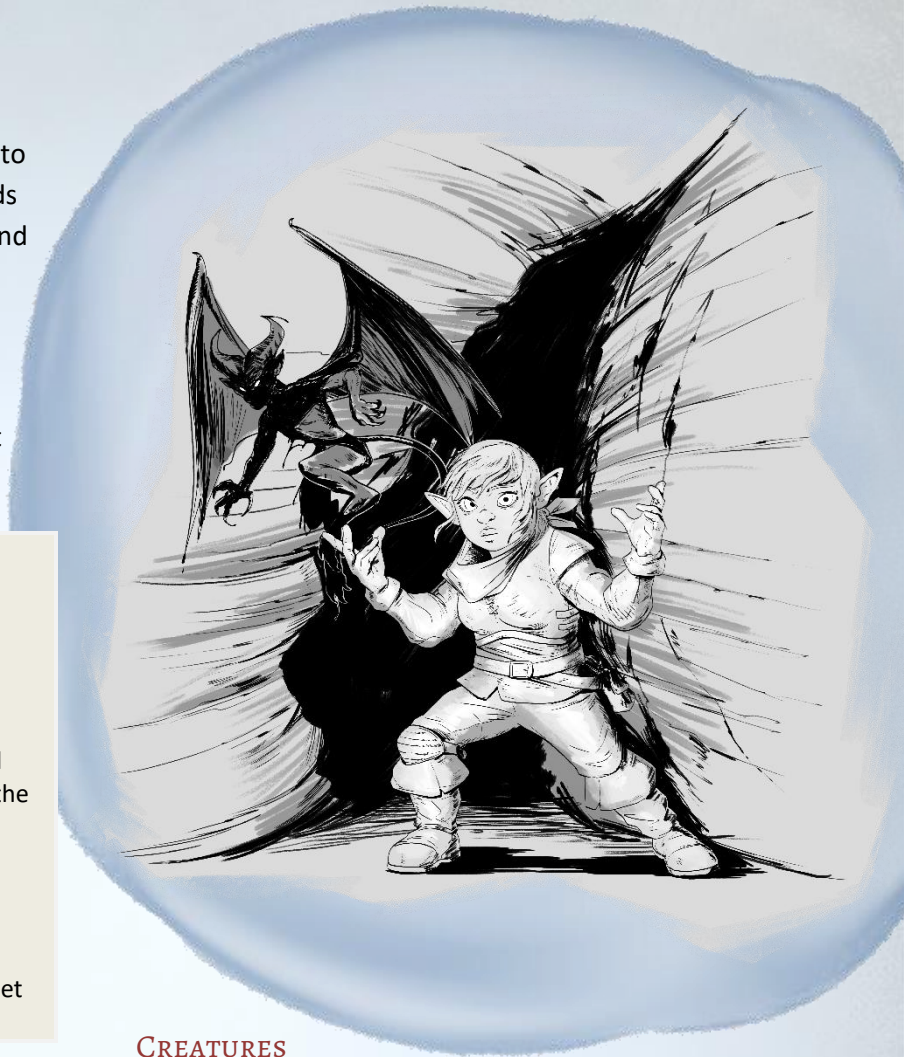
**Ground, walls, and ceiling.** Unless otherwise noted, the interior of the cavern system is natural stone. Stalactites and stalagmites protrude from the roof and floor.

**Sounds.** Dripping water from the stalactites splatters into small pools on the ground. Strange creatures skitter along, moving through unseen passages. Smells. The caverns smell faintly of sulphur and wet salt.

### AREA 1: CAVE ENTRANCE

As the party approaches the entrance to the Devil's Veins, you can read or paraphrase the following:

A female gnome in gray and blue traveler's clothes blinks at you with large, yellow eyes, her fingers twisting together in front of her chest. A creature that looks like a dripping, mud-covered imp hovers in the air next to her. Behind her is a large, black crack in the sheer wall of a cavern.



### CREATURES

Nomi Pathshutter is a neutral good **druid** (CR 2; MM, p 346). She has darkvision out to a radius of 120 feet; advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks; speaks Common, Druidic, Gnomish, Terran, and Undercommon; and has the following spells prepared instead of those listed:

Cantrips (at will): *druidcraft, guidance, produce flame*

1st level (4 slots): *cure wounds, faerie fire, goodberry, healing word*

2nd level (3 slots): *enhance ability, lesser restoration*

Nomi is accompanied by Bill, her chaotic good **mud mephit** (CR 1/4; MM, p 216) companion.



## DEVELOPMENT

Nomi implores the characters for help in passing through the cavern, explaining that she is desperate to reach her wounded brother. She pats a spherical, insulated satchel attached to her belt—it is made of beetle shells molded together into a kind of carrying case. A successful **DC 15 Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion)** check convinces Nomi to open the satchel and reveal its contents. If she does so, icy cold air rises from within and characters who peer inside see the lifestone: a crimson gem, a little smaller than a gnome's fist. It pulses regularly with a dull, throbbing glow like a beating heart. Nomi does not willingly part with the satchel under any condition.

If the characters agree to help her through the "shortcut" to reach her brother, she promises to create a magic gem for them. She readily admits the passage is very dangerous and that gnomes usually take the long way around to Pickshaft Mines to avoid passing through here, but under the circumstances she has no choice. If the adventurers agree to accompany her, she is tearful with thanks. Only at this point does she share the name of the passage: The Devil's Veins.

Nomi introduces Bill, her loyal mud mephit friend: "This is my friend Bill. I made him out of mud and water. He can't speak your language, but he tries to be helpful. He's a little messy but please be patient with him. If he looks like he's going to throw up, you should probably get out of his way. And don't worry if he gets squashed or splattered—I can just make him again when I get home."

If the adventurers agree to help, Nomi and Bill accompany them into the cavern. Characters who attempt to search for another entrance find none; there is only one way into the Devil's Veins, and one way out. The entrance crack is 15 feet high but only a few feet wide, forcing Medium-sized creatures to enter single-file. This

narrow passage continues for 70 feet before opening into Area 2.

## TIME'S RUNNING OUT

Nomi knows she must reach Norbo within two hours or he will die. Therefore, the party is limited to one short rest if they wish to successfully complete this mission.

## ROLEPLAYING NOMI AND BILL

Nomi is a kind, intelligent gnome who spends more time with Bill and other creatures of elemental earth than she does with gnomes or anyone else. She is likely to miss sarcasm and interpret hyperbole literally. She is unfamiliar with surfacers and likely accepts any strange behavior by the adventurers as "typical surfacers customs." In an effort to fit in, she tries to emulate the adventurers' expressions and speech patterns, especially if they use a lot of profanity. After a dangerous encounter in the Devil's Veins, she asks whichever adventurer has most earned her trust to please bring the satchel to Pickshaft Mines in the event of her death, explaining that it is just on the other side of the Devil's Veins. Nomi has never been inside the Devil's Veins and knows nothing of its layout; she only knows that for five years no gnome who went in either end has ever come out the other.

Bill is fearless (because he knows Nomi can recreate him) and totally loyal and protective of Nomi (because he knows that if she dies, nobody is going to recreate him). He speaks only Aquan and Terran, otherwise communicating through grimaces, grins, sighs, whines, giggling, belching, screeching, and whistling.

In combat, Nomi prefers to assist and heal adventurers with her spells while Bill charges recklessly at opponents and uses his breath weapon as much as possible.





## AREA 2: CHASM OF BLOOD

Read or summarize:

The narrow passage opens into a massive chasm spanned by a slim natural bridge of obsidian. Black stalactites drip from the ceiling. The floor of the cavern, a hundred or more feet below you, is covered by massive growths of red and purple luminescent fungi. Their light fills the space with an infernal radiance.

The rock bridge is 5 feet wide and stretches 80 feet across the cavern to a flat ledge on the far side. The cavern roof is 40 feet above the bridge, but several large stalactites extend down as low as 20 feet above the bridge. The cavern floor is 110 feet below the bridge. The entire area is dimly lit with red and purple light.

### TRAIL MARKER

With a successful **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception)** check, or a passive Perception of 13 or higher, characters spot an ancient, badly-faded dwarven rune carved on a rock near the bridge. Characters who can read Dwarvish recognize the rune as the symbol for “piercers above”. A ranger whose favored terrain is the Underdark understands the meaning of this trail marker even if they do not otherwise know the dwarven language.

Creatures who reach the ledge on the far side of the bridge discover two small tunnels in the sheer eastern rock wall (see Area 3).

### FAERZRESS

Areas 2, 3, and 4 of the Devil’s Veins are suffused with a mysterious magical energy the drow call faerzress. Its effects are as follows:

A creature in an area suffused with faerzress has advantage on all saving throws against divination magic. If a divination spell doesn’t have a saving throw, the caster must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw to cast the spell. Failing this save means the spell slot is expended but has no effect.

Any creature attempting to teleport into, out of, or within an area suffused with faerzress must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the creature takes 1d10 force damage and the spell slot is wasted.

When a spell of 1st level or higher is cast in an area suffused by faerzress, the caster rolls a d20. On a roll of 1, the spell has an additional effect, determined by rolling on the Wild Magic Surge table in chapter 3 of the *Player’s Handbook*.

### CREATURES

Six **piercers** (CR 1/2; MM, p 252) hang disguised among the stalactites over the middle section of the bridge. They wait for creatures to reach the middle of the span and then drop from the ceiling. They prefer to attack a group of creatures crossing together, rather than lone individuals. Each piercer drops from 20-40 feet above its intended victim (your discretion, or roll 1d4, rerolling 1s).

Roosting on the underside of the natural bridge are eight hibernating **stirges** (CR 1/8; MM, p 284). These creatures are sleeping when the adventurers enter Area 2. If combat ensues with the piercers, make a **DC 10 Wisdom (Perception)** check for the stirges at the end of each round. On a successful check, roll initiative for the stirges, who hear the combat and attack during the next round. They prefer to attack wounded creatures. Creatures who climb or fly under the bridge automatically spot the roosting stirges.



Characters who find some way to navigate the chasm without using the bridge may be able to avoid the creatures in this area; the piercers are poised above the bridge and are too slow to effectively reposition themselves to drop on victims who are not crossing atop it. If combat with the piercers is avoided, the stirges don't wake up unless characters touch them or create a sufficiently loud noise in the area (such as by casting a destructive spell or shouting from one end of the bridge to the other). At your discretion, characters may be able to jump from stalactite to stalactite, rig ropes to swing on or climb, or come up with other tactics. Reward creative approaches.

### AREA 3: TWIN PATHS

Read or summarize:

The obsidian bridge terminates in a wide, flat ledge on this side of the vast cavern. In the eastern wall are two small, dark tunnels, each about three feet in diameter.

Each tunnel is 65 feet long and both lead to Area 4. The tunnels are impassable to creatures larger than Medium; Medium-sized creatures can move through them only by crawling at half speed, and cannot pass each other inside a tunnel. Small or Tiny creatures can move through them at normal speed. The dim light from Area 2 dissipates 5 feet into each tunnel, leaving them both completely dark.

#### CREATURES

Characters who move through these tunnels without being stealthy are automatically detected by Allinestro Varnix (see Area 4). If characters attempt to sneak through either or both tunnels, have them make **Dexterity (Stealth)** checks opposed by his passive Perception (15). If he detects creatures moving through either tunnel, he dispatches two **giant wolf spiders (CR 1/4; MM, p 330)** with 20 hit points each from Area 4 to investigate—one

spider crawls into each tunnel. If a spider passes through either tunnel to the far side without encountering resistance, it attempts to return to Area 4 using the tunnel it did not previously use (this may result in a spider coming up behind characters in that tunnel). If the spiders encounter a creature in a tunnel, they attempt to paralyze it with bites and drag it to Area 4.

### AREA 4: DRIDER'S LAIR

Read or summarize:

Bundles bound in webs hang from the ceiling of this large, roughly domed chamber. The grey walls are painted with manic, irregular Elvish runes in red and black. Bones and scraps of clothing litter the ground among stalagmites. There is a large crack in the eastern wall.

The ceiling in this chamber forms a rough dome, peaking at 30 feet. The webbed bundles contain the dessicated remains of a gnome, a goblin, and a grick. The crack in the eastern wall leads down a narrow 100-foot-long, 10-foot-wide, 10-foot-tall passage to Area 5.

The Elvish graffiti on the walls was scrawled by the drider. It reads, "Spider Queen, Mother of the Drow, forgive your servant his transgressions. I offer you tribute in blood and fear."

#### CREATURE

Allinestro Varnix, a **dridr** (CR 6; MM, p 120), dens here. If he has not detected the the adventurers, he is in the center of the chamber, gnawing on bones. If his two **giant wolf spiders** have not been dispatched to Area 3, they are with him. If the drider is on alert, he is hiding in shadows on the ceiling, waiting to ambush his prey, and any surviving spiders are waiting immediately above the Area 3 tunnel entrances, just out of the line of sight of creatures in the tunnels. The drider and spiders attack any creatures they detect entering this area. The



drider fights to the death, though he is too large to pursue enemies into Area 3. The spiders fight to the death unless the drider is slain, whereupon they attempt to disengage and flee. The drider is hopelessly insane and unlikely to respond to diplomacy or threats.

### TREASURE

If characters search the chamber, with a successful **DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation)** check they discover the drider's cache of valuables looted from his victims or stolen from Menzoberranzan, hidden in a shallow recess in the northern wall behind a heavy boulder. A successful **DC 12 Strength (Athletics)** check is required to move the boulder aside and reach the treasure. Roll once on the Treasure Horde: Challenge 5-10 table on page 137 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide* to determine what treasure the drider has hidden here over the past five years.

## AREA 5: PICKSHAFT MINES

Read or summarize:

You emerge from the Devil's Veins into a vast natural cavern. The yellow lights of an active mining camp are visible, clustered around a quarry and low-slung stone buildings just a few hundred feet away.

If Nomi has survived, you can add the following:

Nomi peers cautiously out of the dark passage, spots the encampment, and breaks into a run, clutching her satchel. A few small figures spot her approach and begin running to meet you—more deep gnomes, their faces dark from working in the earth. They draw to a halt and regard the rest of you with suspicion, but Nomi quickly intercedes: "These people brought me through the Devil's Veins safe and sound. You can trust them. Now for Segojan's sake, take me to my brother."

If the party accompanies Nomi, they are led into one of the stone huts, to the bedside of a badly injured gnome.

His eyes are closed, and his breathing labored. "I'm here, Norbo," whispers Nomi. She withdraws a glowing crimson gem from the satchel. It hangs in the air over the wounded gnome's chest, spinning rapidly and flashing wildly, pulsing in rhythm like a heartbeat. It then rapidly descends and seems to disappear when it touches the gnome's body. His color immediately improves, his breathing normalizes, and his eyes flutter open and focus on his sister. "I knew you'd come for me," he whispers.

True to her word, Nomi conjures a yellow diamond and hands it to the party member who has made the best impression on her. A tiny, sleeping, orange, glowing creature is visible inside the diamond. It is an *elemental gem of earth* (DMG, p 167).

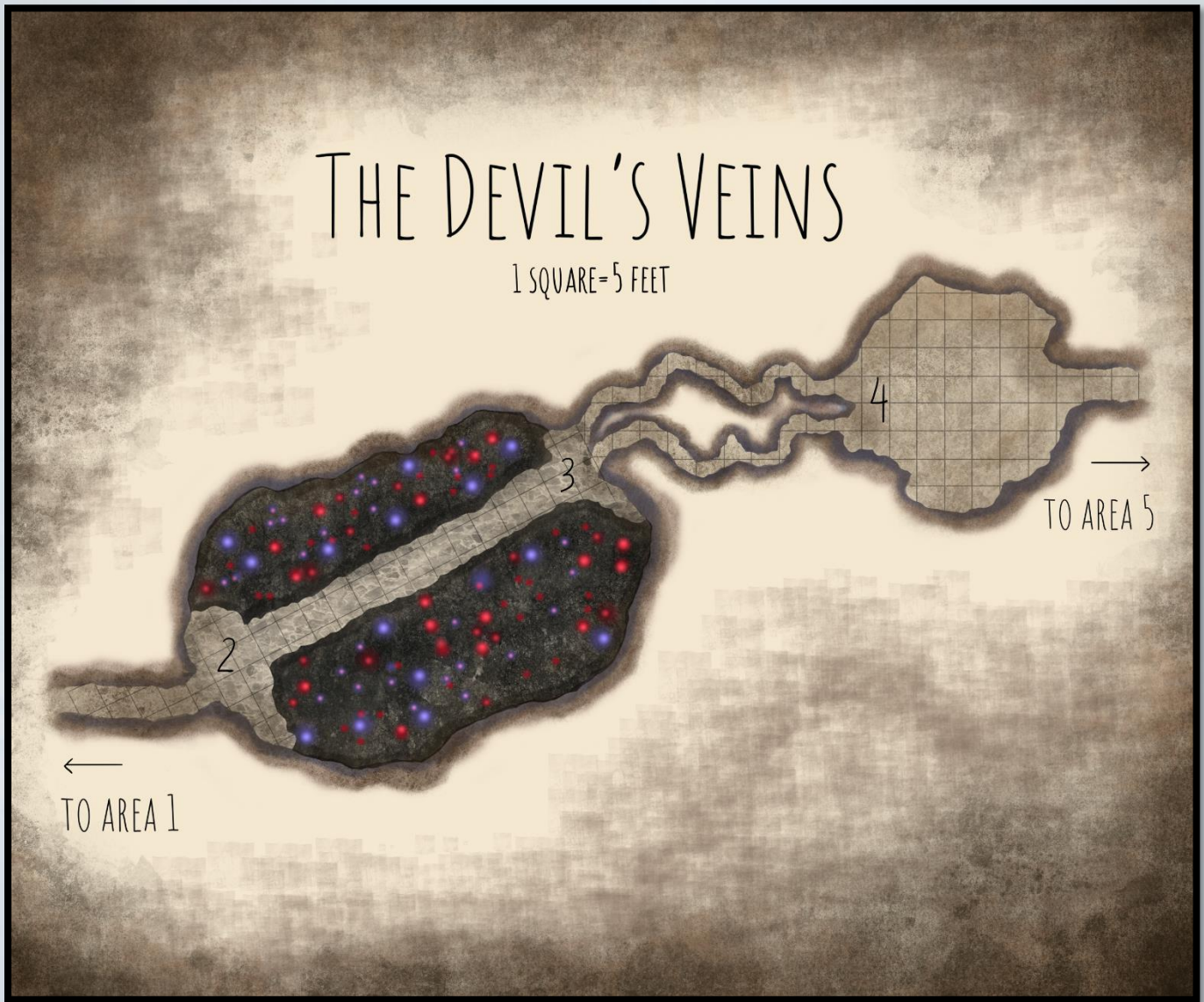
If Nomi has not survived, the adventurers can still save Norbo. A successful **DC 12 Intelligence (Arcana)** check is needed to activate the lifestone

At your discretion, the gnomes at Pickshaft Mines may offer to shelter the characters for a few days and/or direct or guide them to the nearest svirfneblin city. They may also provide a letter of recommendation commending the adventurers, which impresses other svirfneblin (and may anger drow or duergar who discover it).



# THE DEVIL'S VEINS

1 SQUARE = 5 FEET



# LOOKING FOR MORE ADVENTURES?

