

YIG SNAKE GRANDDADDY

Act I: A Land out of Time



CTHULHU · MYTHOS · SAGAS

2





PETERSEN GAMES

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION TO YIG SNAKE

GRANDDADDY	I
INTRO FROM SANDY	I
USING THIS BOOK	I
WHAT IS THE MYTHOS?	I
KNOW THINE ENEMY.	I
Yig	I
The Serpentfolk	2
Elder Things	2
Yithians	2
RUNNING YIG SNAKE GRANDDADDY.	2
Milestone Leveling	2
Where Is Yilan?	2
CAMPAIGN SYNOPSIS	2
Book 1: A Land out of Time	2
Book 2: Against the Serpentfolk	2
Book 3: The Prehistory War	3
Book 4: The Ancient Ages Again	3
VENTISSA	5
TEMPLE ROW	5
THE FIGHTING PITS	5
THE RIVER MARKET	6
THE LAUGHING LOTUS	6
Optional Rule: Inebriation	8
Sidebar: Rumors	7
THE HALL OF CURIOSITIES	8
Sidebar: The Museum's Advantages	8
Sidebar: Stealing from the Museum?	8
OTHER LOCATIONS IN VENTISSA	10
CHAPTER 1: VENTURING FORTH	11
OVERVIEW	11
Where to Start	11
Gehir's Offer	12
The Adventuring Parties	12
Gehir	12
Sidebar: Legend of the Golden Tower	12
Sidebar: Where Is Everyone Staying?	13
THE JOB INTERVIEW	13
The Fight	14
Hired	15
CONCERNS OF THE CAT GODDESS	15
Temple of Bastet	15
THE ANTIQUARIAN.	16
GETTING UNDERWAY	17
Gehir's Wagon	18
Turu	18
Gehir's "Apprentices"	18
The Cooking Contest	19
Scouting the Pass	19
CHAPTER 2: INTO THE WILDERNESS.	21
OVERVIEW	21
Sidebar: The Piney Hills	21

COMING DOWN THE MOUNTAIN.	21
Gehir's Map	22
Washout	22
Planning the Bridge	22
Timber	22
Bridge-Building	22
OVERLAND TRAVEL: GROUP DUTIES	22
Scouting	24
Foraging	24
Hunting	26
Sidebar: Keeping Track of Food	27
Sidebar: The NPCs' Activities	27
OVERLAND TRAVEL: SPECIAL ENCOUNTERS.	26
Mile 15: Fording the River	26
Mile 40: Abandoned Campsite	27
Mile 80: Goblin Village	28
Mile 100: Floating the Wagon	29
Building the Raft	29
CROSSING THE YILANI RIVER	29
Guiding the Horses	30
River Debris	30
Deinosuchus Attack	30
DINOSAUR HUNT	30
The Totem	31
Sidebar: Snake Totems	31
The Lone Chasmosaur	31
DINOSAUR FEAST	32
CHAPTER 3: THE SUCKING SLIME	
OF THE KARSTLANDS	33
OVERVIEW	33
THE KARSTLANDS	33
ENTER THE KARSTLANDS	34
EXPLORING THE KARSTLANDS	34
Monsters	34
Starstones	36
1. Fungal Mat	36
2. Tar Pits	36
2a. Tar Pits	36
2b. Tar Pit Pond	36
3. Secondary Passage	37
3a. Gibbering Moulder Lair	37
3b. Sharp Sandpit	37
4. Lurking Ochre Jelly	37
5. The Tar Lake	38
5a. Carrion	38
5b. Wamp Lair	38
5c. The Tar-Zombies	38
6. The Gassy Shrieker	39
7. The Gap	39
8. The Waterfall Towers	40
8a. The Lake	40
8b. The Marshy Islands	40
8c. The Shrieker Field	40
8d. Lizardfolk Cave	40
9. Zoarglott's Cave	41



10. Tunnel	41	ALLOSAUROS	70
10a. Short Room	41	ANCHORITE	71
10b. Long Room	42	CAMARASAURUS	72
11. Plaza of the Porphyry Tower	42	CHASMOSAURUS	73
THE PORPHYRY TOWER	42	DILOPHOSAURUS	74
The Crystal King	43	GIBBERING MOUTHLING	75
The Gallery and Roof	43	KENTROSAURUS	76
Ooze Incursion	43	PTERODACTYL	77
Making a Stand	43	RIDING CROC	78
Climbing	44	TAR ZOMBIES	79
DENOUEMENT	44	Tar-Zombie Goblin	79
CHAPTER 4: BALD HILL	45	Tar-Zombie Kentrosaurus	80
OVERVIEW	45	THALASSODROMEUS	81
OVERLAND TRAVEL REDUX	45	MAGIC ITEMS	82
Mile 10: Dinosaur Stampede	46	Dagger of Metamorphic Venom	82
Mile 25: Elf Village	46	Helm of the Golden Eagle	82
GM Option: Faster Travel	47	Zoarglott's Necklace	82
Mile 40: Serpentfolk Scout	47	RANDOM ENCOUNTERS	83
Mile 50: Bald Hill in View	47		
ALTHE YINUMEL	47		
Central Courtyard	47		
Ligrowë's Trader	48		
Hammerleaf Smithy	48		
Spiralstone Tavern	50		
Tower of the Magus	50		
Temple	50		
The Palisade Wall	51		
BETRAYAL AT BALD HILL	51		
Splitting the Parties	51		
A Call for Aid	52		
Option A: "Cathbad Can Handle It Himself."	52		
Option B: "We Must Rescue the Rockbreakers!"	52		
Option C: "Run Away! Run Away!"	54		
Sidebar: What if a Character Dies?	54		
IMPRISONED BY GEHIR	54		
APPENDIX: NPCs AND			
ITEMS OF INTEREST	55		
THE FRIENDLIES	55		
Jehanne Auberjonois	55		
Whiskers	55		
Sarai Ninefingers	56		
Maxx	58		
GUNNAR'S TEAM	59		
Enivwenaye	59		
Gunnar the Bold	62		
Absalom "Eagle Eye" Idrisi	62		
THE ROCKBREAKERS	63		
Captain Uri Khorsava	63		
Cathbad the Druid	64		
"Shorty" McCallam	66		
Vitya Bolkorr	66		
GEHIR GREENCLOAK	67		
Alpha and Beta	67		

INTRODUCTION TO YIG SNAKE GRANDDADDY

INTRO FROM SANDY

Lovecraft often wrote about prehistoric “history,” placing elder beings firmly in the real world of the Mesozoic or other eras. This adventure delves deeply into Lovecraft’s extinct ancients. What happens when they are brought to the present day? How would they react? Would the appearance of these super-beings doom humanity and its allied races?

This adventure is based on my speculations of how those ancient races functioned, particularly the Yithians, and also on my desire for an adventure with multiple hyper-intelligent enemies. The clashes and interference among these enemies gives the heroes their opportunity to bring about a human victory.

Yig Snake Granddaddy also prominently features the serpentfolk and how their longing for the Old Times threatens the modern world—but also upsets their own plans when other displaced ancient beings are accidentally brought into the present day.

USING THIS BOOK

Yig Snake Granddaddy is a complete Mythos-inspired fantasy campaign designed to take your player characters from level 1 to level 15. The adventure takes place across fourteen episodes divided among four books. Each chapter should take between one and three gaming sessions, depending on your group’s play style.

Before running each adventure, you as the gamemaster should familiarize yourself with the entire chapter. Sidebars, developer’s notes, Sandy’s Notes, and appendices at the end of the book all provide additional context, cues, and information to aid you in running *Yig Snake Granddaddy*.

This adventure makes extensive use of *Sandy Petersen’s Cthulhu Mythos* for Fifth Edition, and having a copy of that book is essential to running this adventure. Monster stat blocks, the Dread and Insanity mechanics, and the Yog-Sothothery skill from *SPCM* will all be referenced in this adventure. The player options presented in *SPCM* are well-suited to *Yig Snake Granddaddy* and will provide additional roleplaying opportunities and evocative details.

Throughout this adventure, reference will be made to various monsters, NPCs, spells, and magic items. Monster and NPC names may appear in **bold**, while spell and magic item names will appear in *italics*. In both cases, this is a prompt for you to look up the stat blocks in one of three places: the appendices in the back of this book, in *SPCM*, or in the Fifth Edition System Reference Document or the Fifth Edition

core books. If the reference is to *SPCM*, it will be followed parenthetically by *SPCM* and the page number. If the reference is to one of the appendices, it will be followed parenthetically by “page” and the page number. All other references to monsters, spells, or magic items without such an indication are available in the SRD.

WHAT IS THE MYTHOS?

At the break of the twentieth century, an unknown American writer named H. P. Lovecraft began writing stories unlike anything ever written before, which would one day be considered some of the most influential horror tales ever told. They were groundbreaking and poignant, and they contained a plethora of unspeakable horrors, alien intelligences, and innovative creatures.

The framework he invented and shared with other authors is commonly referred to as the Cthulhu Cycle, a term coined by August Derleth as a reference to Lovecraft’s seminal work, “The Call of Cthulhu.” Lovecraft himself referred to the shared mythology as Yog-Sothothery. More than a century after his initial story, Lovecraft’s creations are more popular and widely known than ever before, thanks in no small part to tabletop roleplaying games.

Lovecraft’s writing is based primarily on the premise that the cosmos is full of unknowable forces, unthinkable creatures, and alien intelligences to whom humanity is no more important than a gnat. These powers beyond our understanding are nearly omnipotent and omniscient, akin to humanity’s conception of a god. The servitors of the Great Old Ones, Elder Things, and their ilk have mind-wrenching powers, the support of insane cultists, and their own unfathomable agendas. These are the beings the PCs will battle in *Yig Snake Granddaddy*.

KNOW THINE ENEMY

Yig Snake Granddaddy is about a land being restored to its prehistoric state. Of course, since this is a Mythos adventure, dinosaurs are far from the most frightening things in the world’s distant past. More information about these creatures can be found in *SPCM*, but a brief rundown of them is provided here for your handy reference.

YIG

Yig is a Great Old One known as the Father of Snakes. He is known to take the form of a serpent, or sometimes that of a man, but in his natural form



he is monstrous and terrible—a mighty serpent with too many heads to count, great clawed forelimbs, armored scales, and a single lidless eye. His goals are as unknowable as his mind, but his methods are direct: death by poisoning to any who cross him or his ophidian followers.

THE SERPENTFOLK

Since the height of their empire in the Triassic, serpentfolk have been meticulous planners and underhanded schemers. These snake-headed creatures seem humanoid (and often use shapeshifting magic to look humanoid), but their minds are as cold as their blood. While they no longer rule over vast stretches of the world, some say their empire is even more widespread and insidious. Cunning serpentfolk lurk at the heart of every kingdom, drawing power to themselves and biding their time until they can set their master plan in motion.

ELDER THINGS

Truly alien creatures from beyond the stars, Elder Things are as horrific to behold as they are indifferent to human life. They are radially symmetrical, with five grasping arms, five retractable wings, five motile tentacles, a five-pointed head—even five-lobed brains! Elder Things are hyperintelligent masters of biological science, and their bioengineering is responsible for the gigantic, apocalyptically destructive oozes known as shoggoths, which they used in prehistoric wars with the serpentfolk and Yithians.

YITHIANS

Known to themselves as the Great Race, the Yithians are an unspeakably ancient race of powerful psions. Their bodies seem as alien as the Elder Things—great mollusk feet with tentacular arms, crushing claws, and twin asymmetric heads—but it is only their minds that come from another world. The Yithians long ago mastered the scientific art of projecting their minds across time and space and used this art to map out the future history of the universe. Knowing exactly when they would go extinct, they collectively swapped their minds into another suitable species, with the side effect that the minds of that species were swapped into the Yithians' old bodies just in time to suffer extinction. To some, this is genocide; to the Yithians, it is survival.

RUNNING YIG SNAKE GRANDDADDY

This campaign strikes a balance between plot-driven and character-driven adventure, including elements of open-world exploration in which the players' choices will drive the story. Your characters will battle dinosaurs, befriend NPCs, confront alien minds, travel into the realm of dreams, delve into dungeons

filled with prehistoric terror and high technology, and come face to face with creatures older than the gods.

MILESTONE LEVELING

Yig Snake Granddaddy is an adventure that takes your player's characters from level 1 to level 15. At the end of each chapter, the PCs gain enough experience to progress to the next level. This keeps the campaign moving quickly, allowing everyone to experience the story at a good pace.

WHERE IS YILAN?

This adventure takes place entirely in the Wilderness of Yilan and the nearby city of Ventissa. Their location within the world is intentionally left vague, so they can easily be slotted into any campaign setting, or they can just as easily stand alone. Ventissa is an ancient frontier city on the outskirts of a large kingdom or empire in a semi-arid environment, but its context within the wider world is up to the GM. The goddess Bastet does play a role in this adventure, but the GM should not feel compelled to give the whole adventure an Egyptian theme—the temple of Bastet in Ventissa is already thousands of years old, and its pseudo-Egyptian trappings are somewhat anachronistic and out of place in the city. The GM should feel free to slot in whatever gods and pantheons they feel are appropriate to their campaign or gaming group.

The only caveat to this principle is that Yilan should not be plopped down into a campaign setting where dinosaurs and other prehistoric creatures are commonplace. The apocalyptic resurrection of the prehistoric world is a major plot point in this campaign, and it would be undercut by placing it in a world where dinosaurs are a normal part of life.

CAMPAIGN SYNOPSIS

BOOK 1: A LAND OUT OF TIME

The campaign begins with a contest in which would-be adventurers compete for a spot on an expedition into a dangerous wilderness. They soon discover that creatures from prehistory are being pulled into the present, with disastrous consequences. As the PCs help the expedition find a path through the wilderness, they must face natural hazards and combat giant crocodiles, carnivorous slime molds, and even dinosaurs! After traversing half a continent, they are betrayed by their expedition's leader, Gehir, a serpentfolk in disguise who has far grander plans than he let on.

BOOK 2: AGAINST THE SERPENTFOLK

Captured by the serpentfolk, our heroes escape with the help of an unlikely ally—an emissary of the cat goddess Bastet. Cut off from all outside help, the adventurers must rely on their wit and their grit to sur-

INTRODUCTION TO YIG SNAKE GRANDDADDY

vive in the wilderness while fighting back against the serpentfolk. Meanwhile, the servants of Yig are not resting: they are awakening other great civilizations of prehistory and forging an alliance that threatens to topple time itself.

BOOK 3: THE PREHISTORY WAR

Building their strength, the resilient heroes go on the offensive to undermine Gehir's plans and cut him off from his allies. They travel through the Dreamlands to make allies of their own, get mind-swapped into Yithian bodies for an undercover sabotage mission, and join the hunt for a rare prehistoric snake that Gehir needs to summon Yig himself.

BOOK 4: THE ANCIENT AGES AGAIN

With Gehir on the defensive, our heroes attack both the Yithians and the Elder Things in order to knock them out of the war—but they soon find that there is nothing more dangerous than a cornered serpent. Left with no other option, Gehir puts his deadly plan into motion, and the adventurers must race to stop him before he can sacrifice an entire city to Yig and summon the Great Old One in a world-ending rain of venom.



VENTISSA

0 50 100 150 200

FEET



LEGEND

- A - Arena
- B - Temple of Bastet
- C - Citadel
- D - The Laughing Lotus
- E - The Bronze Star
- F - The Eighth Life
- G - Fighting Pits
- H - Hall of Curiosities
- I - Boh's Blades & Bashers
- J - Grumnir's Armory
- K - Second Sister's Outfitter
- L - North Gate
- M - South Gate

ACT 1: A LAND OUT OF TIME

A Cthulhu Mythos adventure for 4 to 5 characters of 1st–4th level

VENTISSA

Our story begins in the frontier city of Ventissa, a beacon of civilization and security on the edge of the dread Wilderness of Yilan. Ventissa is a small, walled city of granite and sandstone on the banks of the River Semma. It is dominated by a large gladiatorial arena, a round-towered castle, and a sphinx-flanked temple of the cat goddess Bastet. The climate in the highlands is arid, but the Semma keeps the city unpleasantly muggy. The lingering stench of the city's moist underbelly is nearly offset by the valuable incense and spices grown in the nearby hills and warehoused in Ventissa before being shipped downriver. Thanks to its location near a low mountain pass into Yilan, Ventissa is also the staging ground for adventurers and merchants seeking their fortune in that primeval and dangerous land.

TEMPLE ROW

In the center of the city stands a mighty structure that looks much older than the surrounding town—and very well may be. This is an ancient but well-maintained temple to Bastet, the feline goddess of protection. The temple itself sits on a platform of stone steps with sphinxlike cat statues at each corner. The temple footprint is 100 by 200 feet, with the steps rising 10 feet and the colonnade rising another 40 feet. The priestesses of Bastet share the space with hundreds of cats. While not the only temple in Ventissa, it is certainly the most prominent. Merchants and adventurers about to undertake a long journey often make an offering at the temple before departing, seeking the protection of Bastet in their travels.

Bastet is the patron deity of Ventissa. The ancient cat goddess is not widely worshiped elsewhere in the kingdom, but this city is important to her and her priestesses, and thus she takes on outsize importance here. A number of less prominent temples line the streets near the temple of Bastet. The GM should feel free to include temples to deities appropriate to their preferred campaign setting.

Services. Priestesses of Bastet (usually N or CN human **priests**) offer their spellcasting services freely to those who make an offering in the chapel, so long as the offering seems commensurate with their wealth (a few gold pieces for a 1st-level adventurer). They also sell the following items:

Each of the lesser temples is staffed by at least one **priest** of an appropriate alignment for its deity. The priest offers spellcasting services to worshippers. They also sell holy water and *potions of healing* at the market price and 1st-level *spell scrolls* for 100 gp.

Item	Cost
Potion of climbing	75 gp
Potion of healing	45 gp
Potion of greater healing	300 gp
Potion of animal friendship	200 gp
Spell scroll of <i>protection from evil and good</i> (1st level)	100 gp
Spell scroll of <i>enhance ability</i> (Cat's Grace effect only, 2nd level)	500 gp

THE FIGHTING PITS

Nothing distracts from the heat like watching gladiatorial combat, at least according to the citizens of Ventissa. The Ventissan Arena is a large, round building of white stone between the river market and Temple Row. Seating for thousands of spectators overlooks the fighting pit itself, which sits below ground level. Every week, professional fighters of every stripe compete for coin and glory. The arena's professional healers ensure that these combats are rarely deadly; the aim of the fights is spectacle, not blood.

The characters are to compete in the arena as part of a contest to qualify for Gehir's expedition (see "The Job Interview," below).

Outside the arena, several smaller fighting pits cater to bloodier amateur fights where aspiring combatants can prove their mettle before moving to the main stage. If a character wants to compete in one of these fighting pits, consult the table below to determine their opponent(s) and the reward purse for winning.

Fighting Pits Opponents		
d8	Opponent	Purse
1	Khensu (CN human male bandit)	1d6 gp
2	Vaesh Crackarmor (CG half-orc female guard)	1d8 gp
3	"The Masked Marauder" (CN half-elf female noble)	1d8 gp
4	"The Tag-Team Terrors" (two CN halfling male bandits)	2d6 gp
5	Kenni "the Kunning" (NE half-orc male scout)	3d6 gp
6	Maeri "the Mauler" (CE human female thug)	3d6 gp
7	Shariq "the Scoundrel" (CN human male spy)	4d6 gp
8	Dhweyn "the Boulder" (NG human male berserker)	6d6 gp



These amateur fights typically take place in a 30-foot diameter arena surrounded by raucous spectators. Fighting ends when one party yields or is knocked unconscious; death is rare but not unheard-of.

THE RIVER MARKET

You make your way into the throng of people, weaving between booths selling roasted haunches and fresh-baked flatbread, past fishmongers and weavers and perfumers. The air coming off the river is so thick you can almost drink it, but it doesn't seem to have dampened the enthusiasm of the buyers and sellers in their never-ending dance of commerce.

On the banks of the Semma stands a twisting bazaar bustling with activity at all hours of the day. Tents and booths are jammed between more permanent structures that rise out of the chaos like rocks from the sea. Some merchants even hawk their wares from boats pulled up to the shore.

Services. A wide variety of goods are available here, including any piece of adventuring gear, tool, or trade good the characters seek, all available at the

standard prices. In addition, some of the more permanent buildings in the river market house armorers and weaponsmiths: Grumnir's Armory sells metal armor and shields; Second Sister's Outfitter and Leatherworks sells ranged weapons, leather armor, and adventuring gear; and Boh's Blades and Bashers sells weapons of all types.

Encounters. For every hour the party spends in the river market, there is a 25 percent chance of a random encounter. Choose an encounter or roll on the chart below. Alternately, they may encounter some of the other adventurers (see "The Adventuring Parties" or appendix A) shopping in the river market. If the arena fight has not happened yet, the other adventurers may be boasting loudly about their upcoming inevitable victories.

THE LAUGHING LOTUS

This three-story stone building jutting out from the river market into the Semma itself is Ventissa's most notorious tavern—some call it the beating heart of the market. It is a gathering place for travelers, drunks, merchants, and thieves. The second floor is the bar area, packed with tables and booths and barrels of all kinds of drink.

d6 River Market Encounter

- Two young pickpockets (CN human **commoners**) attempt to steal from the characters. They each make a Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check opposed by their targets' passive Wisdom (Perception), making off with some of their gold on a success, and immediately make Dexterity (Stealth) checks to disappear into the crowd if they are spotted. If caught, they attempt Charisma (Deception) checks to lie their way out of consequences. The pickpockets each have 2d4 cp.
- A corrupt **guard** (NE human) seeks to shake the characters down with a phony "adventurer tax," demanding 5 gp from each of you. A successful DC 12 Wisdom (Insight) check sees through his lie. If found out, he will pretend to have been joking and walk away, unwilling to risk a fight that might draw the attention of other guards. The guard has 1d4 × 5 gp.
- A wrong turn takes the characters down a dark alley where they are set upon by 1d4 **bandits** and one **thug** (all NE). If the gang numbers at least two more than the characters, they attack and attempt to knock them out and rob them. Otherwise, they make a show of force, demanding 5 gp from each character for "safe passage" through their territory and dashing away if a fight seems imminent. The bandits have 1d6 gp each, and the thug has 3d6 gp.
- A woman (CN human **noble**) in traveling clothes approaches the characters and asks in a low, conspiratorial voice if they want to buy healing potions. She produces a leather case and opens it with a flourish, revealing eight vials of red liquid. She is selling each potion for 20 gp, and explains that her low price is undercutting the temples' monopoly on potions, which isn't strictly illegal but could get her in a lot of trouble. A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals that she is lying. A DC 10 Intelligence (Arcana) check shows the potions to be fake—nothing more than colored water. She flees if discovered. She has 2d8 + 20 gp.
- The characters' attention is drawn to a merchant (LN human **noble**) shouting at a beggar (CG halfling **commoner**). The stuttering beggar is pleading for a piece of fruit, and the merchant is telling him in no uncertain terms to get lost. Passers-by are pointedly ignoring the exchange. If given the opportunity, the beggar slowly explains through his stutter, "I get bread from the temple, but it's not enough. I need fruit to stop my teeth from hurting." The characters can purchase a piece of fruit for 1 sp or convince the merchant to be charitable with a DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) check. The beggar attempts to share the fruit with the characters if they helped him.
- A small boy (NG human **commoner**) is looking around in a panic and beginning to cry. He has become separated from his parents in the crowd. A guard can be located easily, but the boy only cries louder if left with such a stranger. His parents (NG human **commoners**) can be located with a successful DC 15 group Charisma or Intelligence (Investigation) check, made with advantage if the boy is brought along. The grateful parents offer you all the money in their purse as a reward: 5 sp. A failed group check prompts another random encounter.

The Bar. A set of stone stairs leads up from the river market to the Lotus's main entrance on the second story. The entire floor is taken up by the tavern.

This large room is as bustling and noisy as the river market outside. Scents of baking bread and roasting meat waft from the kitchen hearth in the center of the room. One wall is taken up with barrels and kegs that a team of bartenders move between like bees in a flower garden. Servants hurry around the room with platters of food and pitchers of drink, catering to the tavern's raucous and diverse clientele.

The room is lit at night by dozens of lanterns hanging from the ceiling beams, during the day by large unglazed windows that are shuttered at night. Doors open out to a wooden deck that runs around the side of the building facing the river, where even more people are dining and drinking. Several **guards** in the employ of the tavern are there to deter theft and step in when a fight gets too large.

Storage. A **guard** stands at the staircase leading to the ground floor. The room below is a small guard-room where off-duty guards can get some rest. The rest of the ground floor is divided into a series of secure storage rooms that are rented out to traveling merchants. Some are accessible from exterior doors; others are accessible only through the guardroom. A wooden pier runs around the side of the building facing the river beneath the second-story deck, where boats can dock and unload their goods into the storage rooms. **Guards** patrol this pier at all hours to prevent thieves from picking the locks of the exterior doors.

The Inn. A wooden staircase leads up to the third floor, which is subdivided into dozens of bedrooms. An attendant at a desk is on duty from daybreak to midnight to rent out rooms. Small rooms are furnished with only a simple bed; medium rooms contain a bed, a chest, and a small table; and large rooms contain two beds, a chest with a lock (DC 15), and a writing desk. Every door has a simple lock (DC 15). Anyone who passes out in the tavern is moved to a small room and charged for the night.

Services. Consult the table below for purchasing food, drink, and services.

Food, Drink, Service	Cost
Ale	
Mug	3 cp
Gallon pitcher	15 cp
Wine	
Common (cup)	4 cp
Common (pitcher)	2 sp
Fine (cup)	2 gp
Date wine (cup)	4 cp
Mead (cup)	5 cp
Mead (pitcher)	2 sp
Liquor	
Arak	2 cp
Brandy	4 cp
Meals	
Bread and cheese	1 sp
Fish stew	2 sp
Spiced goat	3 sp
Lodging (per night)	
Small room	1 sp
Medium room	5 sp
Large room	8 sp

RUMORS

Characters who spend time in the taverns of Ventissa are liable to overhear rumors and tales bandied about by the locals. Some of these will be of little import to the adventurers, but a few may carry weight with them. The characters might also seek out such rumors. The GM is encouraged to insert the following rumors into NPC conversation where appropriate:

- (If the characters have not yet fought in the arena) "I hear some wizard is holding a contest in the arena this afternoon, and the winners get the privilege of accompanying him into the Wilderness of Yilan! Doesn't tempt me in the slightest, of course. A whole purse full of gold won't do me any good if I'm dead!" (True)
- "I remember last year some high and mighty noble—what was his name? Oh, yeah, Lord Cerastes—he led an expedition into Yilan. Something about 'Bald Hill'? Anyways, he ain't been seen since, and neither has anyone who went with him." (True)
- "There was some disturbance at the Temple of Bast this morning. I didn't see what was going on, but the priestesses looked pretty upset." (True)
- "Monsters are on the rise in Yilan. Used to be you could head out into the wilderness and come back with rare spices and ancient treasures or whatever, if you were brave enough. Just ask Master Mantell at the Hall of Curiosities. Now it's just too deadly. Something's out there. Something hungry." (True)
- "I was up in the hills last week, and a goatherd told me he'd just killed a dragon. I got a look at it, and I don't know what it was, but it weren't no dragon. Wasn't a bird, either—its beak was full of teeth, and its wings were more like bat wings. Tasted okay, though." (Mostly true—it was a pterosaur, not a dragon)
- "They say a dragon's taken up living in the Wilderness of Yilan. That fool wizard Gehir'd better be careful out there, or he'll end up dead and eaten just like Lord Cerastes and his men." (False)



OPTIONAL RULE: INEBRIATION

Characters who overindulge in drink may become impaired, fall unconscious, or even ingest lethal quantities of alcohol.

Getting Drunk. One drink is a mug of ale, a cup of wine, or a swig of liquor. A character can imbibe a number of drinks equal to their Constitution modifier (minimum 1) without suffering ill effects. This number resets after a short rest. For every drink past this limit, the character must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or gain one level of exhaustion. Failure by 5 or more means the character also falls unconscious.

Hangovers. After finishing a long rest, an inebriated character loses all but one level of exhaustion they gained from drinking; the character retains any levels of exhaustion they acquired from other sources. The lingering level of exhaustion can be removed by a subsequent long rest, provided the character does not gain any further exhaustion from drinking.

THE HALL OF CURIOSITIES

What was once a warehouse has been converted into a museum of antiquities and curiosities, including a selection of fossils and artifacts collected in the Wilderness of Yilan. It is run by scholars and explorers. Anyone who pays the 2 sp admission cost can view the many wonders on display.

This vast hall is filled with natural curiosities and ancient artifacts as well as modern wonders of the arcane. A pair of children stare in awe at a stuffed and mounted dire bear rearing to its full height. A robed scholar silently observes a large brass armillary sphere displaying the constellations. An elf admires a colorful ancient urn that has been reassembled with gold filling in the cracks. There is much to see, and something for everyone. But perhaps the strangest exhibits are the beastly skeletons seemingly made of rock and impressions of antediluvian monsters left in solid stone.

Nature Gallery. This end of the hall is devoted to the natural world. It features stuffed animals, pelts, and articulated skeletons, as well as dried insects, pressed plants, crystals, and medical oddities. A few of the notable exhibits include: a display of dragon teeth and scales; a pair of 8-foot-long ivory tusks alongside what appears to be a 6-foot-long unicorn horn; the skeleton of a 8-foot rattlesnake said to have been found in Yilan; a handful of pure quartz crystals cut into faceted star shapes; a stuffed and mounted giraffe nearly 20 feet tall.

History Gallery. The exhibits in this section feature antiquities from this and nearby lands. The exhibits include a curved bronze sword with a pommel of carved jade, said to have belonged to a

THE MUSEUM'S ADVANTAGES

Characters who spend some time studying the exhibits at the museum may find that the knowledge comes in handy later in the adventure. If they spend at least one hour in one of the galleries of the museum, they can gain advantage on a single skill check of their choice in the future. They must choose to take advantage before rolling the check. The type of check they can gain advantage on depends on which galleries they studied. Each character can gain the advantage of a particular gallery only once, but they can gain advantages from multiple galleries. The players should be made aware of these advantages after leaving Ventissa.

STEALING FROM THE MUSEUM?

Most of the artifacts in the Hall of Curiosities are more valuable to the scholars there than to thieves, but characters may still be tempted to pilfer one or two items. Objects on display that are small enough to steal easily are kept in glass display cases warded with permanent *alarm* spells and locked with DC 18 locks. The Hall employs five **guards** to deter theft and vandalism: one in each gallery and one at the entrance.

king; a selection of colorful vases recovered from an elven ruin; the shattered visage of some unknown conqueror whose lifeless sneer of cold command has outlasted his empire; the golden burial mask of an ancient warrior queen; a giant snake head carved from porphyry, worn with age; and sinuous glyphs etched in some dull and stainless metal that seem to writhe and shift out of the corner of your eye.

Arcana Gallery. These exhibits are of interest mainly to arcanists and natural philosophers. Among the things on display are a glass cylinder filled with ampoules of colored liquid that slowly rise and fall, a rotating contraption of interlocking metal wheels that purports to track the influence of the elemental planes on the material world, a selection of faintly glowing crystals that seem to sing and hum as people pass by, and the severed arm of an iron golem which continues to clench and unclench its fists.

Fossil Gallery. This wing of the museum is full of traces of life from a time before history, frozen in stone by forces beyond comprehension. Notes written below some of the items identify them as "fossils," accompanied by speculation about the creatures that they once were. Notable exhibits include a broken fossil skull, three feet long and filled with sharp teeth; the stone impression of a footprint that a man could comfortably sit in; a crablike claw on the end of a ribbed tentacle partially emerging from a slab of rock; a shard of sandstone bearing the remains of a giant dragonfly with a two-foot wingspan; and the black ribcage of a giant snake, protruding from a bed of crystallized verdigris.

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Development. Master Mantell is working in the Fossil Gallery. He has a theory to present to the characters (see “The Antiquarian,” below).

Gallery	Advantage
Nature Gallery	Intelligence (Nature) checks
History Gallery	Intelligence (History) checks
Arcana Gallery	Intelligence (Arcana) checks
Fossil Gallery	Intelligence (Nature) checks made about dinosaurs or serpentfolk; or Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) checks made about Yithians, Yig, or Elder Things

OTHER LOCATIONS IN VENTISSA

Inns and Taverns. Aside from the Laughing Lotus, Ventissa is also home to the Bronze Star and the Eighth Life. The Bronze Star is an upscale inn and tavern nestled in the Alabaster Quarter, the region of the city where the wealthiest citizens make their homes. It maintains a quiet atmosphere, and disorderly conduct results in swift eviction by armed guards. The Eighth Life is an overcrowded boarding house in the slums, a tightly packed shanty neighborhood on the downriver side of the city, where all the worst smells settle in and never dissipate.

Services at the Bronze Star	Cost
Ale (mug)	4 cp
Wine, common (cup)	5 cp
Wine, fine (cup)	1 gp
Meal	8 sp
Room, comfortable (per night)	10 sp
Room, fine (per night)	2 gp
Suite (per night)	4 gp

Services at the Eighth Life	Cost
Bread	2 cp
Bunk in the common room (per night)	5 cp
Room, squalid (per night)	7 cp

The Citadel. At the edge of the city stands a walled fortress containing the guard barracks and the governor’s palace. Access is not granted without official business, and guards stand vigil at the gates and on the walls at all hours.



CHAPTER 1: VENTURING FORTH!

A Cthulhu Mythos adventure for four to five 1st-level characters

OVERVIEW

The characters arrive in the city of Ventissa with the promise of adventure—rumor has it that the wizard Gehir Greencloak seeks adventurers to accompany him on a trek through the uncharted Wilderness of Yilan to the fabled Golden Tower. To prove their worth, they must compete in the fighting pits against the other adventuring bands. A freak accident in the pits forces the rivals to work together, and an excited Gehir hires all four adventuring groups, promising wealth and fame beyond their wildest dreams.

While Gehir prepares for the journey, the characters explore Ventissa and get a taste of things to come. The Cult of Bastet is growing concerned with reports of strange, primeval beasts coming out of Yilan, and a local scholar has some eccentric theories as to the cause. In the taverns, tales abound of other expeditions that vanished without a trace in the wilderness.

When the expedition gets underway, the adventuring bands share scouting duties. The characters pick a path over the mountains into the Wilderness of Yilan, where far greater challenges await.

WHERE TO START

This adventure begins with a battle in the fighting pits of Ventissa, a competition for a place on a wealthy wizard's expedition into the Wilderness of Yilan. It is up to your players to decide whether their characters have already formed a party or are meeting one another for the first time. If your players decide that they are already a team and want to jump right into the action, you can start in medias res with the fighting pit scene (see “The Job Interview” below). If they want to meet as strangers, you might start them in a tavern such as the Laughing Lotus, where they overhear talk of Gehir's offer and the upcoming competition. Even if they are an established adventuring party, you may still want to start them in a tavern, where they might have some interactions with rival adventuring groups before the fight. If you start the adventure before the fighting pit scene, the characters should know that Gehir's contest is to take place at midafternoon that day.



GEHIR'S OFFER

Gehir Greencloak, a wealthy wizard and scholar, is putting together an expedition to cross the Wilderness of Yilan and rediscover the fabled Golden Tower, an ancient elven fortress said to be full of magic and treasure. He seeks worthy adventurers to act as scouts and guards on this expedition, offering 1,000 gp per person plus a fair share of the spoils. To select the lucky adventuring party, Gehir is holding a tournament in the fighting pits of Ventissa, with the winning team earning the coveted spot on his expedition. This is not a fight to the death, and the arena's staff of healers will be there to ensure none of the contestants dies. Gehir considers the contest to be a job interview of sorts. The adventuring parties are expected to show resourcefulness, teamwork, and fighting prowess. After all, the Wilderness of Yilan is no place for amateurs.

THE ADVENTURING PARTIES

During the adventure, the characters will be accompanied by three allied parties of NPCs: the Rockbreakers, Gunnar's Team, and the Friendlies. For the most part, they will act independently and away from the main action, so as not to overburden the GM or overshadow the player characters. Over the course of the adventure, many of these NPCs will be lost, while a few will become valued advisors to the characters. It is not necessary for the GM to roleplay all these NPCs all the time, but the GM is encouraged to let the characters interact with the NPCs as much as possible; ideally, the players will know these NPCs well enough to want to rescue them if they are captured and to feel something if they are killed. To make this easier, each NPC has a few defining characteristics that should come through in roleplaying interactions with them: a distinctive feature, an endearing trait, and a flaw. Further information on these adventuring parties, along with stat blocks and character information for their members, can be found in appendix A.

GEHIR

Gehir Greencloak appears to be a powerful wizard with a lot of resources and a deep interest in the arcane mysteries of the world. He is old but not frail,

LEGEND OF THE GOLDEN TOWER

Gehir's expedition to the Golden Tower may be a ruse, but the Golden Tower is a real place in the world. The PCs may be aware of it though rumor and legend, or it may be new to them. In short, the Golden Tower is an ancient elven ruin said to lie beyond the Wilderness of Yilan. It once stood at the heart of a great civilization, now fallen into ruin. Some say it was destroyed by war, others by natural disasters. Whatever the case, no one has been to the Golden Tower in centuries. But anyone who locates the ruins is sure to find vast treasures, ancient magics, and powerful weapons from the height of elven civilization ... or so the legends say.

with gray hair and a long beard, his face wrinkled with decades of thought. As a boss, he is encouraging and understanding, but he makes it clear that his orders are final. He largely concerns himself with his own private studies, relying on his hirelings for the labor of the expedition.

This is all a façade. Gehir is actually a serpentfolk in disguise. He is luring adventurers into the wilderness to sacrifice them in arcane cult rituals that rend the very fabric of time. His ultimate goal is to revert the world to its primordial state, establishing a planetwide serpentfolk empire under the divine rule of Yig, the Father of Snakes. Gehir, under the alias "Lord Cerastes," has already led one expedition to its doom in the wilderness, sacrificing the expedition members at ancient sites of Yig worship to create pockets of primeval jungle infested with dinosaurs and other antediluvian beasts.



THE JOB INTERVIEW

The contest for a place on Gehir's expedition is to take place in midafternoon.

When the characters arrive at the arena, an attendant ushers them down a tunnel into an underground chamber where the fighters wait to be called out onto the floor. Along the way, he asks the characters for the name of their adventuring group. They need a name to be considered for the competition.

The waiting room is a long, vaulted chamber with stone benches running along either side. Opposite the door they came in through, a short stairway leads up to a barred gate that opens into the arena. Aside from the characters and the attendant, there are already five people in the room. One is a **guard**, there to ensure no fights break out before they are sup-

WHERE IS EVERYONE STAYING?

The characters may run into the other adventurers at some point before or after the arena fight, especially if they frequent the same locations.

The Laughing Lotus. The Rockbreakers come here to drink, and most of the Friendlies and Gunnar's Team have rooms here. Enivwenaye drinks here with her companions but sleeps at the Eighth Life. None of Gunnar's Team can be found here before the arena fight—they arrive that day and go straight to the arena.

The Bronze Star. The Rockbreakers and Jehanne Auberjonois have rooms at the Bronze Star, but Jehanne usually drinks with the Friendlies at the Laughing Lotus. Captain Khorsava has been to Ventissa before and enjoys the Laughing Lotus, but he wanted to treat his men to nice rooms at the Bronze Star, since they wouldn't be sleeping on real beds for quite a while. Jehanne simply prefers the cleanliness.

The Eighth Life. Enivwenaye and Whiskers have rooms at the Eighth Life.

The Citadel. Gehir stays as a guest at the Citadel and does not often leave its walls.

posed to; another is one of the arena's healers (LG human male **priest**). The other three, apparently the competition, are sitting on the bench.

One of the figures seated on the stone bench stands up when you enter. The man has golden hair, his pale face slightly accented by a scar on his cheek. He wears a suit of gleaming full plate and a yellow surcoat featuring a black tower and a broken chain. "I'm Gunnar," he says, extending a gauntleted hand in greeting. "And this is Enivwenaye and Absalom." A lithe, muscular, dark-skinned woman with piercing blue eyes nods, and a lanky olive-skinned man in a blue and yellow cape looks up from waxing his bowstring. "I guess we'll be fighting you in a bit."

The characters have the opportunity to speak Gunnar's Team for a short time. They are friendly, though Enivwenaye seems more interested in meditating. The guard passes out light blue kerchiefs for the characters to tie around their arms or heads to identify their team; Gunnar's team is already wearing yellow kerchiefs. Soon, the arena healer gathers everyone's attention and explains the rules of the fight:

"All right, combatants, listen up! This is an all-out fight, but it is not a fight to the death! That means no poison, no throat-cutting, and no disintegrations! Swing your weapons as hard as you want, fire off whatever spells you've got prepared, but when someone goes unconscious or yields, they are off limits. Once you yield, you are to drop your weapons and proceed to the edge of the arena,

where I or one of my colleagues will heal you and you can watch the rest of the fight from the sidelines. If brawler goes down and can't get up on their own, an ally may provide immediate aid; otherwise, they are out of the fight. The last team with a member standing wins. Everyone got it? Good."

Trumpets blare out, and the muffled and distorted voice of a herald announcing the coming fight echoes into the cell. The characters can barely make out the names of the adventuring groups. First up are the Rockbreakers; the characters hear the crowd cheering the name. Next, Gunnar's Team is announced. The healer motions to Gunnar and opens the gate. Gunnar's team jogs out. As Gunnar leaves the cell, he turns to the characters and says, "Good luck!" before slamming the visor of his helmet shut and disappearing into the sunlight. The characters are left in the cell for a moment as the announcer calls out the Friendlies, followed by more cheering. Finally, they announce the characters' group name.

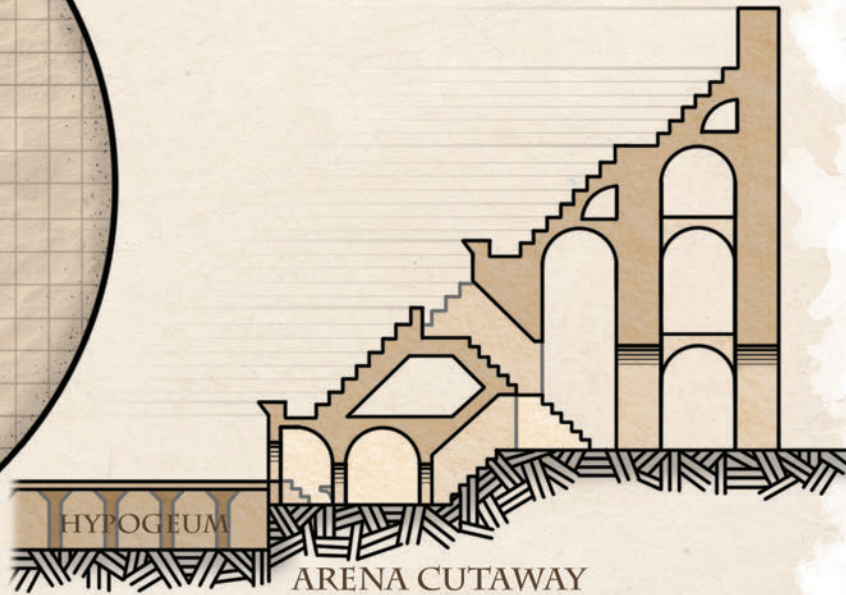
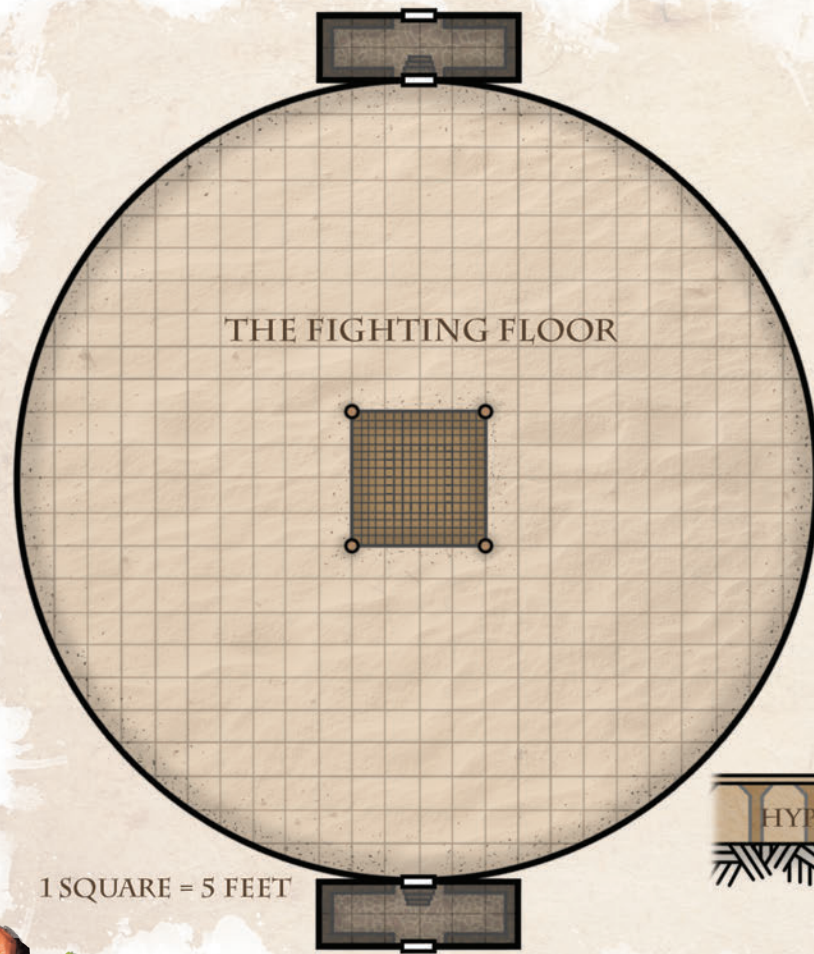
You come out of the small, dark cell into the bright afternoon sun, stunned by thunderous cheering and applause from the crowd. It seems like the entire city has turned out for the spectacle. In a shaded booth overlooking the whole field is an aged man with a long beard, dressed in green robes. This must be Gehir, the wizard you are all competing for. In the center of the round, sandy arena is a square iron grate with ten-foot stone pillars rising from each corner. Over to your right, you see Gunnar's band. To your left, you see a group of four other fighters in leather armor. Across the field you see another team of four, this one led by an armored dwarf. Gehir rises to his feet and raises his arms. The crowd goes silent. Then he drops his arms. Trumpets blare. The crowd erupts. The fight is on!

THE FIGHT

The arena is a 60-foot-radius circle, and each team starts 50 feet away from each of its two neighboring teams, forming a diamond 50 feet on each side. The square of 10-foot-tall pillars in the center measures 20 feet on each side, and the floor inside them is an iron grate. As soon as anyone moves within 1 foot of the grate, it swings downward, forming a ramp into the pit below. There are three lions in a cage beneath the arena, each anchored by a 40-foot chain to a ring set in a stone support column at the far end of the pit, which are released into the pit when the grate falls. A creature on the grate or within 1 foot of it when the ramps are triggered can move up to half their speed away from the pit if they succeed on a DC 5 Dexterity saving throw, falling into the pit on a failure.

There are a lot of combatants in this fight, but it is not necessary for the GM to keep track of them all

THE GREAT ARENA OF VENTISSA



individually. Most of the action can be kept abstract, following the general outline below, unless the characters directly interact with any of the combatants. For simplicity's sake, the Friendlies act on initiative count 20 (losing ties), Gunnar's team acts on initiative count 15 (losing ties), and the Rockbreakers act on initiative count 10 (losing ties). The GM should use their discretion to determine how the NPCs react to the PCs' attacks. The following outline is a suggestion, not a script:

Round 1. Jehanne runs to and climbs up the nearest pillar (not triggering the lion trap) and starts shooting with her bow at anyone in range. The rest of the Friendlies hang back and use ranged weapons against easy targets. Gunnar and Enivwenaye charge the PCs. The Rockbreakers charge the Friendlies.

Round 2. Sarai and Cathbad have a spell duel. Whiskers moves for the center of the arena but triggers the lion trap and runs back to the Friendlies. Absalom shoots at the lions, who roar and rattle their chains.

Round 3. The Friendlies are driven back toward the PCs by the Rockbreakers' assault. Jehanne shoots Gunnar, who orders Enivwenaye to climb up the pillar and get the half-orc down. At initiative count 1, the ring anchoring the lions' chains snaps with a resounding crack and the lions rush out onto the field: one toward the Rockbreakers, one toward the Friendlies, and one toward the PCs. The crowd

Holding Back

Some of the NPC adventurers are individually more powerful than the PCs at the start of the adventure. This is meant to ensure they have a fighting chance in upcoming chapters; they are not intended to outshine or handily defeat the PCs. During the arena fight, the NPC adventurers will not fight to their full potential. Any NPCs with abilities that let them make multiple attacks, like Multiattack, should instead make only one attack per round. NPCs with abilities that let them deal extra damage, like Sneak Attack or Smite, should not use those abilities against the player characters.

gasps. Gehir stands up in surprise. There is a general panic. This was clearly not supposed to happen.

Round 4 and on. The other adventuring groups turn away from fighting each other to deal with the lions, working together to take down the beasts. The NPCs' efforts against the lions should be abstracted so as not to distract from the PCs. If the PCs are having too easy a time of it, one of the other lions, now at half health, bounds over to attack. If the PCs are doing very poorly against the lion, Captain Khorsava comes over to rescue them.

As the last lion falls, the crowd erupts in cheers. The other adventurers raise their weapons in a victory salute. Guards and healers rush the field

to tend to the wounded. Gehir, his voice magically enhanced, calls out, “Splendid! A marvelous performance! I think there is no more need for a contest; clearly you all work well together. You are all hired!”

HIRED

In the aftermath of the arena fight, after the healers have tended to the wounded, Gehir explains to the adventurers that he will hire them all to accompany his expedition. He was impressed with everyone’s fighting spirit, ability to react to changing conditions, and willingness to work as a team. Everyone gets the same deal: 1,000 gp each—250 now and the rest to be paid out upon arrival at the Golden Tower—plus a fair share of the spoils from the tower itself. Gehir instructs them to get a good rest tonight, enjoy the city tomorrow, and meet him at the west gate of the city at sunrise on the day after.

Captain Khorsava announces that the first round of drinks at the Laughing Lotus is on him. The characters are free to follow the other adventurers to the tavern for a night of drinking and celebration. Gehir does not accompany them.

The characters may suspect that Gehir engineered the lion escape. He did, of course. He won’t volunteer that information, but if asked he does not deny it: “I may have magically rusted the chain, yes. There’s far worse than lions where we’re going, and I needed to be sure you all could handle it. Making you fight each other in a controlled environment tells me nothing. I needed to see you in a stressful situation, see how you act under pressure, how you react to surprises. You were still perfectly safe, of course, but that added element of chaos let me see the real you. Now I know I can rely on you.” Gehir is telling the truth, for the most part: he can’t sacrifice someone if they get killed by monsters on the way there.

CONCERNS OF THE CAT GODDESS

At some point during their stay in Ventissa, the characters should pay a visit to the Temple of Bastet. There are many ways to encourage them to go there:

- ◇ They may have heard a rumor of a troubling incident at the temple (see “Rumors” sidebar above).
- ◇ They will want to stock up on healing potions, and the Temple of Bastet is the best place to get them.
- ◇ A priestess on the street may recognize them from the arena and ask for their help.

TEMPLE OF BASTET

Large, jet-black statues of seated cats flank the steps leading up to this temple. Its main structure

is a rectangular colonnade enclosing a sun-filled courtyard full of statues of the cat goddess. Hundreds of cats freely roam the temple grounds, lounging on statues and sunning themselves on the warm stone. Priestesses in loose robes and gold jewelry move with unhurried grace about the temple. A song of worship echoes from a small chapel toward the rear of the courtyard.

Chapel. This rectangular stone building, about 20 feet by 25 feet, stands at the rear of the temple courtyard.

The chapel’s dark interior is lit only by smoky braziers and clouded with burning incense. Painted carvings on the walls depict Bastet slaying a great snake and receiving the worship of mortals. The space is dominated by an alabaster statue of Bastet as a finely dressed woman with a cat’s head, holding a sistrum—a metal rattle—in one hand and a protective amulet in the other. Stacks of gold coins, prayers written on small scrolls, clay amulets, and other such offerings are piled at the foot of the statue. Four priestesses along the walls are singing a hymn to Bastet and rhythmically shaking brass sistra. The High Priestess, her dark skin and gold bangles gleaming in the firelight, stands before an ebony table on which rests a tiny figure wrapped in a shroud of fine linen.

High Priestess Nesmenhit sets a small alabaster vial on the table next to the shrouded figure and approaches the characters. “You are the adventurers I wanted to speak to. We have received an omen of grave danger: An old enemy awakens, and we may not have the strength to defeat them.” Nesmenhit speaks a word, and a priestess appears in the doorway bearing a wooden chest. She opens it to reveal the corpse of a rattlesnake, partially disemboweled, its skin marred by deep scratches. “One of our cats was found dead on the steps of the temple with this beast wrapped around it, their teeth sunk deeply into each other. This snake is not from here. I suggest you take it to the naturalists at the Hall of Curiosities to confirm, but we suspect it comes from Yilan. If that is the case, you journey into great peril, but you may be the ones best positioned to strike at the enemy, to halt their advance before they swallow us all.”

Nesmenhit is prepared to discuss a number of subjects:

- ◇ **Snakes/“an old enemy”:** “The scriptures tell us of a great snake, Apep, who sought to eat the sun. Apep lurked in the tenth region of the night, just before the dawn, but moon-eyed Bastet smote the serpent and saved the sun from its swallowing jaws. Cats have protected us from serpents ever since.”
- ◇ **Bastet:** “Bastet is the protector. She keeps us safe from poison, disease, and famine. Not because she has anything to gain from us—she is not nourished



by our worship like other gods are. She is a cat deity, not a human deity. Yet she cares about us all the same. Maybe it is only because she finds us amusing, but still she cares. In my book, that makes her all the more worthy of worship.”

- ◇ **Cats:** “This temple has always been a safe haven for the stray cats of the city. We care for them, provide them with food and adoration and a place to sleep and sun themselves. In return, they keep the city free of rats and snakes. They are Bastet’s representatives, and we treat them with the respect and dignity they deserve.”
- ◇ **The Temple:** “This temple was here long before the city. There are cats resting in the catacombs beneath our feet that lived and died before mankind learned how to work iron.”
- ◇ **The Hall of Curiosities:** “It’s an odd sort of place, full of natural wonders and relics of history. The people there know many things. It’s in an old building in the warehouse district. You can’t miss it.”
- ◇ **The Wilderness of Yilan:** “We have all heard tales of dark forces at work beyond the mountains. You will fight gigantic beasts that no mortal has ever seen, but they will not be the greatest danger you face there.”
- ◇ **The dead cat:** “They are singing a hymn to her memory,” she says, indicating the choir of priestesses. “She died fighting the enemy, and she will be honored accordingly. After the funeral rites are complete, she will be taken below to the *Per Nefer* and mummified before she is entombed in the catacombs. Her name was Dandelion.”

Catacombs. A trap door (locked, DC 18) behind the Bastet statue in the chapel leads to an underground chamber the same size as the chapel called the *Per Nefer*, or House of Beauty, where dead cats are mummified and wrapped in linens and reeds. A locked (DC 18) wooden door leads to a series of tunnels in which mummified cats are entombed. This is a holy place for followers of Bastet, who dedicate the mummified animals to her glory. Only priestesses are allowed in the *Per Nefer* and the catacombs.

THE ANTIQUARIAN

The characters may visit the Hall of Curiosities (see “Hall of Curiosities” above) to follow up on the lead Nesmenhit gave them. They can gain entry by purchasing admission (2 sp per person), or they may be able to gain entry by persuading the ticket-taker that they are on important business for the Temple of Bastet, requiring a DC 16 Charisma (Persuasion) check. They can gain advantage on the check by presenting the box full of dead snake that Nesmenhit gave them.

The Origin of the Species. Anyone working at the Hall of Curiosities can point the characters toward

Master Steenis (N human male **mage**), who runs the Nature Gallery. He is a thick man with a head of stubble and a pair of brass-rimmed eyeglasses perched on his nose. When you show him the snake, he looks it over and nods. “Yes, this is a species of timberland rattlesnake found across the mountains in Yilan. They can grow quite large. We have a skeleton on display that is nearly 6 feet long. As to how it got here, I have no idea. You never see them on this side of the mountains, let alone in the city.” If asked about what dangers they can expect in Yilan, Steenis is dismissive of the rumors: “There are wild animals in Yilan, nothing more. Pay no attention to what my *eccentric* colleague Master Mantell has been saying. He’s almost worse than the peasants!”

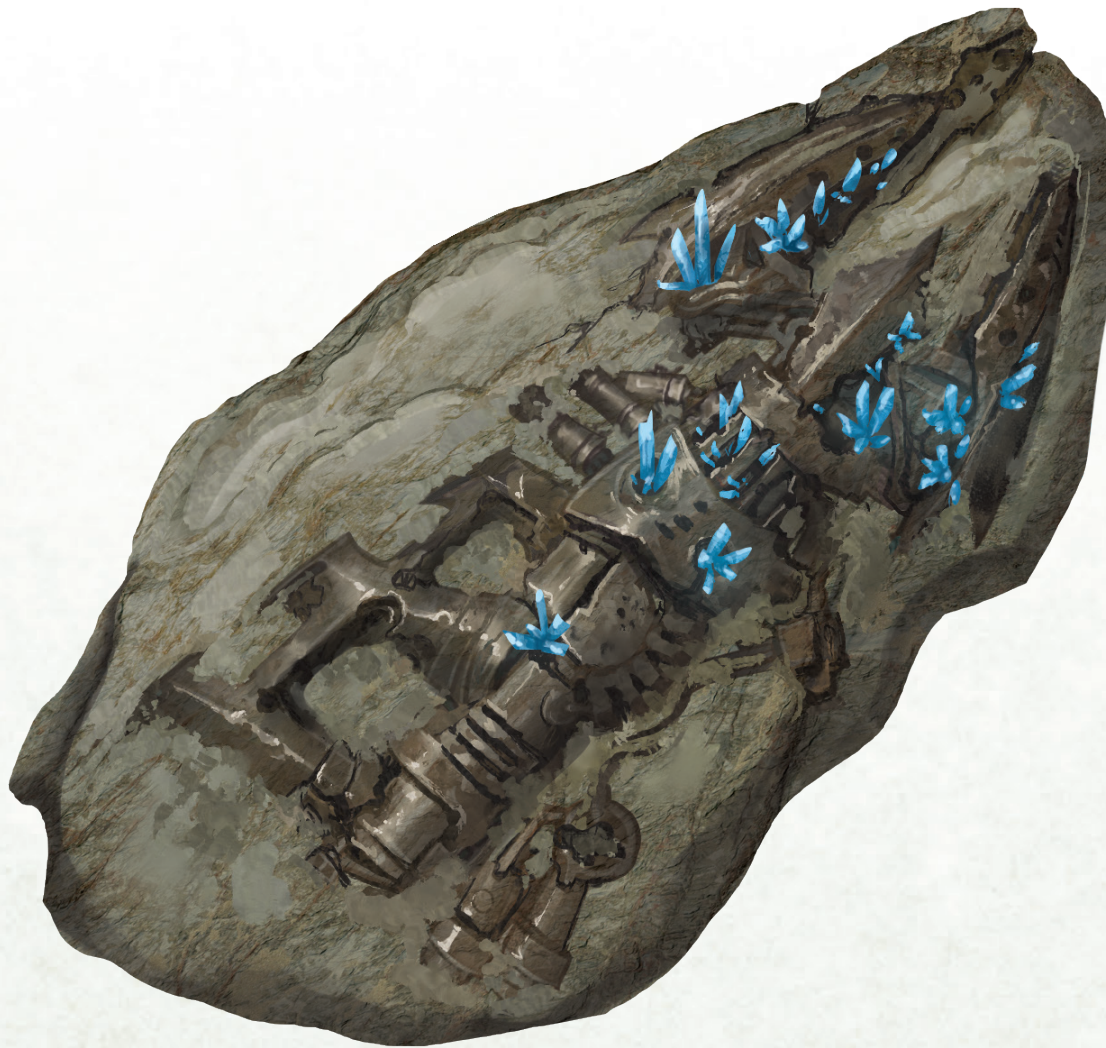
Master of Fossils. As the characters continue browsing the galleries (or start to make their way out), another man catches their attention and beckons them over to the fossil gallery. He is a bony man of about forty, wearing the long brown robes of a scholar. This is Master Algernon Mantell (NG human male **mage**).

“You are the ones going across the mountains, yes? Take a look at these.” He gestures to some of the displays around him. There are seashells made of black stone, monstrous bones embedded in solid rock, and petrified skulls and claws and armor plates of all sizes and shapes. “These are fossils—petrified remains of dead animals. Most of them were taken from Yilan. I used to go on expeditions there, back when it was safer to do that sort of thing. They say there are all sorts of new monsters over there now, monsters the world has never seen before. But I don’t think that’s quite true.”

Comparative Anatomy. Master Mantell hands the characters a broken tooth about 4 inches long and slightly curved, with serrated edges. He explains that it was taken out of the body of a dead shepherd who worked in the hills near the mountain pass into Yilan. Then he shows a fossil skull of some draconic monstrosity, its bone turned to brown rock. Master Mantell encourages the characters to compare the new tooth with the blackened fossil teeth. Aside from the color, the teeth are nearly identical. Even characters proficient in the Intelligence (Nature) skill will be unable to determine what modern animal the tooth could belong to.

“I believe that whatever monsters left these bones here ages ago ... somehow, they’ve come back. Bringing fossils back to life is something I have tried and failed at for decades, but someone or something in Yilan seems not only to have mastered the technique but to be performing it at an unprecedented scale. But that’s not all.”

Strange Eons. Master Mantell produces a key and leads the characters further into the fossil collection,



talking all the way. He unlocks a cupboard below one of the display cases and draws out a large shelf displaying a slab of stone.

“No one is quite sure how old these fossils are, but we know it takes a long time for rock to form. Personally, I believe that these are older than any human civilization. Possibly even older than the gods. What worries me is, if that creature with the teeth can come back, so could whatever made this.” Set into the stone is an angular mass of dark metal terminating in a long tubular structure, the whole thing crisscrossed with orderly lines of crystal. “As near as I can tell, this is our oldest fossil. No one has been able to figure out what kind of metal this is or how these crystals grew in such an unnatural pattern. I think it’s a weapon or a tool, something forged eons before the elves learned how to make fire. I don’t know what it means, but I thought you should see it. Be careful out there.”

The strange fossil in question is a Yithian lightning gun. A DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check notes the impression of a tentacle-like appendage leading to

the mass of metal. A DC 20 Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) check confirms that this is a fossil of alien technology. The latter discovery prompts a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw, with failure resulting in 2 levels of dread lasting until the character finishes a long rest.

If the characters ask Master Mantell about his experiments, he tells them: “I have been performing magical experiments trying to find some way to return one of these fossil organisms to life. Not only would it prove that these creatures actually existed, but it could provide incredible insight into the ancient past. But I’ve never been able to figure out the right combination of spells, and experimenting with resurrection magic is ... prohibitively expensive. I’d given it up years ago, but these stories out of Yilan have reignited my interest. If you encounter anything that could shed light on my work, I’d pay you well for the information.”

GETTING UNDERWAY

The characters and the other adventurers converge on the western gate of the city just as the sun peeks



over the horizon. Gehir is already there, seated on a covered wooden wagon drawn by two horses. “I’m glad you all made it. Now we’ve got a long journey ahead of us, so let’s get going!” He slaps the side of the wagon, and the horses start pulling it along.

GEHIR’S WAGON

Gehir’s wagon is a wooden box about 7 feet wide, 15 feet long, and 5 feet high (7 feet high including the wheels), painted green and yellow. It runs on four wide wheels studded with iron nails for traction, and is pulled by a team of two **draft horses**. The interior of the wagon is accessible through a latched door in the back and a locked (DC 20) hatch in the front, behind where the driver sits. Two-thirds of the interior is storage space packed with supplies, food, a barrel of wine, spare wheels and axles, tents, canvas, rope, and assorted tools. There is a board running along the rear of the wagon, below the doors, that is broad enough for up to three people to sit on. A similar board runs along the sides of the wagon. The front third of the interior is accessible only through the locked front hatch. It contains several iron strongboxes that are magically locked (DC 30 to open, including the +10 from *arcane lock*). This compartment is where Gehir’s apprentices, Alpha and Beta, spend most of their time. The strongboxes contain the magical parasites that Alpha and Beta are bonded to. Gehir wards the front hatch with the alarm spell every night before going to sleep.

TURU

A strange, bat-sized creature alights on Gehir’s shoulder. It is like nothing you have seen before: it has long, membranous wings; a narrow, toothed beak; a fin-like ridge on its forehead; and a short spur coming off the back of its skull. Its leathery hide is covered with down that is not quite hair but not quite feathers. Its back and the leading edges of its wings are black, but its wing membranes and its narrow, keel-like chest are purple. “This is Turu, my new familiar,” Gehir says, noting your curious looks. “Get used to him: I’ve had reports that there are more beasts like him in the lands we’ll be passing through.”

Gehir’s familiar is Turu, a fiendish **pterodactyl** (page 77). Gehir uses Turu to scout ahead or keep an eye on the adventuring parties if they are away from the wagon. Gehir dotes on Turu, feeding him grubs and small pieces of raw meat.

GEHIR’S “APPRENTICES”

Gehir has two apprentices act as his servants. They are both hairless, sallow, and gaunt. Aside from their rough black robes, they wear thick metal collars around their necks, and their faces are scarred with arcane runes that glow faintly red in the dark. They rarely show themselves outside of their compartment at the fore of Gehir’s wagon, and they never speak except to whisper in Gehir’s ear. If asked, Gehir explains: “My apprentices here are the only survivors of a previous, less-well-equipped expedition to the

Golden Tower. I don't know their real names, so I call them Alpha and Beta. Something they encountered twisted their minds and left them horrifically scarred and howling mad. I was able to quell their psychic turmoil with the help of these control collars. I've been studying their minds as I nurse them back to health, and while I haven't quite figured out how to fix what happened to them, I am sure that I can prevent it from happening to any of us."

This story is another lie. The "apprentices" are actually the enslaved hosts of winged eldritch parasites, similar to eremites. The parasites themselves are kept in iron chests in Gehir's wagon. A DC 22 Intelligence (Arcana) or DC 18 Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) check identifies the scars on their faces as glyphs designed to hollow out their souls in preparation for ritually fusing their bodies with other entities. Upon realizing this, the discoverer must succeed on a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw or gain 1 level of dread.

Designer's Note: Revealing the Apprentices

Gehir's "apprentices" are unsettling, and their discovery can make for a creepy reveal. If possible, don't show Alpha or Beta until absolutely necessary—sometime in the middle of chapter 2 is ideal. Hint at their presence by dropping little clues: strange noises at night, Gehir being secretive about his locked section of the wagon, Gehir putting leftover food in their compartment. When the reveal comes, Gehir should seem forthright, acting as if this were the most normal thing in the world. "Oh, did I forget to introduce you? How rude of me! I apologize for the oversight."

THE COOKING CONTEST

The first day's journey is uneventful. The wagon has mostly been able to roll along well-tended roads leading through small villages and past saffron plantations and myrrh groves. This is safe, familiar country, so the adventurers can all stay close to the wagon without taking watch or going on scouting patrols. By evening they have reached the foothills. The low mountains separating this land from the Wilderness of Yilan rise ahead, an obstacle for another day.

As the group makes camp, the different adventuring groups begin to lightheartedly argue about who should be in charge of cooking the evening meal. The Rockbreakers argue that Shorty McCallam is the best cook they'll ever have the luck of traveling with. The Friendlies counter that Sarai is a mean cook herself. Absalom suggests that a cooking contest is in order, and Shorty and Sarai readily agree. They ask the player characters to choose one of their team to represent them as a cook. Absalom admits that none of Gunnar's Team is a great chef, so he volunteers them to act as neutral judges.

Each team's chosen cook must make opposed Wisdom checks, applying their proficiency with cook's utensils if applicable. Shorty's total bonus is +6;

Sarai's is +4. Other characters can contribute to their team's dish as well: if they succeed at a DC 10 group Wisdom (Survival) check to forage for wild herbs or hunt game, the cook's Wisdom check is made with advantage. Gunnar's Team samples the results (Enivwenaye picks any red meat out of her dish, and Absalom happily snatches it up) and proclaims whoever got the highest result the winner. A merry feast is had by all that night.

SCOUTING THE PASS

The next day, Gehir's wagon begins to climb into the foothills. Gehir sends Turu up to get a pterodactyl's-eye view of the terrain, consults his notes, and decides on three likely paths. Each path must be scouted out by one of the teams to determine whether it is clear, safe, and suitable for the wagon to pass through. He sends the Friendlies to check out a promising streambed, the Rockbreakers to investigate a rocky hill path, and the PCs to scout what looks to be a gap between two mountains. Gunnar's team is to stay with the wagon and help navigate it up through the foothills. The groups are to take camping supplies and return to the wagon the next day.

If the characters succeed at a DC 12 group Wisdom (Survival) check, they reach the pass before sundown. Otherwise, they must make camp and continue in the morning. If they make camp, there is a 50 percent chance that 1d4 **hyenas** will break into their camp in the night and try to make off with their rations.

The pathway up toward the gap is stony and rough, but the incline is not too steep for the wagon. After several hours of hiking, the characters make it to a narrow defile sometimes only 20 feet wide, with great chalky cliffs to either side. As they reach a bend in the gorge, anyone with passive Wisdom (Perception) 16 or higher hears a scrabbling sound and hushed whispers coming from up ahead.

As you round the bend, you come face to face with a war party of six goblins armed with blades and bows. They look like they have already been in a fight, and some of them are bleeding from multiple wounds. They yelp in panic as you appear, and draw their weapons.

There are six **goblins**, two of which are injured (at half health and suffering disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks). They will fight the characters, but each time one of the goblins falls the other ones use their Nimble Escape ability to form a defensive line further back. When they are down to just two goblins, they flee back along the defile whence they came. The goblins are the vanguard of a force of wounded and noncombatant goblins fleeing Yilan; their goal is to leave Yilan or die trying. A successful DC 12 Wisdom (Insight) check is sufficient to reveal that the goblins are scared and oddly reluctant to retreat. A successful DC 18 Charisma (Intimidation) check



is enough to set the goblins to flight. Alternately, a successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check can convince the goblins that the characters mean no harm and wish to let them pass, though this check is made at disadvantage if the character making the check does not speak Goblin.

If the characters continue down the path a short distance, they round another bend.

The gorge opens up into a wide ravine sloping downward into the forested Wilderness of Yilan far below. You've found the pass through the mountains! But before you stands a huddled mass of two dozen goblins, many of them injured. Some are missing limbs; others sport deep gashes still seeping blood. They look terrified.

There are 25 goblin **commoners**, plus any goblins that retreated here from the pass. They want to move through the pass out of Yilan. Their fear is readily apparent to any observer. If the characters stand aside, the goblins meekly file through the pass. If they attack or intimidate the goblins, the goblins are stirred to action: the goblins rush past the characters toward the pass, heedless of the danger presented by the characters, and the characters must succeed on a DC 12 Strength or Dexterity saving throw or take 1d6 bludgeoning damage from the goblin stampede.

As the last of the goblins flees through the pass, a deafening roar thunders up from the forest below. Great trees shake like grass as the unseen beast stomps through them, retreating back into the wilderness in search of its next meal.

LEVELING UP

At the end of *Venturing Forth*, all characters gain sufficient experience to reach level 2.



CHAPTER 2: INTO THE WILDERNESS

A Cthulhu Mythos adventure for four to five 2nd-level characters

OVERVIEW

With the pass through the mountains located, our heroes proceed into the Wilderness of Yilan. Despite the swirling rumors of dragons and primeval monsters, the environment itself proves to be their most formidable foe. The adventurers face many challenges in transporting their wagon through rough terrain, necessitating improvisation and hard work. Soon the expedition settles into a routine of scouting, foraging, and trekking, with each adventuring party sharing responsibilities. As they move deeper into the wilderness, they begin to see firsthand the changes that are taking place there and start to uncover clues about the fate of previous expeditions.

THE PINEY HILLS


This adventure mostly takes place in the Piney Hills region of Yilan. The geography of the region is dominated by ridges and rolling hills, with many streams and small rivers flowing down toward the flatlands ahead. Rain is common, and water is easy to find. Stands of scrub pine dot the landscape.

When the expedition must cross a wide river, they are put in a perilous position. An attack by a primeval river monster triggers a near-disaster. While the party recovers, the characters are sent out on a hunt. They discover a place of Yiggish power and find evidence of human sacrifice, but they also come upon the trail of a large dinosaur. The hunt is on! Our heroes feast on dinosaur flesh that night, but the fresh kill attracts unwanted attention.

COMING DOWN THE MOUNTAIN

The characters have successfully found a pass through the mountains into Yilan and brought that information back to the others. The Friendlies had no luck with their path, which terminated in a waterfall, and the Rockbreakers' path was too steep and rocky, so the expedition proceeded along the path picked out by the characters. We return to our story the next day, as the wagon rolls down the pass and into Yilan.

The whole of Yilan seems stretched out before you, a carpet of hills and forests intercut by broad rivers and dotted with rocky mesas. The mountain



range grows taller and broader as it extends to the east and west, gently curving to enclose the area before disappearing into the misty horizon. "It will be a journey of more than a week before we even hit the karstlands," Gehir says, tapping a finger on a crude map. "We've a long way to go yet. Let's get moving!"

GEHIR'S MAP

Gehir has a crude map of Yilan showing his planned route to the Golden Tower. He says that he made it based off the accounts of merchants and adventurers who had visited Yilan before. The route passes down from the mountains, through hills, across a river, through a rough patch labeled "Karstlands," past a rock labeled "Bald Hill," all the way to an *X* marked "Golden Tower." He actually has a much more detailed knowledge of the region; the map is for show. He lets the characters examine it if they wish (facing page).

WASHOUT

It soon becomes apparent that a direct route down from the saddle of this pass will grow too steep and rocky for the wagon. The footpath seems to break to the right, along the top of a cliff, while the land to the left rises into a jagged rocky promontory that would be even more unsuitable for the wagon. The team follows the path along the cliff until they arrive at a washout.

The massive escarpment of the mountain rises to the right of the path. To the left, it drops off again. This gently sloping pathway between two cliffs is wide enough that the wagon is in no danger of toppling over the side. You soon come to an area that has been washed out by a landslide, with no way the wagon could make it across. Gehir calls a halt. "We'll make camp here," he says. "Looks like we'll be building a bridge tomorrow!"

The pathway is 20 feet wide at this point. The washout has carved a gap in the path 15 feet across, with a 20-foot drop to the landslide rubble below. The sides of the washout are rough and rocky, but easy to climb. This appears to be how the goblin refugees made it across the gap. A goblin corpse lies under a large rock in the washout with only its legs sticking out—a victim, apparently, of grabbing onto a loose boulder while climbing. If the characters hoist the rock off the corpse, they find a dagger and a leather pouch containing 13 cp and a small opal worth 10 gp.

PLANNING THE BRIDGE

Unless the players can come up with an alternative plan, they will have to gather wood for the bridge the next morning. The bridge should be 15 feet long and 10 feet wide. Gehir sends the PCs, the Friendlies,

and Gunnar's Team out to find suitable trees to fell. Each group is given full waterskins, an axe, a hatchet for trimming branches, and a 50-foot coil of rope. Each group is responsible for bringing back two suitable logs.

TIMBER

An hour's walk past the washout, the cliffside path gives way to a broad ridge descending into the hills. Gunnar suggests that the teams split up to cover more ground. The characters should make a DC 8 group Wisdom (Survival) check, finding a suitably tall and thick tree on a success, wandering fruitlessly for an hour on a failure. Harvesting a tree requires no ability check, only 15 minutes of labor. Once they have located and felled two trees, they can take them back to the washout.

While gathering timber, the PCs may have either or both of the following encounters, at the GM's discretion.

- ◇ Two **giant centipedes** burrow out of a nearby rotten log, immediately attacking the PCs.
- ◇ The head and hindquarters of a **giant badger** are found in a clearing. It has been bitten clean through.
 - » A DC 10 Wisdom (Survival) check locates tracks nearby—a large, three-toed footprint similar to ones they saw in stone at the Hall of Curiosities.
 - » A DC 10 Intelligence (Nature) check tells the characters that there shouldn't be a predator that large here.

BRIDGE-BUILDING

Back at camp, the Rockbreakers are at work splitting a large log and cutting it down to planks. Gunnar's Team sits by the wagon, drinking and eating. They raise their mugs and invite the characters to join them. The Friendlies soon return with their logs. The beams are extended, the planks laid out, and the bridge built. Gehir joins the party in testing it out. The work takes all day, and Gehir decides to wait until tomorrow to cross. Everyone gets double portions of food at dinner in recognition of their hard work.

OVERLAND TRAVEL: GROUP DUTIES

As the expedition truly gets underway, the adventurers begin to fall into a routine. Their goal for this leg of the journey is to reach the Yilani river, 100 miles away. Without roads, it will likely take more than a week of travel to reach the river. Gehir rotates the adventuring groups through a set of duties: scouting, escorting, foraging, and hunting. He uses Turu to keep tabs on the groups, sending the pterodactyl out to find them and report back on their location and

Stone Plateau

X
Golden
Tower

Bald Hill

Altcliffs

Karstlands





activities. Turu also helps to guide the groups back to the wagon when it is time to make camp. The PCs' party has scouting duty on the first day, escort duty on the second, foraging duty on the third, hunting duty on the fourth, and so on. They are followed in the rotation by the Friendlies, Gunnar's Team, and the Rockbreakers.

SCOUTING

Each morning, the party on scouting duty heads out early, ranging about 5 miles ahead of the wagon to check for danger and plot out a safe course. They make as much advance progress as possible, climb hills and trees to observe the lay of the land, and try to pick the safest and most navigable route for the wagon. They may occasionally check back with the wagon, but most of the communication with Gehir is done through Turu to minimize the amount of backtracking the scouts have to do.

When the characters are on scouting duty, they must make a DC 10 group Wisdom (Survival) check to scout the land and choose a route. On a success, they find a route that lets the wagon travel 15 (10 + 2d4) miles that day. On a failure, they are unable to find a good route and the wagon moves only 10 (5 + 2d4) miles that day. The GM should keep track of how much progress is made each day toward the 100-mile goal.

In addition, each character can choose to perform one of the following activities during the day while scouting:

- ◇ **Clearing an obstacle:** This represents putting in effort to make the wagon's journey easier by heaving rocks and debris out of the way, cutting through fallen trees, leveling a slope, or some other menial task. The character who chooses this activity must make a DC 15 Strength check, with success increasing the distance traveled that day by 2 miles.
- ◇ **Watching for danger:** This represents keeping a lookout for signs of dangerous monsters frequenting the area and taking the effort to keep the scouting party itself from attracting unwanted attention. The characters who choose this activity must make a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check or a DC 15 Dexterity (Stealth) check, with each success reducing their percentage chance of provoking a random encounter that day by 10.
- ◇ **Helping another:** A character can choose to help another in one of the above tasks, granting that character advantage on the check.

Once the characters have made their group Survival check and performed their scouting actions, the GM should check for random encounters (see appendix D). There is a base 50 percent chance that the scouting party provokes a random encounter, although this can be modified by the "watching for danger" activity. If there was a special encounter

that day (see below), the GM may wish to forgo any random encounter.

GM OPTION: FASTER TRAVEL

For some gaming groups, the GM may wish to gloss over the bulk of the journey. In this case, it is recommended that the GM run the party through their group duties and special encounters in the following order: Scouting, Forging the River, Escort, Abandoned Campsite, Foraging, Goblin Village, Hunting. The GM should make it clear that the journey takes place over the course of a week or so.

ESCORT

The party that scouted has escort duty the next day, so that they can guide the wagon along the route that they chose. The escort party protects the wagon from dangers and helps it overcome obstacles. They also have the opportunity to interact with Gehir, although usually he is studying one of his arcane tomes and does not wish to be disturbed.

While the characters are on escort duty, the GM should check for a random encounter at morning, midday, and evening. There is a 20 percent chance of a random encounter occurring each time. Once per day, the GM should also roll on the random obstacles table below or select one to their liking.

D6 Random Obstacle

1	Stuck in Mud. Last night's rain created an unforeseen patch of deep mud that the wagon has blundered right into. To pull the wagon from the mire, the party must make a DC 10 group Strength check. On a failure, the day's progress is reduced by 1d4 miles. On a success, the day's progress is reduced by 1 mile.
2	Tree Fall. A large tree has fallen across the only navigable path, halting progress. The group can shift the tree out of the path with a successful DC 15 group Strength check. Otherwise, it reduces the day's progress by 2 miles.
3	Horses Spooked. An alien smell or sound spooks the horses and they refuse to pull the wagon any further. One character can attempt a DC 15 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check, calming the horses on a success. On a failure, the horses remain spooked for half an hour, reducing the day's progress by 1 mile.
4	Off Track. The wagon has strayed off the planned route. The party must succeed on a DC 10 group Wisdom (Survival) check to guide the wagon back on course. On a failure, they lose 1d4 miles of progress that day as they backtrack.
5-6	no obstacle.





d20 Hunting Encounter

- 1 Roll on the random encounter table (appendix D)
- 2–5 **Lizards.** The party encounters a colony of foot-long, tree-climbing lizards. They must succeed on a DC 11 group Dexterity (Stealth) check to approach the tree without startling them. If successful, each character who succeeds on a DC 14 Dexterity check is able to snatch 1d3 lizards.
- 6–9 **Birds.** The party tracks down a flock of game fowl feeding on the forest floor. They must succeed on a DC 11 group Dexterity (Stealth) check to approach them, startling them away on a failure. Each character who rolls a hit against AC 12 with a ranged weapon attack bags a fowl.
- 10–13 **Rabbits.** The party uncovers a brace of rabbits grazing in a meadow. They must succeed on a DC 12 group Dexterity (Stealth) check to approach them, startling them away on a failure. Then each character who rolls a hit against AC 13 with a ranged weapon attack bags 1d2 rabbits.
- 14–17 **Deer.** The party tracks down a herd of 1d4 + 1 deer grazing in a clearing 1d100 + 50 feet away. The party can attempt a DC 12 group Dexterity (Stealth) check to approach up to their movement speed closer, or they can attack, initiating a combat encounter in which the deer are surprised. They can risk approaching multiple times before attacking, but the deer immediately flee on a failed check. In combat, the deer take the Dash action and move at full speed away from the party.
- 18–20 **Boar.** The party tracks down 1d4 wild boars rooting through the forest floor 1d20 + 50 feet away. The party can attempt a DC 9 group Dexterity (Stealth) check to approach up to their movement speed closer, or they can attack, initiating a combat encounter in which the boars are surprised. They can risk approaching multiple times before attacking, but the boars immediately flee on a failed check. In combat, the boars take the Dash action and move at full speed away from the party if they are uninjured, but they charge anyone who injures them and fight to the death.

FORAGING

The wagon carries some rations and supplies, but not enough for the journey ahead. Water is easy enough to come by in the Piney Hills of Yilan, but the group will have to forage and hunt for extra food. The forage party ranges out from the wagon, searching nearby hills and valleys for fruit, nuts, eggs, edible roots, and other foods to supplement their stores.

Each member of the foraging party rolls a d20, adding either their Wisdom (Survival) or Intelligence (Nature) modifier, gathering the following supplies depending on their result:

Check result	Forage
1–7	Nothing
8	Poisonous mushrooms*
9	Half-eaten animal carcass*
10	Edible grubs
11	Wild grains
12	Edible mushrooms
13	Pine nuts
14	Greens (dandelion, purslane, etc.)
15	Edible roots and tubers
16	Wild onions
17	Flavorful herbs
18	Nuts
19	Berries
20	Fresh fruit
21	Honeycomb
22	A nest of bird eggs
23+	A nest of large reptile eggs

* These can be made safe to eat with the *purify food and drink* spell, although their taste leaves something to be desired.

Alternatively, a foraging character with fishing tackle can spend the day fishing in nearby streams or ponds. Fishing characters must make a DC 10 Wis-

dom (Survival) check, catching 1d4 × 5 pounds of fish on a success, and catching nothing on a failure.

There is a 5 percent chance that the foraging party will have a random encounter.

HUNTING

The hunting party is responsible for bringing fresh game back to the cook pot. The hunters work as a team to track down and kill their quarry. Sometimes they return with a brace of rodents or birds, sometimes with a deer or boar.

A hunt begins with all hunters making a DC 10 group Wisdom (Survival) check to track down potential game. Then roll on the table of hunting encounters at the top of the page.

OVERLAND TRAVEL: SPECIAL ENCOUNTERS

As the expedition progresses, it will run into sites of interest and special encounters along the way. Each special encounter below is listed along with its distance along the expedition's route. Once the scouting party has rolled to determine the day's progress, the GM should check to see whether any of these special encounters is within that range. If the PCs are the scouting party that day, they will encounter it then. Otherwise, they will have the opportunity to encounter it during the course of their duties that day, perhaps stumbling across it while foraging, for example.

MILE 15: FORDING THE RIVER

Fifteen miles into their first scouting mission, the players come across a shallow river that cannot be circumvented. Even if the characters' scouting roll

KEEPING TRACK OF FOOD

The food stores kept in the wagon and the amount of food procured by successful foraging and hunting parties are kept intentionally abstract. The characters are not in a desperate survival situation, and at this point in the expedition they should not feel as though they are one bad hunt away from starvation. The details of what they gather and hunt are narrative flavor. The purpose of the foraging and hunting parties are to keep the characters invested in the day-to-day routine of the expedition—a routine that will soon be interrupted.

doesn't result in 15 miles of progress for the wagon, the scouts will doubtlessly still see the river ahead of them in the course of their explorations.

A river crosses the land in front of you, tumbling down from the nearby mountains. Its waters run cool and clear, bubbling over rocks and sloshing against the stony banks. With no way around, the wagon will have to cross it tomorrow.

The river itself is 100 feet wide and no more than 3 feet deep. Medium-size characters can wade or swim across it easily, but Small characters must swim or be carried. Bringing the wagon across the river will require a lot of preparatory work, so the wagon will not travel more than 15 miles in the first day.

The following morning, the Friendlies set out early to begin scouting, leaving the characters, the Rock-breakers, and Gunnar's Team to help the wagon ford the river. Gehir hands the characters bars of wax to rub along every joint and seam in the lower half of the wagon, making it watertight. Then it comes time to cross the river.

With the wagon sealed up with wax, Gehir orders the expedition to move out. He guides the horses into the water while you wade in front of the wagon, testing the depth and finding the least rocky path across. Cold water splashes against your waist as you blaze the trail, the horses and wagon coming along slowly behind you. The horses whinny and nicker as they push through the water. The stout wagon creaks and groans, its wheels churning in the silt and rock of the riverbed. The crossing is tense, but all goes well. As the horses pull the wagon up onto the bank, Gehir calls out to you. "Good job. But remember, we may have to cross deeper and more treacherous rivers than this on our journey, and simply wading across won't be an option. We'll have to get creative."

After fording the river, Gunnar's Team and the Rock-breakers head out to do their respective duties while the characters dry and care for the horses before continuing to guide the wagon on the path they scouted yesterday.

THE NPCs' ACTIVITIES

The GM should not roll for the successes and failures of the NPCs on their duties, keeping the focus on the actions of the PCs. When an NPC party goes scouting, they plot out a path that will advance the expedition 15 miles the next day. When an NPC party has escort duty, they have an uneventful journey. When an NPC party goes foraging, they come back with a basket full of nuts and berries and maybe a couple of fish. When an NPC party goes hunting, they come back with rabbits or fowl, rarely a deer. They may have tales of close brushes with the local wildlife, and scouts will report back on unusual sites ahead (see "Overland Travel: Special Encounters"), but mostly they are just going about their daily routines.

MILE 40: ABANDONED CAMPSITE

Half of a hill has been cleaved away as if by a swipe of some titan's axe, revealing black fossil bones in the cliffside. The flat clearing below the cliff is a perfect sheltered area for a campsite, and indeed, a circle of fire-blackened stones and some abandoned camping gear show that you are not the first ones to pass this way.

A year ago, this clearing was used as a campsite by Lord Cerastes' expedition. The long-abandoned campfire ring is encircled by logs for seating. A rusty hatchet head is embedded in the side of one, next to the crude inscription "Dagmar was here." A few paces away sits a heavy slab of stone embedded with small bones, evidently chiseled from the nearby cliff and left here by the visitors. A few tent pegs, a short length of rope half-buried in dirt, scraps of canvas, scorched rabbit bones, and half a woolen sock all testify to the travelers who passed through here.

Characters making an Intelligence (Investigation) check learn the following:

- ◇ DC 12: There are no signs that this campsite was used for more than one or two nights. Whoever camped here was just passing through.
- ◇ DC 14: Judging by the weathering and debris, this camp was made around a year ago.
- ◇ DC 16: There is a glint of something under the slab of fossil stone.

The Note. Beneath the fossiliferous stone slab is a small glass vial—like a potion bottle—half-buried in the dirt. It is corked, and inside is a roll of paper with writing on both sides. It appears to have been ripped from a journal. On the first side are a few lines from a journal entry:

"... but it didn't look like a bird. Cerastes said not to bother, but Dagmar was very drunk and threw his best axe at it. He searched for it all this morning but couldn't find it. Anyways, Uriel took



two stone claws from the cliff and gave me one of them! Tomorrow we'll ...”

On the other side of the paper is only one sentence, scrawled in dark, urgent letters:

“The snakes are watching.”

If the characters show this note to the others, they react with concern, but Gehir dismisses it at the rantings of a weak mind gone mad in the wilderness.

Treasure. Dagmar’s “best axe” is embedded 30 feet up in a nearby pine tree. It is a *+1 handaxe*, and its head is inscribed with dwarven runes that protect it from natural rusting. Characters who succeed on a DC 22 Wisdom (Perception) check spot it, although those searching through the eyes of a flying familiar or who specifically state they are looking up gain advantage on this check.

Characters can excavate a small fossil from the cliff with an hour of work. The fossil weighs 1d10 pounds and is worth 1d10 × 10 gp to a collector.

MILE 80: GOBLIN VILLAGE

This collection of small, run-down huts is surrounded by a crude spiked palisade. Skulls of various creatures—some gone yellow with age, but some quite new—hang from the walls. The huts themselves are falling apart and look to have been hastily and recently abandoned. The reason for the abandonment is clear: Part of the palisade has been knocked inward by some great force, and a dozen rotting, half-eaten goblin corpses are scattered around the village.

This is the village abandoned by the goblin refugees that the characters encountered in the pass. There are five main huts as well as dozens of smaller lean-tos and hide tents. Two dugout canoes, each about 15 feet long, are leaning against the side of one of the huts. In the center of the village stands a weathered monolith of red volcanic stone draped with strings of bones and covered with crudely painted goblin glyphs. A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check picks out many non-goblin tracks in the earth, including large, three-toed footprints, smaller footprints of a similar shape, wolf tracks, and boar tracks. Characters examining the skulls on the walls see that most of the older skulls are boar, deer, wolf, and even human, but some of the newest skulls are toothy, reptilian things, more akin to some of the fossils in the Hall of Curiosities.

Being Watched. Characters with passive Wisdom (Perception) 15 or higher catch a glimpse of the following:

On a hill in the distance, you see a humanoid creature mounted on some sort of horse-size reptile silhouetted against the bright sky. It turns its oddly sinuous head as if looking directly at you, then kicks its steed into action and disappears behind the rise.

The watcher is a **serpentfolk** (SPCM 365) mounted on a large, long-legged **riding croc** (page 78). He will be long gone by the time any PC or NPC gets to his location. If the characters bring his presence to Gehir’s attention, Gehir will send Turu to scout for it, to no avail. The serpentfolk scout is actually an ally of Gehir, keeping an eye on the expedition. Characters

who saw the watcher may make a DC 14 Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) or DC 16 Intelligence check. On a success, they can tentatively identify the scout as a serpentfolk. Characters who saw the note from the abandoned campsite and who are aware of the serpentfolk scout must succeed on a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw or gain 1 level of dread.

Monsters. A **giant vulture** has gathered several goblin corpses into a pile and is feasting on their rotting flesh. If any creature comes within 40 feet of it, it attacks them. The vulture itself is scarred across its wings and missing some feathers, as if it has been in a fight.

Treasure. A goblin corpse that was crushed in one of the large footprints has a pouch containing 14 gp and 7 sp. A severed goblin arm dangling over the edge of a hut roof wears a copper bracelet worth 5 gp. A headless goblin corpse is still clutching a warhammer. A small chest in one of the dugouts contains fishing tackle. In one of the huts, 2 shortbows and a quiver of 20 arrows hang on the wall; 4 javelins lean against the wall in another hut. In the largest hut, 2 crossed spears, a round wooden shield, and a blowgun hang on the wall. An unlocked chest beneath them is mostly empty except for a pouch containing 25 blowgun darts and 3 vials of basic poison. Characters examining the chest with a successful DC 16 Intelligence (Investigation) check notice a secret compartment beneath a false bottom. The secret compartment contains 196 gp, 32 sp, and a *potion of healing*.

MILE 100: FLOATING THE WAGON

One hundred miles along the journey, the landscape flattens out into a broad plain, and the expedition reaches the greatest obstacle yet:

A mighty river sweeps across the landscape before you, easily half a mile wide and much too deep to ford. Branches and whole trees float past in the current as the sunlight lends a golden sheen to the rippling, muddy waters.

Fording will be impossible, so the wagon will have to be floated across. Even if the wagon could be made watertight and buoyant, it would be difficult to float across by itself and quite likely to tip over. The only way forward is to construct a raft to hold the wagon and most of the adventurers. Two adventurers will have to swim the horses across, as the horses are too heavy and unpredictable to carry aboard the raft. The teams will also have to unload the heaviest objects from the wagon and bring them across separately.

BUILDING THE RAFT

Building the raft will require at least two days of work felling trees, cutting them to size, lashing them together, and securing the wagon to them with ropes and vines. The teams will have to empty the wagon

of heavy barrels and chests, remove the wheels and axles, and reseal any joints with wax.

On the first day, the characters must make a DC 14 group check, with each PC choosing either Strength or Wisdom (Survival). On a success, they fell enough trees and gather enough sturdy, ropelike vines in one day to begin construction the next. On a failure, they will need another day to gather enough resources. Once construction begins, the PCs must make a DC 14 group check, with each PC choosing either Strength or Intelligence; they may add their proficiency with water vehicles if applicable. On a success, the group constructs the raft that day. On a failure, they need an additional day of work to complete the raft. They set the raft afloat the morning after construction is completed. The finished raft is a 20-foot square of lashed-together logs, with six rough-hewn, 15-foot poles for punting and six crude oars.

While they work, the GM should check for random encounters (appendix D) at morning, midday, and evening. There is a 1 in 20 (5 percent) chance of a random encounter each time.

The Nest. While they gather material for the raft, characters with passive Wisdom (Perception) 14 or higher discover an earthen nest filled with the remains of two dozen hatched eggs. The eggs are soft, leathery, and round, each one about 8 inches in diameter. Characters succeeding on a DC 12 Intelligence (Nature) check can tell that these are crocodile, turtle, or snake eggs, though much larger than normal. Characters who roll 16 or higher can determine that these are crocodile eggs, though much larger than they have ever seen.

Goblin Dugouts. If no one thought to grab the dugout canoes from the abandoned goblin village 20 miles back, Gehir will ask one of the adventuring parties to backtrack and retrieve them. The PCs may choose either to fetch the boats or to stay and help build the raft. It takes a day to return to the goblin village and a day to trek back with the boats, by which time the NPCs should be finishing up construction on the raft. The GM should check for random encounters at morning, midday, and evening, with a guaranteed random encounter at the goblin village. Each dugout is 15 feet long, weighs 100 pounds, and has four short oars.

CROSSING THE YILANI RIVER

Gehir and his apprentices will cross in one dugout along with Gehir's personal effects and the mysterious iron-bound chests the apprentices keep in the front of the wagon, while Shorty and Whiskers cross in the other dugout with the barrels of liquid, some of the heavier tools, and the wagon's axles. Two adventurers will need to cross with the horses (Cathbad will take one horse; a PC may volunteer to take the other, otherwise Gunnar will do it) while the rest take up positions on the raft with oars and punt poles. Guiding the raft across the river doesn't require ability checks and should be described narratively.



With some effort you slide the wagon-raft into the river and begin the laborious process of guiding it across to the other bank. The two dugouts zip across the water at a comparative clip, moving well ahead of the raft. The horses are more reluctant to get going: they nicker nervously, only their heads visible above the water as they swim awkwardly along. Straining at the long punt poles and churning water with the oars, you keep the raft moving forward, fighting the river's current the whole way. Absalom laughs as he bends his back to his oar, "Ahh, the life of a river rat! I thought I'd given it up long ago. Stroke, stroke, fellows! Let's get this bunch of logs across before it falls apart!"

GUIDING THE HORSES

Horses know how to swim instinctively, and they can even bear a rider on their backs while keeping their heads above water. But crossing rivers can be dangerous for horses: they can't hold their breaths like humans can, so if they slip under the waves, they will likely drown. Characters guiding the horses must succeed on three DC 12 Wisdom (Animal Handling) checks to bring them safely across the river (NPCs automatically succeed on these checks). If they fail two checks in a row, the horse panics, and the third check is made with disadvantage. If they fail three checks in a row, the horse slips under the waves and drowns.

RIVER DEBRIS

When the raft has reached midstream, a large uprooted tree comes into view upriver. The tree bears down on the raft like a battering ram, pulled along by the current. If the characters succeed on a DC 14 group Strength (water vehicles) check, they are able to row and punt the raft out of the way of the log. Otherwise, two characters wielding punting poles can attempt to nudge the tree onto a different trajectory: both must succeed on DC 15 Strength checks in order to accomplish this. Up to two additional characters with punt poles can lend aid to this operation, each granting one other character advantage on their strength check.

If either plan fails, the log slams into the raft. Everyone on the raft must succeed on a DC 10 Strength or Dexterity saving throw or fall prone, and those failing the save by 5 or more tumble into the river.

DEINOSUCHUS ATTACK

As the makeshift raft nears the opposite bank and the exhausted horses pull themselves up onto shore, you hear the splash of something slipping into the water and see a huge mass moving toward you. A broad, toothy snout pokes out of the water, followed by a long, scaly back and a sinuous, ridged tail. It is a massive crocodile, at least 25 feet long, and it is bearing down on the

raft. "Get to shore!" cries Absalom. "Get the raft to shore!"

The deinosuchus (**giant crocodile**) is 20 feet from the raft, and the raft is 100 feet from shore. The raft moves 50 feet toward shore every round as long as all six poles and all six oars are manned. Each character that drops their oar or pole to fight the crocodile reduces the raft's speed by 5 feet. For simplicity's sake, the raft moves forward on initiative count 15, and the deinosuchus acts on initiative count 10, losing ties. On each of its turns, it heads directly toward the raft, slips under the water, and hits the raft from below with its tail before surfacing on the other side. Everyone on the raft must succeed on a DC 10 Strength or Dexterity saving throw or fall prone, and those failing the save by 5 or more tumble into the river. The second time the deinosuchus strikes the raft (or the first time, if the raft was previously struck by the tree), the lashing gives way, and the raft falls apart. The deinosuchus attacks only the raft, not the characters.

The giant crocodile slams into the raft from beneath, and the straining ropes snap under the blow. The logs begin to slip apart, and the wagon topples over. Chaos reigns as everyone tumbles into the frothing waters.

Each character on the raft must succeed on a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw or take 1d6 bludgeoning damage from the breakup of the raft. Depending on where in the water the raft breaks apart, characters may have to swim for shore. On initiative count 1 on the round of combat in which the raft breaks apart, Gehir and Cathbad reach the action.

Gehir and Cathbad run down the riverbank, bursting through a stand of reeds. Gehir fires off a string of five glowing *magic missiles*, and Cathbad follows it up with a blast of flame. The massive crocodilian hisses and dives into the water with a splash, chastened for now.

Once everyone is back on land, Gehir leads them in the urgent task of recovering the wagon, which has caught against a tree sticking out into the river about 100 feet downstream.

DINOSAUR HUNT

All the expedition members work hard to repair the wagon and get it back on its wheels so that they can move further inland, away from prowling crocodiles. Most of the tools and supplies that were still in it when the raft fell apart are recovered, but much of the food stores are ruined or scattered into the river. Gehir sends Cathbad and Enivwenaye out to forage for berries, but Shorty comes to the PCs with a special proposal.

“Hey, you guys are pretty capable hunters, right? Everyone’s been down in the dumps since we fell in the river, and I think I know what will pick our spirits up: a feast! But a feast ain’t a feast without a great big hunk of roasting meat! That’s where you come in. Why don’t you range out and kill us something big and tasty?”

THE TOTEM

The characters venture out in search of game. After about 15 minutes, they come upon a strange area:

The air around you grows notably warmer and more humid. Thick green vines wrap around the scrub pines, choking them like verdant snakes. You also notice stumpy, tree-like plants with trunks like pine cones and limbs like ferns, and tall trees with scaly bark in a diamond pattern, unlike anything else you’ve seen in Yilan so far.

A successful DC 12 Intelligence (Nature) check tells the characters that these plants seem like they should be native to a warmer climate, though the suddenly hotter air may explain this change in flora. As they progress into the warm region, they come across a clearing.

At the center of the clearing, 20 feet high, is a tremendous snake carved from red volcanic stone. A rotting humanoid skeleton is bound to the base of the totem, the chainmail it was wearing now little more than a pile of rust. You also notice a powerful stench, too fresh to be coming from the apparent sacrifice; it doesn’t take you long to spot the large mound of fresh dung. Whatever left that—and made the tracks leading away into the forest—would certainly have enough meat on its bones to feed your whole expedition for days.

Upon viewing this grisly cult sacrifice, the characters must make a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw, gaining 1 level of dread on a failure.

The human skeleton, bound to the totem with moldering hempen rope, has been nearly denuded of flesh. A successful DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Medicine) check reveals that the corpse is around a year old. A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) check unearths a small leather pouch nearly buried under dirt and rust. The pouch contains 35 gp, 10 sp, and a fossilized dinosaur claw worth 25 gp. This skeleton belonged to one of the members of the Cerastes expedition mentioned in the hidden note at the abandoned campsite.

The tracks next to the dung are round with stubby toes, suggesting a large quadruped. Characters examining the dung can make a DC 12 Intelligence

(nature) check, identifying it as herbivore scat on a success. Like the dung, the tracks are fresh and hard to miss; characters need only succeed on a DC 8 Wisdom (Survival) check to follow the tracks to their source.



SNAKE TOTEMS

These snake totems appear in multiple locations in Yilan. They are prehistoric serpentfolk totems to Yig, the Great Old One of poison and serpents. Part of Gehir’s plan involves performing sacrificial rituals at these totems to awaken the power of Yig and return them and the surrounding regions to their primeval state. The snake totems form a network of Yiggish power across the land of Yilan, aiding in the encroachment of prehistoric corruption.

A character can identify the totem’s association with serpentfolk and Yig with a successful DC 20 Intelligence (Religion) or DC 16 Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) check. Each snake totem is an object with AC 17, 40 hp, resistance to cold damage, and immunity to fire, poison, and psychic damage. Magic such as the spell *detect evil and good* identifies it as evil. A creature that reduces it to 0 hp must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or gain vulnerability to poison damage until the effect is removed with the *remove curse* spell or similar magic.

THE LONE CHASOSAUR

Following the tracks for a short distance, the characters come to a grassy, semicircular clearing about 100 feet in radius, the far side terminating in a short 30-foot cliff.

As you reach the edge of the wood, a broad semicircle of open grass and shrubs lies before you. The ground at the far edge of the clearing seems to drop off like a small cliff. In the center of the clearing, browsing on one of the leafy shrubs, stands a large, four-legged beast covered with knobby, reptilian skin, mottled brown and gray. It is about 14 feet long from the tip of its tail to its beaky mouth, and its oversize head boasts a trio of short horns. A large, rectangular frill marked with blue spots protrudes from the back of its skull, protecting its neck. It looks tough but slow, and has quite a bit of meat on its bones.

The dinosaur in the clearing is a **chasmosaurus** (page 73). If frightened (e.g., by loud noises or fire), it flees in the nearest safe direction. If wounded, it is



just as likely to run away as it is to charge the attacker. Its bad eyesight leaves it vulnerable to clever hunters, who can successfully scare it into running over the edge of the cliff with a bit of planning. Characters can climb up or down the cliff with successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) checks, or they can go around—the cliff is only 300 feet across and dips down to a gentle slope at either end.

Characters succeeding on a DC 14 Intelligence (Nature) check note that this creature's odd head is similar to a skull they saw in the Hall of Curiosities. The chasmosaurus weighs 3,300 pounds, so dragging its corpse back to camp may be difficult. The clearing is only a half-hour walk from camp, so the characters can summon help to drag it or simply move the camp to the beast.

DINOSAUR FEAST

Once the freshly killed dinosaur is at camp (or the camp has moved to the dinosaur), the heroes begin butchering and roasting the beast. The cooks have prepared a tangy berry sauce that complements the gamey, almost chickenlike meat wonderfully, as well as a salad of foraged greens, mushrooms, and pine nuts dressed with a splash of olive oil and vinegar from Shorty's personal effects.

The atmosphere in the camp picks up as damp adventurers forget their misfortunes and give in to the celebration. As the sun sets, the faces around the campfire are all smiling. Captain Khor-sava and Maxx take turns singing songs. Maxx is in the middle of an upbeat ditty about an elf and a halfling when she stops mid-verse, the blood draining from her face. You follow her gaze to the edge of the firelight, where a huge monster is crouched over the partially butchered beast you slew. It stands on two legs with large, three-toed feet. A pair of undersize arms dangle from a torso that dwarfs your wagon. It squints at you with its tiny green eyes and opens its tremendous mouth of dagger-like teeth, bellowing out a deafening roar. Gehir leaps in front of you, fingers and mouth weaving a spell. He stuns the terror with a dazzling array of shifting colors and shouts, "Get on the wagon! It's time to go!"

The dinosaur is a **tyrannosaurus rex**. The spell Gehir uses to temporarily stun it is *hypnotic pattern*. Fortunately, the horses are still hitched to the wagon to keep them from wandering off. Gehir gets in the driver's seat and whips the horses up to speed, barely pausing to let the adventurers clamber into the back of the wagon, clutch onto the sides, leap on top, or even sit next to him. The wagon thunders off into the night, heedless of danger, Gehir's bright, spell-lit staff leading the way. The monster shakes free from its reverie not long after the wagon gets moving and chases it for a bit before roaring again and stomping back to feast on the chasmosaurus.

LEVELING UP

At the end of *Into the Wilderness*, all characters gain sufficient experience to reach level 3.



CHAPTER 3: THE SUCKING SLIME OF THE KARSTLANDS

A Cthulhu Mythos adventure for four to five 3rd-level characters

ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

Fresh off an encounter with a hungry tyrannosaurus, our heroes run into a wall. The karstlands are a nearly impassable labyrinth of razor-sharp rocks. It is into this chaotic terrain of twisting canyons and towering spires that the adventurers must go, scouting out a safe path for the expedition. In the karstlands, the characters will face tar pits and pterosaurs, zombie dinosaurs and eldritch scavengers, troubled troglodytes and sucking slimes galore. They may also uncover the secret of the karstlands: that this is no natural formation, but the ruins of a prehistoric city built by an alien civilization in the age of the dinosaurs.

Hemmed in by a surging tide of malevolent oozes, our heroes' mettle is put to the test. Can they find safety in an ancient spire of purple stone? Can they hold out long enough for help to arrive?

THE KARSTLANDS

This portion of the adventure takes place in a region of Yilan called the karstlands. Karst is a type of landscape formed from limestone bedrock, which cracks and erodes over eons of exposure to water. In its most extreme examples, karst can become a chaotic terrain of steep-walled canyons and sharp stone spires, as seen in Madagascar's Tsingy de Bemaraha or China's Stone Forest. The karstlands resemble this type of landscape, but they are actually the eroded ruins of a prehistoric city of Elder Things. What were once the strange dwellings of a technologically advanced alien race have eroded into an oddly shaped maze of angular granite. Over hundreds of millions of years, this antediluvian city has been repeatedly buried and re-excavated by geological activity, leaving some Elder Thing buildings oddly preserved while others have crumbled to sand.

As the characters explore the karstlands, they will uncover clues that this is no natural landscape. Characters seeking more information on the karst-



lands can make Intelligence (Nature) checks (dwarf characters have advantage on this roll), gaining the following insights depending on their rolls:

- ◇ DC 12: Karst is a landscape dominated by eroded rock formations that can result in natural labyrinths and towering stone spires.
- ◇ DC 16: Karst is typically formed from limestone, but this terrain is predominantly granite. Many of the rock formations are too regular to be natural.

Characters piecing together that they are walking through the ruins of a fossilized alien city must succeed on a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw or gain 1d3 levels of dread lasting for 1 hour. Characters gaining 1 level of dread must succeed on a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw to proceed further into the karstlands, while characters with 2–3 levels of dread can only stay put or move back through areas they have already seen.

ENTER THE KARSTLANDS

On the run from a hungry tyrannosaurus rex, Gehir and the adventurers travel for hours through the night, coming to a stop well after midnight and falling asleep without setting up camp.

In the early dawn light, you awake to a trio of large, bat-like shadows cast by strange creatures somewhat like Turu, but much larger. They caw like great, croaking crows before disappearing over a ridge of tall, jagged stone. It rises before you like a wall: an abrupt cliff of ragged gray and red stone sometimes reaching 100 feet high, cracked and eroded into towers and canyons. Gehir yawns and cracks his back. “It looks as though we’ve made it to the karstlands,” he says, consulting his crude map. “It stretches for 50 miles to either side. We’ll have to find a way through it.”

After a simple breakfast of trail rations, Gehir decides on a plan: The PCs will scout the nearest craggy passageway into the karstlands, seeking a route through for the wagon. Gunnar’s Team will scout the next passage to the left, and the Friendlies will scout the next passage to the right, while the Rockbreakers stay with the wagon. Turu will check in on the groups periodically. Gehir gives each character a *potion of healing* from his personal store to help keep them alive in the karstlands.

EXPLORING THE KARSTLANDS

The karstlands are a maze of steep stone walls; this is essentially an open-air dungeon. All locations in the dungeon are keyed to the map on page 35.

Inside the Maze. The high walls prevent direct sunlight from hitting the ground except at midday, keeping things shadowy and cool at the floor of the karstland’s many interconnected canyons. Large,

boxy hunks of granite rise between jagged rows of limestone and rough sandstone. Some stone spires have collapsed entirely, creating large spreads of unpassable rubble. In other places, chunks of fallen rock have lodged into narrow crevices between canyon walls, leaving them unsettlingly suspended far above the ground. Vines and climbing plants cling to the upper reaches of the walls, while mats of fungus and unusually large toadstools dominate on the ground.

Tar Pits. The interior of the karstland is dotted with pits of thick, black tar and hot oil bubbling up from the earth. Tar pits are difficult terrain. Any creature that attempts to walk through a tar pit must succeed on a DC 12 Strength saving throw for every 5 feet of movement, sinking 1 foot deep into the tar on a failed save and becoming restrained. A creature restrained by the tar pit suffers 3 (1d6) fire damage at the start of each of their turns. They can pull themselves out of the tar, or be pulled out by another creature, with a DC 12 Strength check, but each time they fail the check, they sink 1 foot deeper into the tar, and the DC to free them goes up by 1. Tar pits are easy enough to avoid, but some tar pits are covered with thin layers of sand or pools of water, concealing their presence. Characters must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check to notice signs of such concealed tar pits, such as black seepage welling up from beneath the sand or a thin, oily sheen on the water. Prodding the surface of the concealed tar pit with a stick or other object instantly reveals the tar underneath. Any attack or effect that deals 5 or more fire damage to a tar pit or sand-covered tar pit sets it on fire for 2d6 hours, increasing the fire damage it deals to 5 (1d10).

MONSTERS

The two most common monsters in the canyons are **shriekers** and **immature slime molds** (*SPCM 378*).

Shriekers are 5-foot-tall, immobile mushrooms covered with open pores through which they expel air in a high-pitched shriek whenever a creature moves within 30 feet of them, attracting nearby monsters to the sound. Shriekers are marked on the map with a special icon.

Immature slime molds are sickly-colored globs of hungry goo roughly the size of a dog, although they can squeeze through cracks as narrow as 1 inch wide. These immature slime molds are so common throughout the karstlands that it is hard to escape the sucking sound they make, like a boot pulling free of mud, as they climb around the chaotic terrain. They are particularly attracted to loud noises. Immature slime molds are often attracted to the shriek of a shrieker. In addition, the GM should roll a d20 at the end of each round of combat that takes place in the karstlands, adding an immature slime mold to the combat if the d20 result is a 1.

Oozes can glide harmlessly over open and

KARSTLANDS





sand-covered tar pits, and their soft slithering does not trigger the shriekers, adapting them well to this environment.

Random Encounters. The karstlands are packed with monsters, making it difficult to find any respite from their constant attacks. Each time a shrieker shrieks, the GM should roll on the random encounter table for this chapter, found on page 83. The GM should also check for random encounters whenever the characters take a short or long rest, with a base chance of 10 percent on a short rest and 25 percent on a long rest.

STARSTONES

The characters may discover caches of starstones scattered about this ruined Elder Thing city. Starstones are flat, five-pointed stones about 2 inches across used by prehistoric Elder Things as currency. Each starstone is inscribed with a series of raised bumps and divots—the Elder Things' binary writing system. The Elder Things fashioned their starstones out of various durable minerals; while their value as currency may be lost on modern civilizations, some starstones retain intrinsic value as gemstones, while others are valuable only as oddities. As it is unlikely that the characters will be in a position to exchange money with Elder Things, these starstones are gems for all intents and purposes.

Olivine. These green-tinged starstones sparkle in the light. They are carved from peridotite, a mineral heavy in olivine crystals. Each one is marked with a single raised bump in the center. They are worth 1 sp to the right buyer. To the Elder Things, olivine starstones were the most basic unit of currency.

Porphyry. Carved from hard purple stone, porphyry starstones are the most common of the starstones, because they are made from more durable rock than olivine. They are marked with five raised bumps arranged in a pentagon, with five divots between them. Porphyry starstones are worth 1 sp to the right buyer, but to the Elder Things they were worth 5 olivine starstones.

Rock Crystal. Rock crystal starstones are carved from pure transparent quartz. They are marked with two bumps followed by two divots followed by one more bump, repeating in a sequence five times around the inner face of the starstone. A rock crystal starstone is worth 30 gp to any buyer; to the Elder Things, they were worth 5 porphyry starstones.

Corundum. Carved from gleaming sapphires or rubies, these starstones are valuable gems in their own right. Their central facet is marked with a sequence of five bumps, a divot, and another bump. A corundum starstone is worth 1,000 gp as a gem, 5 rock crystal starstones to the Elder Things.

Adamantine. Forged from the hardest metal found on earth or in the stars, these starstones are dark and metallic with a faint green or purple sheen. Their points are sharp even after millions of years, and they

can even be thrown as a weapon (treat as an adamantite dart). A sequence of one bump, two divots, three bumps, three divots, and a bump repeats five times around the center of the starstone. An adamantite starstone is worth 500 gp to any buyer. To the Elder Things, they were worth 5 corundum starstones (or 625 olivine starstones).

I. FUNGAL MAT

As you round a bend in the canyon, you come to a place where part of a limestone wall has sheared off. The resulting rocky scree is covered with a mat of irregular fungus, with some toadstools reaching the height of a man. The collapsed wall has not completely blocked the passage, and there is a 10-foot-wide path of relatively flat ground that the wagon could easily move through.

Monsters. There is one **shrieker** at the edge of the fungal mat. If it is triggered, one **immature slime mold** (SPCM 378) will squeeze out of cracks in the rock each round the shrieker continues to shriek.

2. TAR PITS

The sandy ground before you is dotted with pools of bubbling black tar. To the left, a shallow pool of silty water stretches across one open passageway, and another passageway is visible straight ahead. Through the screen of rising heat, you can see a winged creature about the size of a man, with a large red crest rising from its head. It is perched on the arcing white rib of some unfortunate beast that fell victim to the tar pits. The creature caws, angling its toothy beak toward you hungrily.

2A. TAR PITS

This area features several tar pits as well as a few sand-covered tar pits.

Monsters. A trio of hungry **thalassodromeuses** (page 81) attack the party, one of them stalking forward on its wing-claws and short hindlimbs while the others swoop down from the cliffs above, potentially with surprise. These pterosaurs were chased off from the dead chasmosaurus in area 5 by a pack of wamps and are looking for food. They will not fight to the death, retreating to the high cliffs to await an easier meal if the adventurers prove to be too tough for them.

2B. TAR PIT POND

This shallow pond is silty, but even a casual observer can tell that it is only 1 to 2 feet deep at the deepest. The unassuming pond conceals a deadly secret: a tar pit lurks beneath its still waters. Once this is discovered, it should be clear that it would be impossible to ford the wagon across this pond.

3. SECONDARY PASSAGE

The narrow canyon crossing beyond the tar pit pond connects a high-walled rectangular cul-de-sac and a sandy pit full of jagged rocks.

3A. GIBBERING MOUTHER LAIR

This alcove is roughly rectangular in shape, with piles of fungus-covered rubble collected in the corners.

Monster. A **gibbering moucher** lurks against the wall, slithering out to block any creature's escape when they enter its lair. 1d3 **gibbering mouthlings** (page 75), the moucher's offspring, slide out of crevices in the walls to join the fight.

Forage. Characters succeeding on a DC 8 Intelligence (Nature) check can identify the mushrooms growing in this alcove as edible and rather tasty. A character can collect 1d4 pounds of edible mushrooms here with 10 minutes of work.

3B. SHARP SANDPIT

Ridges of sharp rock rise out of this pit of fine-grained sand. Even more sharp rock edges

are concealed just beneath the sand. Any creature moving at more than half speed must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw for every 5 feet of movement, taking 1 piercing damage on a failure and reducing their move speed by 10 feet (to a minimum of 5 feet) until they regain at least 1 hit point.

4. LURKING OCHRE JELLY

As you enter this small area, hemmed in by walls of crumbling stone, the ever-present squelching sound grows louder, nearly drowning out the slow burbling of the tar pit.





Flame Jet. A steady stream of natural gas hisses up from a small pit in the sand. Characters with passive Wisdom (Perception) 14 or higher notice the faint hiss of the gas, and a subsequent DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) check locates the source of the hissing, and a successful DC 14 Intelligence (Nature) check identifies the leaking substance as flammable gas. If an open flame (as from a spell or a torch) passes within 5 feet of the jet, it immediately triggers a burst of flame. Each creature within 5 feet of the flame jet must succeed on a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw or take 5 (1d10) fire damage, taking no damage on a successful save. The flame jet can be stopped if a rock weighing at least 50 pounds is placed over the hole.

Monster. An **ochre jelly** slithers down from the rough stone wall. Creatures succeeding on a DC 8 Wisdom (Perception) check are not surprised by the creeping yellow slime.

5. THE TAR LAKE

A large section of this area is a massive tar pit that has been flooded with water, creating a tar lake. The water flows from area 8 via a narrow stream running through cracks in the stone. Medium or smaller creatures can crawl through this stream from either end, although they would have to make it through the tar lake on this end.

5A. CARRION

The chaos of the karst gives way to a relatively wide-open space, half of which is taken up by a shallow lake of clear water. A lone tower of crumbling granite rises from the center of the clearing. Thirty feet up one of its walls, a rough cave peers out like an empty eye socket. At the base of the tower, a group of hideous monstrosities has gathered around the corpse of a large, horned reptile like the one you hunted, its decaying mass half-sunk in the lake. The creatures are eyeless lumps of dark flesh with bat ears, gaping maws, and nine clawed limbs each. The three on shore seem fixated on the carrion, while a fourth is in the water nearby, struggling to move as if stuck in the mud.

The water at this end of the tar lake is 2 feet deep. The corpse is of an adult chasmosaurus.

Monsters. There are 3 **wamps** (SPCM 393) on shore and one stuck 1 foot deep in the tar. The characters can sneak past the preoccupied wamps with a successful DC 16 group Dexterity (Stealth) check. If the group check fails, or if no attempt at stealth is made, the wamps attack immediately. The wamp in the lake uses its action each round to attempt to escape the tar. If the fight goes poorly for the wamps, the survivors retreat up the wall of the tower into the cave (area 5b).

Lore. Characters seeking information on wamps can make Intelligence (Arcana or History) or Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) checks, gaining the following insights depending on their rolls. If a character is proficient in Yog-Sothothery, they can make these checks with advantage.

- ◇ **DC 14:** These creatures are wamps, carnivorous abominations whose bites transmit disease. They hunt by sound and smell.
- ◇ **DC 17:** Wamps typically haunt abandoned ruins, thriving off the psychic imprint of sorrow and loss.

Development. If the wamps are defeated and the characters are out of sight, any surviving **thalassodromeuses** (page 81) from area 2a return to feast on the chasmosaurus corpse. If the characters enter the cave, the thalassodromeuses attack them as they exit and try to climb down. Characters attacked while clinging to the side of the cliff must make a Strength (Athletics) check against a DC equal to 5 + the damage dealt. On a failure, they fall.

5B. WAMP LAIR

The round cave entrance is situated 30 feet up the side of the tower. The cliff face beneath the cave is well-worn from the wamps' claws and requires a successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check to climb. The area within the cave is pitch black. It is a roughly square space dotted with piles of rubble and bones, with a 40-foot-high ceiling.

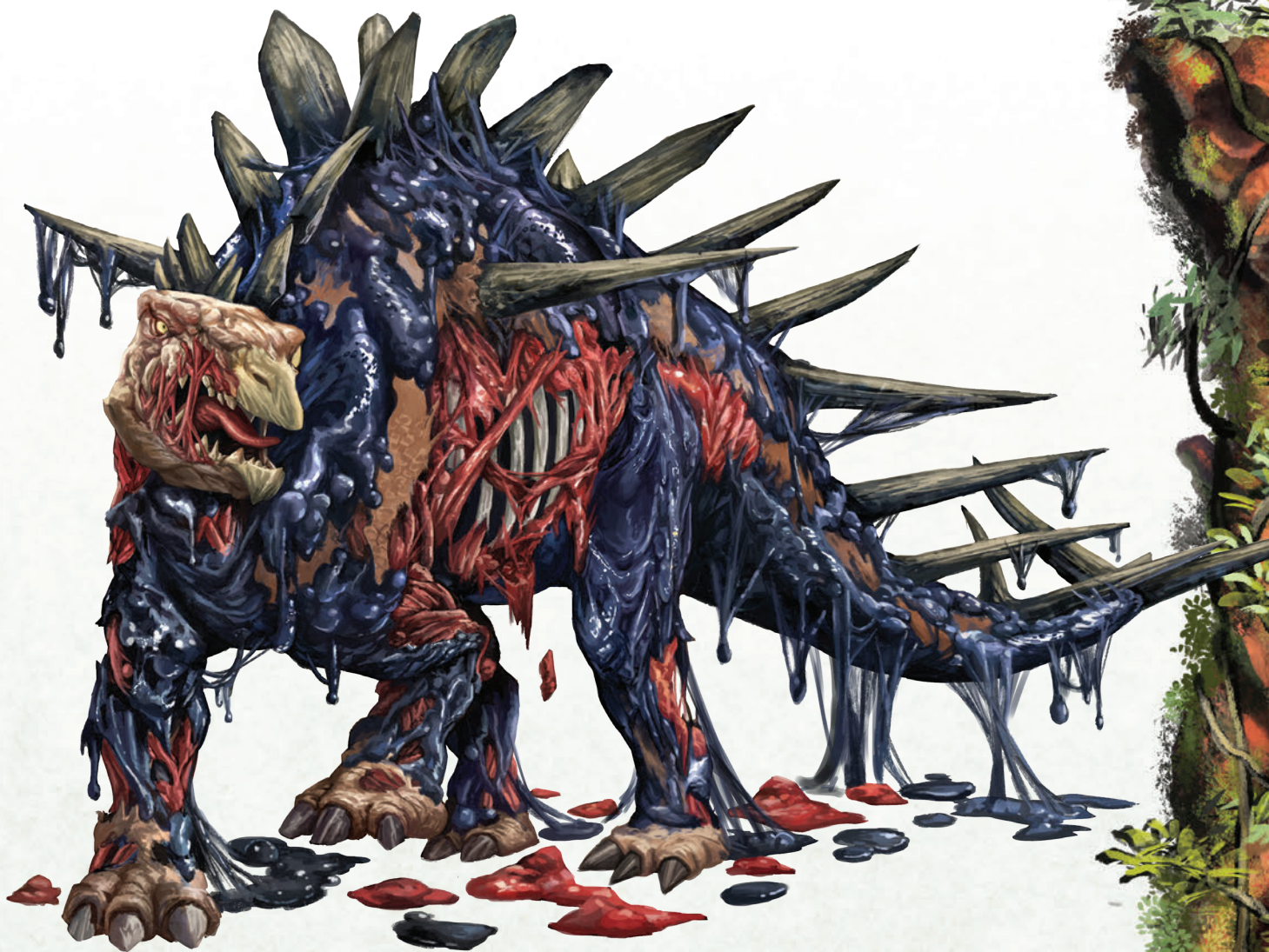
Monsters. Along with any wamps that have retreated from area 5a, there are 2 more **wamps** (SPCM 393) clinging to the walls here. They attack any intruders to their lair and fight to the death.

Treasure. Scattered across the floor and buried in rubbish piles are 12 porphyry starstones, 5 olivine starstones, and 4 rock crystal starstones. Characters who spend 1 hour searching or who succeed on a DC 20 Intelligence (Investigation) check find 2 adamantite starstones half-buried in gravel beneath a snake skull.

5C. THE TAR-ZOMBIES

This part of the lake is dotted with the decaying corpses and half-exposed skeletons of all the creatures that have fallen victim to the tar pit. As you watch, a slow bubble of tar seems to shift one of the carcasses—a 15-foot lump of rotting flesh, dripping with tar and sporting a double row of diamond-shaped plates and bony spikes along its back. The bubble bursts with a sulfurous stench, but the corpse continues to move, lunging out of the black mire, tar oozing from its half-exposed skull.

Monsters. Impelled by necrotic energies, a **tar-zombie kentrosaurus** (page 80) mindlessly attacks the characters. Two **tar-zombie goblins** (page 79) join in the second round of combat, rising from beneath the surface of the tar lake.



6. THE GASSY SHRIEKER

At the center of the small hillock of fungi before you is a bloated, porous toadstool. A faint whine like a dozen atonal reed flutes leaks from the mushroom as it bobs and throbs from some internal pressure. A single small slime mold is wrapped around the base of the mushroom, seemingly attracted to its constant low whistling.

Monsters. The **immature slime mold** (*SPCM 378*) is fixated on the mushroom and will not attack the characters unless provoked. The mushroom is obviously a **shrieker**, but it is so bloated that it cannot shriek, making it unable to summon more slime molds. The cause of its bloating and atonal whistling is not readily apparent: it has grown directly over a jet of natural gas, which fills the hollow mushroom like a wineskin. A successful DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check is enough to notice wavy distortions in the air above the fungus.

Any amount of slashing damage will cause a rupture in the shrieker that instantly tears the entire

fungus apart. Any amount of fire damage causes the shrieker to explode, and all creatures within 10 feet of it must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 11 (2d10) fire damage on a failure or half as much on a success. If the shrieker explodes, the sand-covered tar pit next to it catches on fire and the gas jet the fungus was growing on becomes a flame jet identical to the one in area 4. If the shrieker is destroyed in any way, the slime mold attacks the characters.

7. THE GAP

A narrow gap—only 10 feet wide—cuts between two great spires of granite nearly 80 feet tall. A large chunk of rock has fallen into the gap and become lodged in it, appearing almost to hover above the ground like a great dagger poised to strike. The gap is dark and shadowy, but you see a crack of bright light beyond and can hear falling water faintly echoing down the corridor.

This 10-foot-wide alleyway is indeed wide enough



for the wagon to fit through. The large rock stuck between the two walls is 30 feet up. The entire gap is lightly obscured by shadow.

Monster. At the midway point of the canyon sits a **gelatinous cube** waiting for prey to stumble right into it. Characters can spot it with a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check, but because of the dim light, they have disadvantage on the check unless they have darkvision or are carrying a light source that casts bright light upon it.

8. THE WATERFALL TOWERS

Beyond the gap, the karstland opens up into a wide valley, sunny and verdant. Two rectangular towers of cracked granite rise 100 feet out of the valley's center, clear spring water pouring out of them in dozens of rivulets. The wind spreads a fine spray of water across the valley, bathing it in faint rainbows. A large pond has formed at the base of the waterfall towers, and small creeks run off in every direction, disappearing into cracks in the enclosing stone walls. Grass and mushrooms grow between piles of rubble and collapsed spires, and a few dark cave openings dot the outer edges of the vale.

8A. THE LAKE

The lake is cool, clear, and only 5 feet deep in the middle. The lakebed is lined with soft mud, not cloying tar, and the water is potable. The water towers are hollow and open at the top, filled by rainwater and by natural springs running deep beneath their foundations.

Monsters. Characters venturing into the lake are likely to be attacked by the vooniths from area 8b.

Treasure. Characters who spend at least an hour searching through the lake find 2d10 olivine starstones, 1d10 porphyry starstones, and 1d4 + 1 rock crystal starstones. Characters succeeding on a DC 16 Intelligence (Investigation) check while searching have a 50 percent chance of finding an adamantine starstone and a 10 percent chance of finding a sapphire corundum starstone.

8B. THE MARSHY ISLANDS

Where the largest of the streams flows out from the lake, there are a series of small islands shaded by

tall, broad-capped giant mushrooms. The land is boggy, but the wagon would be able to move through it with some help.

Monsters. Two **vooniths** (SPCM 391) attack any creatures moving through this area. The vooniths—large, carnivorous, salamander-like creatures—are hoping to drag their prey back into their burrow to feast. The vooniths will also attack any creatures that wade into the lake in area 8a.

Voonith Burrow. Once the vooniths have attacked, the location of their burrow is readily apparent. It is a tunnel in the side of one of the islands, its 5-foot-wide mouth partially concealed by weeds. The flooded tunnel is 20 feet long and ends in a spherical chamber 20 feet in diameter, filled with murky water. It is heavily obscured unless the characters have darkvision or bring a light source, in which case it is lightly obscured by the muddy water.

Treasure. The bottom of the burrow is littered with the bones of the vooniths' prey—goblins, pterosaurs, giant toads, and the like. But there is also a stash of shiny things that the creatures have hoarded away. These include 14 cp, 22 sp, 10 gp, 5 rock crystal starstones, 2 adamantine starstones, 2 daggers, a +1 *shortsword*, and a *potion of greater healing*.

8C. THE SHRIEKER FIELD

This grassy field nestled between two low walls of jagged stone is dotted with hundreds of mushrooms, large and small. It would be idyllic if not for the shriekers.

Monsters.

Among the mushrooms in the field are 6 **shriekers**

(their locations are marked on the map). Each round a shrieker spends shrieking, there is a 50 percent chance that one

immature slime mold

(SPCM 378) is

drawn to the field.

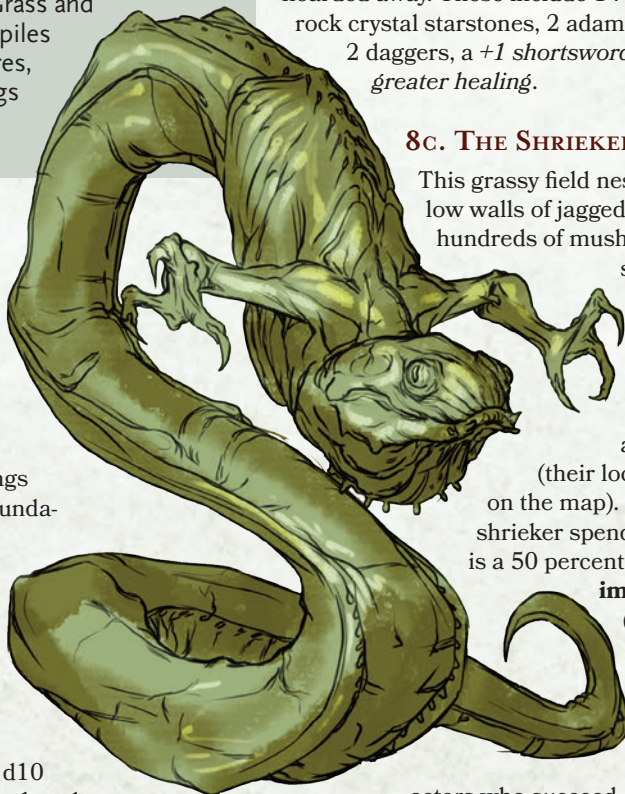
With half a dozen shriekers, that can add up quickly.

Forage. Char-

acters who succeed on a DC 8 Intelligence (Nature) check and spend at least an hour gathering can harvest 1d4 + 1 pounds of edible mushrooms from the field.

8D. LIZARDFOLK CAVE

An eroded crack in the side of the gray stone cliff here leads into a dark cave. The squared-off interior is completely dark. Slimy water slowly drips from the 50-foot-high ceiling and down the fungus-encrusted



walls, pooling in shallow, mineral-rich puddles on the stalagmite-strewn floor. The cave walls are covered with blood-paintings of swirling, abstract shapes.

Monsters. This cave is home to two **lizardfolk**, their tamed **giant lizard**, and a **violet fungus**. The violet fungus has the rotting remains of a goblin entangled in its roots. The crazed monsters attack any creatures venturing into their cave but do not pursue them beyond the cave mouth.

Treasure. The goblin corpse that the violet fungus grew around still has a slimy leather pouch containing 3 olivine starstones, 2 moss agates worth 10 gp each, and a moonstone worth 50 gp. Each lizardfolk has 1d3 porphyry starstones and 1 rock crystal starstone.

9. ZOARGLOTT'S CAVE

The narrow passages leading here from area 3b and area 8 both end at cracks in the gray stone wall. To either side of the cave entrance are a collection of skulls mounted on sticks—goblin, human, and pterosaur skulls. Beyond the cave entrance, there is a 5-foot drop to the cave floor.

This cavern is an oddly square chamber. The walls are granite, but limestone stalagmites dot the uneven floor, each stalagmite topped with the skull of a random creature. Odd scenes of giant snakes and hideous winged beasts are painted in dried blood and smears of tar on the walls, alongside esoteric glyphs and haphazard swirls. Sitting in the center of the cave is a reptilian humanoid with slimy, white, liver-spotted skin. He wears a giant snake skull on his head, its fangs protruding down along his cheeks, and tiny mushrooms are growing out of his flesh. You think for an instant that he is dead, but he wheezes and coughs, turning toward you and opening his milky eyes. “Why you come here?” he croaks.

Zoarglott. The creature in the cave is Zoarglott, a lizardfolk seer. He has the statistics of a **cult fanatic** with the following changes:

- ◇ Zoarglott has the lizardfolk tag and is chaotic evil.
- ◇ Zoarglott wears no armor, but he has AC 13 (natural armor).
- ◇ Zoarglott speaks Draconic and Common.

Zoarglott is not hostile, but he will defend himself to the death if attacked. The seer is prone to fits of coughing and wheezing. Each time he coughs, tiny shriekers growing out of his back inflate and let out a low whistle. Regardless of the noise made in Zoarglott's cave, slime molds will never enter it.

Prophecy. If the characters do not attack Zoarglott, he says the following in broken Common after they tell him why they are here:

“I see you come here. After you come snake. Great snake. Snake Granddaddy. Yig Snake bring back old times. Bring back star-heads. Bring back big village.

Kill Zoarglott. Will come to pass. Killing you no stop it, so Zoarglott no kill you. Maybe you stop Yig Snake. Zoarglott help you if you help Zoarglott.”

Zoarglott can speak on the following subjects:

- ◇ **Zoarglott:** “Zoarglott me. Me Zoarglott. Until death come for Zoarglott. Then Zoarglott bones.”
- ◇ **Help Zoarglott:** “You want help? Bring Zoarglott new skull. Not skull Zoarglott have already. New skull. Also bring Zoarglott starstone.” He holds out a hand with an adamantine starstone and a rock crystal starstone. “Bring Zoarglott three”—he points to the rock crystal starstone—“or one”—he points to the adamantine starstone.
- ◇ **Yig:** “Yig come soon. You help Yig, but you hurt Yig too. You important.”
- ◇ **Snakes:** He points to the snake skull he wears as a helmet. “Zoarglott blend in!”
- ◇ **Star-Heads:** “Star-heads build big village. Zoarglott live there now. But Yig bring star-heads back, star-heads kill Zoarglott. Soon.”
- ◇ **Oozes/Slimes:** “Slimes no come here. Zoarglott cave safe. You rest here safe.” Indeed, some magic of Zoarglott's (or perhaps his lingering stench) keeps slimes from entering his cave, even if the characters kill him.

If the characters give Zoarglott three rock crystal starstones or one adamantine star stone, he begins to hum and rock back and forth, then he says, “You in great danger soon. Purple tower safety. Break Crystal King. Climb high. You survive. For now.”

Skulls. Zoarglott has many different skulls in his cave: goblin, rat, giant snake, giant toad, voonith, wamp, human, pterodactyl, and even thalassodromeus. He does not have a chasmosaurus or kentrosaurus skull. If the players bring him a skull he does not have, Zoarglott gives them his necklace of blue crystals (*Zoarglott's necklace*, page 82). If the players bring Zoarglott a skull and pay him starstones for his prophecy, he also gives them a ruby corundum starstone, saying “Zoarglott not need this soon. Zoarglott thank you.”

Treasure. Zoarglott has one rock crystal starstone, one adamantine starstone, one ruby corundum starstone, a dagger, a *potion of healing*, and *Zoarglott's necklace* (page 82).

10. TUNNEL

An oddly circular hole 15 feet in diameter leads from area 8 into this tunnel. An identical hole leads from area 10a to area 10b. Characters succeeding on a DC 15 Intelligence (History or Nature) check can tell that there is no way the hole is natural.

10A. SHORT ROOM

The walls of this large open chamber are covered with rows upon rows of bumps and divots, much like



the markings on the starstones. Characters succeeding on a DC 15 Intelligence check can determine that this is some form of writing, but it would take far more time than the characters have to decipher it.

The writing is esoteric musing on the nature of time and reality, nearly impossible for any creature without an Elder Thing's three-lobed brain to comprehend. Characters using magic such as the spell *comprehend languages* must make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw, taking 5 (1d10) psychic damage and gaining a random insanity (*SPCM* 74) on a failure, or taking half as much damage and gaining proficiency in the Yog-Sothothery skill on a success. Regardless of success or failure, characters who do this cannot fully comprehend the text on the wall, but they learn that this structure was built by Elder Things untold eons ago.

IOB. LONG ROOM

Limestone seepage over the ages has left the room crusted with stalagmites, stalactites, and other cave formations. Water steadily drips into the shallow pool in the center of the tunnel. A corner of the far wall has collapsed into rubble, creating a wide opening out into the light.

The walls of this long chamber are also covered with bumps and divots, but time has worn so much of them away that it would be fruitless to attempt to decipher them, even by magic.

II. PLAZA OF THE PORPHYRY TOWER

You emerge into a wide-open space dotted with tar pits and mounds of fungus. Several canyons intersect here, making it seem almost like a crossroads or a town square. Towering above everything is a massive pentagonal tower of solid purple porphyry, easily 150 feet high. A dark, circular doorway stands open at the tower's base, and several other holes are spaced at random intervals further up the tower—windows to the blackness within.

The plaza surrounding the porphyry tower is scattered with open and sand-covered tar pits and dozens of **shriekers**. Once the characters make it about half the distance from the tunnel to the tower, they trigger a chain reaction of shriekers:

Two waist-high mushrooms to either side of you let out maddening shrieks, deflating like empty wineskins as they squeeze stored-up air through their whistling pores. More mushrooms around them join in, and soon it seems as though the whole clearing is blasting away like a band of pipers. The deafening, all-encompassing shriek subsides after just a few seconds, only to be replaced by the sucking sound of hundreds of slimes. You see them sliding down from the cliffs, oozing

out of cracks, piling up in the canyons and at the mouth of the tunnel you just exited, converging on you and on the porphyry tower, your only possible refuge from the flood.

There are already 1d4 **immature slime molds** (*SPCM* 378) between the heroes and the entrance to the tower. The nearest other group of oozes is 40 feet away but closing fast. The characters may want to stand and fight, but the GM should emphasize the vast number of oozes they face, adding more of them to the combat each round that it drags on. The only thing that will really stem the tide of the slimes is igniting all of the tar pits in the plaza. If the characters come to that conclusion themselves and begin to implement their literal scorched-earth policy, the GM should feel free to speed up the arrival of Gehir and the other adventurers (see below).

THE PORPHYRY TOWER

Light slants in from half a dozen scattered windows and a large oculus in the roof, dimly illuminating the cavernous interior of this hollow tower. Hundreds of cup-like protrusions of stone extend like shelf fungus from the rear two walls of the pentagon, stair-stepping up the entire height of the tower. The other walls are covered with monumental alien bas-reliefs, worn with age but still barely traceable. In the center of the chamber, half-emerging from a mound of cracked mudstone, is a fossilized figure of horrific physiology, all opalized tentacles and veins of blue crystal. Where its head should be is only a five-pointed crystalline crown, gleaming even in this dim light.

The interior of the tower is one big chamber stretching all the way to the top. Indirect sunlight slants in through the scattered window-openings and an oculus in the roof, but the room itself is dimly lit.

Shutting the Door. A large circle of stone stands next to the doorway against the inside wall. It can be slid into a slight divot in the floor of the doorway, shutting the door, with a successful DC 13 Strength check. At the end of each round that the characters are inside the tower but the door remains open, 1d4 – 1 more **immature slime molds** (*SPCM* 378) attempt to come through the doorway.

Carvings. The carvings on the three open walls are heavily eroded, but they depict creatures with ridged, barrel-shaped bodies, five tentacle legs, five tentacle arms, five wings, and a star-shaped head. Characters succeeding on a DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana) or DC 15 Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) check can identify this as an Elder Thing, a race of alien creatures from prehistory. The elder things in the carvings seem to be ruling over some vast city alongside gigantic reptiles, shapeless blobs, and alien fungi.



THE CRYSTAL KING

The figure in the center of the room is a fossilized Elder Thing, still half-encased in rock, roughly 5 feet wide and 8 feet tall. Much of its alien physiology has been transmuted to crystal by the fossilization process—the same crystal used to make Zoarglott's necklace, in fact. This is the thing that Zoarglott referred to as the Crystal King in his prophecy. Characters succeeding on a DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana) or DC 15 Wisdom (Yog-Sothothery) check can identify the fossil as an Elder Thing.

The fossil Elder Thing is an object with AC 17, 80 hp, resistance to acid and cold damage, and immunity to fire, poison, and psychic damage. Dealing damage to the fossil Elder Thing causes fractures to appear in its crystalline structure, and a high-pitched ringing pulses out as the entire figure begins to glow with a nimbus of purple energy. After a few seconds, that purple energy blasts upward in a beam of light, though the oculus in the tower roof, piercing the heavens. This is the last vestige of the fossilized Elder Thing's hibernating consciousness, a yearning for outer space that has imprinted on the very crystal of its physical being.

Oozes will not willingly move within 5 feet of the fossil Elder Thing unless it is destroyed. Whenever the fossil Elder Thing is damaged, it unleashes its purple beam of light, and any oozes within the tower are stunned until the end of their next turn.

THE GALLERY AND ROOF

The rear two walls of the chamber are taken up by cup-shaped circles of stone protruding from the wall. These were Elder Thing seats. Each one is 5 feet across, with a horizontal gap of 5 feet between each platform. Each successive row of platforms is 5 feet up from the next, and staggered so that the platforms of one level are over the gaps on the next

level, leaving 10 feet of vertical space between each platform and the one directly above it. The first row of platforms starts 10 feet up from the floor. Climbing from one row of platforms to the next is a simple matter requiring no ability check.

Teleporter. At the corner where the two gallery walls meet, there is a 5-foot circle inscribed on the ground and inlaid with strange gold symbols, and a series of 5-foot-wide, gold-veined stone hoops running up the corner directly above it, spaced at 10-foot intervals all the way to the ceiling. This was an Elder Thing elevator, used to teleport flightless servants and allies up to the upper gallery. Even after all these millennia, it still functions—somewhat. If the circle on the ground or any of the stone hoops takes any amount of lightning damage, anything in the circle is instantly teleported up to the matching circle in the upper gallery, and vice versa. Creatures transported by this ancient device must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or take 4 (1d8) psychic damage when they are teleported.

Upper Gallery. There is a 5-foot-wide stone ledge running along the top of the chamber, just 10 feet above the uppermost row of circular platforms and 10 feet below the ceiling. Five 5-foot-wide holes in the ceiling at each point of the pentagon above the upper gallery provide access to the roof.

The Roof. The pentagonal roof is flat and stable, with a pentagonal oculus 10 feet on each side opening into the great chamber below. The outer edge of the roof is marked only by a series of hemispherical stone mounds, twenty-five on each edge of the pentagon. From up here, the ancient Elder Thing city below stretches off in every direction.

Ooze Incursion

The characters are safe in the tower for a brief moment (or up to an hour, if the GM feels the party needs time to take a short rest). Once the GM deems it dramatically appropriate, slimes begin to squelch their way in through the high windows of the tower and down the interior walls. At the end of each round, roll 1d4. On a 1, an **ochre jelly** enters the tower. On a 2–4, that number of **immature slime molds** (SPCM 378) join the fray. Shortly after the battle begins, Turu flies in through one of the windows, chirps and swoops to get the characters' attention, and flies upward, exiting through the roof oculus. Help is on the way; the heroes just need to hold out long enough to survive. The characters have two options: make a stand or climb the gallery to the roof.

MAKING A STAND

The Elder Thing's alien influence keeps the slimes at bay, so characters opting to stand and fight will likely soon gravitate toward that circle of safety. They may discover that repeatedly striking the fossil temporarily stuns the slimes, but dealing too much damage to the fossil will destroy it, ending its protective effects.



At the most dramatically appropriate moment per the GM's discretion—preferably after several rounds of combat, when the characters have exhausted most of their resources and all hope seems lost—the characters' allies arrive:

Turu flits through the air above your heads once again, chirping and squawking triumphantly. There is a loud knock at the door, and the great stone rolls away seemingly of its own accord, revealing a welcome sight. Gehir, Gunnar, Captain Khorsava, and Sarai stand framed in the doorway, backlit by flames. All your traveling companions pour into the tower and join the fray, firing off spells and smashing oozes. Together, you make short work of the remaining slimes just as you did with the escaped lions back in the arena. You held your ground with vigor and bravery, snatching victory from the jaws of certain defeat.

CLIMBING

Giving a strict, round-by-round account of climbing the 150 feet to the tower's roof would quickly become tedious. Instead, the GM should deal with the climb narratively, describing the surge of oozes mindlessly squelching around the floor below and the hungry slimes hot on the heels of the climbing heroes. The characters can ascend at half speed by climbing from one platform to the next, but the platforms also act as obstacles for creatures with a climb speed, turning the walls into difficult terrain for the oozes.

Ooze from Above. After the heroes have climbed about halfway up, as they reach up to the next platform, they find it already occupied by an **ochre jelly** that entered through the ceiling. If the fight takes longer than three rounds, 1d4 – 1 more immature slime molds approach from below on the fourth and sixth rounds of combat.

Rooftop Pudding. Once the characters get up onto the roof, they find that another enemy has climbed up onto the roof from the outside: a **black pudding**. If the characters use the teleporter rather than climb, this is the only encounter they will need to face.

Once the black pudding is defeated, the characters' attention is drawn to the noise of battle below. Their allies have arrived!

Turu returns, circling above your heads and chirping triumphantly. Your attention is drawn to the land below you. The tar pits surrounding the tower are all ablaze, the mats of shrieking fungus scorched to ashes. Blackened slimes are retreating to their crevices. You see Gehir's wagon in the courtyard below, Cathbad the druid and Gehir himself launching flames and crackling bolts of energy in every direction. Your reinforcements have arrived! You made it. You climbed and fought and never gave up, winning a towering victory against overwhelming odds.

DENOUEMENT

The party has made camp inside the porphyry tower, bringing the horses and cart inside and shutting the door. Gehir finds the ancient Elder Thing ruin fascinating and already plans another expedition here once the expedition to the Golden Tower is a success. The trail that the Friendlies were scouting turned out to be much safer and more direct than this one—it is one of several paths that converge on this tower. The passage that Gunnar's Team scouted was a dead end. Gehir had already gathered the others and set off on the Friendlies' path. He sent Turu to summon the PCs but found them in danger. The blast of energy from the fossil Elder Thing helped guide the allies to the tower, and they set the tar pits on fire to ward off the slimes.

That evening, Gehir invites the characters to join him on the roof. He is surveying the karstlands with his spyglass and a set of cartographer's tools, making notes on his map. The courtyard below is still smoking, the tar pits still ablaze, and not an ooze is in sight. "I believe I've located a route through the rest of the karstlands from up here. We'll venture out tomorrow, sticking together as a group for safety. You did great today. We couldn't have done it without you. And I wanted you to be the first to know that I've decided to double all of your pay at the end of the expedition. But for now, take a look at that." He points to a rocky hill in the distance and hands you the spyglass. You can see that it is a large protuberance of rock with a great black maw of a cave in the side of it. "That's Bald Hill, the next stop on our journey. We're getting there. That much closer to the Golden Tower." He sniffs deeply. "Now it smells like Shorty's cooking up something delicious, so get down there and eat up. I'll join you once I've finished my observations."

LEVELING UP

At the end of *The Sucking Slime of the Karstlands*, all characters gain sufficient experience to reach level 4.



CHAPTER 4: BALD HILL

A Cthulhu Mythos adventure for four to five 4th-level characters

ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

Victorious over the massed slimes of the karstlands, our heroes venture into the wilderness once more. Yilan grows ever more treacherous, and the adventurers bear witness to a dinosaur stampede. The expedition stops briefly at an elven village to resupply, a respite from the jungle and a last homely hearth before their journey gets underway in earnest. The elves see them off with a request for information and a word of warning. When the adventurers arrive at Bald Hill, what begins as an ordinary day ends in betrayal and a deadly ritual. Nothing will be the same after this.

OVERLAND TRAVEL REDUX

Following the battle at the porphyry tower, the adventurers rest and head out the next day. Gehir decides to keep the party together for safety. Following the route that Gehir plotted out from atop the tower, the expedition maneuvers through the rest of the karstland canyons over the course of a day. True to Gehir's expectations, the slimes of the karstlands do not

attack the massed party, and the expedition makes it safely out of the hazardous terrain.

They make camp on the far side of the karstlands, and Gehir orders a resumption of their previous scouting and foraging duties. Their goal is Bald Hill, 50 miles away. Impressed with their performance in the karstlands, Gehir orders the PCs to take scouting duty first. As before, the characters and other adventuring parties will rotate through the tasks of scouting, escort, foraging, and hunting, following the rules set out in chapter 2 (page 26).

As the expedition progresses, they will run into sites of interest and special encounters along the way. Each special encounter below is listed along with its mileage along the expedition's route. Once the scouting party has rolled to determine the next day's progress, the GM should check to see whether any of these special encounters is within that range. If the PCs are the scouting party that day, they will encounter it then. Otherwise, the characters will have the opportunity to encounter it during their duties that day.

MILE 10: DINOSAUR STAMPEDE

As the characters scout ahead, they find a dry riverbed that would make an ideal road for the wagon. Partway down the riverbed, as the banks begin to slope up higher, the characters notice the ground shake, see clouds of dust approaching, and hear the roars and bellows of strange beasts. Characters with passive Wisdom (Perception) 14 or higher have two rounds of advance warning; otherwise, they have only one round to prepare.

The earth trembles beneath your feet. Panicked, trumpeting calls intermixed with ferocious roars echo through the cloud of dust that billows down the dry riverbed. Titanic shapes burst out of the reddish cloud, all long necks and stout legs. They are easily the largest creatures you have ever seen. A few smaller, spike-backed animals are running with them. Dashing through this stampede is the predator that no doubt instigated it—an olive-skinned, bipedal monster with narrow, slashing jaws and bony ridges over its beady eyes.

The dry, flat riverbed is 50 feet wide, and its sloping, rocky banks are each 20 feet wide, gaining 10 feet in elevation. The riverbanks are difficult terrain. The stampeding dinosaurs will stick to the flat riverbed, only moving onto the difficult terrain of the banks if they are actively pursuing characters there.

Monsters. The stampeding dinosaurs are long-necked **camarasauruses** (page 72) and spiny **kentrosauruses** (page 76), pursued by a hungry **allosaurus** (page 70) and several colorfully crested **dilophosauruses** (page 74). The camarasauruses and kentrosauruses are not interested in attacking the players, only moving and taking the Dash action on their turns unless directly attacked by the PCs. The allosaurus is similarly focused on its prey, moving and making an attack against the nearest camarasaurus each turn. If the PCs draw the attention of the allosaurus by attacking it, it may instead attack the characters, though the GM should be aware that such an encounter could easily turn deadly. The dilophosauruses are opportunistic and will break away from the stampede to attack any characters that they can see. Once any of the carnivorous dinosaurs is focused on attacking the characters, it

cannot be dissuaded from its attack unless one of the prey dinosaurs is killed, providing an easy meal for the hungry predators.

The GM may wish to make one initiative roll for all the stampeding dinosaurs, or one roll for the herbivores and one for the predators. The stampede of dinosaurs moves at a speed of 60 feet per round. For the convenience of the GM, the stampede is broken down into 60-foot segments. After the last round of warning, the first such segment begins its turn where the PCs were when they first perceived the stampede. The dinosaurs in each segment of the stampede are:

Segment 1: 3 camarasauruses.

Segment 2: 2 camarasauruses, 1 kentrosaurus, 1 allosaurus.

Segment 3: 1 camarasaurus, 2 kentrosauruses, 2 dilophosauruses.

Segment 4: 2 camarasauruses, 1 dilophosaurus.

Segment 5: 1 wounded kentrosaurus (at half health)

If the characters have already withdrawn up the slope of the riverbank by the time the stampede arrives, the dilophosauruses are running along the top of the bank rather than in the riverbed, the better to attack the PCs.

Any characters who find themselves in the flat riverbed while the first four segments of the stampede pass through it must make a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw each round to avoid being trampled, falling prone and taking 18 (4d8) bludgeoning damage on a failed save.

MILE 25: ELF VILLAGE

Halfway between the karstlands and Bald Hill stands the small elven village of Althe Yinumel, an outpost of the dwindling wood elf population scattered throughout Yilan. Whatever group of adventurers is scouting that day reports the location of the village back to Gehir. Gehir alerts the other groups that the wagon will stop there for an hour, and anyone may take the opportunity to purchase needed supplies from the elves there. If the wagon's progress for that day would take it exactly to the 25-mile mark, Gehir has the expedition camp outside the village; otherwise, he insists that it push on as far as it can that day. While at the village, Gehir purchases more rations and wine for the party to replace the stores depleted by their journey and the mishap in the river. Cathbad, meanwhile, purchases a small keg of mead.



GM OPTION: FASTER TRAVEL

As before, the GM should feel free to gloss over the bulk of the journey if it is right for their gaming group. In this case, it is recommended that the GM run the party through their group duties and special encounters in the following order: Scouting, Dinosaur Stampede, Escort, Elf Village, Foraging, Serpentfolk Scout, Hunting. The GM should make it clear that the journey actually takes place over the course of four days.

For more information on the elf village, see “Althe Yinumel” below.

MILE 40: SERPENTFOLK SCOUT

As the characters go about their duties for the day (most likely on foraging or hunting duty), they have a close run-in with a mounted serpentfolk scout. Characters with passive Wisdom (Perception) 12 or higher notice a serpentfolk mounted on a large, crocodile-like creature partly visible through some trees 100 feet away.

You catch a glimpse of a serpentine figure through the brush some distance away: a reptilian man with the head of a snake, mounted on the back of a mighty crocodile with a lupine gait. He appears to be searching for something—or someone.

Monsters. The **serpentfolk** (SPCM 365) scout is mounted on a **riding croc** (page 78). The scout is one of Gehir’s minions, a loyal serpentfolk helping to keep a furtive eye on the expedition while patrolling Yilan. The scouts are not supposed to get so close, but this individual has been careless. The PCs are approaching from downwind, preventing it from catching their scent. If discovered, it attempts to flee. If engaged in combat, it fights to the death rather than risk being captured. In the unlikely event that the characters are able to coerce information from the serpentfolk, it reveals only that it is a soldier in the army of Yig, the Father of Snakes and true lord of Yilan.

Treasure. The serpentfolk has a *+1 dagger*, a *potion of healing*, and a pouch containing 6 silver nuggets worth 45 gp each.

Development. Gehir professes to know nothing about the serpentfolk and says it’s just one more thing to worry about in a wild land full of giant reptiles.

MILE 50: BALD HILL IN VIEW

After a journey of several days, the expedition arrives at Bald Hill, the next stop on Gehir’s route. Bald Hill is a large outcropping of bare rock; the surrounding vegetation seems unwilling to grow over it. It is notable not only for its baldness but also for the cave in its side.

The hill before you is a huge, steep-sided mound of bare stone that looks almost like it could have erupted from the earth yesterday. Only a brave few vines and grasses have insinuated themselves into its craggy face over the eons, leaving the hill unnaturally bare. A gaping maw of a cave yawns open in the side of the stony mound, its entrance partially obscured by fallen boulders and heaps of rubble.

Gehir orders the expedition to stop at the base of Bald Hill because he wants to investigate it before moving on. If the expedition reaches Bald Hill toward the end of the day, it makes camp there, and this scene begins the following day; otherwise, Gehir proceeds immediately with the next phase of his plan.

For further information, see “Betrayal at Bald Hill” below.

ALTHE YINUMEL

Passing through stands of bristling pine and gnarled, mistletoe-bearing oak, you come upon a tiny hamlet, although “hamlet” is perhaps too rustic a word to evoke the grandiose beauty of this small elven settlement. Twisting wooden colonnades support curved roofs tiled in all the colors of an autumn forest. Open galleries and courtyards blend seamlessly into enclosed buildings. The only jarring element is the spiked palisade wall around the village. Clearly a recent addition, this utilitarian defensive wall cuts the settlement off from the surrounding forest. You see several elven woodcarvers laboring to beautify the hastily erected structure, but it seems a futile effort.

Althe Yinumel—its name means “golden eagle” in the local Elvish dialect—is a tiny outpost of elven civilization amid the wilds of Yilan. Nestled in a lush grove of ancient trees, its twisting, open architecture evokes the spirit of the surrounding forest. In ages past, the wood elves were numerous in Yilan, but they have been in decline for quite some time now. The recent upheavals in Yilan caused by the machinations of Gehir and his serpentfolk have driven yet more elves from the great Yilan basin. Althe Yinumel is one of their last holdfasts in the region.

LOCATIONS

Althe Yinumel is a small village, but it holds several places of interest for the visiting adventurer.

CENTRAL COURTYARD

The center of the village is a cobblestone courtyard surrounded by an airy, vine-wrapped peristyle adjoining several of the town’s more important buildings. A fountain of cool, pure water pours into an ornate basin of monumental alabaster in the middle of the



courtyard. Passing elves dip cups into this basin and drink deeply of its refreshing waters.

Development. The mayor of Althe Yinumel, Lord Axina Redwind (NG male elf **knight**, unarmored and armed only with a scimitar) greets Gehir's party in the courtyard as it arrives and remains in the courtyard for the duration of its visit. He tells the characters:

"Yilan is a troubled land, and it is becoming more dangerous to live here. Someone is working great magic here, bending time and space to ill purposes, and their magical meddling is destroying the delicate balance of life in Yilan. Terrible creatures are wreaking havoc on the countryside; no doubt you have encountered some on your journey. We would ask your help in this matter. If you come across any clues in your travels that would point to who is behind this or how they are accomplishing it, I would be grateful for the information."

Gehir says the expedition to the Golden Tower is his top priority right now, and he stresses to the characters that they will only be here in Althe Yinumel for about an hour. But he tells Lord Redwind that if they uncover any such clues on their journey, they will be sure to pass through Althe Yinumel on their way back from the Golden Tower in several months' time.

Axina Redwind is prepared to converse on the following topics:

- ◇ **Snake totems:** "Yes, my scouts have reported these red stone serpents as well, often at the center of the environmental disturbances. In some cases, the snake statues seem to have replaced preexisting pieces of that same red volcanic stone. What role they could possibly play in this magic, I have no idea. You should to speak to Urdimas, the magus who lives in the tower here. He is well versed in arcane lore."
- ◇ **Serpentfolk:** "The foul serpentfolk once lived here in great numbers before the elves came to Yilan. We broke their petty kingdoms and drove them from the land. I have heard reports of serpentfolk incursions here, but not in any great numbers. True, the potential connection between them and the reptilian monsters is obvious, but serpentfolk lack the knowledge or coordination to work such great magics. If they are behind it, which I find unlikely, they must have help. More likely, they are simply taking advantage of the chaos."
- ◇ **Dinosaurs:** "These reptilian monsters are foreign to this land. They are destroying the balance of the environment here, killing deer and birds, uprooting trees. Strange plants are choking out the native flora. Whatever magic is causing these changes must be stopped before all of Yilan is irrevocably changed."
- ◇ **The palisade wall:** "Unfortunate, but necessary to keep out roving monsters. Before, Althe Yinumel

blended perfectly into the surrounding land. This crude wall has severed our village from the forest which sustains it. But without it, those giant lizards would eat us in our sleep."

- ◇ **The Golden Tower:** "I wish you well in your quest for the Golden Tower. It was erected by my people a millennium ago, though none has seen it in a century. I myself have never had the privilege of seeing it, but the stories say it is beautiful."
- ◇ **Services in town:** "We don't get many visitors passing through anymore, but those that do tend to restock on supplies at Ligrowë's Trader or enjoy some wine at the Spiralstone Tavern. Then there's the Hammerleaf Smithy, of course, and Urdimas over at the Tower of the Magus has been known to sell spell scrolls from time to time. And I know that the temple sometimes has useful potions and healing magic available."

LIGROWË'S TRADER

A sign hanging above the door of this pink stone building proclaims "Ligrowë's Trader—The Only General Store in Yilan" in both Elvish and Common. Inside, the shelves of this well-lit establishment are filled with various and sundry items that passing travelers might find useful, as well as curiosities and even small fossils for sale. The proprietor is a dark-skinned half-elf named Ligrowë (NG female half-elf **noble**, unarmed and unarmored), whose friendly demeanor and natural charisma mark her out from the normally stoic and reserved elves of the town.

Goods. Any mundane adventuring gear, tool, or ranged weapon can be purchased here at the normal cost, in addition to the following goods:

Item	Cost
<i>Bag of holding</i> (1 available)	4,000 gp
<i>Cloak of elvenkind</i> (1 available)	2,400 gp
<i>Efficient quiver</i> (1 available)	1,750 gp
<i>Potion of healing</i> (5 available)	55 gp
Small fossil (ammonite, leaf, crab, etc.)	10 gp

HAMMERLEAF SMITHY

The village smithy is situated in a stone gazebo with sculptural bronze vines wrapped around its columns. The smith, Dramillio Hammerleaf (NG male elf **veteran**, unarmed and unarmored), is hard at work forging a set of large iron hinges in the shape of oak leaves which will eventually grace a gate in the town's palisade.

Goods. Any mundane weapon or armor made primarily of metal can be purchased here at the standard price. Dramillio will also repair any damaged weapons or armor for free. In addition, the following special items can be purchased here:

Item	Cost
+1 <i>scimitar</i>	1,000 gp
<i>Mithral chain mail</i>	1,750 gp
<i>Mithral chain shirt</i>	500 gp

- A The Palisade
- B Central Courtyard
- C Ligrowë's Trader
- D Hammerleaf Smithy
- E Spiralstone Tavern
- F Tower of the Magus
- G Temple
- H Vineyard





SPIRALSTONE TAVERN

Situated right off the central courtyard, this small tavern has a cozy and inviting atmosphere. Open circular windows let a pleasant breeze waft through. The elf behind the bar is Geberelde (NG nonbinary elf **spy**), who plays their harp when not busy pouring drinks. Geberelde pours wine from a drinking horn made from an opalized fossil ammonite with an ornate silver handle. Several other elves (**commoners**) are also in the tavern, drinking wine and enjoying the harp music.

Services. The following food and drink is available for purchase at the Spiralstone:

Item	Cost
Wine, common (cup)	5 cp
Wine, fine (cup)	5 sp
Mead (cup)	1 sp
Brandy (dram)	5 cp
Bread and cheese	1 sp
Wild rice and sautéed mushrooms	2 sp
Venison steak	4 sp

TOWER OF THE MAGUS

This three-story round tower is home to the eccentric wizard Urdimas (N male elf **mage**). While generally concerned with his own research, Urdimas has been known to sell spell scrolls to passing adventurers. The first floor of his tower, where he does any such business, is cluttered with books and scrolls and jars of strange substances. His living quarters are on the second floor, and the top floor is where he performs magical experiments and observations; these floors are off limits to visitors.

Services. Before he will agree to sell any spell scroll, Urdimas asks a favor of the adventurers. He needs a fossil for one of his magical experiments, though he doesn't say what exactly the experiment entails. It can be any fossil, even one purchased from Ligrowë (Urdimas seems unaware of Ligrowë's fossil-selling business). He will also accept any sort of starstone from the karstlands even though they are not fossils, finding them fascinating and worth study nonetheless. Once appeased with a fossil or starstone, Urdimas is willing to sell the following spell scrolls:

Spell	Cost per Scroll
<i>Alarm, color spray, detect magic, feather fall, floating disk, grease, identify, mage armor, unseen servant</i>	50 gp
<i>Acid arrow, blur, continual flame, gentle repose, magic weapon, misty step, see invisibility</i>	300 gp
<i>Counterspell, dispel magic, fireball, glyph of warding, major image, remove curse, stinking cloud, tiny hut</i>	600 gp

Development. Urdimas is willing to discuss his theories on the snake totems and the time-shifting magic that has been plaguing Yilan:

- ◇ **Snake totems:** "The snake totems you speak of may be related, but I don't think they are the

cause. They may be acting as a sort of ... amplifier for other powers. What I have discovered is that these changes are taking place at the intersections of ley lines. The magic seems to be ripping open time itself and dragging ancient animals and plants into the present, along with the thicker, warmer, primeval atmosphere."

- ◇ **Serpentfolk:** "I'm less inclined than Lord Redwind to minimize the threat of the serpentfolk. True, we elves broke the back of the snake people millennia ago, but they have been around since long before elves first set foot on this land, and they intend to be around long after we're gone. I wouldn't put anything past them."
- ◇ **Human sacrifice:** "It doesn't surprise me that you've seen evidence of human sacrifice at the center of one of these *changed* places. It is true that the sacrifice of a sentient humanoid can serve as the catalyst for powerful magic. But this magic is beyond what any mere human or even an elf could work. I suspect the sacrifice is part of a ritual that allows intervention by some outside power—a demon or a deity, or something older and more terrifying. But that is beyond me. I do not truck with forces I cannot control."
- ◇ **Experiments:** "I have been doing experiments, trying to see what may be causing this magical disaster. At the moment, I am testing whether these "fossils" can act as a magical catalyst—a material component, if you will—in the generation of a temporal rift."
- ◇ **Ley lines:** "Ley lines are natural conduits of magical energy that crisscross the entire world. They are difficult to tap into, but sometimes strange magic is possible at places where these lines intersect. That could be helping whomever is causing these catastrophes. Wait, I have a map somewhere around here of the ley lines and where the changes have taken place. Let me find it ..." Urdimas shows the characters a rough map of Yilan, mostly devoid of topographical details, though a few key locations are marked on it. The entire parchment is crossed by seemingly random red lines, and some of the intersections of those lines have been circled. Urdimas lets the characters look at the map and copy it if they like, but he will not part with it (see the handout at the end of the book).

TEMPLE

Althe Yinumel's temple is a small, circular colonnade about 20 feet in diameter supporting a shallow dome with a large oculus. A bronze brazier stands on pedestal in the center of the temple, surrounded by small fonts of holy water. Green ivy climbs throughout the temple, integrating it with the natural world. The priest is an ethereal-looking elf named Hylanth (N male elf **priest**) who worships an elven nature deity.

Services. Hylanth will cast *cure wounds* at 1st level up to four times for free, but for a casting of *cure*

wounds at a higher level or for any other higher-level spell in his stat block, he asks that the recipient donate 10 gp to the temple. In addition, he has the following items for sale:

Potion	Cost
Holy water	25 gp
<i>Potion of animal friendship</i>	125 gp
<i>Potion of climbing</i>	50 gp
<i>Potion of healing</i>	50 gp
<i>Potion of greater healing</i>	250 gp
<i>Restorative ointment</i>	350 gp

Spell	Cost per Scroll
<i>Detect poison and disease, faerie fire, jump, longstrider, shield of faith, thunderwave</i>	45 gp
<i>Barkskin, darkvision, enhance ability, flaming sphere, gust of wind, lesser restoration, moonbeam</i>	275 gp

THE PALISADE WALL

A recently built wall of sharpened wooden stakes surrounds the town. A movable barricade is deployed in front of an archway that marks where a more permanent gate will be installed in the future. A half-dozen elven craftsmen are carving intricate leaf designs into the bare wood of the palisade, and seven armored elves patrol the perimeter. These elven guards are LG elven **scouts**, each armed with a scimitar and wearing a *mithral chain shirt* and a *helm of the golden eagle*.

BETRAYAL AT BALD HILL

Bald Hill is critical to Gehir's plan, and the expedition's arrival there is an important step toward his ultimate goal. In prehistoric times, Bald Hill was an important temple to Yig, a stone butte carved into the shape of a rattlesnake head and filled with winding tunnel complexes. Gehir plans to establish a headquarters here for himself and his serpentfolk minions. A key part of this plan is to capture and imprison the adventurers he has brought along with him. Some of the adventurers will be sacrificed here as part of a ritual to restore Bald Hill to its former glory. Others will be kept in reserve, to be sacrificed elsewhere as Gehir's plan unfolds. But first, Gehir must outwit the heroes ...

SPLITTING THE PARTIES

Gehir tells the expedition members that he plans to spend a few days investigating Bald Hill, saying he believes it to contain an ancient ruin. The player

characters are told to scout around the other side of the hill in search of other entrances to the caves. Meanwhile, he sends the Rockbreakers into the cave mouth and Gunnar's Team to the shore of a nearby lake, while the Friendlies stay with the wagon.

Bald Hill is a sizable rocky outcropping, made all the larger by a talus slope of eroded scree that forms a conical curtain-mound around the base of the hill. Walking around the perimeter of the hill while navigating the rocky terrain takes about 20 minutes. Gehir's wagon is encamped on the edge of a copse of trees about 1,500 feet (a 5-minute walk) away from the cave entrance.

As the characters, the Rockbreakers, and Gunnar's Team depart, Gehir has Alpha and Beta unload the mysterious iron-bound chests from the front compartment of the wagon. Once the scouting teams have been out of sight for a few minutes, Gehir opens the chests, uniting Alpha and Beta with their eldritch parasites and completing their transformation into **anchorites** (page 71). Gehir and his anchorites subdue and capture the Friendlies, then move into the cave, where a team of serpentfolk are already lying in wait to ambush the Rockbreakers. Meanwhile, Gunnar's Team and the PCs are walking toward ambushes of their own.





A CALL FOR AID

Once the characters have spent about 10 minutes walking toward the rear of Bald Hill, they receive an urgent message via the *animal messenger* spell:

A small bird alights on a nearby branch, but when it opens its beak, a human voice issues forth—the voice of Cathbad the druid: “This is Cathbad speaking. We’ve been ambushed! In the cave. Snake people everywhere! We need help! Wait, is that—? All is lost. Fly, bird, fly!”

The party must decide whether to proceed on their own assigned mission or trek back to the cave to rescue the Rockbreakers.

OPTION A: ‘CATHBAD CAN HANDLE IT HIMSELF.’

The characters decide to proceed with their own work, trusting in the Rockbreakers to pull through on their own. Their circumambulation of Bald Hill takes them to a relatively flat patch of ground surrounded by shrubs and low trees. In the center of the clearing sits one of the mysterious iron-bound chests from the front compartment of Gehir’s wagon. It is clearly unlocked, its lid slightly open.

Monsters. Surrounding the clearing are six **serpentfolk** (SPCM 365) hiding within illusory rocks and shrubberies created with *minor illusion*, which grants them advantage on their Dexterity (Stealth) checks. Each serpentfolk is armed with a net in addition to its normal weapons. Lurking 60 feet away in a copse of trees is a **medusa** that has drunk a *potion of invisibility*, and 120 feet up the cliffs, hidden beyond the rocky escarpment, is Beta the **anchorite** (page 71). This team of ambushers waits for just the right moment to strike, preferably when the characters are investigating the open chest in the center of the clearing. The ambushers’ goal is not to kill the characters but to incapacitate and capture them, either by beating them unconscious or petrifying them with the medusa’s gaze.

Treasure. Each serpentfolk carries a *potion of healing*, which they have been ordered to administer only to dying characters after they have been tied up, to ensure that the captives do not bleed out before they can be properly sacrificed. The iron-bound chest contains only a thick brown sludge—a nutrient slurry consisting mostly of Beta’s blood, in which Beta’s eldritch parasite lived for the length of the journey into Yilan.

Defeat. This encounter should end with all the player characters alive but in the custody of the serpentfolk. Whether they fall unconscious or succumb to petrification, their last waking sight is a scene of utter defeat:

As your vision darkens, you see a bright flash of light, and the whole mass of Bald Hill seems to shift and rebuild itself, gaining a distinctly scaly

appearance as you are hit by a wave of warm, humid air. The last thing you see is a serpentfolk approaching you with a coil of thick rope. Then ... blackness.

OPTION B: ‘WE MUST RESCUE THE ROCKBREAKERS!’

The characters rush to the rescue of the Rockbreakers. As they round the hill, making their way toward the cave mouth at the front, they are shocked by a sudden change in their environment:

A flash of light fills the sky, and a great clap of thunder roils the earth. Bald Hill changes before your eyes, re-forming as if erosion were running in reverse. In an instant it is transformed from a shapeless mass of naked stone to a bold promontory carved into the shape of a gigantic rattlesnake head emerging from the earth. A blast of hot tropical air nearly knocks you on your back. Great spindly trees, stout ferns, and tall spires of fungus burst from the soil. What once was a cave is now the fanged maw of a great stone snake. As you stand before it, a wail of despair echoes from the depths of its serpentine throat.

The characters are now at the mouth of the cave. They will have to climb over the lip of the serpent’s jaw to see into the cave, and the bright light outside makes it difficult to see into the darkness beyond. Gehir’s wagon (abandoned, unbeknown to the characters) is still several minutes away, so they are the closest help to the Rockbreakers in the cave. When the characters clamber into the cavernous mouth of the stone snake, they see the full extent of their betrayal.

Standing on the carved, bifurcated tongue of the stone rattlesnake is Gehir, his green garb spattered with blood. He holds a dripping dagger over the corpses of Captain Khorsava and Jehanne Auberjonois. Gehir turns to you, the semblance of his face dissolving away to reveal a serpent’s head. His scarred apprentice, Alpha, hovers behind him on batlike wings. Other serpentfolk stand over the beaten and restrained forms of the remaining Friendlies and Rockbreakers. Young Vitya, tears streaming down his face, and Sarai Ninefingers struggle against their bonds as their serpentine captors attempt to subdue them. Cathbad, Shorty, Whiskers, and Maxx lie bloody and unconscious on the cavern floor.

Gehir immediately orders his minions to subdue the characters, flustered at this small hiccup in his plan. They will do everything in their power to keep the PCs from escaping. Their goal is not to kill the characters but to incapacitate and capture them.

Allies. Sarai and Vitya are both injured (half health) and disarmed; they have been bound securely



with ropes and are restrained. Sarai has expended her spell slots. The other NPC adventurers are unconscious but stable, with all their spell slots expended. If the PCs are able to free Sarai or Vitya, they will fight as long as they are able to; otherwise, they can only watch helplessly. Subduing these adventurers was not an easy task: five serpentfolk and a riding croc lie dead or dying upon the floor.

Monsters. Eight **serpentfolk** (*SPCM* 365), three of them injured (half health), stand around the room. The three injured ones will remain with Sarai and Vitya unless they are needed to turn the tide of battle. The serpentfolk have 3 **riding crocs** (page 78) at their command. **Gehir Greencloak** (page 67), now revealed in his true serpentfolk form, stands in the center of the room; he has expended one spell slot of



WHAT IF A CHARACTER DIES?

The goal of the bad guys in this climactic battle is to capture the characters alive, but there are many difficult-to-control variables in any battle. If a PC ends up dying, there are a few ways to proceed. The first and most likely option is that the player can roll up a new character who can awake in the dungeons alongside the rest of the party. This new character will need some reason to have been wandering around Yilan before being captured by serpentfolk. Another option is for a player to take over the character of one of the surviving NPC adventurers, working with the GM to roll up a character of the same general class and abilities. This option is less ideal, as most players will prefer to make their own characters rather than inhabit a preexisting NPC. Finally, if the player is particularly attached to their character, the GM may have Gehir bring them back through *raise dead* or similar magic. It may strain credulity that the serpentfolk mastermind would expend such resources on a future sacrifice, but he *has* already gone through the trouble of trekking them for weeks through the jungle.

each level 1st through 5th. Alpha the **anchorite** (page 71), similarly unmasked, hovers nearby. If the battle turns against Gehir, he can call Beta the anchorite to him as well.

Defeat. This encounter should end with all the PCs alive but in the custody of the serpentfolk, their last waking sight is a scene of utter defeat:

As your vision darkens, you see your friends and allies fallen around you, Gehir and his serpentine minions triumphant. They close in on you as your consciousness slips away, leaving only the blackness of the void.

OPTION C: 'RUN AWAY! RUN AWAY!'

The characters decide to abandon all pretense of valor and flee into the wilderness. If they flee while on the verge of one encounter or another, the hostile forces arrayed for that encounter will pursue them to the best of their abilities. But the characters may decide to flee at some less obvious moment, such as immediately after receiving Cathbad's call for aid or upon seeing the transformation of Bald Hill. In that event, Gehir will soon learn of their failure to show up at their appointed ambush and send both Alpha and Beta out in search of them in **anchorite** (page 71) form. Once Alpha and Beta find the adventurers, **Gehir Greencloak** (page 67) will arrive mounted on a **shantak** (*SPCM* 368). They attack the adventurers with the intent to subdue them and bring them back to Bald Hill.

If the characters instead flee to the lakeshore where Gunnar's Team was sent, they find the members of Gunnar's Team petrified and surrounded by an ambush force similar to the one described in option A.

IMPRISONED BY GEHIR

Whether the PCs succumbed to petrification or were beaten into unconsciousness, they awake in a dimly lit stone cell.

The darkness of defeat gives way to dreams. You dream of being swallowed by a great stone snake, roasted in its fiery gullet. You dream of dense, steaming jungles packed with terrifying reptilian life, all gnashing teeth and raking claws. You dream of burning venom coursing through your veins like lava through the core of a volcano. You awake in a feverish haze, sweating and panting in a dark stone cell, the only light coming from a flickering fire somewhere beyond the heavy door. Only your companions are there with you, shaking sleep from their heads. You hear a strange, rhythmic rattle, like the purr of a cat. Suddenly, an empty corner of the cell is occupied. A desiccated, mummified cat wrapped in spell-scribed linen bandages and wearing a gold and carnelian collar regards you with empty eyes. "Well," it purrs, "That didn't go very well, did it?"

LEVELING UP

At the end of *Bald Hill*, all characters gain sufficient experience to reach level 5.

APPENDIX: NPCs AND ITEMS OF INTEREST

THE FRIENDLIES

This band of rogues led by Sarai Ninefingers began as a splinter group of outcasts from a thieves' guild but quickly became a lucrative adventuring band for rejects and rebels from all walks of life. Their code: Never steal from someone who doesn't deserve it,

never start a fight (but always finish one), and never betray one of your own. The Friendlies took this job because a former member broke the third rule and ran off with most of the group's gold. Each Friendly marks themselves with a heart patch sewn onto their clothing.



JEHANNE AUBERJONOIS

"I'm not afraid to get my hands dirty ... figuratively speaking, of course."

The bastard daughter of a human nobleman and an orcish peasant, Jehanne never felt that she belonged anywhere until she joined the Friendlies. Her clothes and equipment are expensive, and she always keeps them clean and in good condition. She wears the heart patch of the Friendlies on the sleeve of her blue and white checkered tunic.

GAME STATISTICS

Jehanne Auberjonois is a chaotic neutral half-orc **scout**, with these changes:

- ◇ She has Strength 15 (+2).
- ◇ She has the following racial traits: She is proficient in Intimidation (+2). She has darkvision out to a range of 60 feet. She speaks Common and Orc.
- ◇ **Relentless Endurance (Recharges after a Long Rest).** When Jehanne is reduced to 0 hit points but not killed outright, she drops to 1 hit point instead.

TRAITS

- ◇ **Distinctive Feature:** Always clean and well-dressed.
- ◇ **Endearing Trait:** She is generous and loves to share.
- ◇ **Flaw:** Her obsession with cleanliness sometimes interferes with her work.



WHISKERS

"Always have a plan for when your plan fails."

Whiskers is a zoog, a race of small forest dwellers known for making cruel traps. Like all zoogs, he has a ratlike mouth surrounded by an array of short tentacles, hence the name he adopted when he joined the Friendlies. His tail has been cut down to a stub, an injury he refuses to talk about. Whiskers spends a lot of time thinking and observing, but he is also excitable and a fast talker. He has golden-brown fur and wears forest green clothes.

GAME STATISTICS

Whiskers is a chaotic neutral zoog **spy** with these changes:

- ◇ He has the following racial traits: His walking speed is 25 feet. He has a burrowing speed of 10 feet and a climbing speed of 25 feet. He has darkvision out to a range of 60 feet. He speaks Common and Zoog.
- ◇ Whiskers has the following additional attack:
 - » **Bite. Melee Weapon Attack:** +4 to hit, reach 5 feet, one target.
Hit: 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage.

TRAITS

- ◇ **Distinctive Feature:** Aside from being a zoog, he has only a stub of a tail.
- ◇ **Endearing Trait:** Loves to play pranks.
- ◇ **Flaw:** Seriously loves to play pranks.

SARAI NINEFINGERS

“If you’re ever feeling weak, don’t be afraid to borrow a little strength from your friends.”

Sarai is a half-elf with a haunted past. In a moment of weakness and on the verge of death, she made a dark pact with a fiend, gaining magical powers but also a black spot on her soul. She has worked all her life since trying to make amends for the wrongs she has done. She is guarded and secretive. Her pale skin and short, platinum hair contrast with her black clothing trimmed with purple.

TRAITS

- ◇ **Distinctive Feature:** Missing her right pinky finger.
- ◇ **Endearing Trait:** Sticks up for the underdog.
- ◇ **Flaw:** Slow to give her trust.

SARAI NINEFINGERS

Medium humanoid (half-elf), chaotic good

Armor Class 15 (studded leather)

Hit Points 27 (6d8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
9 (-1)	16 (+3)	11 (+0)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)

Saving Throws Dex +5, Wis +4, Cha +4

Skills Deception +4, Perception +4, Sleight of Hand +5, Stealth +5

Senses passive Perception 14

Languages Common, Elvish, thieves’ cant

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Spellcasting. Sarai is a 1st-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 12, +4 to hit with spell attacks). She has the following warlock spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *eldritch blast, mage hand*
1st level (1 slot): *expeditious retreat, hellish rebuke*

Cunning Action. On each of her turns, Sarai can use a bonus action to take the Dash, Disengage, or Hide action.

Fey Ancestry. Sarai has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can’t put her to sleep.

Sneak Attack (1/Turn). Sarai deals an extra 3 (1d6) damage when she hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally of Sarai that isn’t incapacitated and Sarai doesn’t have disadvantage on the attack roll.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Sarai makes two attacks with her shortsword or shortbow.

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage.

Shortbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage



MAXX

“Look on the bright side—it’s not the end of the world.”

The tiefling Eumaxxanaria—Maxx for short—was raised in an apocalyptic cult, but she rejected her dark calling and escaped. She lived as a thief on the streets until she found support and companionship among the Friendlies. Maxx and Sarai have bonded over their mutual struggles with their dark sides, and they watch out for each other when times are tough. Maxx has pale purple skin marked with darker freckles; straight, black hair; and a pair of short horns sprouting from her forehead. She embraces her demonic heritage as a unique part of herself and a constant reminder that evil is a choice, not something you are born into. She has a rich, smoky singing voice and plays the mandolin.

TRAITS

- ◇ **Distinctive Feature:** Purple skin and horns.
- ◇ **Endearing Trait:** Quick to forgive mistakes.
- ◇ **Flaw:** Prone to panic.



MAXX

Medium humanoid (tiefling), chaotic good

Armor Class 15 (studded leather)

Hit Points 22 (4d8 + 4)

Speed 30 ft.,

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
9 (-1)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)	12 (+1)	17 (+3)

Saving Throws Cha +5

Skills Deception +5, Performance +5, Stealth +5

Damage Resistances fire

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages Common, Infernal, thieves' cant

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Innate Spellcasting. Maxx's spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 13). She can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *thaumaturgy*

Spellcasting. Maxx is a 2nd-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 13, +5 to hit with spell attacks). She knows the following bard spells:

Cantrips (at will): *minor illusion*, *vicious mockery*

1st level (3 slots): *bane*, *charm person*, *healing word*, *heroism*, *mist of R'lyeh* (SPCM 109)

Distract (3/day). As a bonus action, Maxx can target one creature on her turn within 30 feet of her that can see and hear her. The target must succeed a DC 13 Charisma saving throw or have disadvantage on its next attack roll or saving throw until the start of Maxx's next turn.

ACTIONS

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

Light Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. Hit: 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage.

GUNNAR'S TEAM

The creatively named Gunnar's Team is led by Gunnar the Bold, whose straightforward kindheartedness guides this band of do-gooders. As a whole, Gunnar's Team is uncomfortable with subterfuge and unwilling to look the other way when injustice rears its head. Its members believe mercy is more important than punishment and charity is more valuable than treasure. All members of Gunnar's Team incorporate the color yellow into their dress.



ENIVWENAYE

"Generosity is never wasted."

Enivwenaye, "Eni" to her friends, is a stalwart martial artist who uses her fists to further the cause of justice. She is a vocal critic of those who hoard their wealth or spend it extravagantly rather than use it to benefit the less fortunate. She has dark brown skin and gleaming blue eyes. She keeps her black dreadlocks up in a short ponytail and wears a simple beige tunic intricately crisscrossed with braided yellow cord. Enivwenaye moves with an effortless grace born from years of strict training. She religiously abstains from eating red meat.

TRAITS

- ◇ **Distinctive Feature:** Sapphire-like eyes and perfect posture.
- ◇ **Endearing Trait:** She loves jokes and laughs loudly and easily.
- ◇ **Flaw:** She is too hard on herself when she fails at a task.

ENIVWENAYE

Medium humanoid (human), lawful good

Armor Class 15 (unarmored defense)

Hit Points 19 (3d8 + 6)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	15 (+2)	13 (+1)

Saving Throws Str +4, Dex +5

Skills Acrobatics +5, Stealth +5

Senses passive Perception 12

Languages Common

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Ki Action. Enivwenaye can use a bonus action to take the Dash, Disengage, or Dodge action.

Unarmored Defense. While wearing no armor and wielding no shield, Enivwenaye adds her Wisdom modifier to her AC.

ACTIONS

Unarmed Strike. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) bludgeoning damage, and Enivwenaye can use a bonus action to make another unarmed strike attack.

GUNNAR THE BOLD

“Kindness costs nothing, but it means everything.”

Gunnar is a knight-errant on a quest to make the world a better place. He is a simple man, direct in all things and uncreative in his decision-making. He is affable and attentive, always ready to listen to the voices of others. Gunnar has pale skin and shoulder-length golden hair. He wears plate armor with a yellow surcoat displaying a white tower inside a circle of chain, a device that also appears on his shield.

FAITH

Gunnar worships a lawful good god who values mercy and justice. The GM should feel free to choose an appropriate god from their campaign setting, especially if one of the PCs worships the same god. However, Gunnar is less devoted to any specific god than he is to his ideals.

TRAITS

- ◇ **Distinctive Feature:** Golden hair and an old scar down his left cheek.
- ◇ **Endearing Trait:** Extremely friendly and a good listener.
- ◇ **Flaw:** He is sometimes too ready to be merciful.

GUNNAR

Medium humanoid (human), lawful good

Armor Class 20 (plate, shield)

Hit Points 33 (6d8 + 6)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	10 (+0)	13 (+1)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Wis +4, Cha +5

Skills Athletics +4, Insight +4

Condition Immunities disease

Senses passive Perception 12

Languages Common

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Spellcasting. Gunnar is a 3rd-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 13, +5 to hit with spell attacks). Gunnar has the following paladin spells prepared:

1st level (3 slots): *bless, cure wounds, heroism, protection from evil and good, sanctuary, shield of faith*

ACTIONS

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

Smite (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) slashing damage plus 9 (2d8) radiant damage. If the target is a fiend or undead, the radiant damage increases by 1d8.

Lay On Hands (3/Day). Gunnar touches one creature, restoring up to 5 hit points to the target, curing the target of one disease, or neutralizing one poison affecting it.

REACTIONS

Protection. When an ally within 5 feet of Gunnar is attacked by a creature he can see, he imposes disadvantage on that attack roll.





ABSALOM 'EAGLE-EYE' IDRISI

"Steady on."

Absalom is the marksman of Gunnar's Team and its newest recruit. He is cocky and competitive, but also quick with an encouraging word or compliment. He has a rakish smile and deep brown eyes, a thick black moustache and a head of shaggy curls. His armor is made of woven strips of leather over a padded coat, and he wears a blue cape trimmed with yellow silk and a matching yellow silk sash-belt.

GAME STATISTICS

Absalom Idrisi is a lawful good human **scout**, with these changes:

- ◇ He has Charisma 14 (+2).
- ◇ He wields a scimitar instead of a shortsword, dealing slashing damage.

TRAITS

- ◇ **Distinctive Feature:** A broken nose and flashy clothes.
- ◇ **Endearing Trait:** Encouraging and cocksure.
- ◇ **Flaw:** Very bad at sticking to the plan.

THE ROCKBREAKERS

This party began as an all-dwarf mercenary crew, but its membership changed drastically as old members were lost in combat and new members joined. The Rockbreakers are led by Captain Khorsava, a dwarf and a hardened mercenary warrior, and his trusted second-in-command Cathbad, a human druid who has proved invaluable in helping the captain deal with the unique threats of the surface world. Khor-

sava left the rest of his mercenary company in the south, taking only a handpicked few to Ventissa to compete for a spot on the expedition. The sigil of the Rockbreakers is a pair of crossed pickaxes in black over a gray field with a white pale.



CAPTAIN URI KHORSAVA

“Duty, honor, and discipline in all things.”

Captain Uri Khorsava is a seasoned warrior whose firm devotion to order and discipline inspires his men to meet his high expectations. Khorsava’s word is his bond. He has dark bronze skin and a bright orange beard that spills out in braids over his black scale armor.

TRAITS

- ◇ **Distinctive Feature:** Bright orange hair and black armor.
- ◇ **Endearing Trait:** When he’s in a good mood, he sings old dwarven ballads in a rich baritone.
- ◇ **Flaw:** He is uncompromising in his discipline, ready to deliver a stern rebuke to anyone who breaks a promise or retreats from battle, no matter the circumstances.

CAPTAIN URI KHORSAVA

Medium humanoid (dwarf), lawful neutral

Armor Class 17 (scale mail, shield)

Hit Points 60 (8d8 + 24)

Speed 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	11 (+0)	12 (+1)	15 (+2)

Saving Throws Con +5

Skills Athletics +5

Damage Resistances poison

Senses passive Perception 11

Languages Common, Dwarvish

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Dwarven Resilience. Khorsava has advantage on saving throws against being poisoned.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Uri makes two melee attacks.

Battleaxe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) slashing damage, and Khorsava may use his bonus action to make a shield smash attack against the same target.

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

REACTIONS

Gird Ally (Recharges on a Short or Long Rest). When an ally within 30 feet of Khorsava who can see and hear him makes a saving throw against the charmed or frightened condition, Khorsava speaks forceful and encouraging words that grant that ally a +2 bonus on their saving throw.

CATHBAD THE DRUID

“Sooner or later, nature always wins.”

Cathbad, often referred to simply as “the Druid” by the other Rockbreakers, is valued for his sage wisdom and knowledge of the natural world. He has leathery skin, and his black hair and short-cropped beard are streaked with gray. He wears a breastplate of thick hide over his white robes. Cathbad is quick to smile and quick to forgive, always counseling patience and planning over rash action. His drink of choice is mead.

TRAITS

- ◇ **Distinctive Feature:** White woolen robes that never seem to get dirty or damp.
- ◇ **Endearing Trait:** Extremely laid-back and friendly.
- ◇ **Flaw:** A little too fond of mead.

CATHBAD

Medium humanoid (human), neutral

Armor Class 14 (hide; 16 with *barkskin*)

Hit Points 27 (5d8 + 5)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	13 (+1)

Saving Throws Int +3, Wis +5

Skills Nature +3, Survival +5

Senses passive Perception 13

Languages Common, Druidic

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Spellcasting. Cathbad is a 3rd-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 13, +5 to hit with spell attacks). Cathbad has the following druid spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *druidcraft, mending, produce flame*
1st level (4 slots): *create or destroy water, cure wounds, entangle, thunderwave*
2nd level (2 slots): *animal messenger, barkskin, enhance ability, spider climb*

ACTIONS

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

Sling. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 30/120, one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) bludgeoning damage.





‘SHORTY’ MCCALLAM

“Cooking is what separates us from the beasts.”

Shorty was brought along less for his fighting prowess than for his way with food. His nickname started as a joke among the dwarves (who are barely taller than he is), but now he wears it with pride. Life among the dwarves has also encouraged Shorty to cultivate facial hair: a pair of bushy red muttonchops.

GAME STATISTICS

Shorty is a neutral halfling **bandit**, with these changes:

- ◇ He has Wisdom 14 (+2).
- ◇ He has a walking speed of 25 feet. He speaks Common and Halfling. He can move through the space of any creature of Medium or larger size.
- ◇ He applies twice his proficiency bonus to ability checks made with cook’s utensils (+4).

TRAITS

- ◇ **Distinctive Feature:** Red muttonchops and a thick accent.
- ◇ **Endearing Trait:** Excellent cook.
- ◇ **Flaw:** Shorty is the loudest snorer.



VITYA BOLKORR

“Perfect is close enough.”

Vitya is the youngest member of the Rockbreakers and son of Captain Khorsava’s Second Lieutenant Vadim. He is Khorsava’s protégé and is always seeking his captain’s coveted nod of approval. Vitya is eager to prove himself and firmly believes he has the potential to be a great warrior someday. He has ruddy cheeks, a jet-black beard, and stone-gray eyes.

GAME STATISTICS

Vitya Bolkorr is a lawful neutral dwarf **guard**, with these racial traits: He has a walking speed of 25 feet. He has advantage on saving throws against poison and resistance to poison damage. He has darkvision out to a range of 60 feet. He speaks Common and Dwarvish.

TRAITS

- ◇ **Distinctive Feature:** His black beard is braided into one thick rope.
- ◇ **Endearing Trait:** Always eager to help, no matter the task.
- ◇ **Flaw:** Overconfidence.

GEHIR GREENLOACK

GEHIR GREENCLOAK

Gehir has spent years laying the groundwork for this expedition. The pieces are all in place, and now his grand plan is coming to fruition. Soon he will be able to reveal his true form. He is living under the alias Gehir Greencloak, a wealthy but unassuming elderly wizard. In this guise, he appears to be an aging human man with tired eyes, pale skin, and a long white beard. He dresses in simple traveling robes with an emerald-green cloak and hat. His familiar is Turu, a **pterodactyl** (page 77).

In his true form, he is a serpentfolk, one of a race of primeval snake-headed humanoids that ruled the land long ago. If his plan succeeds, the world will be plunged into primordial chaos, ready to be conquered by Gehir and his serpentine allies.

ALPHA AND BETA

Gehir's two apprentices, Alpha and Beta, are actually spell-scarred hosts for eldritch parasites. They are magically bound to serve Gehir in all things. They speak only to Gehir, usually in whispers. Gehir keeps them out of sight for the most part, but they have a role to play in his ultimate plan. Alpha and Beta have pale, waxy skin stretched across their prominent bones. Robes of black sackcloth gird their hairless bodies, and collars of dull iron encircle their necks. Their faces are scarred with arcane runes that glow faintly red in the dark.

GAME STATISTICS

Alpha and Beta are both lawful evil human **urbane magicians** (SPCM 406) and know the following spells: *charm person*, *darkness*, *expeditious retreat*, *fear*, *hellish rebuke*, *mirror image*, *vampiric touch*.

When bonded with their parasites, Alpha and Beta become **anchorites** (page 71).





GEHIR GREENCLOAK

Medium monstrosity (shapechanger), neutral evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 144 (17d8 + 68)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	18 (+4)	18 (+4)	20 (+5)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Con +8, Int +9, Wis +6

Skills Arcana +9, Deception +11, Perception +6, Yogg-Sothothery +11

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities frightened, paralyzed, poisoned, stunned

Senses blindsight 30 ft., darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 17

Languages Aklo, Common, Serpentfolk

Challenge 10 (5,900 XP)

Innate Spellcasting. Gehir's spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 17). He can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *minor illusion*

1/day each: *charm person*, *major image*, *mirror image*, *suggestion*

Spellcasting. Gehir is a 12th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 17, +9 to hit with spell attacks). He knows the following spells:

Cantrips (at will): *acid splash*, *chill touch*, *light*, *mending*, *poison spray*

1st level (4 slots): *alarm*, *hideous laughter*, *lethargy of Tsathoggua* (SPCM 106), *magic missile*

2nd level (3 slots): *acid arrow*, *detect thoughts*

3rd level (3 slots): *bestow curse*, *counterspell*, *hypnotic pattern*, *sign of Eibon* (SPCM 113)

4th level (3 slots): *black tentacles*, *confusion*, *locate creature*, *wall of fire*

5th level (2 slots): *dominate person*, *hold monster*

6th level (1 slot): *ancient sorcery of serpentfolk* (SPCM 92), *mass suggestion*

Combat Caster. Gehir has advantage on Constitution saving throws made to maintain concentration.

Fractured Mind. Gehir's alignment cannot be divined via magical means.

Keen Smell. Gehir has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on smell.

Magic Resistance. Gehir has advantage on saving throws against spells and magical effects.

Shapechanger. Gehir can use his action to polymorph into a Medium humanoid or back into his true form. His statistics are the same in each form. Any equipment he is wearing or carrying isn't transformed. He doesn't change form if he dies.

Special Equipment. Aside from his *dagger of metamorphic venom* (page 82), Gehir carries a *potion of superior healing*.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Gehir makes two melee attacks: one with his bite and one with his dagger.

Bite (Serpentfolk form only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage, and the target must make a DC 16 Constitution saving throw, taking 9 (2d8) poison damage on a failure, or half as much damage on a success.

Dagger of Metamorphic Venom. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d4 + 6) piercing damage, and the target must make a DC 16 Constitution saving throw, taking 27 (6d8) poison damage and becoming poisoned for 1 minute on a failure, or taking half as much damage on a success. At the end of each of the poisoned creature's turns, it makes a new saving throw, ending the poisoned condition on itself on a success.



ALLOSAURUS

The allosaurus is a swift and deadly predator. This bipedal dinosaur grabs at its prey with powerful claws and delivers a series of quick slashing bites to debilitate it. Allosauruses are fiercely territorial but sometimes cooperate with others of their species to attack larger prey. They typically stand over 8 feet tall and measure around 30 feet from snout to tail.

This predatory dinosaur has a narrow snout that opens unnervingly wide, revealing a maw lined with saw-like teeth. Its powerful arms are tipped with three sickle-like claws, and its long tail whips out behind it for stability as it runs.



ALLOSAURUS

Huge beast, unaligned

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)

Hit Points 95 (10d12 + 30)

Speed 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	14 (+2)	17 (+3)	2 (-4)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)

Senses passive Perception 11

Languages —

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The allosaurus makes two melee attacks, one with its claws and one with its bite.

Slashing Bites. The allosaurus makes two bite attacks with disadvantage against a Large or larger target, dealing slashing instead of piercing damage.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 20 (3d10 + 4) piercing damage.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) slashing damage. If the target is a Large or smaller creature, it is grappled (escape DC 15). Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained, and the allosaurus can't claw another target.

ANCHORITE

The path to becoming an eremite is long, arduous, and fraught with peril. The mages who choose to pursue this transformation often experiment on their followers and slaves before undergoing their final transformation, producing the pitiable anchorites. These powerful aberrations lack free will, existing only to serve and protect their masters, to whom they are soul-bound.

The chitinous terror advancing with preternatural speed has the bipedal form of a humanoid fused with some sort of living exoskeleton. The symbiote's hinged jaws protrude over the hunched back of its scarred host. Its grotesquely elongated appendages terminate in viciously serrated claws, and two pairs of insectile wings move asynchronously, propelling it with startling speed and agility.



ANCHORITE

Medium aberration, chaotic evil

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points 97 (15d8 + 30)

Speed 45 ft., fly 45 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	16 (+3)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	6 (2)

Saving Throws Str +7, Dex +6

Skills Arcana +6, Athletics +7, Perception +5

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 15

Languages Aklo, Common, telepathy 1 mile (targeting only its master)

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Spellcaster. An anchorite is a 6th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). It has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *mage hand*, *minor illusions*, *shocking grasp*, *true strike*

1st level (4 slots): *expeditious retreat*, *shield*

2nd level (3 slots): *see invisibility*, *misty step*, *web*

3rd level (3 slots): *counterspell*, *dispel magic*

Bound-Soul Resurrection (1/Turn). When the anchorite is reduced to 0 hp, it instead drops to half the hit points it had before it was hit (rounded down) unless it had exactly 1 hit point, or unless the damage was the result of a spell or effect that can affect multiple creatures.

Gestalt Body. The anchorite has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks and on saving throws against diseases, poisons, and being blinded, charmed, deafened, frightened, poisoned, possessed, stunned, or knocked unconscious.

Magical Attacks. The anchorite's weapon attacks are magical.

Magic Resistance. The anchorite has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The anchorite makes two attacks: one with its bite and one with its claws.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) piercing damage.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) slashing damage.

REACTIONS

Protect (1/day). When an attack hits the anchorite's master and the anchorite can see the attacker, the anchorite teleports up to 60 feet to swap places with its master and becomes the target instead.

CAMARASAURUS

The camarasaurus is a large sauropod dinosaur with four stout limbs and a long neck. It typically stands 15 to 20 feet high at the shoulder and is around 50 to 60 feet long, although an exceptionally large specimen may reach 75 feet in length. Its massive head is blunt and sturdy, with its eyes placed high up the skull. Camarasauruses are herbivores, capable of reaching vegetation high up in trees. They often travel in herds similar to elephants.

This towering beast is bigger than an elephant, with great pillars for legs and a long neck stretching to the sky. Its wrinkled skin, clay-red splotched with pale yellow, is covered with pebble-like scales.

CAMARASAURUS

Gargantuan beast, unaligned

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 108 (7d20 + 35)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
23 (+6)	8 (-1)	21 (+5)	2 (-4)	12 (+1)	5 (-3)

Saving Throws Con +7

Senses passive Perception 11

Languages —

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Trampling Charge. If the camarasaurus moves at least 20 feet straight toward a creature and then hits it with a stomp attack on the same turn, the target must succeed on a DC 12 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone. If the target is prone, the camarasaurus can make one stomp attack against it as a bonus action.

ACTIONS

Stomp. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 24 (4d8 + 6) bludgeoning damage.



CHASMOSAURUS

Chasmosaurus is a ceratopsian dinosaur smaller than triceratops, standing about as high as a cow and roughly 15 feet long from beak to tail. A large, rectangular frill extends from the back of its skull like a tower shield. It has three short horns on its face that it rams into predators or rivals, and a sharp hooked beak it uses to defend itself as well as to strip branches of their leaves.

This four-legged beast with knobby reptilian skin is about 15 feet long from the tip of its tail to its beaky mouth, and its oversized head boasts a trio of short horns. A large rectangular frill marked with blue spots protrudes from the back of its skull, protecting its neck.

CHASMOSAURUS

Large beast, unaligned

Armor Class 12 (natural armor)

Hit Points 60 (8d10 + 16)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	9 (-1)	15 (+2)	2 (-4)	11 (+0)	8 (-1)

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages —

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Charge. If the chasmosaurus moves at least 20 feet straight toward a target and then hits it with a gore attack on the same turn, the target takes an extra 9 (2d8) piercing damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (2d10 + 5) slashing damage.

Gore. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d8 + 5) piercing damage.



DILOPHOSAURUS

The dilophosaurus is a predatory dinosaur, much smaller and swifter than a tyrannosaurus but larger and more powerful than a velociraptor. It is easily identified by the pair of colorful crests over its snout, which it uses in displays to attract mates or warn away rivals. It uses its three-clawed hands and crooked snarl of a jaw to hunt prey, mostly smaller creatures than itself, although it will opportunistically attack weak members of larger species. The typical adult dilophosaurus is around 20 feet long and stands 4 to 5 feet high at the shoulder.

This slender, bipedal dinosaur has a distinctive double row of colorful, semicircular crests on top of its head and a hooked jaw lined with curved teeth. It stands about as high as a man, but more than 20 feet in length.

DILOPHOSAURUS

Large beast, unaligned

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)

Hit Points 52 (7d10 + 14)

Speed 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)	2 (-4)	11 (+0)	12 (+1)

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages —

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Pounce. If the dilophosaurus moves at least 20 feet straight toward a Large or smaller creature and then hits it with a claw attack on the same turn, the target must succeed on a DC 13 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone. If the target is prone, the dilophosaurus can make one bite attack against it as a bonus action.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d10 + 3) piercing damage.

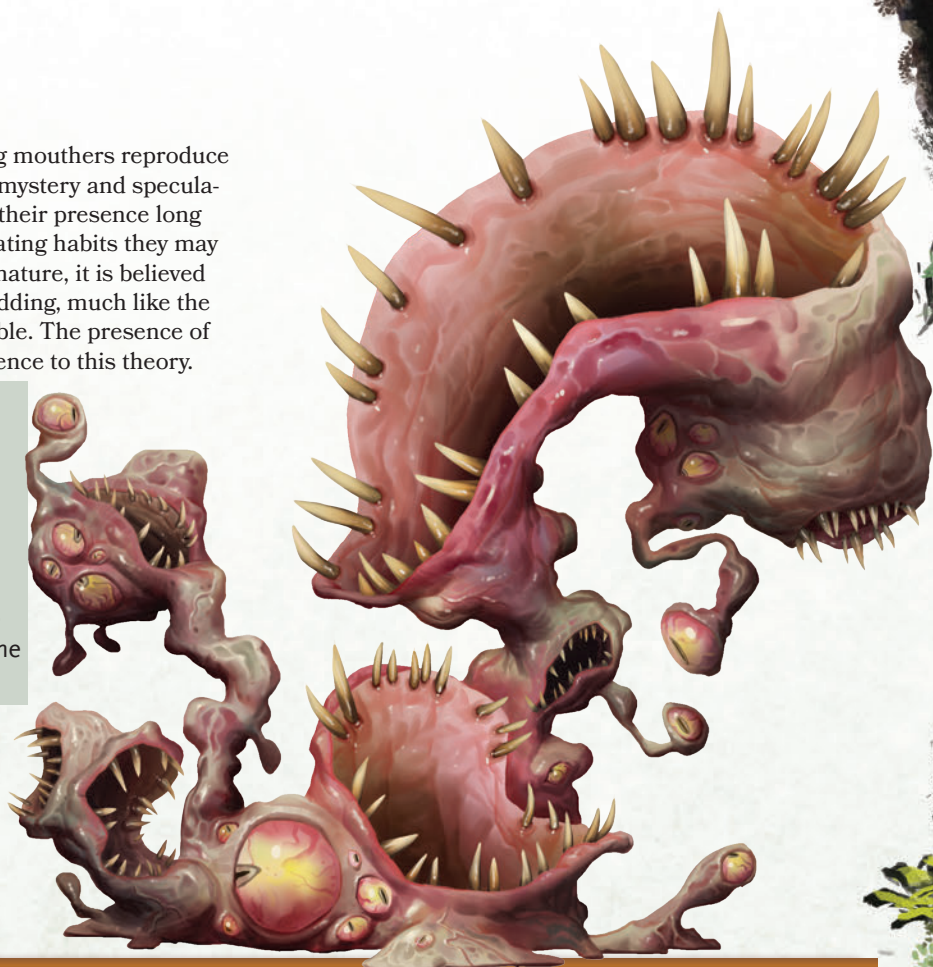
Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) slashing damage.



GIBBERING MOUTHLING

The process by which gibbering mouters reproduce is understandably shrouded in mystery and speculation. Few creatures can stay in their presence long enough to observe whatever mating habits they may have. Because of their solitary nature, it is believed that they spawn progeny via budding, much like the slimes they superficially resemble. The presence of nests of mouthlings lends credence to this theory.

No more than a few feet in diameter, this shiny mass of irregularly formed slime is covered with dozens of small mouths and partially formed, lidless eyes searching for prey. One large, toothy mouth opens so wide that the creature seems on the verge of turning inside out.



GIBBERING MOUTHLING

Tiny aberration, chaotic neutral

Armor Class 11

Hit Points 18 (4d4 + 8)

Speed 10 ft., swim 10 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
7 (-2)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	3 (-4)	10 (+0)	6 (-2)

Condition Immunities prone

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages —

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Aberrant Ground. The ground within a 5-foot radius around the mouthling is softened to sucking mud and difficult terrain. Each creature that starts its turn in that area must succeed a DC 8 Strength saving throw or have its speed reduced to 0 until the start of its next turn.

Gibbering. The mouthling babbles nonsensically while it

can see any creature and isn't incapacitated. Each creature that starts its turn within 10 feet of the mouthling and can hear it must succeed on a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, the creature can't take reactions until the start of its next turn and rolls a d8 to determine what it does during its turn.

d8	Effect
1–4	The creature does nothing.
5–6	The creature takes no action or bonus action and uses all its movement to move in a randomly determined direction.
7–8	The creature makes a melee attack against a randomly determined creature within its reach or does nothing if it can't make sure an attack.

ACTIONS

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

Blinding Spittle. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 10/40 ft., one creature. *Hit:* The target is blinded until the end of the next round, or until the spittle is removed as an action.

KENTROSAURUS

The kentrosaurus is a smaller dinosaur than its more recognizable cousin, the stegosaurus. It has parallel rows of bony plates along its humped back, elongating and transitioning to conical spikes over its hips and down its tail. This herbivore bristles with defenses: its tail spikes are over a foot long, and its defensive shoulder spikes are even longer. The creature is more than 15 feet long from snout to tail and stands 3 feet high at the shoulder.

This lumbering, hump-backed reptile sports a double row of spines and diamond-shaped plates along its back. Its heavy tail is tipped with a splay of foot-long spikes, and two even longer spikes jut out from its shoulders.

KENTROSAURUS

Large beast, unaligned

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points 68 (8d10 + 24)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	9 (-1)	16 (+3)	2 (-4)	11 (+0)	5 (-3)

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages —

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

ACTIONS

Shoulder Spike. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage.

Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 18 (4d6 + 4) piercing damage.

REACTIONS

Brace. When a creature moves to within 5 feet of the kentrosaurus and makes an attack against it, the kentrosaurus makes a shoulder spike attack against that creature.



PTERODACTYL

The pterodactyl is a small primeval flying reptile with a wingspan up to three-and-a-half feet. It can walk awkwardly on the ground using its feet and wings, but it is a swift and agile flyer. Pterodactyls use their long, tapering beaks filled with dozens of small, conical teeth to snatch up fish, insects, and small animals.

A flying reptile the size of a hawk, covered in feather-like down with leathery wing membranes. Its long, toothy beak is topped with a colorful fin-shaped crest.



PTERODACTYL

Tiny beast, unaligned

Armor Class 10

Hit Points 2 (1d4)

Speed 10 ft., fly 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
4 (-3)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	2 (-4)	13 (+1)	8 (-2)

Skills Perception +3

Senses passive Perception 13

Languages —

Challenge 0 (10 XP)

Flyby. The pterodactyl doesn't provoke an opportunity attack when it flies out of an enemy's reach.

ACTIONS

Bite. Melee Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 1 piercing damage.

RIDING CROC

“Riding croc” is a catch-all term for several large terrestrial predecessors of the modern crocodile. These crocodiles have upright gaits that let them walk on land without dragging their bellies. Their thick snouts—more closely resembling a tyrannosaurus’s than an alligator’s—let them hunt prey on land. With their scaly armor and toothy maws, riding crocs make ideal battle mounts for intelligent reptilians like lizardfolk and serpentfolk.

This horse-size, crocodile-like beast runs forward with a lupine gait, its maw lined with dozens of sharp teeth ready to tear into flesh.



RIDING CROC

Large beast, unaligned

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points 30 (4d10 + 8)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)	2 (-4)	10 (+0)	5 (-3)

Skills Stealth +2

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages —

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Burst of Speed (Recharge 5–6). The riding croc can use its bonus action to Dash.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d8 + 3) piercing damage.

TAR ZOMBIES

Not everything that perishes in a tar pit sinks to the bottom. Tar pits that accumulate too many corpses can attract necrotic energies that spontaneously reanimate some of the hapless victims. These desiccated, tar-covered zombies exist solely to feed more bodies into the black mass in which they were created.

This emaciated goblin corpse is oozing tar from its open wounds, yellowed bones protruding from mummified flesh.



TAR-ZOMBIE GOBLIN

Small undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 11

Hit Points 13 (3d6 + 3)

Speed 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	3 (-4)	6 (-2)	5 (-3)

Saving Throws Wis +0

Damage Vulnerabilities fire

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 8

Languages understands Common and Goblin but cannot speak

Challenge 1/8 (25 XP)

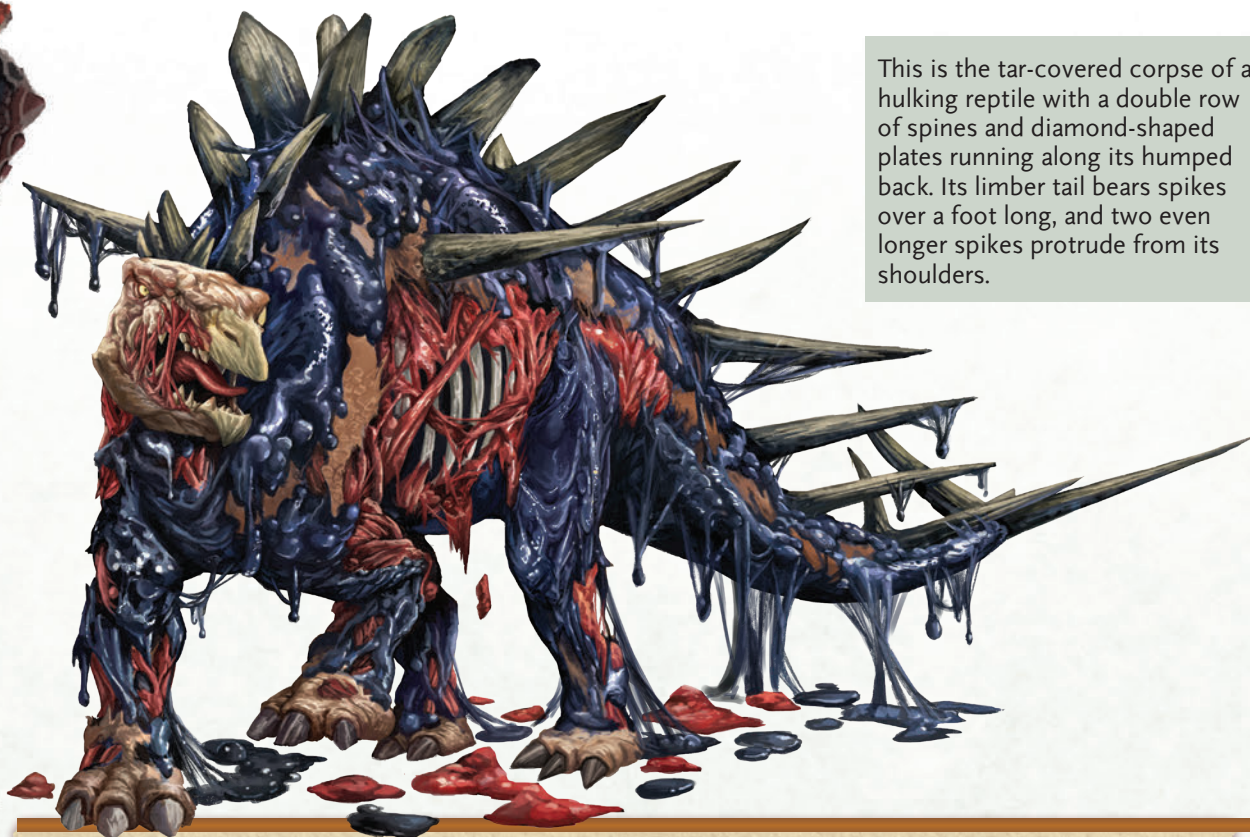
Adhesive. The tar-zombie goblin adheres to anything it touches. A Medium or smaller creature adhered to the tar-zombie goblin is also grappled by it (escape DC 11). When a creature makes a successful melee weapon attack against the tar-zombie goblin, the attacker must succeed on a DC 10 Strength saving throw to pull the weapon free, dropping the weapon on a failure.

Tar Walker. The tar-zombie goblin ignores difficult terrain created by tar pits and can never be restrained by tar pits.

Undead Fortitude. If damage reduces the zombie to 0 hit points, it must make a Constitution saving throw with a DC of 5 + the damage taken, unless the damage is radiant or from a critical hit. On a success, the zombie drops to 1 hit point instead.

ACTIONS

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +1 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 2 (1d6 - 1) bludgeoning damage and the target is grappled (escape DC 11).



This is the tar-covered corpse of a hulking reptile with a double row of spines and diamond-shaped plates running along its humped back. Its limber tail bears spikes over a foot long, and two even longer spikes protrude from its shoulders.

TAR-ZOMBIE KENTROSAURUS

Large undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 11

Hit Points 85 (9d10 + 36)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	7 (-2)	18 (+4)	2 (-4)	6 (-2)	5 (-3)

Saving Throws Wis +0

Damage Vulnerabilities fire

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses passive Perception 8

Languages —

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Adhesive. The tar-zombie kentrosaurus adheres to anything it touches. A Medium or smaller creature adhered to the tar-zombie kentrosaurus is also grappled by it (escape DC 14). When a creature makes a successful melee weapon attack against the tar-zombie kentrosaurus, the attacker must succeed on a DC 10 Strength saving throw to pull the weapon free, dropping the weapon on a failure.

Tar Walker. The tar-zombie kentrosaurus ignores difficult terrain created by tar pits and can never be restrained by tar pits. The tar-zombie kentrosaurus does not take fire

damage from heat sources such as tar pits, only from open flames.

Undead Fortitude. If damage reduces the zombie to 0 hit points, it must make a Constitution saving throw with a DC of 5 + the damage taken, unless the damage is radiant or from a critical hit. On a success, the zombie drops to 1 hit point instead.

ACTIONS

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (3d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 14).

Shoulder Spike. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage.

Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 18 (4d6 + 4) piercing damage.

Tar Belch (Recharge 6). The tar-zombie kentrosaurus expels a blast of hot tar from its gullet in a 10-foot cone. All creatures within the area must make DC 14 Dexterity saving throws, taking 18 (4d8) fire damage and becoming restrained on a failure, or taking half as much damage on a success. A DC 14 Strength check made as an action frees a restrained creature.

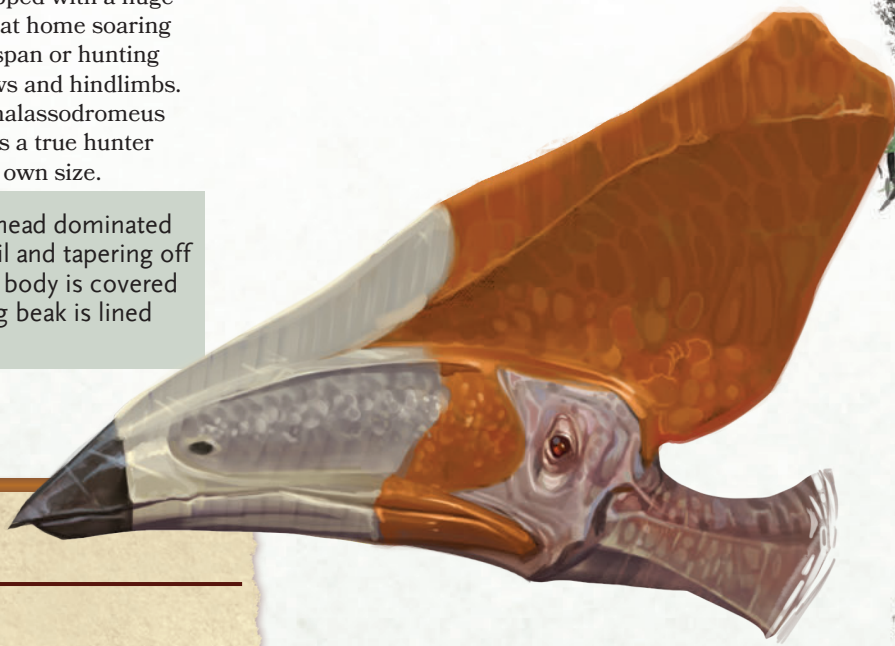
REACTIONS

Brace. When a creature moves to within 5 feet of the tar-zombie kentrosaurus and makes an attack against it, the tar-zombie kentrosaurus makes a shoulder spike attack against that creature.

THALASSODROMEUS

This pterosaur stands as tall as a human, with a beaky head over 4 feet long and topped with a huge crest like a shark's fin. It is equally at home soaring through the air on its 15-foot wingspan or hunting prey while walking on its wing-claws and hindlimbs. Unlike many smaller pterosaurs, thalassodromeus doesn't just eat fish and insects: it is a true hunter that can even take down prey of its own size.

The flying reptile has a massive head dominated by huge red crest rising like a sail and tapering off to a forked point. The creature's body is covered with downy feathers, and its long beak is lined with sharp teeth.



THALASSODROMEUS

Medium beast, unaligned

Armor Class 13

Hit Points 18 (4d8)

Speed 30 ft., fly 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	17 (+3)	11 (+0)	2 (-4)	10 (+0)	7 (-2)

Skills Perception +2

Senses passive Perception 12

Languages —

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Flyby. The thalassodromeus doesn't provoke an opportunity attack when it flies out of an enemy's reach.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.
Hit: 7 (2d4 + 2) piercing damage.

MAGIC ITEMS

DAGGER OF METAMORPHIC VENOM

Weapon (dagger), very rare (requires attunement by a creature of evil alignment)

This curved dagger has a serpent-shaped golden hilt set with emeralds. You gain a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon.

If you are attuned to this dagger, you can use a bonus action to coat the blade with viscous poison. You choose whether this poison functions as *ignition metamorphic venom* or *strike and escape metamorphic venom* (SPCM 120). The poison remains for 1 minute or until used up. The dagger can't be used this way again until the next dawn.

HELM OF THE GOLDEN EAGLE

Wondrous item, uncommon

This mithral helm is crafted in the shape of a stylized eagle's head, complete with bronze feathers and amber eyes. When wearing the helm, you have advantage on sight-based Wisdom (Perception) checks made outdoors in daylight.

ZOARGLOTT'S NECKLACE

Wondrous item, uncommon (requires attunement)

This crude necklace is strung with seven rough, violet crystals. While attuned to it, you have proficiency in the Yog-Sothothery skill (if you are already proficient with that skill, you can apply twice your proficiency bonus to Yog-Sothothery checks). The necklace has 7 charges. While wearing it, you can use an action to expend 1 or more of its charges to cast *magic missile* from it. For 1 charge, you cast the 1st-level version of the spell. You can increase the spell level by one for each additional charge you expend, up to a maximum of 3rd level.

The necklace regains 1 expended charge daily at dawn. If you expend the necklace's last charge, roll a d20. On a 1, the necklace crumbles to dust and is destroyed.



RANDOM ENCOUNTERS

RANDOM ENCOUNTERS, CHAPTER 2

d20	Encounter
1–2	1d4 + 1 hyenas
3	1d4 blood hawks
4–5	1d2 giant poisonous snake
6	1d3 giant badgers
7–8	1d4 giant centipedes
9–11	1d6 + 2 goblins
12–13	1d4 wolves
14–15	1 brown bear
16–17	1d2 giant vultures
18	1 giant boar
19	1 griffon
20	1 giant scorpion

RANDOM ENCOUNTERS, CHAPTER 3

d20	Encounter
1–8	1 immature slime mold (<i>SPCM</i> 378)
9–10	1d2 immature slime mold (<i>SPCM</i> 378)
11	1d4 immature slime mold (<i>SPCM</i> 378)
12	1 ochre slime
13	1d2 gray oozes
14	1d2 violet fungi
15–17	1d4 wamps (<i>SPCM</i> 393)
18	1d3 thalassodromeuses (page 81)
19	1d4 tar-zombie goblins (page 79)
20	1d2 lizardfolk

RANDOM ENCOUNTERS, CHAPTER 4

d20	Encounter
1	1d4 + 1 wolves
2–3	1d4 thalassodromeuses (page 81)
4–5	1d3 giant poisonous snakes
6	1d4 + 2 wamps (<i>SPCM</i> 393)
7–8	1d2 kentrosauruses (page 76)
9–10	1d8 + 2 goblins and one hobgoblin
11–12	1d4 + 1 giant centipedes
13–14	1d4 riding crocs (page 78)
15	1d4 dilophosauruses (page 74)
16	1d3 chasmosauruses (page 73)
17	1d4 camarasauruses (page 72)
18	1 triceratops
19	1 allosaurus (page 70)
20	1 serpentfolk (<i>SPCM</i> 365) on riding croc (page 78)

YIG SNAKE GRANDDADDY

Act 2: Against the Serpentfolk

COMING NEXT MONTH!



CTHULHU · MYTHOS · SAGAS

2



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