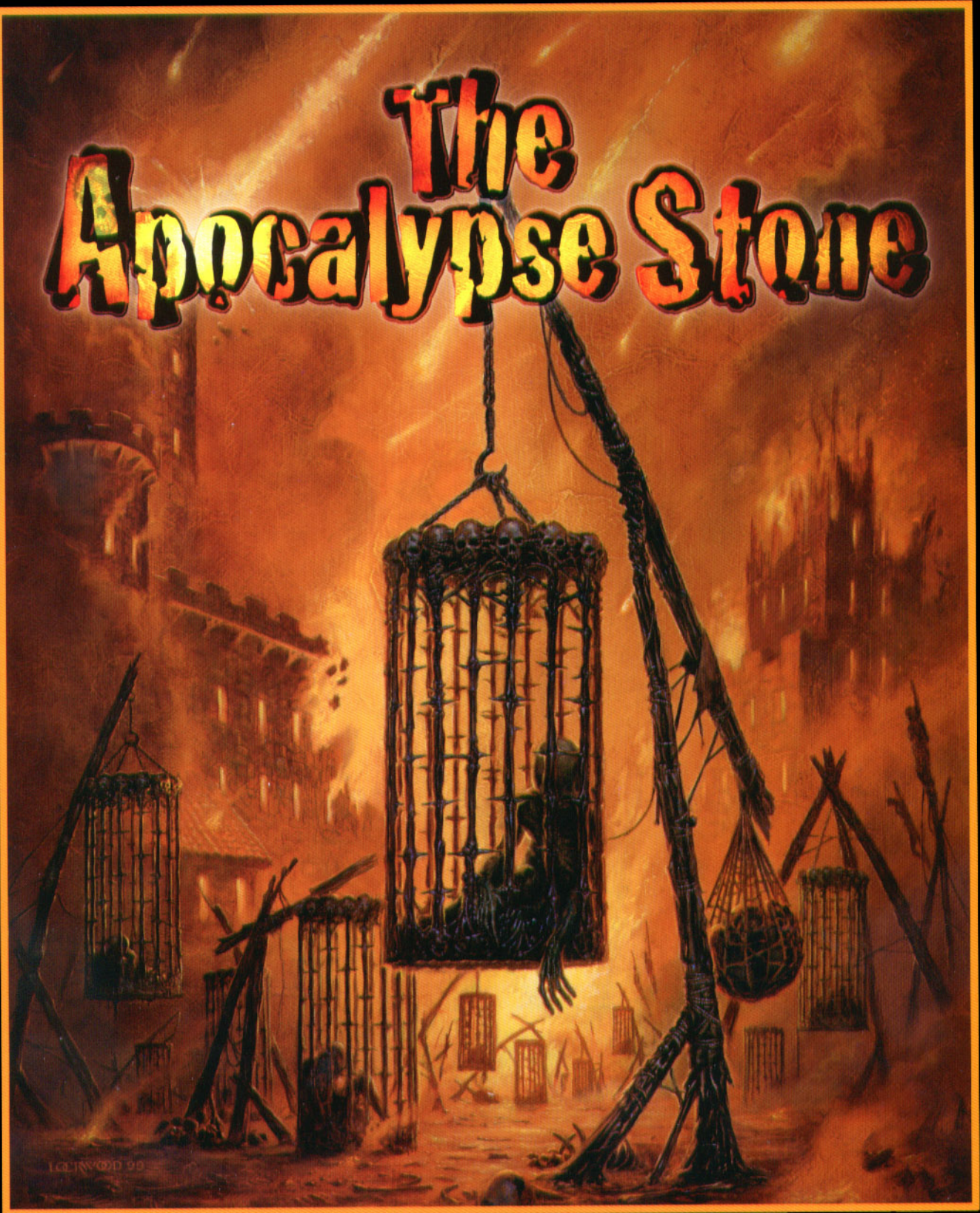


Advanced
Dungeons & Dragons[®]
Adventure

The Apocalypse Stone



Jason Carl and Chris Pramas

Advanced Dungeons & Dragons®

Adventure

The Apocalypse Stone

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Introduction

Every civilization has its own myth about the end of the world. The phrase itself conjures images of earthquakes, rains of fire, floods, plagues, crumbling civilizations, and a host of other terrifying catastrophes. These are powerful, evocative images of finality and are not to be introduced lightly into an AD&D® campaign. But if you intend to bring your campaign to a memorable close, you can't beat the impact of the world's destruction.

Many reasons might motivate a Dungeon Master (DM) to bring about the end of a game world, and with it his or her campaign. This book helps you do just that! The story of your campaign's final days can be one of the most difficult and challenging tasks you ever undertake as DM—but it can be among the most rewarding as well.

How to Use This Product

Warning: *This adventure will end your campaign and destroy your world!*

The Apocalypse Stone is an adventure for four to six characters of level 15 and above, for a total of 60 to 90 experience levels. The player characters (PCs) undertake what they initially believe to be a divine quest, which they later discover is a terrible lie. Worse, their unwitting participation leads to a dire sequence of events that culminate in the destruction of their world. The PCs eventually learn that they had a hand in setting these events in motion and are partially (albeit unintentionally) responsible. They also realize that they can do little, if anything, to prevent the coming apocalypse.

Read this adventure carefully before running it: The plot is complex, and requires you to pull the wool over the eyes of both the player characters and the players themselves. Yes, that's right: The *players* must believe this is just a typical adventure for Garloth's setup to work. A reclusive wizard wants a group of adventurers to get back a family heirloom, and he's willing to pay handsomely for services

rendered. This is a classic opening that shouldn't arouse undue suspicion.

The most important piece of advice is: Lie to your players. Really! Hide it inside another module, pull out the pages and put them in a binder, whatever it takes to keep your group from suspecting this adventure is different from the rest. Without the shock value, its impact is considerably less.

Second, make recovering the *Stone of Corbinet* seem like the end of the adventure. Try to ensure that the game session ends after the PCs give Garloth the *Stone* and collect their payment. This will make it seem like they have once again emerged triumphant from a deadly situation. They should have no idea that their actions may spell the end of the world.

Though intended as an adventure to end your current campaign with the proverbial bang, this product is also a guide to running a compelling story with an apocalyptic theme and contains general information on adapting these concepts effectively to your own campaign style. It can also establish a dramatic transition from your current campaign setting to an entirely new one, if you so choose. Chapter 6: Apocalyptic Advice offers some suggestions to the DM looking for a challenge.

Why Blow Up the World?

By this point you might be thinking, "Hey! Wait just a minute! I've put a lot of time, effort, and energy into creating and developing and running my campaign—*why* on earth would I want to bring it to a screeching, smoking halt?" That's an excellent question with several equally excellent answers, each of which leads to a possible conclusion (see Chapter 5: The Keep at the End of the World). If you're uncertain about the wisdom of destroying your campaign world, read on.

The End Times

It happens: You've been running the same campaign for years, and your DM intuition tells you that the time is right to bring closure to all the stories you have told. It's time to retire the current campaign and possibly prepare the stage for a new one. This is especially true if events in your campaign have altered the course of its world's history or destiny; cataclysmic natural disasters, divine intervention,



and the ultimate battle between good and evil can all herald the end times.

Every story has a natural endpoint, and long-term campaigns are no exception. But when you have poured heart and soul into yours, it's unsatisfying to simply tell your players, "Sorry, that's it." Both they and you deserve a conclusion that has meaning, involves the player characters, ties up all those loose ends, and creates great, lasting memories of equally great roleplaying. Concluding your campaign with a shattering apocalypse achieves all these goals, and lets you have a lot of fun in the bargain.

Out with the Old, In with the New

Perhaps your campaign has reached the point where it no longer has the same excitement and challenge as when it was new, and you're looking for something different. Nonetheless, you may be reluctant to destroy all that you have labored long to create—quite understandable.

An apocalyptic adventure doesn't necessarily mean the literal end of your campaign.

Instead, the campaign world, or just a portion of it, undergoes dramatic changes that effectively create a new campaign setting. The conclusion of *The Apocalypse*

Stone changes your campaign world significantly and permanently, but also leaves it relatively intact as the setting for a whole new range of possibilities.

New stories can be set on the same world as the old campaign, but the changes wrought by these apocalyptic events give the new campaign an entirely different atmosphere, tone, and style.

Correcting Mistakes

Sometimes what begins with the best of intentions doesn't quite turn out right in the end. Campaigns

that endure for years, unless managed very carefully, often see the player characters ascending to tremendous heights of power. When this happens, there's not much you can throw at the PCs to seriously challenge them any longer, and both the players and their characters become jaded with even cosmic-level threats. It's a struggle to come up with bigger and more dangerous story elements for every game session, and once the characters have truly climbed the highest mountains, what else can they look forward to? Ending the world "cleans house" on a campaign that's gone over the top.

Taking a Break

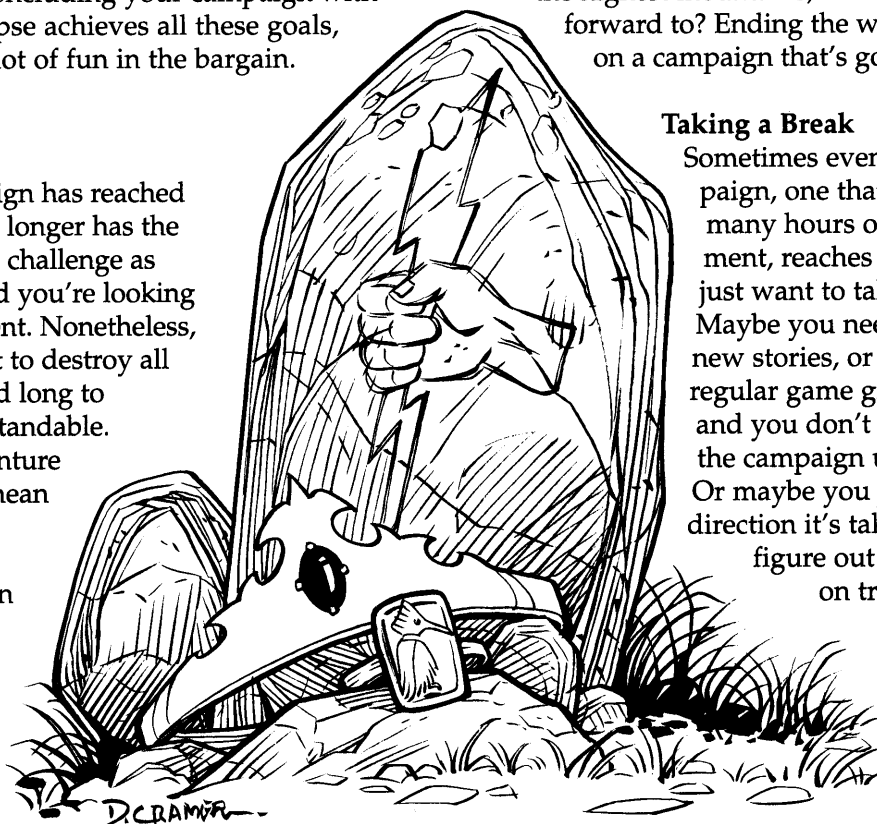
Sometimes even a well-loved campaign, one that has provided many hours of fun and excitement, reaches a point where you just want to take a break from it. Maybe you need time to think up new stories, or perhaps your regular game group is in transition and you don't want to continue the campaign until it stabilizes. Or maybe you just don't like the direction it's taking and want to figure out how to put it back on track.

The Apocalypse Stone offers a solution: Destroy the campaign world with a dramatic flourish, but allow the

player characters to survive. This puts your campaign on hold until you're prepared to continue it and at the same time offers an array of entirely different story possibilities. Once you've decided where you want to go with the campaign, you can take it out of "retirement" and carry on.

What If You Don't Want to End the World?

Perhaps, on reflection, you have decided that you don't want to end things once and for all. Maybe





you're happy with your campaign just the way it is, and you would prefer to continue telling its stories for a while longer. Or perhaps you find the idea of lying to your players unfair and would prefer to give the PCs an even chance to rescue themselves and their home. You can opt to run *The Apocalypse Stone* as an open-ended adventure that gives the heroes the opportunity to come out on top, averting disaster at the last moment should they think of a reasonable means of doing so. You can even eliminate any possibility of the PCs stumbling by introducing a fail-safe element, such as a fatal flaw in the villain's scheme or the ultimate monkey-wrench—divine intervention.

Preparing for the End

This adventure is designed for use with any campaign, which means that you must adapt some portions of it to suit your own game's milieu, history, and style.

Who's in Charge?

What deities are responsible for creating the *Stone of Corbinet* and *Castle Pescheour*? (See Chapter 1: The Beginning of the End.) Most published AD&D campaign settings have a pantheon of gods who are more or less involved in the affairs of mortals; whether you are using one of these or running a homegrown campaign, you'll need to decide which ones participated in the compact that both created the *Stone* and agreed on its guardians.

You'll also have to establish the identity of the god whom the Pescheour family worships and who set up the heroic tests the PCs will encounter. This adventure is written on the assumption that this is the God of Justice, but pantheons and campaigns vary. If no deity in your pantheon corresponds to this role, choose another that works equally well and adjust the information presented in the text as necessary.

Where's the Castle?

The adventure leads the party to a remote island on which is located *Castle Pescheour*. The information



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presented in Chapter 2: The False Test places the island in the tropics and suggests appropriate locations in various published AD&D campaign settings. But if you're running this adventure in a world of

your own creation, you'll have to set up this locale. See Chapter 2 for some more suggestions about customizing this island to your campaign.

The Castle and the Stone

Long ago, before the very beginning of things, the gods assembled in their place of meeting. They agreed to build a world and set in its navel the *Stone of Corbinet* [kor-bee-NET], the center of its existence and the source of its life. To protect this precious seed, they raised around and above it a fabulous castle, built of gleaming marble and darkest obsidian. But the gods could not agree on who should guard the castle—each desired his or her own champion to have the honor, and none would permit the chosen agent of another to take up the task. Finally the God of Justice addressed the assembled deities and proposed a test to determine the best guardian for the castle and the *Stone*.

"Let each of us choose a champion to seek the castle," said Justice. "The one who first finds it will become its ruler and will sire a family of guardians to defend the *Stone* ever after."

The gods saw the wisdom of this plan and agreed. They selected champions who embodied those virtues their respective divine patrons thought most important and sent them forth. These questers traveled the length and breadth of the world, seeking the elusive stronghold. But though the castle was part of the world, as the *axis mundi*, the umbilicus of the cosmos, it possessed a unique feature that made it difficult indeed to locate: It moved about the world, seemingly at random, appearing one day in one location, only to disappear the next. The champions searched far and wide but could not find their goal. The quest seemed impossible.

One day the champions met to discuss their progress, each admitting failure and declaring the goal to be unreachable. It was at this time that a man, who rode a horse without a saddle and who bore no symbol, device, or weapon, appeared among their number. The champions asked the newcomer which god he served, and he replied: "I am called Pescheour. Each of you embodies

those qualities your gods deem best. I am what is best in mortals."

So saying, Pescheour [pesh-UR] turned his horse away without another word and rode straight to the castle. Its gate opened before him, and he passed inside without difficulty and beheld its secret, the *Stone of Corbinet*. The God of Justice crowned him ruler of the castle that very day, and King Pescheour made a pact with the gods: Neither he nor his descendants would ever remove the *Stone* from the castle or reveal the secret of its power to any other living creature or being, lest a terrible curse befall their line forever.

The newly crowned King Pescheour gathered to his seat others of purity and honor, and after swearing them to the same pact with the gods, made them his household. With such folk at his command, he was well satisfied that the *Stone* would be safe. He took a wife from among their number, and together they began a dynasty of guardians who remain the defenders of the castle and its secret to this very day.

King Pescheour ruled in peace and wisdom for more than three centuries and then stepped down from the throne, crowning his eldest son in his place. Still vigorous despite his unusually advanced age, Pescheour departed the castle on horseback and rode away from its gates, never to return. Some of his line speculate that he ascended to the realm of the gods, to sit among their number and serve them; others believe that he simply wandered the world and died in some foreign land. His true fate remains unknown, even to his family, and if the gods know they have not said.

Since that time, King Pescheour's descendants have ruled the castle and honored their pact with the gods. Once or twice in each generation, a lone hero locates the castle and its mysteries; any such worthies are admitted into the household and sworn to the pact, swelling the number of the *Stone's* defenders. None who gained the castle are permitted ever to set down their burden, and thus its existence remains the most closely guarded secret.



What's the Story?

Between the time the PCs “liberate” the *Stone of Corbinet* and the time they realize their error and attempt to fix it, you’ll need to run some interlude adventures. Chapter 3: Interlude establishes a framing story—the revenge of an aggrieved archdevil—but also requires the PCs to see how the coming apocalypse is affecting their world. The nature and details of these “filler” adventures are up to you.

Likewise, the final outcome has to suit your goals and tastes. Are you committed to destroying the world, and if so, which conclusion best meets your needs and your players’ expectations? See Chapter 5: The Keep at the End of the World for some suggestions.

Background Information

Each chapter in this adventure starts with a summary of its important events and some background information to help you run it most effectively. The whole premise of this apocalyptic story, though, rests on a creation myth that might not work with your campaign. This myth is described below; read the story carefully and decide if you need to revise any of its elements.

The seeds of the world’s destruction were sown at the moment of its birth, when the gods created an object that embodied the physical intersection of the Prime, Ethereal, and Astral Planes: the *Stone of Corbinet*. The *Stone* is a divine artifact that maintains the world’s connection to the planes, and thereby to the gods themselves.

The Black Sheep

So it continued for millennia. The gods and the descendants of Pescheour kept their pact, and the *Stone* and castle remained safe. There were threats to the family’s charge: irresponsible kin who did not take their duties seriously; assaults from fiends who meant the world harm; and a few weak kings who allowed rumors to leak out, obliging successors to deal with the mess.

The current king, Alain [ah-LAYN], was crowned ten years ago. He was the younger son of the

previous king, Étain, and was chosen to ascend the throne instead of his elder brother, Garloth. Though he did not voice his concerns publicly, the old king perceived in his eldest child a selfishness that did not bfit the future guardian of the *Stone of Corbinet*. He also took a dim view of Garloth’s fascination with the dark arts: While knowledge is an admirable goal, and indeed can benefit the *Stone*’s defender, Garloth’s interests lay in less savory and less ethical directions. The old king made his decision known to the assembled family and court . . . and his sons.

Prince Garloth received the news that he would not inherit the throne with remarkable aplomb: He neither objected nor cursed but accepted the pronouncement calmly, to the surprise of the Pescheour family and retainers. Étain congratulated both his sons—Eric on becoming the new crown prince, and Garloth for displaying such wisdom and self-restraint.

Underneath his calm exterior, however, Garloth seethed with rage and jealousy, and his heart was afire with thoughts of vengeance. How could his father betray him so? He was the eldest, the right belonged to him, and he would have it—whether his father was willing or not. If his family would not grant him his due, he swore, he would take it for himself.

Turning to his magical studies for solace, he began with fearful purpose to dedicate his every waking hour to mastering the most ancient and blackest of arcane rites. The Pescheour line was touched by the gods, and Garloth found himself capable of magic beyond mortal ken. He converted his chambers into a sanctum and library, then went into the world, gathering more lore to help him recover what he had wrongly lost.

King Alain naturally disapproved of his brother’s behavior and warned him to cease his researches into the black arts. Prince Garloth paid him no heed but continued to seek the forbidden mysteries. Finally Alain, fearing that his brother had become unhealthily obsessed, ordered him to leave off his researches lest they endanger the castle and the family. This commandment, heaped atop the other perceived indignities, enraged Garloth to the point of speechlessness. Gathering his belongings, the prince departed Castle Pescheour for good.



Wielding his newfound arcane might for the first time, Prince Garloth raised for himself a stronghold in mockery of his family's castle. With his god-touched blood, combined with his mastery of long-forgotten spells, he imbued his keep with abilities similar to those of Castle Pescheour. But despite this accomplishment, Garloth knew it would be hollow if his fortress lacked the one object that made his family and its home so extraordinary: the *Stone of Corbinet*.

A Villainous Plot

The Pescheour family's pact with the gods prevent Prince Garloth from removing the *Stone of Corbinet* himself. However, he was able to find a loophole in the wording of his oath: Absolutely nothing prevents him from manipulating other individuals into retrieving the *Stone* for him. He has schemed to deceive a group of powerful heroes into assailing Castle Pescheour, seizing the *Stone*, and delivering it into his waiting hands. He chose the PCs precisely because they are among the most powerful and skilled individuals in their chosen fields—and if they are also famous adventurers, accustomed to great risks and legendary deeds, so much the better.

Magic and Madness

To prepare the way for his chosen instruments, Garloth committed treachery against his own family, a betrayal that ranks among the foulest of all time. Approximately two weeks before the events of this story begin, he returned to the family home from his stronghold. Presenting himself to his brother, he asked forgiveness and apologized for the rift he had caused in their family. King Alain, moved by his apparent contrition and humility, granted Garloth pardon.

That very night, and for six nights thereafter, Prince Garloth returned his family's hospitality by weaving a diabolical spell to trouble Alain's dreams. Through his dark arts, he bestowed on his brother nightmares of such vividness and horror that soon Alain could not sleep at all for fear of these unnatural terrors; in short order the strain, lack of sleep, and the power of the spell itself forced the king's mind over the edge. He succumbed to a howling and paranoid insanity from which he could not be freed.

At that moment Garloth unleashed the second surprise he had prepared for his family. The traitorous prince's *coup de grace* was another terrible spell that transformed every inhabitant of the castle into an evil monster, robbing them of not only their true forms but their identities as well. When Garloth departed the castle, he left behind a gibbering madman and a menagerie of loathsome creatures.

Deceit and Disaster

Garloth's plan is to guide his dupes subtly but inexorably along the path that will lead them to the *Stone* and the final act of his revenge. First, he engineers a series of deceptions, all designed to impart tantalizing bits of information to the PCs. He wants them to know about the castle and, to a limited degree, the *Stone of Corbinet* but controls the information so that it conveys a distorted version of the truth.

He persuades the PCs that they are undertaking a divine trial so secret and ancient that the gods themselves no longer reveal it to their followers. He draws them in with three planned encounters, each of which seems to uncover a little more of the legend. When he judges the PCs convinced of the lore's authenticity, Prince Garloth "reveals" himself as a divine avatar. He bids them journey to Castle Pescheour and retrieve the *Stone of Corbinet* as proof of their virtue, giving them a signet ring that leads them unerringly to the castle.

Prince Garloth's revenge is complete once the PCs retrieve the *Stone* and turn it over to him. He bestows treasure on the party and promises "divine rewards," but has no intention of fulfilling the latter; it's simply a diversion so that he can make good his departure. but after their mission is complete, the PCs experience puzzling and distressing experiences. In discovering what has befallen their world, they begin to realize their unwitting role in its fate. They are visited by a genuine avatar of Justice, who subjects them to a *real* divine trial. If they are successful, they eventually return to Castle Pescheour and have an opportunity to rescue their world. When the PCs are once again in Prince Garloth's presence, they are armed with the knowledge of his lies and the nature of his betrayal. As the world comes apart at its very seams, they must try to redeem their earlier mistakes by wresting the *Stone of Corbinet* from their enemy's grasp and returning it to its proper place.



Chapter 1: The Beginning of the End

DM Background

Garloth's first order of business is to convince his chosen dupes (our heroes) of the legitimacy and importance of undertaking a mission to Castle Pescheour. He believes the best way is to persuade them that in so doing they are actually undertaking the long-hidden test.

Garloth leads the PCs to conclude that they, too, may pass this divine trial and reap equally divine rewards. He needs his heroic pawns to know about Castle Pescheour and, to a limited degree, the *Stone of Corbinet*, but he has to conceal the truth. He has designed a series of deceptions to impart certain enticing details to the PCs and has recruited various individuals for that purpose.

First, Garloth duped a well-known minstrel to bait the hook with an irresistible tale of fabulous treasure and great adventure. The PCs encounter this entertainer at a festival that begins the story. Next, they meet up with what appears to be a wizened sage, actually an actor hired by Garloth, who has a piece of hitherto unknown lore about a divine trial and an ancient treasure. Then they run afoul of an old rival, tricked or impersonated by Garloth. Through careful manipulation of existing antagonism, the evil prince makes his false story seem much more believable.

Finally, when he judges them convinced by the tale, Garloth reveals himself to his chosen instruments—after a fashion. He appears in the form of a spectral knight, congratulates the PCs on learning of the divine test, and offers them the means to undertake the trial.

Party Like It's the End of the World!

Despite its ominous background, *The Apocalypse Stone* begins on a relatively upbeat note, with a

festive occasion in the lives of the player characters, such as a party, feast, ball, or carnival. You know your campaign best, so devise an opening scene of celebration that you can weave convincingly into the fabric of the story. Take care to keep the characters (and their players!) unaware they are being made unwitting tools of a master plan. They should not foresee the momentous decisions—and their consequences—that will soon be thrust upon them.

The merrier the scene, the better it will contrast with the grim developments that unfold as the adventure progresses. The event might be thrown in honor of the PCs (perhaps to celebrate their latest successful adventure), or it might be a suitable occasion, such as the wedding of the local noble, to ensure their attendance. Best of all would be to tie it into previous events in your campaign. The only stipulation is that the PCs must be present and able to hear the minstrel's story about the *Stone of Corbinet*, described below. If a festival or similar celebration is not appropriate for your campaign, set up alternative and plausible circumstances for the characters to encounter Garloth's agent. This could be as simple as a variation on the traditional "You're all sitting in the tavern."

Baiting the Hook

While the event is completely legitimate, Prince Garloth turns it to his advantage to give the PCs their first hint about the *Stone*. Garloth's unwitting accomplice in this first deception, a famed minstrel, appears during the event and recites a story that should pique the PCs' curiosity and interest. It will be much more convincing if some features of this tale tie into your world's existing cosmology and are linked to legends that the PCs have likely heard during their long careers.

The minstrel, like the adventurers, has been duped by Garloth in a recent meeting. The prince masqueraded as a fellow bard and mentor, who claimed to have heard this bizarre and enticing tale of hidden lore from the gods themselves. No bard can resist a new bit of lore, and Garloth took care to fill his vessel with this song not long before he or she entered the festival town.



When you judge that the time is right for the PCs to hear this story, read aloud or paraphrase the following:

At the height of the festivities, a minstrel clad in bright motley steps before the crowd. Gently strumming a lute, the entertainer calls loudly for attention.

"Lords and ladies, I beg thee attend my tale! For it begins with a question dear to all our hearts: Where do heroes come from? Some answer that they are chosen by fate, others that they are born like all of us but tested in the fires of adversity. But whatever their origin, how shall we know them when they walk among us? by design of the gods themselves. Many boast of great deeds; many claim to be worthy of honor and praise; yet among these, sadly, are those who are but deceivers, not true heroes at all. Hear now a tale, which though brief gives

answer to these questions. It is a story seemingly new, but in fact long forgotten—perhaps by design of the gods themselves.

"Long ago, when all the lands we know were but the merest inklings in the thoughts of the very air, the gods assembled in their place of meeting. Here they asked the very questions I have posed to you: How are heroes to be made, and how shall we know those worthy of such distinction? A long time they debated, and argued, and discussed—all the gods great and small took part, for the subject was of much interest to each and every one. After a time had passed that we cannot, with our mortal minds, truly comprehend, they agreed on how to separate heroic wheat from mundane chaff. "The gods devised a trial that only the bravest, truest, and most worthy heroes could hope to pass. Together they raised a fabulous castle of marble and obsidian, bestowing upon it the curious power to move through the world. The castle appeared here one





day, there the next, that none might know where and when it would travel again. Within it the gods placed a treasure, precious beyond any other object they had made before or have made since. Then they set fearsome monsters and ravenous beasts to guard the castle and its treasure, and to bar the way of all who would enter.

“Finally the gods did say unto one another, ‘This shall be our pact. We shall utter no words of this place nor its treasure to any but those we believe the most worthy. To them we shall send a sign to seek this castle and its secrets, and whosoever among them finds it and gains its treasure shall deserve rewards befitting the divinely favored. Thus shall the true heroes, those who deserve great honor and praise, distinguish themselves without doubt from those who merely pretend their worth.’

“And matching thought to deed, so was it done. The castle yet moves about our world, hidden from the eyes of the unworthy, unto this very day. Only those whom the gods would test shall know its secrets, and only those who prove their worth in this divine trial shall reap its rewards. So shall we know our true heroes and honor them above all others.”

The Stuff of Heroes

The minstrel’s tale refers, of course, to Castle Pescheour and the *Stone of Corbinet*, but it reveals only partial truths, twisted to make the PCs believe in the divine quest to seek the castle and obtain its treasure. It is vital not to let them suspect they are being led on, so let them take their cue from the behavior of others. They’re probably well known to the festival attendees, who may look curiously at these great heroes while the tale is told. The minstrel too may eye them meaningfully if, as is likely, he or she knows of their exploits.

At the conclusion of the tale, the minstrel looks dramatically around the crowd, weighing their reactions, as though seeking heroes befitting the legend. If the PCs take the bait, they’ll probably approach the bard for more details about the story. But if they require nudging, you should be able to arrange an encounter through the crowd’s reaction.

The troubadour is every inch a professional—free with information, but vague about its exact provenance. (One’s sources are one’s livelihood, after all.) With careful questioning, however, the PCs can learn the following important points:

- The minstrel believes strongly that the tale is genuine and that the castle and its treasure really do exist. However, he or she suspects that the story is so ancient and its provenance so obscure that few recall its existence, let alone the kernel of truth from which it sprang. Presumably, the gods don’t want mortals to know of the divine test, lest such knowledge attract too many false or unworthy aspirants.
- The story was told by the bard’s mentor, a master troubadour named Derryn Fireharp, who claimed that a god whispered the tale in his ear during a dream. (If you prefer, substitute the name of a well-known NPC bard.) This bit of information will be very hard to discover, but you should allow the PCs to learn it, with some difficulty, to explain why they’ve never heard the legend before. In fact, Garloth used the *armor of lies*, an artifact of unsurpassed illusionary power, to impersonate the minstrel’s patron and plant the misleading tale without suspicion. (For more about the *armor of lies*, see the Appendix.)
- The minstrel does not know where the castle might be found but has one more scrap of related lore, which he or she will impart to the PCs in return for a good meal and a flagon of fine drink. If they grant this request, they hear a brief story of a noble and true knight who lived perhaps a millennium ago, named Lucius, who sought to prove his heroic worth. He rode out with two young squires into the wild, whence he never returned. Perhaps Lucius found the castle and passed the test, ascending into the realm of the gods, or perhaps he failed and perished somewhere in the lonely places of the world.

It’s possible that the PCs will use magical means to determine whether or not the minstrel is telling the truth. He is. Garloth is no fool: That’s why he set up a real entertainer to believe in the tale’s veracity. He



knows that “false-flag” recruitment can be undone too easily through powerful spells and magical devices.

The minstrel has no further information and leaves town at the conclusion of the festival, bound for other gatherings that will pay to hear songs and stories. If the PCs ask, they might learn about the next destination, though like as not the minstrel travels wherever his or her feet point. The minstrel doesn't know where Derryn Fireharp might be but can suggest some likely places.

Setting the Hook

Having been tantalized by this previously unknown tale, the PCs should be either thirsting for more or suspicious of a trap. If possible, allow some time to pass before moving to the next stage to pique their curiosity or blunt their suspicion. It's quite likely the PCs will start asking after the whereabouts of Derryn Fireharp, which you can use to lead them further into the deception. If they do not take steps on their own, however, the trap comes to them.

Garloth has, of course, been watching the events from a safe distance, using magical scrying to check on the progress of his plan. He has recruited an unscrupulous actor to pose as Thormose, an ancient sage, and set up the next part of the deception. Where the PCs encounter “Thormose” depends on whether they retrace the minstrel's path in search of his or her mentor, move on to another location, or stay where they are and investigate.

In the first case, they meet up with the false sage on the road, heading to their previous location. In the second, they are approached by the disguised actor, who claims to be on the minstrel's trail and seeking information from anyone who's heard this story. If the PCs investigate their location, they'll discover the “sage” in a rundown hovel in the worst part of town. Whatever the situation, they meet him in the seediest possible surroundings. The encounter must be convincing: The characters should believe that they are indeed speaking with an old and timid sage, not an actor masquerading as one.

Call attention to the rundown nature of the area—the rats, the filth, the stench, the grinding poverty. Draw a sharp contrast with the opulent festivities

wherein they first learned of the test. Having learned of the minstrel's belief in the story, it's less likely the PCs will use magic to test the truthfulness of their interlocutor, but if they do, Garloth has covered his tracks. (See “The Plot Thickens” below.)

Academic Pursuit

If the PCs encounter Thormose in their town or in a mean wayside inn, read aloud or paraphrase the following.

The hovel before you looks much like all the others in this part of town: Dirty, poor, and about as inviting as a pigsty on a hot day. Where the door should be hangs a dirty strip of dark cloth; all the windows facing the street are likewise, blocking any glimpse of what might be inside. Why would a sage of any reputation choose to stay in such a filthy dungheap?

The hovel is exactly what it appears to be. If the PCs listen carefully, they can just barely make out the steady and faint sound of scratching; Nothing prevents them from walking right in, if they so choose, and surprising the lone inhabitant within. If they knock or call out, a weak and quavering male voice bids them enter.

Moving aside the cloth reveals a single dingy room with a dirt floor, lit only by a tallow candle, which gutters and is nearly extinguished by the inflowing breeze. The candle sits on a cheap wooden table, behind which is the only other piece of furniture in the place: an equally cheap and flimsy chair. Bent over the table and writing with a quill in a stained, leatherbound book is an incredibly ancient man. He has the whitest and most unruly hair you have ever seen, and his face is a leather patchwork of wrinkles. About his frail body he wears a greasy, shabby old robe, badly mended in numerous places.

The old man munches absentmindedly on the end of a pair of thick, wire-rimmed spectacles and initially pays no attention to his visitors. In a querulous voice he mutters that he'll be right with



you. He makes few more marks in the book before looking up, an expression of surprise passing across his wizened features. Then, looking past you—as if expecting someone else to come in the door at any second—he slams the book closed and clutches it to his chest. Sputtering and stammering, he demands to know just who you are and why you have come.

If they encounter him on the road, emphasize the rags and generally unclean condition of this supposed scholar. He still has the quill and the stained book.

The actor has been paid by Prince Garloth to impersonate a very old and nervous man, and is playing his role to the hilt. He reacts to any aggressive actions or threats from the party by first quivering in fear, then pretending to faint dead away if they continue. He responds well to friendly or soothing overtures, however, inviting the PCs to join him and asking how he can be of service.

The old man identifies himself as Thormose, a sage who specializes in folklore. He claims to be particularly interested in ancient legends, tales, fables, and other apocrypha, and is currently researching the topic of the divine test. If pressed, he “admits” to having been hired by a group of wealthy adventurers who thought themselves worthy aspirants. “Thormose” says that they were paying very well to gather every scrap of information he could find on this legend and copy it down into a book for them.

He confirms readily enough that he doesn’t own this hovel, but that it belongs to one of his employers, from whom he claims to be expecting a visit soon. He throws nervous glances about him every few moments to emphasize that he doesn’t expect to remain alone and helpless for long.

The Plot Thickens

As the befuddled but brilliant scholar, “Thormose” dispenses snippets of random academic wisdom while answering questions about his role in this situation. He pretends reluctance to answer inquiries about the divine test, the castle, or its secrets, citing his employers’ desire that he not divulge any infor-

mation on those topics. He nonetheless “allows” the characters to cajole, wheedle, bribe, or threaten the information out of him, though not without some difficulty (as he was paid to do).

The sage will agree to sell his collected information to the PCs—if they can put up the same fee promised by the rival party. This amounts to the princely sum of 10,000 gp in cash (a modest price, he assures them, for information that may lead to the path of divinity itself!). Once paid or otherwise “persuaded” to be helpful, he thumbs to the first page of his book and begins reciting the facts he’s “gathered” thus far.

“Hmm, yes, let me see . . . yes, here we are. Bear with me: My handwriting isn’t what it used to be, you know. Ahem.

“And the gods raised a mighty castle, each imbuing it with a portion of divine essence. Beautiful and wondrous was it to behold, all of whitest marble and blackest obsidian, its colors and design embodying the duality of thought and deed. Then the gods produced a treasure, a fabulous stone of a radiance and clarity never known before or since. The sheer beauty of the stone held even the gods spellbound, and it was with great reverence that they hid it within the castle walls.

“Then were the gods well satisfied with what they had wrought, confident that only the most worthy heroes would find the castle and its great secret. But the God of Justice spoke, saying unto them, ‘Pride goeth before a fall. We must know that what we have done is what should be. Let each of us choose a champion to seek the castle, and let this be the very first test of heroes. Whoever finds the castle and gains the stone will become its king, and his family will rule in our name and guard the treasure from the unworthy ever after. To them shall fall the duty of testing those who seek to prove themselves.

“The gods saw the wisdom of his words and each chose a champion who best embodied their virtues. These mortal aspirants traveled across the lands, seeking the elusive treasure. The castle appeared on no map or chart, and some said that it appeared one day in this place, and the next



day in that. The champions began to despair: Theirs seemed an unreachable goal.

"At this time did a man, named Pescheour, appear in the world. He rode a horse without saddle and bore no weapons; nor did he wear the symbol of any god. The champions all asked him whom he served, and Pescheour answered them thusly: 'You have each tried to embody what is best in the gods whom you serve. I am what is best in mortals!'

"With no other word unto them did Pescheour turn his horse and ride straightaway to the hidden castle. Its gate lay open before him, and the God of Justice crowned him its king that very day. Then did that first King Pescheour swear a mighty oath, that he and his descendants would ever protect the stone from all but the most worthy, lest a terrible curse befall them.

"King Pescheour gathered unto him men and women who were pure of heart and made them his household. With such warriors and wizards at his command, the king would keep his oath and fulfill his charge. For full three hundred years did he rule the castle, then crowned his eldest son king in his place. He left the castle shortly thereafter. There are those who do say that Pescheour ascended unto the realm of the gods; others, that he left all behind him to wander the world and that he died alone in a foreign land.

"Perhaps once in a generation, worthy men or women shall find the castle. There shall the gods test them. They shall face such foes as shall make their blood ice with fear. They shall learn the castle's secrets, and from its depths they shall retrieve the stone as proof of their bravery and courage. By this trial and no other shall the worthy be revealed and receive such rewards as truly befit the chosen of the gods. Ever after shall these worthies walk in divine favor, and they shall know wealth and honor beyond all mortal ken!"

Of course, Garloth has again twisted the true story of the *Stone of Corbinet* to suit his purposes. He wants the PCs to believe the tale so completely that they, too, desire to find the castle and reap great rewards. His hired mouthpiece faithfully repeats

the words he was told to say, written in the book he was given. Should the party attempt to discover the truth through magical means, they learn only what the actor truly believes. As far as he knows, he really was hired by a rival adventurer who hoped to draw out any further knowledge of the legend from the PCs.

Of course, the party might simply filch the sage's book; if they do so, they find it contains the same information. To dissuade the curious, the flyleaf of the book is prepared with a brief passage in the common tongue that conceals a defensive feature, *fire trap* (1d4 + 20 points of damage). Following the trapped page comes the information delineated above, written in a spidery hand and taking up the first seven or eight pages of the book. The remainder is blank; "Thormose" explains petulantly that he's just started on this business and hasn't had time to gather anything more yet.

Hook, Line and Sinker

Equipped with this new knowledge about the divine trial and its rewards, the PCs should be well and truly snared. They will probably want to know how to find the castle of which the legend speaks. "Thormose" shrugs his shoulders helplessly at this point, claiming that his research has led him no further—yet. However, he assures them that he intends to keep digging for answers, and that he will be happy to impart newfound information to them as it becomes available (at a fair price, of course).

Garloth plans to present the answer to his chosen instruments, but in good time. He first wants to make certain that they are completely enthralled by the idea of the divine test. They must truly believe that they possess valuable knowledge, and the best means of accomplishing that is to make them believe that someone else wants it too. Thus Garloth arranges a third encounter, but this time instead of feeding the PCs information he will seem to take it from them. In this encounter he uses the *armor of lies* to appear as the rival adventurer who supposedly hired "Thormose."

Hands Off!

The best time and place to set up this encounter is when the PCs return to their home, inn, or camp.



There they surprise the disguised Garloth in the midst of ransacking their belongings for information about the divine test. Alternatively, their “rival” ambushes the party on the road or even kidnaps a friend or relative of one of the characters, demanding the information as ransom. (This last also foreshadows the unpleasant events to come in Chapter 3: Interlude.) Garloth doesn’t actually want the information, but must be convincing in the role of someone who’s desperate for it.

Even if the PCs get into a fight with their supposed rival, he or she continues to demand what they know about the divine test as the combat rages. Though Garloth himself could best them single-handedly, he keeps up the disguise of a mundane, though high-level, opponent. After a few rounds of holding them at bay, he escapes magically with a curse and a threat. The PCs should be left with the idea that they have only temporarily foiled their rival for the divine test.

Further Investigation

The PCs might decide to conduct their own research, attempting to corroborate the details they have by calling on other sages, wizards, or priests. They could even seek answers in the tomes and scrolls of a library, college, or other storehouse of ancient knowledge. However, they will find nothing: The gods and the Pescheour family have been exceedingly faithful to their pact of secrecy. It is only now, through the treachery of Prince Garloth, that ordinary mortals have come to hear of the castle and its provenance. The lack of information may actually cement the credibility of this story in the PCs’ minds—after all, what information they have emphasizes how secret it is.

The “Truth” Revealed

Once the PCs have encountered Garloth’s dupes and agents, and have been satisfactorily hooked, the prince is ready to “reveal” himself and the truth to them. By now they should believe in the existence of the alleged test, or at the very least its possibility. Suddenly, Garloth appears in his true form, claiming to be an agent of the Pescheour family sent here to conduct the PCs to the divine challenge. This revelation should be dramatic: The middle of a crowded

market square is probably less suitable than a dark forest or an open field under a starlit sky.

Without warning, the very air seems to waver and ripple before your eyes, like the surface of a pond suddenly disturbed by a violent wind. Then the rippling air shimmers with thousands of tiny, brilliant lights, and from this incandescence coalesces a shape. It is a tall and muscular man, resplendent in golden armor, his helm thrown back to reveal a strong and handsome face, flowing dark hair, and piercing gray eyes. At his side he wears a sheath of beaten gold that holds a massive broadsword, its pommel encrusted with a king’s ransom in fabulous gems, and emblazoned on his golden shield is a kingfisher bird, poised to strike at unseen prey. In moments the shimmering light has faded away, and the knight stands before you. Without a word he bows deeply in your direction.

This is only a projection of Garloth, though in his true appearance. The PCs cannot harm this image, nor can they hinder its actions. Allow them an opportunity to react to this unexpected and strange situation. Provided they do not initiate hostilities, their golden visitor holds his bow a moment, then straightens to his full height and intones in a deep, strong, and calm voice:

“I am Prince Garloth, scion of Pescheour and keeper of the sacred pact. My family has been charged since the dawn of time with testing the best this world can offer and rewarding those who prove worthy. I come before you now to bestow unimaginable honor: You have shown yourselves deserving candidates to undertake the divine trial of legend! I congratulate you. Should you succeed in this test, you will be among the chosen few, the most heroic mortals in this world, and you shall choose your own rewards.

“Take from my hand this golden ring. With its aid seek the castle of legend. You will know it by its unique appearance, for it gleams both white and black as it stands atop a lonely place. There you must defeat any who may oppose you. Give



them no quarter, for they shall do their utmost to keep you from your goal.

"Gain the castle, and inside retrieve a token of your mission: a stone of surpassing beauty and light, which is hidden within its walls. Beware the castle's guardian beasts, for they too shall seek to bar your path! I shall appear before you again when you possess the shining stone. Deliver it into my hand, and your worth shall be proven and your trial ended. Then shall you have those things you choose as your reward, and your names will join the ranks of the precious few whose worth is known to the gods themselves."

At the conclusion of this speech, Garloth extends a golden gauntlet: In its palm is a plain gold ring, set with a single pure white diamond. Unlike the prince's image, the ring is solid. Once it is removed from Garloth's hand, his image begins to shimmer and ripple again; in moments, he is gone.

The PCs cannot hinder Garloth's departure. Should they ask him to remain, address any questions to him, or attempt to stop him, he merely raises an armored hand as he begins to fade and speaks:

"You have the mettle to succeed in this quest. Fear not! Seek the castle. Pass the test!"

If the PCs examine the diamond on the ring, they see suspended within its facets the tiny image of a kingfisher, identical with the emblem on the knight's shield. Upon Garloth's disappearance, they notice that the diamond has begun to glow ever so faintly with a pure white light. The light seems to glow more brightly when the ring is pointed at a particular point on the compass—the direction of Castle Pescheour.

Honesty is the Best Policy

This section presents Garloth as dealing directly with the PCs in the guise of a rival adventurer. While this approach works in a campaign that has no other NPCs who can challenge the party, it's very likely that over the years of play you have established some notorious foes or ambitious rivals who play off against your PCs. In such a situation you'll reel in your players and their characters much more easily if their old nemeses are actually competing with them.

Of the two ways to set this up, the easier is to have Garloth's agents approach a rival group as well. The wandering minstrel, who does after all believe the legend, must have traveled to a number of towns before encountering the PCs; it's a simple matter to make sure one of them is the rivals' home base. The hired actor can just as easily be paid to pitch his story to the other group, though this requires his employer taking a different guise (say, one of the PCs!). Garloth need only stand back and let events unfold predictably, with a rival (preferably a master thief) trying to grab whatever information the PCs may have about the legend. This subplot may occupy several sessions, further disguising the true nature of this adventure.

Another approach is to have the actor hired by the disguised Garloth impersonate a rival notorious to your players. In this case, the competing adventurers are unaware of the false legend. They'll find out soon enough, though, when your PCs confront them and demand to know how they heard of the castle and the *Stone*. Protestations of ignorance from the PCs' rivals will probably be taken as lies, leading to entanglements and misdirection that further your true motive just as effectively.



Chapter 2: The False Test

DM Background

This section chronicles the next stage of Prince Garloth's scheme to possess the fabled Stone of Corbinet, with the unwitting help of the player characters. Through duplicity and subtle manipulation, Garloth has persuaded them to wrest the Stone from the fearsome creatures that guard it. What they do not know, of course, is that Garloth himself is the creator of those guardians.

The traitorous prince's spell transformed the inhabitants of his family's castle into monsters, robbing them of not only their true forms but their identities as well. Cooks and scullions became harpies; the garrison became giant trolls and shambling mounds; hunters became invisible stalkers; and the personal guard are now disgusting grell. Knights grew into beholders and gorgons, and their steeds into nightmares; and in place of the king's most trusted officers sprang up ancient dragons. The castle seneschal became a dreadful thessalmonster. The Pescheour family suffered the most dreadful transformations, though, and Garloth's evil magic destroyed the king's mind, leaving him a madman gibbering amid the loathsome menagerie.

The former castle inhabitants react to intruders like the monsters they have become. A gem of seeing or a true seeing spell will not reveal their original forms: They are, for all intents and purposes, exactly what they appear to be. The three beholders are self-proclaimed rulers of the court, ordering the others about as they see fit and forming plans both to defend the courtyard and conquer the island.

The Test Begins

After their consultation with Prince Garloth, the characters are free to begin their journey to Castle Pescheour, which is currently located on a remote

tropical island. Whether they start immediately, arrange for the care of their holdings, if any, or acquire some equipment, the castle remains in the same place long enough for them to get there.

Finding the castle isn't a problem: The signet ring that Garloth presented to them will lead the PCs there unerringly. The ring itself seems an ordinary gold band, unadorned except for the single diamond with its embedded kingfisher—the emblem of the Pescheour family. It radiates magic and automatically adjusts to fit the finger of any human-sized being. The kingfisher emblem glows brightly when it points in the direction of the castle. However, the ring gives no indication of the distance one must travel, nor does it have any power to bring the wearer there; it merely points the proper direction.

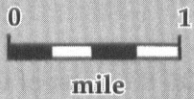
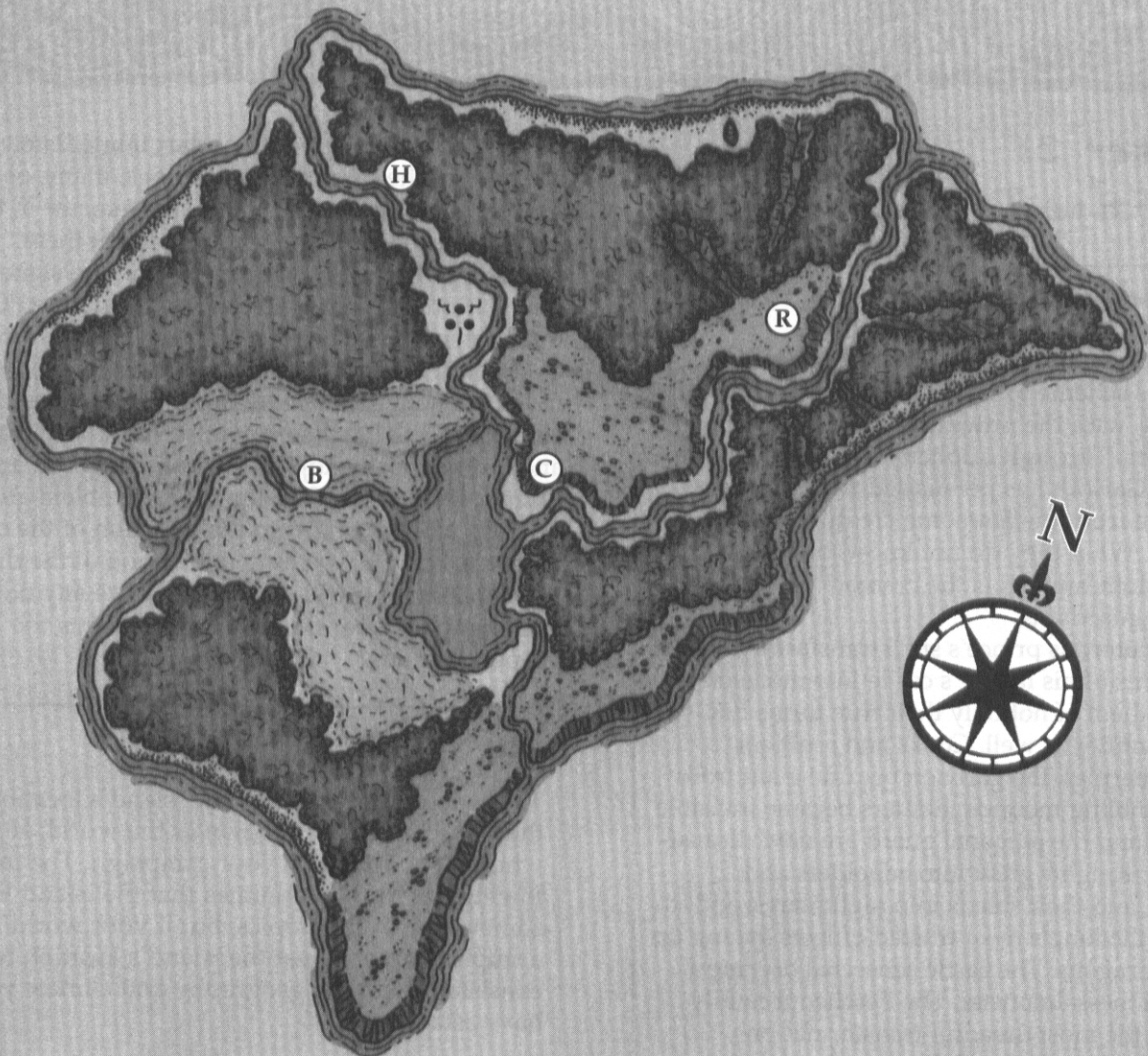
Where's the Island?













The only requirement for the island's location is that it be in a remote region of the world, so use whatever works with your campaign. The following description assumes that the island lies somewhere in the tropics, but if your world lacks a tropical zone, adjust the island's location to be consistent with the geography and climate you have established.

Here are some possible locations for the island if you are using a published campaign setting.

- **THE FORGOTTEN REALMS®:** Off the coast of the Jungles of Chult, the Black Jungles, or Samarach.
- **GREYHAWK®:** Off the coast of the Amedio Jungle, or among the island groups southeast of the Hellfurnaces.
- **DRAGONLANCE®:** Among the islands of the Spine of Taladas, including Selasia, far to the northeast of Nordmaar and due north of Karthay.
- **MYSTARA™:** Southwest of the Kingdom of Ierendi, somewhere in the Sea of Dread.

The False Test



	Jungle		Swath of Destruction
	Black Sand Beach		Rocky Escarpment
	Cliff		Castle Pescheour
	Marsh		Red Dragon Lair
	Stream		Black Dragon Lair
	Lake		The Hunt
	Ship Debris		Smoking Ruin



Reaching the Island

However the characters reach the castle, it's important to keep them from suspecting that the fate of their world hangs in the balance. Don't tip your hand by suggesting something is different about this adventure; stick to your usual method of adjudicating extended travel. Enforcing new rules for no apparent reason or prohibiting the PCs' normal transportation, whether sailing ship or magical steed, will only make your players suspicious. Present any travel hazards—monsters, storms, assassination attempts, political disputes—as you would normally.

Approaching by Sea

Characters who sail to the island need only decide where to make landfall once they arrive, a decision simplified by the fact that little of the shoreline is suitable for landing.

Your destination finally comes into view: The island is an emerald on the horizon, set in a peaceful field of blue. The following wind carries your vessel steadily toward your goal. Soon you can make out details: dense green jungle canopy, rugged cliffs and soggy marshes interspersed with stretches of black-sand beach, and rocky escarpments rising high above the treeline. Several small streams empty into the sea from beneath the spreading palm trees, which nearly meet the shore.

When the characters approach within a mile, they can make out additional details, such as unexplained smoke (see "The Smoking Ruins" below). Approaching or sailing past the northernmost beach reveals the wreckage of what appears to be wooden sailing vessels (see "The Wreckage" below). At this distance the characters are also in a position to first glimpse Castle Pescheour.

Drawing closer to the shore, you see thin strands of smoke rising from the island's interior. Several triangular, charred strips of vegetation radiate through the lush jungle like terrible scars through healthy flesh.

Drawing closer to the shore, you see thin strands of smoke rising from the island's interior. Several triangular, charred strips of vegetation radiate through the lush jungle like terrible scars through healthy flesh.

As you gaze over the tops of the tall palm trees, an incongruous shape catches your eye. You can make out the features of a castle atop the highest escarpment, its curtain wall, towers, and keep contrasting with the otherwise natural setting. At a closer distance you discern the colors of the stone forming the edifice: gleaming white and darkest jet.

Circumnavigation of the island reveals four stretches of black-sand beach where smaller boats can land safely; the jungle treeline is 3d20 yards from the water's edge at these spots. Concealing oneself against this dark background is very difficult without garb to match; characters on the beach will be clearly visible to any flying creatures or nearby watching hostiles.

The remainder of the coastline is either cliff or marsh, neither of which offers safe harbor. It's possible to take a smaller vessel, such as a skiff or rowboat, up one of the streams. These are navigable all the way to the central lake, but the vessel must have a shallow draft and some form of propulsion other than sail (such as oars or magic). See the "Environment and Terrain" section below for more information about the streams and lake. Depending on where the characters decide to make landfall, they might well be seen by one or more of the island's inhabitants.

Approaching by Air

Characters at this level of experience will likely possess means of air travel, such as *flying carpets*, *fly spells*, *rings of flying*, and winged mounts. Airborne characters have the advantage of observing the island's topography from above before deciding where to alight. However, there's a higher likelihood of being spotted as they approach: Nothing screens them from the watchful eyes of the dragons, for example. Read aloud or paraphrase the following as the PCs begin their flight above the island:



The island is covered by what appears to be a dark green carpet waving gently in the breeze—the palm tree canopy. The jungle nearly meets the shore along most of the coastline, but in places you can see gently curving stretches of black, sandy beach. Rising above the treetops are several rocky escarpments, and atop the highest sits a castle built from stones of gleaming white and darkest jet. Far below it lies a body of open water, wisps of steam rising slowly from its greenish-brown surface, with ribbonlike streams flowing from it through the jungle to the sea. Flanking the steaming lake is a stretch of dense marshland, with more jungle to either side.

Here and there, massive swaths of the forest are missing, apparently crushed and flattened by some unknown force. The narrow end of each swath points like an arrow toward the northernmost scarp. A burned area mars the greenery to the northwest of the lake, and thin streams of smoke rise from it.

Other Modes of Travel

If the characters reach the island by means other than sailing or flying (*teleporting*, for example), the level of danger and exposure will depend on where and when they arrive. These details are up to you, the DM. Even characters with access to potent magic can still show up next to someone (or something) hazardous.

Environment and Terrain

The information here briefly outlines the island's salient features to help you answer player questions. If some of these details don't fit your campaign, adjust them as needed.

Physical Features

The island is about 6 miles across at its widest point. However, the terrain is rugged and slows foot travel considerably: An unencumbered human would require almost an entire 10-hour day to walk across, not including any encounters along the way. Traveling by other means (such as flying) will reduce this time to varying degrees.

The island has no roads. Earthbound beings get around primarily via the many game trails that crisscross the jungle floor. These trails allow normal movement, but their twists and winding ways prevent seeing much more than a few dozen paces ahead at any time. This increases the chance of surprise for both parties to 50% (1–5 on 1d10) in any trail encounter. Neither does the island have cities; the indigenous yuan-ti lived in and around a stone temple before it was destroyed by a dragon attack (see “The Smoking Ruins” below), and castaways dwell in makeshift shelters near their wrecked canoes (see “The Castaways” below).

This island is of volcanic origin and has surprisingly varied terrain. The six primary topographical features are beach, escarpment, jungle, lake, marsh, and stream.

- **Beach:** Four gently curving beaches drape the shore of the island. The fine, jet-black sand is actually pulverized volcanic rock, worn down by millennia of wind and wave action. The dark color makes it difficult to conceal people or equipment (such as a boat).
- **Escarpment:** The volcanic forces that raised the island also produced rocky heights. The soil of the escarpments is too thin to support vegetation larger than isolated patches of grass and a few small, hardy plants. Their steep vertical pitch, combined with the crumbling surface, make them dangerous to climb (–25% penalty to Climb Walls checks). A colony of pteranodons once had a rookery on the northernmost escarpment, but the red dragon Reznor (formerly the commander of the Pescheour garrison) killed almost all the flying reptiles and now claims the site, marked “R” on the map, as his lair.
- **Jungle:** The majority of the island interior is carpeted with medium rain forest. This lacks the heavy undergrowth that characterizes dense jungle, so travel across the forest floor is not too difficult. The thick vegetation, however, makes accurate navigation problematic: There's little to see but tree trunks and treetops. Characters who pass through the jungle must be certain of where



they are going or risk becoming lost (more of an inconvenience than a danger on a body of land so small).

- **Lake:** Natural springs, heated by volcanic activity, carry hot water up from deep beneath the earth, feeding a freshwater lake that occupies an old crater. The spring water is so hot that the lake surface actually steams into the already humid air.
- **Marsh:** Some of the island's low-lying areas have exceedingly poor drainage, creating dense marshes. These are difficult to traverse and slow foot travel considerably. The marshlands are also home to a mated pair of ancient black dragons (former cocaptains of the Pescheour family's personal guard) who lair in the area marked "B" on the map.
- **Stream:** The spring-fed lake in turn feeds several shallow, slow-moving streams that meander to the sea. These vary in width from about 12 to 20 feet and in depth from about 4 to 8 feet. All the streams are navigable by small craft for their entire length, but moving against even this sluggish current requires a method of propulsion other than wind.

Climate

The island is situated in the tropics. Such a climate is uncomfortable for anyone not accustomed to the extreme heat and humidity. The sky is hazy or overcast for the better part of the day, and precipitation is frequent. Characters wearing heavy armor (even magical) will be particularly uncomfortable, but this discomfort should not unduly hinder them.

A tropical environment can be very dangerous for the unprepared or the severely wounded and exhausted. High-level characters might scoff at mundane threats such as disease or sunstroke, but these maladies aren't trivial to those who are in less than peak condition.

Flora and Fauna

Before the arrival of Castle Pescheour and its horde of monsters, the island was home to a rich

variety of life, all closely interdependent. But that delicate balance has been upset, perhaps irreparably, by the depredations of the dragons and other creatures. Many of the indigenous animals are dead, killed for food or sport, as are more than a few of the native yuan-ti. Wide areas of jungle have been crushed by the larger beasts or burned by dragonfire.

Among the surviving mundane fauna, the PCs are likely to encounter spider monkeys, constricting and poisonous snakes, parrots and other tropical birds, lizards, turtles, bats, spiders, tropical freshwater fish (mainly in the streams), insects, and perhaps even a jaguar or two. A handful of the pteranodons survived Reznor's attack and are constructing a new rookery on the southernmost escarpment. All these creatures are nervous, and either flee the characters' approach or attack out of panic. The only sentient beings on the island, apart from some of the castle monsters, are the yuan-ti and the marooned humans.

The most prevalent and noticeable plant life on the island are the towering palm trees, which range in height from 80 to 200 feet. Liana is ubiquitous; the jungle vine binds the palms into a gigantic web. Below, the dense canopy creates a permanent twilight broken in places by isolated shafts of sunlight. So much light is blocked that smaller ground plants don't thrive, so the jungle floor has light undergrowth—much less than in an average temperate forest. What little there is consists of broadleaf ferns, shorter vines, and small flowering plants. Several varieties of dangerous and sentient plants have found niches in the island habitat as well, and a few of these (such as giant sundews, hangman trees, and choke creepers) have thus far survived the ongoing mayhem.

Castle Pescheour

Castle Pescheour is located atop the highest of the rocky escarpments, near the center of the island and overlooking the lake. Visible from most of the shoreline, its classical lines and marble-and-obsidian construction stand out against this otherwise primitive setting. The edifice obviously does not belong here.



Traveling to the Castle

One or more visible features—the smashed boats, the smoke, the swaths of destruction, or perhaps a glimpse of a human or monster—will probably entice the adventurers to investigate. Each location has its own hazards, which are outlined below. Should the PCs press on to the castle without investigating any of the strange situations on the island, they are still likely to run afoul of the dragons. This encounter gives the party a taste of things to come and may be perceived by them as part of the expected test. The characters might experience a run-in with these monsters even if they do check out other locations.

The Dragons

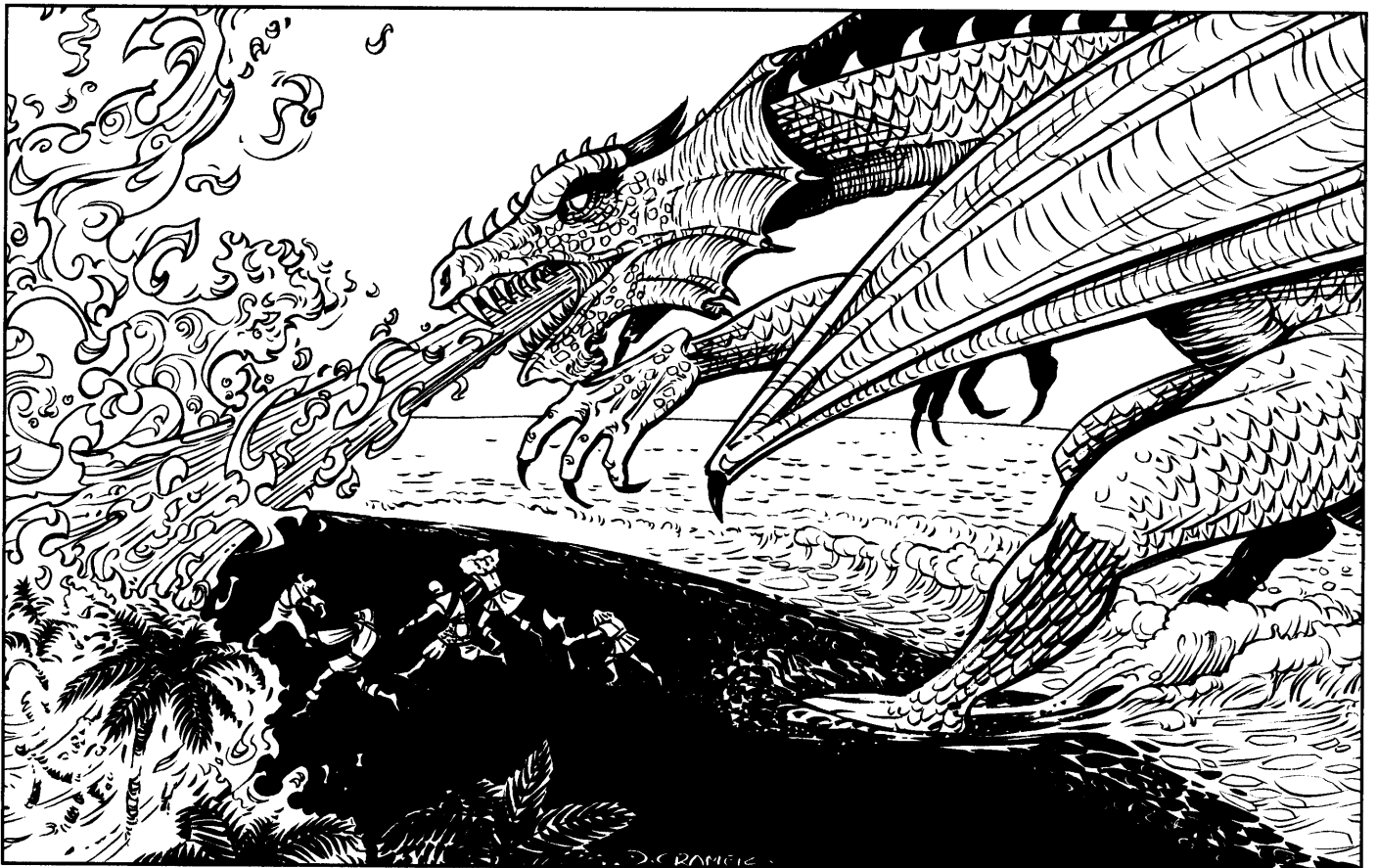
Gaidon and Narella

Once the married cocaptains of the *Pescheour* family's personal guard, Gaidon and Narella were

transformed into a mated pair of old black dragons. Now they dwell in the marsh and prowl the island for prey, with no memory of their previous lives apart from their names. They react to their environment and each other exactly as if they have been black dragons for their entire lives.

The island's food supply is limited because of the high number of large predators here. Though black dragons normally hunt at night, these ones often soar over the island during daylight hours, seeking adequate prey. They love both yuan-ti and human flesh, and are quick to snatch up morsels of either race. A favorite hunting tactic is for Narella to conceal herself in the marsh or lake while Gaidon dives from the air, using his claws, tail, wings and teeth to drive prey into the ambush. This is their preferred attack against characters they spot on the ground.

If the PCs are flying over the island and are not invisible or otherwise hidden, Gaidon spots them and





rises from the swamp to attack; Narella hides below, ready to enter the fray if her mate needs help or to pounce if Gaidon manages to drive the PCs toward her. Both dragons are persistent and will make the most of their capabilities, though if badly injured they will dive into the waters and remain submerged.

Gaidon and Narella aren't especially willing to talk, but they are aware of another dragon, a venerable red (Reznor), also inhabiting the island. Thus far the black dragons haven't crossed his path, which is fine with them; they plan to vacate the island once they've devoured the easy pickings.

Gaidon & Narella, male & female old black dragons (Dragon, Chromatic, Black) (2): AC -3; MV 12, Fly 30 (C), Sw 12; HD 16; hp 122, 108; THAC0 5; #AT 3 (claw/claw/bite); Dmg 1d6+8/1d6+8/3d6+8; SA breath weapon, dragon fear, spell use, spell-like powers; SD immune to acid; MR 25%; SZ G (60' long, 50' tail); ML fanatic (18); Int average (10); AL CE; XP 15,000 each.

Special Abilities: SA—acid breath once per 3 rounds (5' wide, 60' long, damage 16d4+8); spell-like powers (as 13th level) at will—*water breathing*, 3× per day—*darkness* (80' radius), once per day—*corrupt water* (80 cu. ft.), *plant growth*, *summon insects*, *charm reptiles*.

Notes: Gaidon's spells memorized (5): 1st—*detect magic*, *magic missile* ×3, *sleep*. Narella's spells memorized (5): 1st—*charm person* ×2, *magic missile*, *shocking grasp*, *wall of fog*.

Reznor

Reznor was the aged but highly competent commander of the Pescheour garrison, aggressive in his defense of the castle. Now he is the island's most fearsome predator and remembers nothing but his name. Reznor burned the pteranodon rookery atop the highest escarpment and, having eaten its former inhabitants, has taken it as his lair; he likes the feel of the steam on his scales as it escapes from lava-filled pockets far below the surface. It was Reznor who attacked and destroyed the yuan-ti temple (see "The Smoking Ruins" below), and he looks forward to hunting more of the snake-people.

In combat, Reznor is a fearsome opponent: He enjoys diving out of the sky at earthbound prey,

watching them scatter in terror before his *dragon fear*. He keeps his breath weapon in reserve until a threat proves sufficiently dangerous (or combustible). If seriously wounded or otherwise hard pressed, he retreats to his rocky shelter, adopting the most defensible position he can contrive in the circumstances.

Reznor is barely interested in the island's other inhabitants. He intends to feed off the rest of its indigenous creatures (and perhaps the pair of black dragons as well) and then seek greener pastures—he's annoyed that the island seems to contain not a bit of worthwhile treasure.

Reznor, venerable male red dragon (Dragon, Chromatic, Red): AC -9; MV 9, Fly 30 (C), Jp 3; HD 21; hp 145; THAC0 2; #AT 3 (claw/claw/bite); Dmg 1d10+10/1d10+10/3d10+10; SA breath weapon, *dragon fear*, spell use, spell-like powers; SD immune to fire; MR 55%; SZ G (160' body, 150' tail); ML fanatic (17); Int exceptional (15); AL CE; XP 22,000.

Special Abilities: SA—fire breath once per 3 rounds (cone 5' wide at mouth, 30' wide at far end, 90' long, damage 20d10+10); spell-like powers (as 19th level) 3× per day—*affect normal fires*, *pyrotechnics*, *detect gems*, *kind and number* (100' radius), once per day—*heat metal*, *suggestion*, *hypnotism*.

Spells Memorized (Wizard 2/2/2/1, Priest 1): 1st—*affect normal fires*, *charm person*, 2nd—*ESP*, *invisibility*, 3rd—*dispel magic* ×2, 4th—*polymorph self*; 1st—*command*.

The Wreckage

The wreckage of several wooden sailing vessels dots the black sands along a section of the northernmost beach, clear indications that the adventurers are not the first to set foot on the island. The wrecks are visible from both the seaward side of the beach and the air, so unless the PCs approach the island from another direction without circumnavigating it, they can spot them easily, even at night.

Closer inspection reveals that these are the wrecks of six long outrigger canoes that were hand-carved from massive trees. Their hulls and pontoons are now smashed and scattered around an area of beach roughly 50 feet in diameter. The canoes appear to have been broken apart by a great force, and great



trenches are dug into the beach, with sand flung about in heaps. No tracks are to be found, with one exception: Numerous human footprints surround the area. The prints encircle all the wreckage and lead up and down the beach and into the jungle in several places. One set constitutes a well-traveled trail, leading from the wreckage into the trees.

The Castaways

The canoes belong to primitive humans, visitors to the island who had the misfortune to arrive here just before the appearance of Castle Pescheour and Prince Garloth's spell. Their home is another tropical island, approximately a day's hard canoe journey from this one. Their mission was to expand their people's knowledge of the nearby islands and find new hunting and gathering grounds. The trail leads toward the shelters of the marooned sailors, from which the stranded crew can see their destroyed vessels and watch for rescuers or intruders.

The nature of these humans is left to what best suits your campaign. In the World of GREYHAWK setting, they could be savage Suloise from Hepmonland or Amedian Olman; a FORGOTTEN REALMS campaign may have them originate in Chult. Or, if your world has no equivalent culture, they may be a similar hunter-gatherer people appropriate to the island's setting.

Led by the chieftain's eldest child, a young warrior who had recently attained adulthood, the expedition reached this island in the afternoon of the day before the castle arrived. Naturally, they were amazed and worried by its sudden manifestation the next morning. After debating what its appearance might mean, the leader ordered a squad of warriors to make a quick reconnaissance of the strange "stone hut" while the rest of the expedition scouted out the jungle.

A Tale of Terror

Both parties encountered horrors aplenty in their respective tasks. The reconnaissance team made its way safely up the escarpment, only to be slaughtered by harpies at the castle's main gate (see "Castle Pescheour" below). Meanwhile, the jungle team discovered the yuan-ti. The resulting fight was one-sided and brief, ending with the death or capture of most of the luckless humans, though a few managed

to escape. The captives' lives ended quickly, as did those of their captors: Not long after the yuan-ti corralled them in their temple, Reznor the red dragon attacked, destroying the edifice and all within.

The few humans who escaped scattered into the jungle. A handful managed to make it past the various monsters that the castle was disgorging and back to their canoes—only to find them smashed to pieces, victims of the black dragons. The hapless survivors constructed some makeshift shelters near the wreckage of their boats and now subsist on what fruits and plants they can. They hope that their chieftain will send a rescue party, but that may not happen for many weeks. Meanwhile they live in fear that the yuan-ti or castle monsters will find them.

The castaways can see characters who approach the wrecked canoes and believe, at least initially, that this is yet another threat from this cursed place. In a preemptive strike, they charge from the jungle and attack with spears and stone axes. It should not take long for the PCs to realize this crude weaponry poses little threat, and that their attackers are half-starved and terrified. If the PCs refrain from killing the primitive humans and make an effort to communicate, they will learn much that can help with their quest.

The castaways are reluctant to leave the dubious safety of their shelter, but if the PCs can convince them of their good intentions (such as promising to rescue them from this awful place), they may agree to guide the party to the yuan-ti ruins or the castle. They can provide the following information:

- **Monsters:** The expedition encountered the yuan-ti ("snake-men"), the black and red dragons, and the harpies, as well as the gorgons and the grell described below. They also know where the dragons live and when they are most active.
- **Castle:** They can describe the sudden appearance of the "great stone hut" and the monsters that overran the island after it arrived. They have no idea that the *Stone of Corbinet* lies in the castle: After their recon team failed to return, they gave the place a wide berth and so cannot describe its contents.



- **Smoking Ruins:** They can describe the location of the yuan-ti temple and its destruction by Reznor.

Castaways (Human, Tribesmen) (14): AC 8 (hides); MV 12; HD 1; hp 8, 8, 7, 7, 7, 6, 5, 5, 5, 5, 4, 4, 3; THAC0 20; #AT 1 (spear or stone ax); Dmg 1d8; SZ M (average 5'9" tall); ML unsteady (6); Int average (10); AL N; XP 15 each.

Swaths of Destruction

These triangular, charred strips like scars radiate through the jungle out from the central escarpment. This is indeed the source of the destruction: Reznor the red dragon burned these strips with his searing breath, both for amusement and to drive prey into the open.

Fortunately, the island's frequent rainfall makes conditions sufficiently wet to prevent the flames from setting the remainder of the forest alight—so far. If Reznor continues to burn acreage, he will soon eradicate the jungle, leaving the island a barren rock before he departs it for more interesting locations.

Close inspection reveals that all the trees, vines, and undergrowth are charred black, covering the ground with a layer of coarse ash. Walking through any burned areas leaves deep footprints and stirs up gray-black ash clouds.

The Smoking Ruins

The island's only intelligent natives before the arrival of Castle Pescheour were a group of yuan-ti half-breeds who raised a temple to their foul god deep within the jungle. Here they held their secretive rituals and sacrificed those unlucky enough to fall into their clutches.

The castle's appearance changed the balance of power drastically. Hunters became the hunted as hordes of castle monsters roved the island in search of prey. Finally the temple itself fell victim to the marauding red dragon. Little is left now but tumbled stones and burnt vegetation; what treasure survived the flames was carried off by Reznor, scanty though it was. The remaining yuan-ti are now refugees from the castle's horrors, as are their

erstwhile human victims. If the party explores the vicinity of the ruins, they soon come upon more evidence that all is not right.

The Hunt

Should the PCs approach or fly over the area marked "H" on the island map, read aloud or paraphrase the following:

Crashing pell-mell through the jungle is a most bizarre procession. A group of shouting, panicked creatures combining the worst features of humans and snakes burst through the vegetation. They are pursued by half a dozen large, metallic, bull-like beasts. The snake-things rush through the jungle at top speed, heedless of anything except escaping their terrible pursuers. Some lag behind their companions and fall prey to the leading bull creatures, which breathe out a noxious green cloud that envelops them. The unfortunate snake beings instantly turn to stone. While some of the bull-things continue in the macabre hunt, others begin devouring the statues they just created!

The fleeing creatures are, of course, yuan-ti, and their pursuers are a pack of gorgons. Those gorgons who stop to feed on their kill will attack adventurers if aware of them; the yuan-ti are their first victims of the day, so they are still able to breathe petrifying vapor three more times. They also possess an additional breath weapon conveyed by Prince Garloth's spell: a noxious cloud of chlorine gas.

Yuan-ti half-breeds (32): AC 4/0; MV 12, slither 9; HD 8; hp 55 each; THAC0 13; #AT varies by form; Dmg varies by form; SA psionics, spell use; MR 20%; SZ M (8' tall or long); ML elite (14); Int genius (17); AL CE; XP 4,000–6,000 each.

Special Abilities—Yuan-ti with snake heads bite once per round for 1d10 damage, those with snake tails constrict for 1d4 damage per round and have scales instead of skin (AC 0), and those with snake heads and snakes instead of arms bite three times per round (once for 1d10 damage and twice with the arms for 1d6 damage apiece); SA—Yuan-ti with



snake tails have human heads and once per day may cast *cause fear*, *darkness* 15' radius, *snake charm*, *sticks to snakes*, *neutralize poison*, *suggestion* and *polymorph other*.

Psionics (abilities marked with * are always known): Level 6; Dis/Sci/Dev 18; Attack/Defense MT, II/M-, IF, TW; Pow 17; PSPs 15 × Mult; *Clairsentience*—danger sense, feel sound, poison sense*, *Psychometabolism*—animal affinity* (snake), metamorphosis (snake), chameleon power*, chemical simulation*, flesh armor, *Telepathy*—attraction (to snakes), aversion* (to snakes), false sensory input, inflict pain, invincible foes, life detection, phobia amplification*, posthypnotic suggestion, repugnance (to snakes), taste link*.

Notes: The yuan-ti have been weaponless since their temple was plundered. Morale may be lower than listed due to their straitened circumstances (DM's choice). Half of the yuan-ti (16) have snake heads; one-quarter (8) have snake tails and scales instead of skin; and one-quarter (8) have snake heads and snakes instead of arms.

Gorgons (4): AC 2; MV 12; HD 8; hp 60, 57, 56, 44; THAC0 13; #AT 1 (horns); Dmg 2d6; SA breath weapon; SZ L (8' tall); ML average (10); Int animal (1); AL N; XP 2,000 each.

Special Abilities: SA—petrifying breath 4× per day (cone of gas 5' wide at mouth, 20' wide at far end, 60' long, saving throw vs. petrification or turn to stone); poison gas once per day (cone of gas 5' wide at mouth, 20' wide at far end, 60' long, damage 10d4+5).

Random Encounters

Not enough native creatures are still living on the island to warrant terrain-specific encounter tables—too many have been wiped out by marauding castle monsters. In fact, the PCs can infer from the island's diminished normal plant and animal life that something is very wrong. A jungle, even on such a small island, should be teeming with life, but here the number of individual forms and communities is unnaturally small. By highlighting the lack of normal plant and animal populations, you can heighten the tension of the situation.

This does not mean that a party setting off across the island will have no encounters at all. Rather, the PCs are more likely to run afoul of the monsters that ravaged the local populations. When the characters are not engaged in a keyed encounter, roll 1d10 for every 3 turns they spend on the island. A roll of 1–5 indicates an encounter with a transformed inhabitant or an indigenous monster: Roll 1d12 and consult the table below. Otherwise, if you desire, they meet up with hostile indigenous creatures, such as a flight of 2d10 pteranodons, a giant sundew or two, or a giant constrictor snake. Each entry indicates the total number for that monster type. Given the small and isolated location, as well as their unusual origins, creatures have no way to replenish their populations. Thus, if the characters slay twenty-four grell, they will not encounter any more, even in keyed locations. The giant trolls are the sole exception: Those noted here have wandered away from the castle, and their losses do not affect those still in the barracks.

Island Encounters

Die Roll	Result
1	1–2 black dragons (see "Gaidon and Narella" above); total 2
2	Red dragon (see "Reznor" above); total 1
3	1d8 harpies (see "Main Gate" below); total 8
4	1d8 invisible stalkers; total 8
5	Thessalmera; total 1
6	1d4 shambling mounds (marsh and jungle only); total 12
7	1d6 giant trolls (see "Barracks" below); total 12
8	1d10 gorgons (see "Smoking Ruins" above); total 10
9	2d6 grell workers; total 24
10	2d4 yuan-ti halfbreeds (see "Smoking Ruins" above); total 32
11	1–2 nightmares (see "Stable" below; night only); total 4
12	Roll twice more

Invisible Stalkers (8): AC 3; MV 12, Fly 12 (A); HD 8; hp 60, 57, 55, 55, 54, 46, 43, 38; THAC0 13;



#AT 1 (vortex); Dmg 4d4; SA surprise (-6 to targets' surprise rolls); SD invisibility (-2 to opponents' attack rolls); MR 30%; SZ L (8' tall); ML elite (14); Int high (13); AL N; XP 3,000 each.

Thessalmera (Thessalmonster) (1): AC 5/2/0 (lion head/snake heads/dragon head and body); MV 12; HD 10; hp 72; THAC0 11; #AT 9-11 (6-8 snake heads/lion head/tail/dragon head); Dmg 1d6 (6-8)/3d4/1d12/2d4; SA acid, breath weapon, immobilization; SD immune to acid and petrification, regenerate 2 hp/day, resistant to fire (+3 save); SZ H (30' long); ML steady (12); Int low (5); AL NE; XP 10,000.

Special Abilities: SA—acid bite from snake heads causes 1d6 additional damage per hit (save vs. poison for half); pincer tail immobilizes M-size or smaller victims on hit (escape on successful Open Doors at +5, 1 attempt per round); dragon head breathes fire 6x per day (cone 5' wide at mouth, 50' wide at end, 20' long, damage 3d8).

Notes: Each snake head takes 12 hp; loss of heads does not affect monster's overall hit points; lion head controls unless destroyed, then dragon, and if that is destroyed the creature fights in a berserk fury until killed.

Shambling Mounds (Plant, Intelligent) (12): AC 0; MV 6; HD 11; hp 80, 80, 80, 77, 77, 77, 71, 71, 71, 68, 68, 68; THAC0 9; #AT 2; Dmg 2d8/2d8; SA silent attack (-3 to targets' surprise rolls), suffocation; SD half damage from piercing and slashing weapons, half damage from cold (save for no damage), immune to fire, nourished by electricity; SZ L (8' tall); ML fanatic (17); Int low (6); AL N; XP 9,000 each.

Special Abilities: SA—any creature hit by both arms in the same round is entangled and suffocates in 2d4 rounds unless the shambler is killed or the victim breaks free (successful Bend Bars/Lift Gates roll); SD—grows 1' in height and gains 1 HD per electrical attack against it.

Grell workers (24): AC 5; MV Fl 12 (D); HD 5; hp 38 each; THAC0 15; #AT 11 (tentacle x10/bite); Dmg 1d4 (x10)/1d6; SA drop attack (-3 to targets' surprise rolls), paralysis, lift; SZ M (4' diameter); ML elite (13); Int average (9); AL NE; XP 2,000 each.

Special Abilities: SA—drop attack gives opponents a -3 penalty to surprise rolls; paralyzing tentacles (saving throw vs. paralysis at +4 or paralyzed for 5d4 rounds); any creature held by two or more tentacles may be lifted from the ground and subject to bite attack on the following round.

Gaining the Castle

Castle Pescheour is located atop the highest escarpment on the island, its front gate some 800 feet above the jungle floor. No road or path leads upward: The party must scale the cliff face, fly to the top, or find some other means of reaching the summit. The irregular cliff face offers abundant handholds, but the young volcanic rock crumbles easily (-25% penalty to Climb Walls rolls). Ascending in daylight exposes the climber to the watchful eyes of the dragons (provided that they are awake and active) and any remaining pteranodons. Trying it at night without a light source is quite dangerous, as it is difficult to differentiate safe and unsafe hand- and footholds in the darkness (an additional -25% penalty). A broad, relatively flat shelf surrounds the castle and provides ample room for flying characters to alight and scout the perimeter.

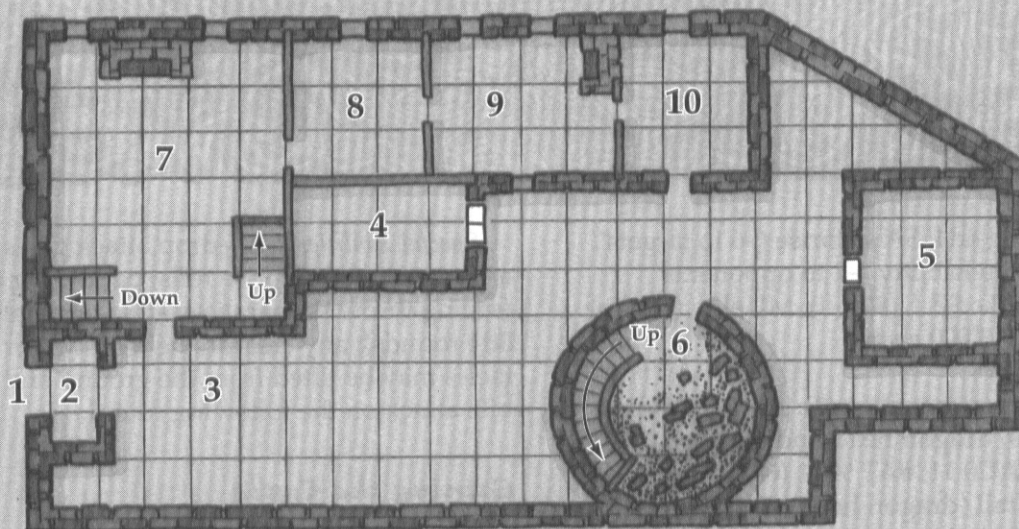
Beneath These Castle Walls

Once the PCs gain the summit, they will be right at the feet of the castle walls and visible to anything on top of them. The surrounding ledge is relatively flat but irregular, varying from 4 to 30 feet in width. Up close, details of the castle's construction are easily visible: Massive blocks of white granite and black obsidian, polished to a deep shine. The stone is pitted in places as if by impacts (the legacy of the castle's untold years of travel throughout the world).

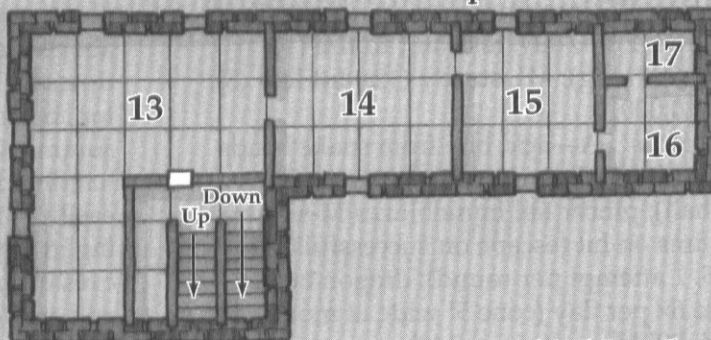
Castle Pescheour

Once they enter the castle proper, the party must run a gauntlet. The castle's monsters are disposed about its grounds and buildings to defend against intruders. They have been given standing orders by the three beholders (former knights) and will react according to the situation and their instructions.

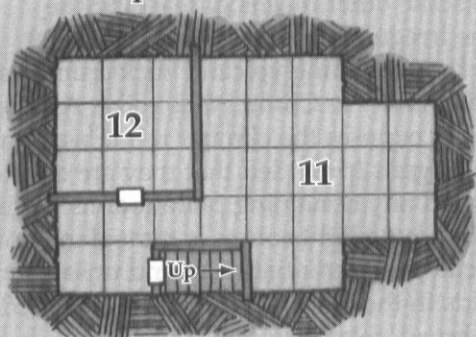
Ground Level



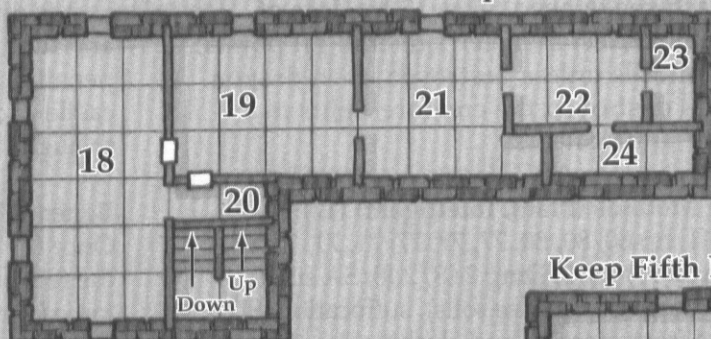
Keep Second Level



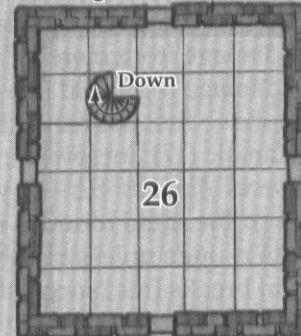
Keep Lower Level



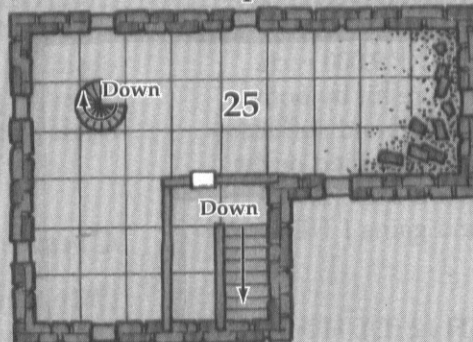
Keep Third Level



Keep Fifth Level



Keep Fourth Level



Castle Pescheour



one square = 10 feet



A Note on Tactics

The beholders have instructed the harpies (posted at the main gate) to deal with intruders first by day. If the harpies are unable to handle the opposition, the trolls inhabiting the barracks and the nightmares in the stables are to remain in their respective lairs and ambush any who enter. (See the "Stable" and "Barracks" descriptions below.) If the intruders bypass them and enter the keep, the courtyard monsters are instead to keep watch and assault en masse any who emerge.

Should the characters approach the castle at night, they will encounter the harpies right away. However, the nightmares and trolls both prefer to hunt after sundown and may be elsewhere.

Grounds and Outbuildings

1. Main Gate

The only mundane passage into the castle is this recessed, vaulted archway in the western wall. It was once protected by a massive iron door, but this now lies twisted and broken on the ground just outside the archway. The door has been ripped from its hinges by some tremendous force; though some 6 inches thick, 12 feet tall and 8 feet wide, it is crumpled like so much paper. Anyone standing before the archway can see clearly into the barbican interior and get a good look at its corpse-and-filth-strewn floor (see "Barbican" below). They can also see into the barren courtyard beyond.

The main gate is haunted by a flight of harpies. Once the cooks, scullery servants, and chamber staff of Castle Pescheour, now they are vile creatures who think only of torturing and eating their next victims. Characters who approach the gate on foot hear the harpies before they can see them.

Suddenly the still air is filled with an unexpected sound: voices raised in song. A dirgelike melody fills the air, sweet and sad enough to tug at even the toughest heartstrings. It's hard not to stand and listen in wonder. The song appears to be coming from somewhere within and above the gates.

The monsters first sing in an attempt to *charm* intruders and draw them through the barbican into the courtyard where they can be attacked and slain. Should the party resist their lure, the harpies open the barbican's roof grate (see below) and hurl rocks and filth onto the heads of anyone inside, hoping to drive them out. The harpies swoop down to attack anyone who either refuses to enter the main gate or flees outside the castle walls.

If the adventurers approach the castle from above, they can see the flock of harpies perched on the barbican roof waiting for prey. Unless the PCs are invisible, though, the harpies will also see them and attempt to lure the party down to the roof with their charming song.

Harpies (8): AC 7; MV 6, Fly 15 (C); HD 7; hp 54, 52, 50, 50, 49, 46, 43, 42; THAC0 13; #AT 3 (claw/claw/bite) or 3 (claw/claw/stone); Dmg 1d3/1d3/1d6 or 1d3/1d3/1d2; SA singing and *charm*; SZ M (6' tall); ML elite (14); Int low (6); AL CE; XP 975 each.

Special Abilities: SA—Humans and demihumans who hear a harpy's song must make a successful saving throw vs. spell or be *charmed* for the duration of the song (harpies may sing even while engaged in melee, and a separate saving throw is required for each); harpy's touch *charms* victims for 20 +1d10 hours.

Notes: Each harpy has a supply of 1d10 stones to hurl down on anyone inside the barbican.

2. Barbican

The main gate opens into the barbican, a small, rectangular gatehouse that is actually an extrusion of the castle wall. Another archway, identical with that in the outer wall, leads into the courtyard. A portcullis once blocked this entry but has been torn out of its casement and cast aside; it now lies dented and useless in a corner. The gatehouse ceiling is not entirely solid but forms a "murder hole" consisting of a grid of metal bars, each wide enough for an adult human to stand on, covered by two metal plates. This defensive structure allowed castle defenders to rain arrows or boiling oil down onto invaders. The harpies know of this advantage and will remove the plates if anyone takes shelter inside the barbican, the better to assail them with song, filth, and missiles.



Any ambient light entering the barbican's open doorways or murder hole reveals a grisly sight.

In the dim light you can see the floor is strewn with corpses—or rather, parts of corpses. Limbs, torsos, heads, and less identifiable pieces are scattered throughout the chamber, along with a great quantity of what appears to be bird filth and large gray feathers. A variety of crude weapons—stone axes, spears, primitive bows—litter the ghoulish scene.

Closer inspection reveals that many of the remains have been partially eaten. The harpies killed and ate the warriors who came to scout out the castle, dropping scraps through the open grating. Spending at least a turn searching the barbican will reveal a total of seven dead individuals. Those who are still recognizable seem to share a common origin. If the PCs have already encountered the primitive castaways, they can discern that these victims were once people of the same stock.

Should the characters manage to communicate with the deceased warriors through a *Speak with Dead* spell or similar magic—not a simple task considering the language barrier—they can learn what happened. The luckless humans were charmed by the harpies' song and then slain when they ventured here to scout the "stone hut" for their expedition leader, whom they left on the beach. They can't otherwise provide any more information than what the survivors know (see "The Castaways" above).

3. Courtyard

The inner courtyard is little more than a layer of hard-packed dirt and clay. The dirt surface shows clear evidence of frequent use, with several well-worn pathways connecting all the visible doorways. (The Pescheour garrison and knights drilled and practiced swordplay in the open space.) Should the PCs get to this point undetected, they can see and hear the harpies perched atop the barbican roof and will be in a position to launch a surprise attack if they wish.

Two wooden outbuildings (the stable and barracks) face into the courtyard. In one corner is a three-story stone tower, and opposite it a large keep

dominates the scene. During the hours of night, the doors to the outbuildings are open wide while their monstrous inhabitants rove the island in search of prey; the barracks doors are closed tightly during the day. The keep and the tower must have had doors once, but these are now completely missing.

4. Stable

The stable, like the barracks, is not part of the main castle structure; thus it is not built of marble and obsidian but fine hardwoods with a strong slate roof. Shuttered windows can be opened from the courtyard to allow those outside to peer in, and both doors hang open. They are not smashed like the main gate or portcullis: The stablehands had them open when disaster struck, and so they have remained.

The wooden doors hang wide open, rocking gently and creaking in the breeze. The air hereabouts smells strongly of horse dung, but the mundane odor fails to cover up something more sinister underneath, something foul and noxious, not unlike smoke—and perhaps the faintest whiff of brimstone.

The Pescheour stable once held five royal mounts, which were transformed into nightmares by Garloth's spell. Four of these evil steeds remain; one was slain by the black dragons. They spend their days in the cool of the stables, flying out over the island at night in search of victims. The nightmares don't bother intruders in the barbican, courtyard, or keep, preferring not to compete with the monsters inhabiting those areas. However, they instantly attack anyone who opens the shutters or steps in front of the stable doors and into their line of sight.

Nightmares (4): AC -4; MV 15, Fly 36 (C); HD 6+6; hp 54, 53, 47, 44; THAC0 17; #AT 3 (hoof/hoof/bite); Dmg 2d4+2/2d4+2/2d4; SA burning hooves; SD noxious vapor; SZ L (6' tall at shoulder); ML elite (14); Int very (11); AL NE; XP 2,000 each.

Special Abilities: SA—burning hooves set alight any combustibles on a successful attack; SD—cloud of noxious vapor (victims within 10' radius must



make a successful save vs. paralysis or be at -2 penalty to attack and damage).

5. Barracks

The building interior is a shambles. All the furniture has been pulverized and the mattresses heaped into a filth-covered pile in the center of the only room to create a vile nest.

The soldiers of the castle garrison were transformed by Prince Garloth's spell into a pack of bloodthirsty giant trolls. Most are still here, though a few wandered into the jungle and did not return, preferring the open-air environment. The remaining trolls sleep through the daytime heat inside their barracks lair, emerging when it's cooler to hunt across the island.

Should the PCs arrive during the warmest time of day (midmorning to dusk), all the trolls are resting within. The stomach-churning stench that emanates from the building heralds their presence. During the cooler hours, there is only a 50% chance that the trolls are on the premises.

Trolls, giant (9): AC 4; MV 12; HD 8; hp 62, 61, 60, 58, 56, 55, 55, 55, 53; THAC0 13; #AT 1 (spiked club) or 2 (claw/claw); Dmg 2d6+7 or 1d6+1/1d6+1; SA regenerate 3 hp/rd., hurl boulders for 2d8 damage (200 yd. range); SD catch thrown boulders 25%; SZ L (10' tall); ML fanatic (17); Int low (6); AL CE; XP 1,400 each.

Special Abilities: SA—regeneration starts on the third round after first blood.

6. Knights' Tower

The fate Garloth's spell bestowed on the brave and true knights of Castle Pescheour was particularly cruel. These noble souls now roam the island as some of the most evil monsters known: The three occupants of the tower are now a trio of beholders. With no memory of their prior lives, the monsters believe they were magically whisked here from elsewhere. They have agreed to a temporary truce so as to pool their talents in learning how they arrived and how best to conquer the island. They already control the courtyard and intend to take over the rest of the castle—just as soon as they devise a suitable plan and gain some intelligence about what's inside.

The tower door is missing—not ripped off its hinges or lying broken on the ground, but simply *gone*, as if it had vanished into thin air. The building itself is three stories tall, but the interior is now merely a hollow cylinder filled with a pile of broken timbers and stone rubble to a height of about 20 feet.

The door was removed and the tower's interior structures collapsed courtesy of the beholders' disintegration beams. The result is a lair that is nearly impassible to intruders but easy for the beholders to negotiate with their natural levitation. If the trio have any warning of the characters' approach—most likely through their minions outside—they hide in convenient spaces and emerge from the rubble to attack at an opportune moment, bringing as many eyestalks as possible to bear. Adventurers who gain the tower entrance stealthily see the beholders circling about the rubble, floating up and down the hollow interior as they mutter to themselves and one another (the beholder equivalent of pacing the floor).

Beholders (3): AC 0/2/7 (body/eyestalk/central or smaller eye); MV Fly 3 (B); hp 75, 75, 75; THAC0 5; #AT 1 (bite); Dmg 2d4; SA magic; SD antimagic ray; SZ M (5' diameter); ML fanatic (18); Int exceptional (15); AL LE; XP 14,000 each.

Special Abilities: SA—Magical effects (from 10 eyestalks) *charm person*, *charm monster*, *sleep* (single target), *telekinesis* (up to 250 lbs.), *flesh to stone* (range 30 yds.), *fear* (as wand), *slow* (single target), *cause serious wounds* (range 50 yds.), *death ray* (as *death spell*, 1 target, range 40 yds.); SD—antimagic ray from central eye (range 140 yds., 90-degree arc).

Notes: Each eyestalk has 1d8+4 hp; severed eyes do not count against the creature's hp total. Body has $\frac{2}{3}$ of total hits, central eye has $\frac{1}{3}$; destroying body kills the creature.

Keep Ground Level

The keep is an imposing structure of five visible levels, constructed of the same marble and obsidian as the castle walls. Apart from the high, narrow



windows and arrow slits, only the doorway to the great hall (area 7 on the map) offers a means of entry. A recessed marble archway marks the entrance, but here too the door is simply gone. One of the beholders in the tower recently disintegrated it as a prelude to investigating the keep.

7. Great Hall

Anyone standing in the courtyard before the keep's main entrance can see into the great hall.

Even in daylight, the vast room within is dim—all the shutters are closed tightly and no fire burns in the great obsidian hearth. With sufficient light, all appears to be surprisingly normal; no sign is visible of the violence that marks the barbican and main gate.

Rows of hardwood tables and benches line the floor of the hall, and all the places are set with fine pewter plate and cups ready to receive a meal. Gems flash from flatware and drinking vessels on the table farthest from the door and closest to the hearth, marking it as the seat of someone important and wealthy. Rich tapestries cover the walls, depicting scenes of well-dressed knights and ladies enjoying outdoor leisure activities such as hunting, jousting, and dancing. You can see stone stairways to the immediate right and left of the main door leading to the floors above and below, respectively, and an archway set in the center of the east wall. Whatever lies beyond the arch is obscured, however, by a brocade curtain decorated with golden thread.

This peaceful scene is an illusion, a *veil* spell woven by its monstrous inhabitants—five aranea. Their fabric of lies is as skillfully spun as the webs that in reality festoon the hall. This quintet of arachnid monsters were once the ladies-in-waiting who attended Queen Elaine and Princess Jeshute. They have taken over this entire floor of the keep, creating a veritable maze of webbing only they can navigate easily. The aranea know of the castle's other inhabitants but so far have not been troubled by them or by the creatures who dwell in the courtyard. They prepare their illusion when they detect the approaching party.

Anyone able to pierce the *veil* sees the hall as it truly appears. Smashed remains of the wooden tables and benches lie scattered across the marble floor; the tapestries are torn and stained beyond recognition; the plates and cups are thrown down and befouled; and all is draped from ceiling to floor in thick, sticky webbing. Only the brocade curtain across the eastern archway is truly what it seems.

Those who enter without perceiving the room's true condition will blunder into the webs, which begin about a dozen feet inside the doorway. Roll 1d4 for each character affected by the illusion; the result is the number of web strands that stick to him or her. For each attached strand, the character's movement rate is reduced by one-fourth; anyone whose movement drops to 0 is stuck fast and must get free before progressing. Stuck characters can be freed with a successful Open Doors roll or by destroying the webs that hold them (2 points of slashing damage per strand). The aranea move to devour anything that becomes enmeshed in their webs. They will wait for at least one party member to become stuck before they attack, casting spells and throwing web strands like lassos.

Contact with the webs does not dispel the illusion, which remains in place for 12 rounds after being cast or until disbelieved, whichever comes first. Until the *veil* is penetrated, PCs who stick to web strands explain their predicament away as a cloak caught on a nail, a table or bench in the way, or some natural but unnoticed obstacle, as appropriate to the method of travel.

Aranea (5): AC 7; MV 18, Web 12; HD 3; hp 24, 21, 21, 18, 16; THAC0 17; #AT 1 (bite); Dmg 1d6; SA poison, spell use, sneak attack (-1 to targets' surprise rolls), web; SD spell use; SZ M (6' diameter, spider form); ML steady (11); Int high (13); AL N; XP 650 each/940 (see notes).

Special Abilities: SA—Venomous bite 3× per day (save vs. poison or suffer an additional 1d4 damage per round for 1d4 rounds); spell use (as 6th-level wizard) 1st—*charm person* ×2, *mending*, *shield*, 2nd—*mirror image* ×2, 3rd—*non-detection* ×2; can use web as lasso to entangle on successful hit.

Notes: The largest aranea can also cast *veil* as a 12th-level illusionist twice per day. Garloth's spell



has robbed these of the ability to take human form, but they may change freely between human-spider hybrid and spider forms.

8. Parlor

The aranea have not bothered to conceal the true state of this room, which was once one of the best appointed chambers in the castle. The Pescheour family often met here, among the finely crafted furniture and art objects collected from dozens of strange lands, to share evenings of song, poetry, literature, games, and conversation. Now the room is a complete shambles: The furniture has been smashed to flinders, the artworks destroyed, the tapestries ruined, and the carpets ripped to shreds. Like the great hall, this room is also covered with aranea webs; characters must either cut their way through (which takes 2d4 rounds) or find some other means of clearing the webbing before they can progress.

The only *objet d'art* still intact is a *scarab of insanity* that King Alain acquired during his travels. He had placed the golden scarab under a glass case and set it on the mantelpiece for safekeeping; it now lies on the floor amid the shattered glass of its former container.

9. Kitchen

Webs cover this room as they do the main hall and the parlor, but in even greater profusion. It takes 3d4 rounds to hack through the dense, sticky barrier. Barely visible beneath the mass are appointments befitting a kitchen: a cooking hearth, shelves, tables, and cupboard, as well as the remains of foodstuffs, such as burst sacks of flour and meal. Hanging within the webbing are the mummified remains of a dozen mundane animals native to the island—some wild boar, a jaguar, several spider monkeys—and two of the primitive humans who fled into the keep while their fellows were being ripped apart by the harpies.

10. Pantry

More victims of the aranea hang in the webbing that shrouds the former pantry. The desiccated husks of a giant snake, a pteranodon, and several spider monkeys are enmeshed in the strands. Beneath this

gruesome scene lie the remains of the pantry's stores, including many casks of drinkable ale and wine; sacks of rotting grain, flour, and meal; wooden crates filled with still-edible dried and salted meats and fish; and other food staples, most of which have rotted in the tropical heat and humidity. The room has nothing of value, but if the PCs wish to search they must first clear away the webs (treat like those in the kitchen).

Keep Lower Level

11. Shrine

The stairway leading downward from the great hall ends at a solid wooden door bound in iron and emblazoned with the symbol of the god of Justice. The door opens away from the stairs, swinging easily on well-oiled hinges. Beyond is a dim but still firelit chamber, from which escapes the distinctive and nauseating stench of rotting flesh.

This is the Pescheour family shrine, dedicated to their patron deity (the God of Justice) and cared for by Princess Jeshute, Étain's youngest child and only daughter. It contains no seats, for the god prefers worshipers to approach while standing.

The princess lived in the room next to the shrine and spent most of her time here in prayer and meditation. It was her responsibility to maintain the sacred flame of Justice at all times, a duty she performed diligently. If the PCs enter the shrine, they can get a better look at its contents:

The shrine consists of a simple altar constructed from smooth blocks of white marble and black obsidian, placed at the far end of the vestibule. Nearby is a wide brazier filled with dimly glowing embers; on the floor at its feet are several bulging sacks of coal. The remainder of the shrine is bare, devoid of pews, seats, or cushions.

Garloth's spell transformed Jeshute into a fearsome spirit naga. The evil creature remains here, in the place that meant so much to her original self, with no memory of her past life. She and the aranea upstairs are on reasonable terms, and they permit her to pass



in and out of the keep unmolested because she often returns from hunting with a snack for them as well.

The naga spends most of her time coiled on the section of floor to the left of the altar. She still fills the brazier with coal because she likes the heat and finds the dim light useful, but no longer keeps the flame of Justice lit. She has not had the time since her transformation to set the traps for which her monstrous kin are known and feared. She attacks any intruders first with spells, using her gaze attack when an opportunity presents itself.

Naga, Spirit: AC 4; MV 12; HD 10; hp 77; THACO 11; #AT 1 (bite); Dmg 1d3; SA poison, gaze, spell use; SZ H (15' long); ML elite (14); Int high (13); AL CE; XP 5,000.

Special Abilities: SA—Poison bite (save vs. poison or die); gaze attack (save vs. paralyzation or be charmed); wizard spells memorized (4/2/1): 1st—*hypnotism, magic missile* ×2, *wall of fog*, 2nd—*blindness, Melf's acid arrow*, 3rd—*wraithform*; priest spells memorized (3/2): 1st—*darkness, protection from good, sanctuary*, 2nd—*enthrall, hold person*.

12. Jeshute's Chamber

The spartan furnishings in this small room include a simple frame bed and mattress, a narrow wardrobe filled with plain robes and boots, and a wooden washstand with a clay basin and pitcher, topped by an unadorned glass mirror. A large wooden chest lies at the foot of the bed.

The princess lived alone in this austere chamber, seldom ascending to the upper portions of the keep except for family meals or when consulting the library. The wooden chest holds the family's store of religious texts: books and scrolls pertaining to the god of Justice.

If the PCs look through the scrolls, they can find some obscure references that may offer a hint as to the true nature of the *Stone*:

- There can be no pearl without a grain of sand.
- A fragmentary passage: "And Justice spoke, saying There must be order. For if a thing, no matter its size, is out of place, it affects all other things."

- It is the nature of creation to be flawed, and the nature of gods to mend that flaw.
- One loose thread an entire tapestry unravels.
- The creator is saved or damned by the created.

Keep Second Level

This level comprises the private rooms of Prince Eric, the young heir to the Pescheour throne. The prince moved into these rooms only recently; prior to his sixteenth birthday, he shared Jeshute's chambers since she spent so much of her time in the family shrine. Before he took up residence here these rooms were the sanctum of his uncle Garloth, but the traitor prince removed all his arcane equipment when he departed the castle.

13. Sleeping Chamber

The door on the second-level landing opens into the sleeping chamber, the largest of the prince's rooms. The door is shut and locked from within and shows no sign of damage or forcible entry; the lock can be picked normally. If the PCs open the door, read aloud or paraphrase the following:

Opening the door reveals a dark, silent interior that appears almost completely undisturbed. The windows are shuttered, and no fires or other light sources are present. The floor is covered with sumptuous carpets and the walls with hangings depicting brave knights slaying dragons and rescuing the wyrms' captives; both carpets and tapestries are intact. Immediately opposite the doorway is a large, neatly made four-poster bed, and next to it, a tall gilded frame. It must once have held a looking glass, but now thousands of reflective shards lie on the floor around it.

After their experiences on the ground level, the adventurers may be tempted to believe the scene is an illusion, but it is quite real. The mirror is the only sign that anything is amiss. It was shattered by the room's occupant, the once lively and energetic Prince Eric, who has been transformed into an iron golem. This grim, silent creature now remains unmoving amid the former prince's royal effects.



Opening the door alerts the golem, which is standing in a corner of the dayroom (location 14), to the presence of intruders. The golem waits until the PCs are inside the sleeping chamber before stirring to confront them. Once it begins its approach to the main chamber, the PCs feel the vibrations and noise caused by its heavy, metallic tread. The monster will continue to pursue the PCs even if they leave this level of the keep.

Around the corner of this L-shaped chamber is a massive wardrobe of polished dark wood. It contains an array of rich velvet, silk, linen, and brocade clothing, tailored for a slim person of youthful height. Next to the wardrobe is a dummy torso stand holding Prince Eric's armor, a suit of *platemail* +3. Hanging on the wall next to the armor is the Pescheour heir's weapon, a *longsword of dancing*, and a *shield* +3.

14. Dayroom

This room is as dim as the sleeping chamber, with windows likewise shuttered, and contains similar carpets and tapestries. A finely crafted wooden desk sits near the center of the room next to a pair of gilded candelabras, each holding six unlit tapers. Before the south window is a marble bench fitted with a red velvet cushion, and by the east wall is a large wooden table on which are carefully arranged a painted set of wooden knights, soldiers, horses, siege machines, and dragons, and a wooden castle. A bookcase stands against the north wall, containing volumes that range from children's stories to religious homilies, grammars to histories.

The iron golem stands silently in the southeast corner of this room. Should the PCs make their way undetected into the sleeping chamber (location 13), they encounter the golem here instead.

Iron Golem (1): AC 3; MV 6; HD 18; hp 80; THAC0 3; #AT 1 (fist); Dmg 4d10; SA breath weapon; SD +3 or better weapon to hit, immune to poison and most spells, regenerates from magical fire; SW *slowed* by magical electricity, vulnerable to rust monster; SZ L (12' tall); Morale fearless (20); Int non- (0); AL N; XP 13,000.

Special Abilities: SA—breathes poisonous gas once per 7 rounds (10' cube directly in front, damage

4d10); SD—magical fire regenerates 1 hp per die of damage it would have caused.

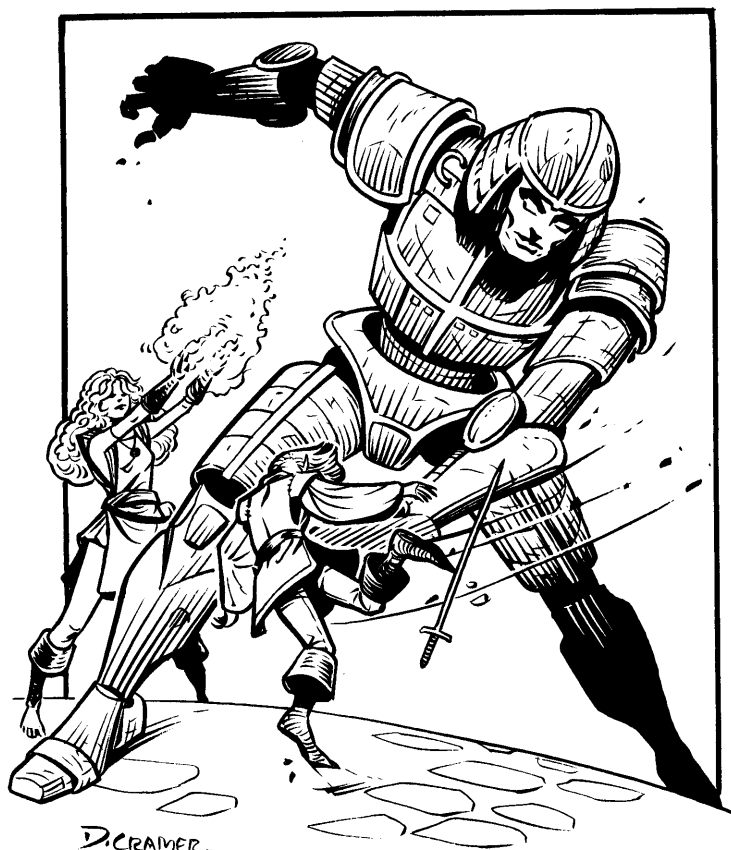
15. Bathing Room

Adventurers exploring this room find normal bathing and grooming items, including a carved obsidian tub, a marble washstand and basin, soap, and towels. A *decanter of endless water* rests on the edge of the tub; this variety can produce either hot or cold water. Another gilded mirror frame stands in the corner, its glass also broken and littering the room's floor.

The door on the east wall opens into the linen closet (location 16), off of which is the garderobe (location 17).

Keep Third Level

This suite of beautifully appointed rooms belongs to Queen Elaine, Eric's grandmother and mother to Alain, Jeshute, and Garloth. Here the Queen Mother





spent most of her days since the death of her husband seven years ago, indulging her deep love of the arts. She surrounded herself with artistic accomplishments, some created by her own hand and others acquired in the course of the castle's travels. She is still here, as are the sculptures, mosaics, and paintings she so enjoyed, but thanks to her malicious son both the Queen Mother and her beloved art have acquired more sinister forms.

18. Gallery

The stairway opens onto a broad landing whose western side is open, to best display the gallery of art objects assembled by the Queen Mother.

The windows of this large chamber are open, showing off the many sculptures displayed here to their best advantage. Standing between the windows of the south wall, near the staircase, are a pair of exquisite stone statues that resemble a young, hearty king and queen.

Near the center of the room, atop a worked platinum tripod, is a large clay basin, painted with expensive enamels; on the floor next to the tripod is a crystal decanter filled with water. A mahogany table against the north wall holds several dozen wood, stone, and clay sculptures of animals.

Several of these pieces are now inimical to living creatures. The stone statues are representations of Elaine's long-dead parents, sculpted by her own hand. Garloth's spell transformed them into a pair of stone golems that will attack anyone ascending or descending the staircase the moment they reach the landing (location 20).

Stone Golems (2): AC 5; MV 6; HD 14; hp 60, 60; THAC0 7; #AT 1 (fist); Dmg 3d8; SA *slow* once per round (range 10'); SD +2 or better weapon to hit, immune to most spells; SW *rock to mud, stone to flesh*; SZ L (9½' tall); ML fearless (20); Int non- (0); AL N; XP 8,000 each.

Special Abilities: SW—*slowed* for 2d6 rounds by *rock to mud*; *stone to flesh* makes vulnerable to any attack for the following round.

The clay basin is another dangerous object. Approximately 3 feet in diameter, kiln-fired and painted in the Pescheour family colors, it radiates magic. If filled with water (perhaps from the inviting decanter), the basin becomes a variant *bowl of watery death* that affects whoever fills it.

Many of the sculptures on the table are of familiar, mundane creatures; the remainder depict monsters, including a dragon, a unicorn, a manticore, a chimera, a cyclops, and a minotaur. Most are ordinary, but the manticore sculpture radiates magic: If handled, it instantly attains the size and abilities of a true manticore, much like a *figurine of wondrous power*. However, unlike that magical item, the manticore cannot be controlled, nor can it be returned to its inert form. It immediately attacks the character handling it and continues attacking until destroyed. The creature cannot fly in the confines of the gallery, of course, but it uses its natural weaponry and other powers normally.

The remainder of the gallery is filled with ordinary items—plates, bowls, decanters, cups, and statues of people and animals.

Manticore (1): AC4; MV 12, Fly 18 (E); HD 6+3; hp 50; THAC0 13; #AT 3 (claw/claw/bite); Dmg 1d3/1d3/1d8; SA tail spikes; SZ H (15' long); ML elite (14); Int low (5); AL LE; XP 975.

Special Abilities: SA—volley of 1d6 tail spikes 4x per day (range 180 yds., damage 1d6 per spike).

19. Sitting Room

Access to the other rooms on this level is through the sitting room. Unlike the gloomy quarters on the lower levels, this room is well lit. Here the characters find all the media in which Elaine enjoyed working, as well as a variety of half-finished art projects.

The window shutters in this room, unlike those in the dim chambers below, are open to admit any available light. You have evidently come upon an artist's studio. A potter's wheel stands on a spattered tarp in the room's southern side, surrounded by now-hardened lumps of clay; it holds a clay shape vaguely resembling a vase. A long shelf along the south wall contains



dozens of clay objects—drinking vessels, serving bowls, human and animal figures—that are finished and dried but as yet unpainted.

In the northeast corner stands a large wooden easel, its canvas draped with fabric; nearby on the floor is an artist's palette coated with dried paint, and a multitude of brushes lie about the easel's legs.

Even the floor of the room is a work of art: an unfinished mosaic depicting this very castle as seen from a distance. About three-quarters of the mosaic is complete. A sack full of tile pieces and a pot of glue wait near the center of the floor.

Removing the cloth drape from the canvas reveals a half-finished painting of a stark, windblown landscape rendered in many shades of gray. Garloth's magic has changed the Queen Mother's handiwork into a deadly trap. Anyone coming within 30 feet of the painting and gazing at it must make a successful saving throw vs. spell or suffer the effects of a *mirror of life trapping*.

21. Sleeping Chamber

This chamber contains the expected furnishings of a bedroom: bed, dressing table, mirror, and the like. The mirror, though intact, has been turned toward the wall. The former Queen Mother was transformed into a greater medusa and now spends most of her time in this room. She knows of the iron golem and the aranea on the floor below her but doesn't interact with them. Thus far she has had little interest in emerging from the castle.

When the medusa detects intruders on this level, she prepares her *short bow +2* and poisoned arrows but will hold back until the intruders enter the sitting room. At that point she will fling open the door connecting the two rooms and attack with her bow and gaze. If the party bypasses this floor altogether and the medusa detects their presence, she will wait until they have climbed to the upper levels, then move onto the landing to ambush them when they descend the stairs.

Medusa, Greater: AC 3; MV 12; HD 8; hp 60; THAC0 13; #AT 1 (bite or shortbow) + weapon;

Dmg 1d4 or 1d6 + weapon; SA petrifying gaze, poison; SD poisonous blood; MR 20%; SZ M (6' tall); ML elite (14, +1 Morale bonus); Int very (12); AL LE; XP 4,000.

Special Abilities: SA—petrifying gaze (range 30', save vs. petrification or turn to stone), effective after death (+1 save per day); poisonous snake bites (save vs. poison at -1 or die); SD—poisonous blood (contact, even after death, requires a save vs. poison or die).

Special Weapon: *shortbow +2*; 12 poisoned arrows dipped in her own blood (save vs. poison at -1 or die).

The door in the east wall leads to a full-sized bathing room (location 22), wardrobe (location 24), and garderobe (location 23). Again, the mirrors in these rooms face the wall.

Keep Fourth Level

The king of the Pescheour line has traditionally dwelled in the upper reaches of the keep, above the other members of his family but below the room that houses the sacred *Stone of Corbinet*. King Alain was no exception to this custom.

The king's quarters are actually one large chamber, furnished in a manner that is surprisingly unassuming for a monarch; Alain was one of the more modest of the Pescheour rulers.

25. King Alain's Chamber

The staircase ends at a narrow landing opposite an arched wooden door bound in brass. The door is unlocked and slightly ajar, and from within come the muted but constant sounds of muttering, punctuated by an occasional short, sharp laugh, and pacing footsteps. The sounds cease the moment the PCs set foot in the room.

Though the shutters are closed, light emanates from above an open spiral staircase in the northwest corner and illuminates this large chamber. The strange noises also seemed to be coming from the top of the stairs, though they stopped as soon as you entered.



The room is decorated simply, with comfortable but plain rugs and understated tapestries that depict various landscapes. A large, solid four-poster bed is against the north wall, the coverings of its thick down mattress still made up and untouched. Near the bed is a wooden wardrobe, finely carved but also somewhat plain; it contains well-tailored clothing that bespeaks royalty without ostentation. A leather reclining couch is set against the western wall, beneath an open window; next to it stands a handsome round oak table with four matching chairs. A pile of rubble is all that remains of the former bathing area.

Keep Level Five

The top level of the keep houses the *Stone of Corbinet*. King Alain remains with his sacred charge, though his mind has been destroyed by Garloth's treacherous magic.

26. The Chamber of the Stone

When the PCs climb the spiral stair to the topmost chamber, they see no immediate threat.

This uppermost chamber is illuminated by a *continual light* spell centered on the ceiling. There is no sign of anyone or anything that might have produced the sounds you heard. The room is completely empty, except for an intricate wrought platinum-and-steel framework. Inside is a platinum casket inlaid with gold and adorned with a dazzling array of smaller jewels, any single one of which is worth a small fortune; the framework holds the casket some four feet off the floor. Its lid is open, and though the object inside does not glitter in the light, it nonetheless radiates a distinctive aura of power. It is perhaps a foot in length, made of a hard white substance shot through with a delicate tracery of black. Its shape suggests an immense egg.

The characters are likely to be suspicious of the seemingly innocuous room—would the object of

their quest be completely unguarded? They are correct: King Alain is waiting invisibly to attack intruders. He waits until someone arrives at the staircase landing or otherwise enters the room, then opens up with his *staff of thunder and lightning*. He continues to attack with everything he's got, and between casting spells he rants about his intent to fry, gut, smash, and otherwise annihilate those who dare to violate his sanctum.

The platinum casket contains the *Stone of Corbinet*. Although the mad king wants desperately to prevent anyone from taking the *Stone*, his mind is not working properly. He can't formulate tactics more sophisticated than hitting every possible target with damaging spells. His obsession allows thinking parties to outmaneuver him.

Alain, former king, male human W14: AC 10; MV 12; hp 38; #AT 1 (staff); Dmg 1d6; SA spell use, *staff of thunder and lightning*; SD spell use; SZ M (6'1" tall); ML fanatic (18); Str 7, Dex 15, Con 10, Int 18, Wis 9, Cha 6; AL CN.

Spells Memorized (5/5/5/4/4/2/1): 1st—*chill touch, magic missile* ×2, *shield, shocking grasp*; 2nd—*detect invisibility, invisibility, mirror image, stinking cloud* ×2; 3rd—*dispel magic* ×2, *fireball, fly, slow*; 4th—*ice storm* ×2, *stoneskin, wall of fire*; 5th—*cloudkill, cone of cold, telekinesis, wall of force*; 6th—*chain lightning, globe of invulnerability*; 7th—*Mordenkainen's sword*.

Prince Garloth's spell inflicted a particularly cruel fate on his brother. Rather than transforming the king into a monster like the others, it robbed him of his senses. Alain still appears human, but his mind is ravaged by a ceaseless paranoia that renders him incapable of doing anything other than pacing his rooms and trying to kill anyone or anything that disturbs his solitude.

The king's once handsome features are distorted by madness: His eyes bulge in their sockets and dart left to right quickly; his mouth twitches nervously as he rambles insanely; his chin is covered with stubble, and his hair is wild; his clothes are stained and unkempt. As monarch, he used his powerful magic to rule wisely and honor his patron god. Now a raving lunatic, he hurls his sorcerous might at any threat, real or perceived.



The Wounded Land

The crazed Alain does not stop attacking until the PCs manage to score a telling blow against him—that is, actually deal damage. When that occurs, read aloud or paraphrase the following:

The man's eyes roll up into his head as he staggers backward and away, bony hands clutching spasmodically at the wound, mouth open in a soundless grimace of pain. A peal of thunder, louder than a dragon's roar, rips through the air, and the stones of the keep begin to tremble faintly.

The shaking grows stronger with each passing moment. Tremors ripple upward from the castle foundations, and blocks of marble and obsidian fall from the ceiling, shattering with a spray of powder and shards. Glancing outside a window confirms that the castle walls, tower, and out-buildings are also falling quickly into ruin.

Though mad, King Alain is still the keystone of the Pescheour family: He and the castle are attuned closely. By wounding him, the PCs have unleashed a magical storm that will destroy the castle in a few short moments. If they ignore these troubling signs to concentrate on their opponent, Alain offers no further resistance; he collapses to the floor in a semiconscious state. Anyone who attempts to heal his wounds is completely unsuccessful; mortal healing magic is not potent enough to undo what should never have been done. (See Chapter 4: The Wasteland.)

The castle will collapse upon itself in a matter of minutes, burying those inside under tons of rubble. The PCs cannot reverse this destruction. Every round they remain inside the castle after the tremors begin, each must make a successful saving throw vs. spell or be struck by 1d6 falling blocks of stone; each stone inflicts 1d20 points of damage. The creatures who live in the castle are also caught in the destruction and are far too preoccupied with survival to bother fleeing characters.

Should the PCs escape the castle while it is still collapsing, they notice something perplexing: Only



it is affected. The escarpment on which it sits and the remainder of the island suffer no ill effects or damage whatever, remaining stable while the castle shakes itself to pieces.

The Proof

The PCs have stolen the *Stone of Corbinet* from its fortress, ruining the castle in so doing. Shortly after their “success,” Prince Garloth appears to claim the *Stone*, as promised. The most dramatic place for him to meet them is on the shore, but you’re free to choose any location that seems appropriate.

Suddenly standing before you is a knight clad in shining golden armor—the very same who offered you this opportunity to prove yourselves. His startlingly blue eyes hold each of yours for a moment, as if searching for something that cannot be expressed in mere words, and a wide grin spreads slowly across his face. Then he bows at the waist in a gesture of deep respect, and rising again, speaks in a tone that conveys equal measures of wonder and gravity: “You are to be congratulated. So few have come so far! Truly, you are every inch as worthy as I foresaw. Now earn your just reward and deliver unto me the token of your valor.” So saying, he holds out an armored hand, palm up.

Should the characters hesitate, Garloth stands before them patiently, hand outstretched, until they surrender the artifact. (See below for other possible outcomes.) Assuming they do hand over the *Stone*, read aloud or paraphrase the following:

Accepting the stone, the knight bows a second time and says gently, “Your names will be remembered until the end of time itself, for you have passed the essential test of valor.

“But one more trial remains before you may claim the reward that awaits: the test of character. This test will come upon you suddenly, when you do not expect it. When this second

trial begins, you must choose the correct path. I suspect you will have no more difficulty passing the next test than you did this one. Remember: Be on your guard—you will not know the second trial until it begins. Farewell!”

So saying, he vanishes before your eyes, taking the shining stone with him.

Garloth’s intent is simply to con the party so that they won’t immediately become suspicious and pursue him. Little does he know that, perhaps due to his divinely touched blood, he has the true power of prophecy! Chapter 4: The Wasteland deals in depth with the real “test of character” Garloth has unknowingly foretold.

The PCs may have become stranded during the course of the adventure; for example, if Reznor destroyed their boat. In such circumstances, Garloth uses his magic to transport the party anywhere in the world they wish to go. If they choose to remain on the island after he departs, though, they discover that apart from the castle’s destruction, nothing else has changed. They must face any remaining monsters if they wish to explore the place further.

Rebellious Characters

Some PCs may entertain thoughts of doublecrossing Prince Garloth or otherwise keeping the *Stone of Corbinet* from him, for a variety of reasons both selfish and noble. Since the apocalyptic events of this story cannot unfold unless the *Stone* is surrendered, you might have to steer them in the proper direction. Here are some possible character motivations and suggestions for how to deal with them.

Greed

High-level characters may well covet the *Stone* for themselves, reasoning that if it’s so valuable as to be the focus of a divine trial, it should remain in their hands and not Garloth’s. They may entertain notions of selling it, keeping it as a souvenir or heirloom, or attempting to unlock its magical secrets. Should this be the case, Garloth reacts first with disappointment and then stern, righteous anger. He warns the PCs that they do not understand what they are doing,



and that they risk angering the gods themselves if they refuse to complete the quest they began.

Should the fear of gods not be enough to change the PCs' minds, Garloth evaluates their condition carefully and quickly. If he believes he can defeat them without serious risk to himself, he will attempt to take the *Stone* by force on the spot. Even if he is obliged to depart empty-handed, the characters' greed will have availed them nothing. Garloth will locate and confront them again soon enough, bringing with him the necessary firepower to seize the *Stone*. (See Chapter 5: The Black Keep for more about the minions who serve Garloth.) He will keep trying, if necessary, until the *Stone* is his; though it might take him days, weeks, or even months to claim it, he has little to lose by the delay.

Reward

The more shortsighted may insist that Garloth make good on the promised reward before they turn over the *Stone of Corbinet*. If they struck a bargain with the prince before embarking on the quest, they might now insist on his honoring the terms. Prince Garloth has no difficulty with this demand, and in fact he expected as much when he started this affair. He has accumulated unimaginable wealth over the years and is prepared to grant the party any promised material reward regardless of extravagance, expense, or exotic nature. However, he expects to receive the *Stone* immediately upon fulfilling the bargain and may insist on a simultaneous transfer if he feels the PCs are untrustworthy.

Belligerence

The characters may decide that, since they've passed a divine test, they are on a par with greater powers and challenge Garloth to take the *Stone* from them—if he can. The prince initially ignores

their impertinence, reminding them calmly that the test isn't really over until they deliver the *Stone* to him. Should the PCs continue to taunt or otherwise insult him, his patience soon wears thin: He does want to take possession of the *Stone* as quickly as possible. Appealing to their sense of divine justice isn't likely to work in this case, so he moves straight to deciding whether to seize the *Stone* now or return with the necessary force to claim it later.

Suspicion

Even if you let nothing slip about the true significance of this quest, some of your players might still become suspicious. Maybe they've learned not to trust you as a DM, or maybe the characters had second thoughts about the unusual elements of the test.

Though adventurers often tend to be greedy and self-interested, some parties may be driven by pious devotion. They may begin to question their patron's intentions if they discover prophetic writings or other hints within the castle that suggest a greater role than what they've been led to believe.

Should the PCs mention their suspicion to Garloth, he appeals to their sense of guilt, honesty, fair play, and conscience. (Any paladins in the party should be particularly vulnerable!) He dons his most convincing expression of pain and confusion, still holding out his hand for the *Stone*, and expresses dismay at their grievous error. He reminds them that he is the avatar of a god, and that his word carries divine weight. Garloth also tries to persuade them that they do not understand the *Stone's* powers, and that in the wrong hands it can become a dreadful liability. He continues working on them until they either hand over the *Stone* or he's forced to try claiming it by force.



Chapter 3: Interlude

DM Background

Once the *Stone* has been turned over to Prince Garloth, your players should believe the adventure complete. You can reinforce this impression by ending the session at that point. As far as they know, the party has once again braved great danger and come out on top.

Now is the time to turn away from the true storyline and run an unrelated adventure. This serves two purposes. It lulls the players into a false sense of complacency: One adventure is over, and another one has begun. As well, it allows you to slowly and deliberately introduce the effects of the world's isolation into the background. If you do this properly, the PCs should realize that their world is falling apart and that they are powerless to help.

Meanwhile in the main story, the consequences of the PCs' actions are catching up to them: They have unknowingly made a powerful enemy. While they are pursuing some new adventure, this enemy is plotting his vengeance behind the scenes. This subplot unfurls in several horrific encounters, interspersed with events in the interim adventure. The PCs are likely to be confused by these situations, which are completely unrelated to their current endeavor. The subplot's climax is a confrontation with their new enemy; if the PCs survive, they can learn vital information that sets up the challenges in the following chapter.

What Adventure?

You should give careful consideration to the outside adventure that you run at this point. It should be challenging for the PCs, of course, but it should not be something long and complicated. Try to pick (or design) an adventure that can be played in two sessions. For the average group, a short published module is probably appropriate, such as *Hellgate Keep* (TSR9562, 1988), *Eye to Eye* (the third of the beholder series, 9536), or the ever-popular *Tomb of Horrors* (reprinted in the *Return to the Tomb of Horrors* boxed set, TSR1162, 1998).

A Lonely World

With the *Stone of Corbinet* removed from Castle Pescheour, the world becomes cut off from the multiverse. Offworld travel is now impossible: Wizards can't even find the Astral and Ethereal Planes, never mind pass through them. More seriously, since the Outer Planes are the homes of the gods, clerics and paladins begin losing their spells. To most, it looks like the gods have turned their backs on the world.

Throughout the rest of the adventure, the world operates under unusual restrictions. Special rules exist for different character classes and creature types, some of which will affect the PCs directly. These are detailed below.

The general rule is: No interplanar contact of any kind is possible. No character, creature, or item can travel to the Astral, Ethereal, or any other plane or demiplane. Spells, magical items, and innate abilities with such effects, or that utilize planar pathways in their workings, do not function. Similarly, spells, items, or abilities that rely on contact with another plane do not function.

Specific Effects

Wizards

Many wizard spells rely on travel to or through, or contact with, the Astral or Ethereal planes; others use extradimensional spaces. So long as the world is cut off from the planes, none of these spells function. Other spells will not work if used to travel to or contact another plane. Affected spells include the following.



<i>Astral spell</i>	<i>Invisible stalker</i>
<i>Animate dead</i>	<i>Leomund's secret chest</i>
<i>Banishment</i>	<i>Lorlovein's shadowy transformation</i>
<i>Binding</i>	<i>Magic mirror</i>
<i>Blink</i>	<i>Major creation</i>
<i>Conjure elemental</i>	<i>Maze</i>
<i>Conjure elemental-kin</i>	<i>Minor creation</i>
<i>Contact other plane</i>	<i>Mordenkainen's magnificent mansion</i>
<i>Deeppockets</i>	<i>Phase door</i>
<i>Demand</i>	<i>Reincarnation</i>
<i>Demishadow magic</i>	<i>Rope trick</i>
<i>Demishadow monsters</i>	<i>Sending</i>
<i>Detect phase</i>	<i>Shades</i>
<i>Dimension door</i>	<i>Shadowcat</i>
<i>Dimensional blade</i>	<i>Shadow form</i>
<i>Dismissal</i>	<i>Shadow magic</i>
<i>Distance distortion</i>	<i>Shadow monsters</i>
<i>Drawmij's instant summons</i>	<i>Shadow walk</i>
<i>Duo-dimension</i>	<i>Succor</i>
<i>Energy drain</i>	<i>Summon shadow</i>
<i>Ensnarement</i>	<i>Teleport without error</i>
<i>Estate transference</i>	<i>True seeing</i>
<i>Etherealness</i>	<i>Vanish</i>
<i>Gate</i>	<i>Vision</i>
<i>Hornung's random dispatcher</i>	

Clerics and Paladins

Clerics rely on the support of their god. As channels for divine power, they must have clear access to the deity's plane to be granted spells and powers. Of all the classes, they are the most adversely affected by the theft of the *Stone of Corbinet*.

As clerics who travel the planes realized long ago, distance from a deity's home plane reduces the number and potency of spells available. Under normal circumstances, the spellcaster is considered 1 level lower for each intervening plane between the caster and his or her god. Now that the world is drifting out of alignment with the rest of the multiverse, this penalty begins to apply even though the deity's home plane abuts the Prime.

The first change that clerics are likely to notice is losing the ability to return the dead to life. With

contact to the Outer Planes severed, the departed are cut off from the Prime forever. Conversely, and more horrifyingly, the souls of the newly dead cannot leave this world. They are trapped here as phantoms, cursed through no crime of their own.

You should take care not to unduly penalize cleric PCs. They will lose many of their spells as the adventure continues, but the pace is up to you. This is expressed in "time units," left intentionally vague. The recommended value for a time unit is one week, but you can adjust this as best suits your campaign. See the "Countdown to Armageddon" sidebar.

For each time unit that passes, a cleric loses a level's worth of spellcasting ability. For example, after two time units have elapsed, a 15th-level cleric would cast spells as one of 13th level. The character's actual level does not change, only the spells to which he or she has access. Hit points, THAC0, and other class benefits are unaffected. However, once all spellcasting ability is gone, the cleric begins to lose granted abilities (such as





turning undead) at the same rate, in a particular order or randomly, according to your taste.

Paladins have similar problems, since their special powers are also granted by the gods. They lose spellcasting abilities and then class benefits (such as the laying on of hands) exactly as clerics do.

Undead

The undead have a special connection to the Negative Energy Plane, which gives these creatures the power to defy death. With that connection snapped, undead creatures lose some of their abilities. Until the world is somehow realigned with the multiverse, they are subject to the following special rules.

- They cannot drain life energy.
- Ghosts and other ethereal undead are banished to the Ethereal Plane when the *Stone* is taken (people who die after this point cannot travel to the Outer Planes and manifest as phantoms).
- No regeneration is possible.
- The quality of magical weapon needed to hit them is reduced by one step. For instance, creatures normally requiring +1 weapons to be hit can now be struck by normal weapons.
- No additional undead may be animated.

Extraplanar Creatures

At any given time, numerous extraplanar visitors, such as elementals, demons, and devils, are on the Prime Material Plane pursuing their own hidden purposes. Their ability to move from plane to plane and to *gate* in allies make them formidable opponents and thus arrogant in their dealings with mortals. When the *Stone of Corbinet* was stolen, those visiting the Prime got a rude surprise. Many of their powers don't work anymore. Worse yet, they are now trapped on this wretched mortal world!

Until the world is somehow realigned with the multiverse, extraplanar creatures must abide by the following rules.

- They lose 1d6 of their spell-like powers, always beginning with the *gate* ability, if possessed.
- If they are reduced to 0 hit points, they suffer permanent death (quite a shock to the average devil!).

- The quality of magical weapon needed to hit them is reduced by one step. For instance, a creature normally hit by +3 or better weapons can now be hit by those of +2 or better enchantment.

The End Times

The main purpose of this chapter is to show the PCs the consequences of their actions firsthand. The "Countdown to Armageddon" sidebar suggests some ways to introduce this into the background of the framing adventure, but if you have the inclination and the time, you might want to involve the PCs more directly. Here are some ideas that can be expanded into full encounters if desired.

A Plague of Insects

The current crisis seems to have driven the thri-kreen mad. Packs—or swarms—of the mantis warriors have spread across the land, destroying anything in their path. Their attacks seem to follow no pattern and respect no territory. The packs simply zigzag from settlement to settlement, shredding all opposition. There is no record of thri-kreen working together in such numbers. The PCs might be asked to clear out a swarm that is plaguing their home province or travel to a distant city that has put out a general call for "exterminators."

Scholars of thri-kreen culture are baffled. The mantis warriors do not worship gods, so they have no reason for distress at being cut off from the Outer Planes. But they are missing the point: Thri-kreen have a special reverence for nature and the elements, and that is the root of their madness. Suddenly out of contact with the Inner Planes, the thri-kreen know the world too has been denied the elemental building blocks of the universe. Even before it is apparent to others, the thri-kreen can feel the world beginning to come apart. This vision of unavoidable death has driven them into a destructive frenzy.

A Rain of Frogs

The bullywugs have also become a menace, though their threat is more calculated than the random attacks of the thri-kreen. They have always thrived on others' weakness, and recent events have



provided excellent opportunities for plunder. They have no idea what's going on in the world, nor do they care. With societies breaking down all over, the bullywugs were only too happy to come out of the swamp and begin raiding in earnest. Since law and order are quickly becoming things of the past, there are few to stop them.

As with the thri-kreen, residents of areas plagued by bullywugs might be looking for freelance warriors to rid them of this threat.

A Lack of Faith

The population is running scared. They have always been able to count on their priests and shamans in time of need. These figures have provided a sense of stability, and their presence assured the favor of the gods. Now, as priests lose their powers, the people are losing their faith.

There were whispers that the priests could no longer commune with the gods. As the weeks wore on, it became plain: The expected miracles were no longer forthcoming. The priesthoods' evident desperation fueled the fires of speculation. In truth, religious leaders were as baffled as their parishioners. They could only hope that if they kept faith, the gods would reveal their reasons.

This wasn't enough for some. Crazy shouts rang through the streets from mobs who asserted that the gods had abandoned them because the priests had done something wrong. Priests were assaulted and lynched. In some cities, churches were burned or looted. Statues of the old gods have been thrown down, and new ones have risen to take their place.

Prophets and doomsayers are plentiful, rousing the crowds with fiery oration and promising answers that the public desperately wants to believe. Fanatics walk the streets with whips, flagellating themselves for the sins of humanity. They hope that their blood may bring the gods back and return the world to what it once was. The surviving priests bar themselves in their temples and wait with fading hopes for a miracle.

A PC priest or paladin might be employed by his or her temple to put together a rescue party to liberate the beleaguered staff. Less scrupulous characters might even decide to take advantage of the public's gullibility. Or the party could join a "holy war" to

overthrow a cult leader who has usurped a city's government on religious grounds.

Plague and Pestilence

It would hardly be an apocalyptic story without a good plague! One of the first things to go when order breaks down is the sanitation system. This makes cities into giant breeding pits for horrid diseases. When a plague does come along, the city folk flee, invariably spreading it to other locales. Within a short time, deadly infections sweep across the globe, both magical and mundane. Below are several ideas for new illnesses to ravage your world.

- **Horsemouth:** This pestilence causes victims to burn with an incredible fever and froth at the mouth (hence the name). The body literally burns itself out trying to fight the disease, and most victims die in less than a week (Con -1d8 days). Hallucinations are a common side effect.
- **Brainburn:** Some say this is a curse or a potent spell rather than a disease. Brainburn affects only wizards, somehow recognizing individuals who work with magic. It attacks the brain directly, causing chronic pain and swelling. Those afflicted lose the ability to cast one spell per day (starting with the highest-level spells). When they can no longer cast spells, their heads literally explode, killing them instantly.
- **The Sickness:** This deadly wasting disease is so common it has no name other than "the sickness." It is extremely contagious. Victims lose 1 Constitution point a day as their flesh melts away. Worse, they remain lucid during the process. When Constitution reaches 0, the afflicted person dies.

The party might be called upon to enforce the quarantine of an infected city, or find themselves pressed by desperate victims of a plague in search of curing magic. The priests' declining ability to heal them only exacerbates the problem. There might even be a quest to find some legendary panacea.

Twelve Steps to Armageddon

So how *do* you present the end of the world as we know it? This is a situation where the advice "Show, don't tell" applies more than ever. Start with minor events occurring far away, rumors of which reach the PCs as they're engaged in something else. Then progress to more serious and immediate threats, things that are hard to ignore. Those of a heroic bent may try to stop these terrible events from happening, but for every small victory there are ten unavoidable disasters. The end of the world is a relentless process—let the players feel the time pressure (even though they really can't do anything about it). Here are some ideas that can be used as background material or adventure seeds that emphasize the process. You should mix in events of unique importance to your campaign, but include some traditional mythic elements; they will be recognized by most people and help play up the sense of apocalyptic doom.

The progression of events is measured in "time units," which are intentionally left vague to suit the needs of individual campaigns. The recommended value for a time unit is one week, but could be as little as one day or as long as one month or more if you want events to move along faster or slower.

1. Something Rotten in the Temple: An important political figure in a distant realm has been assassinated. Normally this would cause temporary instability while the victim is restored to life, but this time the clerics are dismayed to find that they cannot raise him or her. Even a *rod of resurrection* has no effect. The PCs might only hear of this, or they could be assigned to find out the reasons or quest for a legendary artifact.

2. Have You Heard the News?: Suddenly the world's important NPCs, known for always acting the same way, seem like different people. For instance, a superior in the church hierarchy who has always been full of self-confidence is now unsure of his or her actions, having lost some spells.

3. The Great War: With the dissolution of planar connection, order begins to break down everywhere. Insurrection and mob rule are the order of the day; mighty empires (perhaps of opposed alignments) hurl their armies at one another. The PCs could get drawn into one or more of these clashes, or might only hear ever-increasing numbers of reports.

4. Prophecy Fulfilled: An ancient legend or a mythic figure manifests, whose appearance is said to presage the "death of the gods."

5. We're Saved! (Or Are We?): Severance from the Negative Energy Plane has seriously weakened undead creatures. A group of adventurers—which could be this party—sent against a powerful undead army wipes out the foul monsters with little effort. Or a notorious evil, such as a vampire, who has troubled the land for centuries falls to mundane weaponry. Have the gods finally decided to cleanse the world of this evil?

6. A Change in the Weather: It's too hot, or snow falls in high summer. A long drought or a great flood assails the land. Whatever the form, the weather is fouled up and signifies that something is deeply wrong.

7. A Swarm of Vermin: Some area of the world is overrun by verminous creatures who devastate the crops, devour all the stores, torment the inhabitants, and the like. The pests could be locusts, biting flies, scorpions, rats, rabid kender—the actual type is unimportant.

8. The Birds: Normally harmless little birds, such as sparrows or robins, suddenly descend on the population in great numbers, killing and eating them.

9. Mass Extinctions: One day, all of a certain creature simply don't exist anymore. Perhaps all the dwarves vanish, or a sea is empty of fish. Some part of the world's structural rules has come undone, and these disappearances are the symptom.

10. Bring Out Your Dead: The seas and the land bring forth the bodies of those lost to them since the taking of the *Stone*. Now that the world is cut off from the Outer Planes, the souls of the dead cannot become petitioners and are trapped as phantoms that wander the land.

11. A Darkness O'er the Land: With no connection to the Elemental Planes, the world's components are sliding out of balance. There are stories of midday blackness swallowing the sun, lightning striking from a clear sky, entire lakes drying up, hails of fire and ice mixed, and the like.

12. There Goes the Neighborhood: One of the campaign world's major cities (Waterdeep, Palanthas, Greyhawk, etc.) is destroyed in a suitably spectacular fashion, spawning hysterical stories of the gods' wrath.



A New Enemy

In politics and in war, timing is everything. Nowhere is this more unforgiving than in Baator, known to most mortals as Hell. Grand Duke Moloch, former viceroy of Baalzebul and Lord of Malbolge, the sixth circle, learned this lesson well. Millennia ago, he had plotted to oust Asmodeus from his position as the Lord of Hell. At first everything seemed to be going to plan, but then the plot went awry, Asmodeus crushed the opposition, and Moloch was banished from the infernal courts. Since then, he has been planning his return. For centuries he marshaled resources, won allies, and prepared for the surprise attack that would take back Malbolge. When all was nearing completion, Moloch went into hiding on a backward Prime world. At the appointed hour, he would simply *plane shift* to Baator and lead his armies to triumph.

Either the universe has a great sense of humor, or Moloch is the unluckiest archdevil around. Thanks to the party's meddling, the consummate schemer's millennia-old intrigues have come to naught. As it turned out, his attack was scheduled to begin three days after the theft of the *Stone of Corbinet* from Castle Pescheour. At the appointed time, Moloch found that he could not leave the Prime, nor could he communicate with his lieutenants on Baator to halt the attack. Instead of taking back his piece of Hell, Moloch found himself stranded while his carefully gathered army was being slaughtered by the forces of the Hag Countess Malagard. The word "furious" does not even begin to describe his state of mind.

When Moloch realized that his plan had been foiled, he flew into a rage and began to slaughter the minions trapped with him on this insignificant Prime world. Then, in a sudden moment of clarity, the archdevil realized that he was taking vengeance on the wrong parties. Dispatching worthless underlings was diverting enough, but Moloch knew that he'd get real satisfaction only from punishing the real criminals. If he could not rule Malbolge, at least he could take slow and bloody vengeance on those foolish enough to cross him. Someone was responsible for cutting him off from the planes, and Moloch was determined to find out who.

Even without access to some of his powers, Moloch was quickly able to find the responsible parties—one surprise "visit" to a high-level wizard with a debt to satisfy provided the needed information. To learn that impudent mortals had ruined his schemes was the last straw; Moloch set about plotting a hideous revenge. The diabolic payback unfolds in a series of vignettes interspersed within the framing adventure.

For more information on Moloch and the history of Baator, see the *Guide to Hell* (TSR11431, 1999).

Setup: The Eight Faeries Inn

This encounter can be used anytime the PCs are on the road. It's best inserted early in the framing adventure, since it sets up the conflict with Moloch. The PCs should be traveling a route new to them, so they won't be suspicious at the appearance of a previously unknown inn. However, with a little retrofitting this could be adapted to an existing roadhouse in your campaign (though explaining the new innkeeper and his "famous dish" may be difficult).

You've been traveling all day, and the sight of an inn up ahead is a welcome one. The brick-and-stucco building looks cozy and inviting, and as you get closer the delicious odor of home cooking tantalizes your hunger. When you enter the inn, you are welcomed by a jolly man who introduces himself as Gustav. "Welcome," he says, "to the Eight Faeries Inn! I have a table for you over here by the fire. You want drinks, yes? And food? Let me recommend our house specialty, roasted pork buns. It's a secret recipe from the East, taught to me by a grateful patron some years ago."

Gustav is very proud of his delicious pork buns and will insist that each PC try some, even if they end up ordering a different main course. Just before biting into one, though, the diner suddenly finds the pastry unappetizing, catching a strange odor or feeling a sudden chill. Have the player make a roll if you wish, but however you choose to handle the situation, the PC should not actually consume the



meat—for a very good reason! (See “A Rude Awakening” below.)

Their host is quite effusive and maintains a running monologue throughout the meal. Any who take the time to listen notice that his stories have a common theme, whose connection to their own actions will become horribly clear later. See the “Countdown to Armageddon” sidebar for some more ideas about the stories Gustav relates. Here’s an example:

“Poor Marie is still sulking. Her wedding was on the only rainy day of the last two weeks. Ach, it’s been nothing but bad timing around here. But no one at the nuptials was struck by lightning, like Claus! The first time he leaves his house in days, and he gets struck dead. At least Claus knows the peace of death. What about Rainer? He spent ten years writing that book of his, only to lose it in a flash flood.”

As Gustav talks, he takes care of all of his guests, refreshing drinks, bringing steaming plates of food



from the kitchen, and keeping the fire well stoked. By the end of the evening, everyone should feel happy and relaxed. Gustav gives them as many rooms as they need, and all are warm and comfortable.

Talking with the other patrons reveals them to be a typical assortment of travelers. Several merchants, religious pilgrims, and entertainers are happily munching on Gustav’s delicious specialty. They can neither confirm nor deny the innkeeper’s stories. The PCs might also notice the cook, a hulking man who never speaks. If asked, Gustav says only, “We just call him Cook. He was born mute, but that hasn’t kept him from becoming a great artist in the kitchen.” (See below for more information about Gustav and “Cook.”)

The Hand of Moloch

The Eight Faeries Inn seems too good to be true, and naturally, it is. The inn itself is real enough, but its original staff and unfortunate guests were killed two nights before the PCs arrived. The murderers were two yugoloths, Skallathrax and Grellnor, who are mercenaries in the service of Grand Duke Moloch. They were sent to start the campaign of terror against the PCs and have been more than up to the task.

Skallathrax is a cunning arcanaloth and in charge of the operation, and the nycaloth Grellnor is his bodyguard. The two had little trouble slaughtering the inn’s terrified inhabitants, leaving them plenty of time to prepare for the PCs’ arrival. Their skill with illusion set the trap with the cruel perfection at which fiends excel.

Skallathrax hid the bloodstained walls and charnel stench of the inn with a *mirage arcana* spell. This powerful illusion makes the inn seem homey, the food taste delicious, and the beds feel soft and comfortable. He employed his innate *advanced illusion* power to populate the slaughterhouse with shadows of its former customers. Grellnor, for his part, has taken the place of the inn’s cook and has been happily concocting special culinary delights; he is particularly proud of the pork buns he whipped up.

A Rude Awakening

The night passes uneventfully; anyone on watch does not see or hear anything suspicious. At dawn,



however, Skallathrax dispels his illusion, and the inn changes character in an instant. Suddenly the PCs' comfortable bunks become beds of razor-sharp spikes; those sleeping on them awake in agony, taking 2d20 damage per round from the metal blades. As howls fill the inn, the two yugoloths *teleport* away and report to Moloch on a job well done.

But the worst is yet to come; when the PCs go downstairs, a nightmarish scene awaits them.

As you descend the staircase, your nostrils fill with the stink of blood and putrid flesh. The common room, which seemed so cozy last night, is now an abattoir. Hacked bodies lie in pools of blood about the room, or nailed to the wall like so many holiday ornaments. The tables and benches are soaked in gore, and your stomach turns as you remember the comfortable hours you spent there last night.

In the midst of this revolting scene, one thing stands out. It is a table, impeccably clean and set for breakfast. In its center is a platter filled with the same pork buns you had for dinner last night. A note, signed "M," lies on top of the buns. It reads:

"So it begins. You have only to wonder when you will meet your end, and who will be your executioner. While you ponder, please enjoy your complimentary breakfast. Eat up—the staff put a little bit of themselves in each bun."

A quick look in the kitchen confirms your worst fears: More cut-up bodies lie near a meat grinder, with scraps still clinging to its blades. Plates stacked full of garbage are lined up along the countertop; a bowl of rotting dough, reeking of decay, completes the horrific scene. A wave of nausea washes over you. Who would do such a thing? And why?

PCs who search the inn find no other living guests, and also no signs of struggle. A few judicious *silence* spells and the yugoloths' ability to *teleport* made the slaughter all too easy. The murderers made no attempt to conceal their actions; several large, bloody footprints were left on the floor. A Tracking proficiency check at a -6 penalty (unless the character has

Pushing the Envelope

Face it: These are the end times. Nothing the PCs have encountered before can prepare them for the world's finale. If your play group is jaded and needs some serious shaking up, or if your players are mature enough to handle graphic horror, you can take this scene to the limit. Fair warning: This is not for the fainthearted!

In the "extreme horror" version, the PCs are exposed to the prospect of committing cannibalism. Inadvertent anthropophagy is a recurrent element of revenge in myth, such as the Greek story of Thyestes, who was served his own children in a stew; his unknowing sin brought a curse upon his household for generations.

The disguised fiend is most persuasive, even offering free samples, and the PCs get no hint of the awful truth until the next morning. Milk the horror of the situation for all it's worth: You'll know you've succeeded if you disgust the *players* as well as the characters. The level of detail is left to your discretion.

encountered yugoloths before) can identify the tracks; it takes an exceptional success (an extremely low die roll, at the DM's discretion) to determine that they belong to two different types of yugoloth. Beyond this information, there's nothing more to learn about the perpetrators or their motive. The yugoloths are mercenaries, after all, and they have no reason to expose or sacrifice themselves here.

Skallathrax, arcanaloth (Yugoloth, Greater): AC -8; MV 12, Fly 18 (B); HD 12+24; hp 98; THAC0 9; #AT 3 (claw/claw/bite); Dmg 1d4/1d4/2d6; SA poisonous claws, spell use, spell-like powers; SD +2 or better weapon to hit, immune to acid, fire, and poison, half damage from gas-based attacks; SW double damage from cold-based attacks; MR 60%; SZ M (6' tall); ML champion (16); Int supra-genius (19); AL NE; XP 20,000.

Special Abilities: SA—poisonous claws (each successful hit imposes a cumulative -1 penalty to opponents' attack rolls, negated by *bless*, *neutralize poison*, or *slow poison*); spell-like powers (as 12th-level



wizard) at will—*alter self, cause disease, charm person, continual darkness, fly* (unlimited duration), *improved phantasmal force, invisibility, magic missile, shape change* (any humanoid form), *telekinesis*, once per day—*advanced illusion, fear*.

Spells Memorized (4/4/4/4/4/1): 1st—*burning hands, hold portal, shocking grasp, wall of fog*; 2nd—*detect invisibility, ESP, Melf's acid arrow, web*; 3rd—*delude, fireball, haste, slow*; 4th—*confusion, ice storm, minor globe of invulnerability, stonewall*; 5th—*avoidance, cone of cold, feeblemind, wall of force*; 6th—*mirage arcana*.

Grellnor, nycaloth (Yugoloth, Greater): AC -6; MV 12, Fly 36 (C); HD 11+22; hp 90; THAC0 9 (6 with *battle-ax* +3); #AT 2 (claw/claw) or 1 (*battle-ax* +3); Dmg 1d8+8/1d8+8 or 2d8+11; SA bleeding, spell-like powers; SD +1 or better weapon to hit, immune to Enchantment/Charm spells, immune to acid, fire, and poison, half damage from gas-based attacks; SW double damage from cold-based attacks; MR 70%; SZ M (9' tall); ML champion (16); Int exceptional (16); AL NE; XP 25,000.

Special Abilities: SA—claw attacks cause continued bleeding for an additional 1d6 damage per round until magically healed; spell-like powers (as 11th-level wizard) at will—*alter self, charm person, comprehend languages* (always active), *detect invisibility* (always active), *detect magic* (always active), *dispel magic, enlarge* (or *reduce*), *fear* (by touch), *continual darkness, fly* (unlimited duration), *improved phantasmal force, invisibility, magic missile, polymorph self, produce flame, project image, read magic* (always active); once per day—*reverse gravity, word of recall*; 3× per day—*command, mirror image*.

Notes: The fiends have lost some of their abilities due to being trapped without extraplanar contact, including the ability to *gate* in others.

The Horror: Keeping It in the Family

Nothing defines “single-minded” like a devil bent on vengeance. While the yugoloths were offering the PCs a taste of mortality, Moloch was planning something even more horrific. With the help of *teleporting* and *polymorphing* minions, he did some quick research on each of the party members. (Since they are likely heroes of renown in their world, learning

about them shouldn't be hard.) The PCs, caught up in situations presaging the end of the world, are not in ready communication with family and friends, which made the fiend's task all the easier. In short order Moloch was able to find out all he needed to know. He then dispatched his servants to round up a few of the PCs' closest relatives and the elemental spirits, conveniently stranded here, that he would need to complete his plan.

With raw materials in hand, Moloch then set about creating a very special “present” for each of the PCs. The archdevil brutally killed three to four relatives of each character—parents, spouses, siblings, cousinsæ but not before letting them know exactly who was to blame. This grisly deed wasn't enough, though; he then cut up and sewed together their bodies into blasphemous monstrosities, one flesh golem for each character. Once the task was complete, Moloch chose a suitable time and place to unleash his vengeance.

This Time It's Personal

Before the encounter begins, you should decide which unfortunates were chosen to be part of Moloch's golems. You can heighten the horror by choosing NPCs who have played a substantial role in the campaign. This might mean substituting friends or lovers of the PCs for relatives, if that's likely to have more impact. Retired members (that is, former characters) of the adventuring party might also be very effective.

This encounter is best used after the climax of the framing adventure. The PCs will probably be feeling good about having completed another mission successfully, so the horror of the situation should be especially intense. Pick an appropriate location to heighten the effect; you're not limited to using the forest clearing described here. For instance, if the PCs inhabit a castle or estate, they might encounter Moloch's golems in the courtyard on their return home.

You are traveling through the woods, memories of your most recent triumph dominating your thoughts. The darkness gives way as you enter a broad clearing. Bright light illuminates a scene better left in the gloom.



You are confronted by a group of hulking monstrosities equal in number to your own. Each tops seven feet in height and looks like the creation of a lunatic, with mismatched extremities and disfigured features. Crude stitches crisscross their bodies: These monsters were obviously sewn together from mismatched parts. It's clear that human remains were used to create these things, but a worse truth awaits.

As you get closer, you recognize the grimacing, patchwork faces that stare blankly at you. Fathers, mothers, lovers, and friends—pieces of all are combined into this horrible menagerie. The figures plod toward you, and voices croak from the broken faces. The woeful chorus cries out, "Look what you've done to us. What did we do to deserve this?"

As you read the above text, describe identifying features of the NPCs who form the golems. Having them shout out personal messages will add to the horror. Moloch directs the golems to attack, and the PCs have little choice but to defend themselves. Flesh golems are not a serious threat to such high-level PCs, but this encounter is really for psychological impact. Emphasize the rolling eyes and the pitiful wails as the characters are forced to cut down their own murdered relatives.

Golems can't talk, of course, though the horrible creations retain some memory of their death and the reason for it. The *invisible* Moloch is hiding 60 yards (or farther) away, using illusionary magic to recreate the voices of his victims, which he remembers well. Since he is using *improved invisibility*, he is quite difficult to detect. Should the PCs think to look for a controller, Moloch simply *teleports* away. He has other plans for their demise—all in good time.

Flesh Golems (Golem, Lesser) (4–6): AC 9; MV 8; HD 9; hp 40 each; THAC0 11; #AT 2 (fists); Dmg 2d8/2d8; SD magical weapon to hit, immune to poison, most spells, resist fire- and cold-based spells (*slowed* for 2d6 rounds), restored by electricity-based attacks (regenerate 1 hp/die); SZ L (7' or more tall); ML fearless (20); Int semi- (4); AL N; XP 2,000 each.

The Revelation: Bloody Vengeance

Moloch is most pleased with himself after witnessing the golem confrontation and is ready to end the miserable lives of those who crossed him. He has toyed with the PCs and made them feel fear, hatred, revulsion, and guilt. Now is the time to execute his final punishment.

Being an evil genius in the best tradition, Moloch picks an appropriate moment to launch his assault. As with the previous situations, the primary consideration is emotional effect. His preferred choice is a funeral for the victims slain in his previous schemes. Since this makes a very fitting conclusion, you may want to subtly encourage your players to organize such a funeral for their characters' dead relatives. When Grandma asks if there's going to be a funeral, who can say no? This tactic works especially well if all the PCs live in the same city.





If a funeral isn't in the cards, Moloch will settle for the next best thing and contrive to attack the PCs when they are someplace they consider safe. This could be the fortified keep of their castle, if they have one, or a secret base of operations in a different city. The archdevil wants to shatter all their illusions before killing them, so violating their sanctum is appropriate.

Moloch has dispatched an *invisible* erinyes to spy on the PCs and watch their movements. When the erinyes sees an opening, she *teleports* to Moloch and informs the archdevil the time is ripe. Moloch casts *fly* on himself; then he and his three pit fiend bodyguards cast *improved invisibility* on themselves and *teleport* to the chosen place. They've worked out a plan ahead of time to cause the greatest mayhem and panic. Given their power, especially with the equivalent of a lesser god, the party's destruction is a real possibility.

Diabolical Tactics

The four devils hover above the PCs, waiting for just the right time to begin their coordinated attack. On the first round, they cast the following spells in this order: One pit fiend casts *hold person* on the group's most apparently dangerous wizard, the two remaining pit fiends throw *fireballs* into the party's midst, and Moloch follows up with *Evard's black tentacles*.

In the second round, Moloch *flame strikes* the most powerful-looking fighter. A pit fiend engages the wizard who was targeted on the first round. The other two pit fiends cast *hold person* at the most threatening targets (including the wizard, if he or she resisted the first attempt).

From this point forward, the fight is in your hands. In general, the devils try to divide and conquer. There's no easy win: PCs who group together are blasted by *fireball* after *fireball*, while those who scatter end up facing several pit fiends at once in hand-to-hand combat. Moloch does not risk personal engagement unless the need is acute—after all, he is trapped on this world and would be utterly destroyed if he fell here. Instead he strategically uses *walls of fire* to hedge in the PCs and *suggestions* to manipulate their actions. He also delights in destroying any innocent bystanders whenever possible, to exacerbate the characters' already considerable feelings of guilt.

If he does engage in hand-to-hand combat, Moloch fights according to his mood. While level-headed, he prefers to use his whip. He can attack twice a round with this weapon (see the character description below for more information). When enraged, Moloch prefers to dive in with his claws and teeth. This gives him three attacks and allows him to use his prodigious strength.



At the climactic moment, Moloch drops his *invisibility* and addresses the PCs. He wants them to know the architect of their destruction—and what villain can resist the urge to gloat?

A great roar fills the air, heralding the appearance of your unseen foe. Floating above you is a muscled brute. His red-orange skin seems to burn with the heat of a furnace and he holds a whip that crackles with energy in a clenched fist. He grins, exposing a mouthful of razor-sharp teeth, and addresses you with contempt dripping from every word.

“You stand on the brink of annihilation—and you don’t even know why, do you? Bah, you pathetic mortals! Your thoughtless action has not only ruined my triumphant return to Hell but also destroyed the mound of dirt you call a world. This miserable backwater may tear itself apart, but not before Grand Duke Moloch exacts every ounce of his vengeance!”

Moloch taunts the PCs while the fight continues, but his assault does not let up for a moment. The devil wants them to know exactly what they have done, so through persistent questioning they can find out

Grand Duke Moloch, Archdevil in Exile

Alignment: Lawful Evil

AC: -7

Move: 18

THAC0: 1

Hit Points: 154

Strength: 19 (+7)

Intelligence: 19

Dexterity: 19

Wisdom: 22

Constitution: 22

Charisma: 20

Size: L (14½' tall)

Magic Resistance: 70%

Morale: Fearless (20)

No. of Attacks: 3 (claw/claw/bite) or 2 (whip)

Damage: 1d6+7/1d6+7/2d6+7 or 6d4 /6d4

Weapons: Six-tailed, thorned whip (6d4 electrical damage)

Special Attacks: In addition to physical attacks, Moloch has many spell-like powers (as 20th level). He has lost access to several of these, but the following remain (each usable once per round): detect invisibility, detect magic, fire charm, fly, geas, improved invisibility, know alignment (always active), polymorph self, produce fire, pyrotechnics, read languages, read magic, suggestion, wall of fire. Once per day, he can summon Evard’s black

tentacles, call down a flame strike, and utter an unholy word. Once per turn, Moloch can spew forth a cloud of noxious gas. These fumes affect 1d8 creatures within 30 feet, who must make a successful saving throw vs. breath weapon or drop their weapons and flee for 1d6 rounds.

Special Defenses: Weapons of +2 enchantment or greater are needed to hit Moloch. Normally this would be +3 or better, but he is more vulnerable while out of contact with Baator. He also shares the baatezu immunity to fire and poison attacks, and suffers no damage from silver weapons. He has no special vulnerability to cold-based magic, and further is not affected by spells of 3rd level and lower.

Moloch used to be as powerful as a god. He ruled Malbolge, the sixth circle of Hell, and commanded legions of devils. All this fell apart during the Reckoning, a cataclysmic battle that reshaped infernal politics. Since then, the embittered Moloch has wandered the planes, plotting his return. Through their actions the PCs have ruined his dreams and stranded him on this Prime backwater. His only purpose now is to cause them suffering.

Physically, Moloch is enormous. A hulking figure, he is a mass of horns and claws. His red-orange skin highlights his ferocity, and his prodigious mouth is filled with razor-sharp teeth. This monstrous body hides a mind of great cunning, however, and those who underestimate Moloch’s genius rarely live long enough to learn from their mistake.



that Moloch was thwarted by their taking the *Stone of Corbinet*. They can also confirm the horrible truth that Moloch hints at: Their world is indeed cut off from the planes.

Moloch plans this to be a fight to the finish, but he is no fool. He's aware of his vulnerability and is likely to *teleport* away if it's clear he has been defeated. However, his rage may so blind him to the possibility of final death that he does not leave quickly enough; it's possible for the party to destroy the archdevil in this case. The final outcome is entirely at your option. If Moloch does retreat, his absence would be only temporary—he's demonstrated a willingness to harry the PCs through eternity if need be. Recurring villains are a staple of adventure fiction, so if that's to your taste you can bring back Moloch throughout the story as dramatically appropriate. Any surviving pit fiends, as well as the yugoloths Skallathrax and Grellnor, would accompany him.

Pit fiends (Baatezu, greater) (3): AC -5; MV 15, Fly 24 (C); HD 13; hp 92, 80, 78; THAC0 7; #AT 6 (wing buffet/wing buffet/claw/claw/bite/tail); Dmg 1d4+6/1d4+6/ 1d6+6/1d6+6/2d6/2d4+6; SA fear, poison, spell-like powers, tail constriction; SD +2 or better weapon to hit, immune to fire and poison, half damage from silver weapons, regeneration (2 hp/round); SW double damage from cold-based attacks; MR 50%; SZ L (12' tall); ML fearless (19); Int genius (17); AL LE; XP 21,000 each.

Special Abilities: SA—*fear* aura, 20' radius (save vs. rod, staff, or wand at -3 or flee in panic for 1d10 rounds); poisonous bite (save vs. poison or die in 1d4 rounds; victim infected with disease regardless of save); tail constriction on successful hit (holds victim for 2d4 additional damage each round unless a successful Strength check is made); can divide up attacks among up to six different opponents; spell-like powers (as 13th-level caster) once per round—*advanced illusion, charm person, detect magic, detect invisibility, fireball, hold person, improved invisibility, infravision, polymorph self, produce flame, pyrotechnics, suggestion, wall of fire*; once per day—*symbol of pain*.

Notes: The devils are weakened and have lost some of their abilities due to being trapped without extraplanar contact, including the ability to *gate* in other fiends and the once-per-year *wish* spell.

Chapter 4: The Wasteland

DM Background

It should now be clear to the PCs that something is deeply wrong with the world. Not only that, it may be their fault. Even this knowledge is no help, however; they still have no idea how to fix the problem. They don't know where to find Garloth or even what his real name is. Fortunately for them, they have an unknown ally.

The God of Justice is of necessity bound up with the essence of the castle and the *Stone of Corbinet*. Sensing that something was wrong, the deity sent an avatar to the Prime Material Plane to find out what was going on. This envoy arrived just before the PCs took the *Stone*; like other beings of extraplanar origin, the avatar was suddenly cut off from the planes. Faced with an apocalyptic problem, out of contact with the divine consciousness, and bereft of most godly powers, the avatar is in a difficult position. This emissary of Justice is, moreover, still bound by the rules that the gods established when they created the *Stone of Corbinet*, and cannot simply trounce Garloth and put the *Stone* back where it belongs.

Though unable to intervene directly, the avatar can work through the PCs; should they regain the castle, they can heal the king's madness and learn Garloth's location. Castle Pescheour is on this world, and the avatar has retained some abilities connected with that restriction. It is not possible to just point the party at the castle, though: Gods and *Stone* alike are bound to set challenges to identify the most deserving guardian. By proving themselves worthy of the castle's secrets, the PCs might be able to defeat Garloth and return the *Stone* to its rightful place. The avatar will help as much as possible, but in this weakened state can do little but offer clues and advice. It is a tenuous hope to hang the fate of the world on, but the avatar has little choice.



The tests begin when the PCs receive a cryptic dream and awake to find themselves elsewhere. They then encounter a series of situations that challenge them to rise above the common herd. Parties who continue to treat this like any other adventure will fail the tests and doom the world. Those who pass at least three of the tests demonstrate superior character and may find the hidden castle once again.

The PCs may not understand at first that they are being tested. The avatar cannot come right out and tell them what's going on, but can make brief appearances to give them some clues. However, if they have failed the test in question, they are treated harshly.

Blood on the Snow

The avatar of Justice contacts the PCs shortly after their climactic battle with Moloch. In a dream, the avatar shows them a vision to spur them into action. It is important that they all experience this dream, so even if they have set watches, the sentries nod off on the appointed night.

As each of you sleeps, your normal rest transforms, and mundane dreams give way to an unbidden vision. You find yourself on a barren, snow-covered plain, staring at a castle in the distance. Although the scene is foreign, you feel like you have been there before.

A trail of blood spatters the snow, leading to the castle, and from somewhere nearby you can hear water bubbling. You are unwounded, yet you are sure that the blood is yours. As you put your foot on the trail, it divides into two paths. You know you must choose the right one if you are to find the castle and the wounded man that lies within.

The vision fades, and you wake up with a start. The camp is gone, and you realize that you have been transported somewhere else. You can see mountains nearby, and a fresh snowfall covers the surface of your bleak surroundings. Of the blood trail there is no sign. If there is a path to follow, you must find it yourselves.

The avatar has transported the PCs to a distant region of their world, near the current location of Castle Pescheour. This area has been racked with political and social upheavals since the taking of the Stone, and all order has been cast aside. The wasteland graphically shows the PCs the consequences of their actions. It also provides the opportunity for their salvation.

You'll have to locate this place in a suitable part of your own campaign world. The location should be somewhat remote and at least partially mountainous. It should have several cities, and ideally two rival nations. You may need to change some details of this chapter and revise the encounters accordingly to fit your world, but this should not take too much work. Here are some ideas for situating the wasteland in a published campaign setting.

- **FORGOTTEN REALMS:** Southwestern region of the Endless Waste, near the Sunrise Mountains.
- **GREYHAWK:** The southern Abbor-Alz, or the Plains of the Paynims near the borders of Ket and the Sultanate of Zeif.





- **DRAGONLANCE:** In the Fifth Age, the Northern Wastes between Nightlund and Palanthas, near the Vingaard Mountains. This region of northern Solamnia works in the Fourth Age as well, though with different political divisions.
- **MYSTARA:** The northern regions of the Khanates of Ethengar, near the Heldannic Territories.

The PCs may have questions about the particulars of the dream: What did the castle look like? How far away was it? In fact, they each saw something slightly different. (You might want to write the dream visions on slips of paper and pass one to each player.) They can find out quickly by comparing notes. One may have seen a large stone keep, while another saw a sumptuous palace with minarets and golden domes. The avatar plucked an image of the ideal castle out of each PC's mind and built the dream around that. It seems familiar not only because the dreamer has been to Castle Pescheour, but also because it grew from his or her own subconscious.

The First Test: Foresight

Player characters tend to act first and think later. Such recklessness displays a bravery that is commendable, but prudence also is an asset. This test gives the PCs a chance to show some foresight by remembering that their primary goal should be to reach the castle.

The party is in the middle of a wilderness with no clear direction and will probably start arguing about which way to go. They will find no actual trail here, for the dream was allegorical. The "path" is a series of encounters that put the PCs to the test. Don't let the discussion go on too long before sending them an obvious clue: a plume of smoke rising from the barren plains. Lacking any other indicators, the PCs are likely to investigate. However, if they don't take the bait, Palmides races up to them shortly thereafter with news of the disaster (see below).

You head out onto the plains, angling toward the smoke in the distance. After three hours of walking, the plume of smoke still lies ahead of you, but now you see signs of life—and death. A storm of violence has swept over these lands, which none seem to have survived.

You pass through several villages, or rather what's left of them: Two have been destroyed, with not a stick left standing. Buildings and their inhabitants have been torn apart by something large and inhumanly strong. The remains lie strewn up to 200 feet away, as if they had been hurled there by a powerful force. The third village was apparently ravaged in a raid. The buildings are all burned, and black-feathered arrows protrude from scores of corpses.

Investigating the destroyed villages does not provide much additional information, but those who make a successful Tracking check find several enormous footprints in the first two. The trackers have never seen anything quite like these. Their best guess is that the prints belong to some kind of dragon, or perhaps a reptilian gargantua. The third village also has some telltale tracks, but these are from the kind of small horses favored by nomads. There's no sign of the monstrous creature's passage here.

Whether the PCs continue toward the smoke plume or remain in the ruins, within minutes they see a mounted figure approaching in the distance. He is riding hard and seems to be making a beeline for the party.

The rider is traveling at terrific speed. As he gets closer, you can see that he wears light mail and carries a long spear. His horse is straining, the breath from its heaving sides clearly visible in the chill air. The man rides right up to you, reining his horse in furiously and dismounting with a jump.

The man tears off his helm, exposing long hair and wild eyes. He stares at you expectantly and then shouts, "Well, have you seen it?"



“The Horned Beast! It has torn this land asunder! My quest is to defeat this monster, and I will not rest until I have slain it. I will gladly go into battle alone against the Horned Beast and give my life to save this land. What true hero would not?”

“What of you? Will you join my sworn quest to hunt this beast wherever it might go, to hound it to the ends of the world until it is destroyed? Join me now, else I must quit your company and continue alone.”

Palmides holds out his hand to you. “Who will swear the oath?”

It isn't obvious, but this is the first test. Reckless characters, keen to slay monsters, will forget about the vision and the larger purpose. Any who take the oath and join Palmides on his hunt have just accepted a *quest* (bestowed by the avatar) and must fulfill their obligation or face the consequences. Those who have the foresight to see beyond the immediate threat and decline Palmides's offer retain their freedom of action. If the party chooses not to follow Palmides, go to “The Right Choice” below.

The Wrong Choice

The party fails the Test of Foresight if half its members swear the oath to kill the Horned Beast.

Whatever the party's choice, Palmides is eager to be on his way. He is heading toward the smoke himself, in hopes that the Horned Beast will be there. Should the PCs accompany him, they can find out more while traveling to their destination.

- The creature first appeared a [time unit] ago. (See Chapter 3: Interlude for more about time units.) It wanders the countryside with impunity, attacking and destroying anything it comes across.
- Several military units tracked the creature down and attacked it. There were no survivors.
- Some reports say the beast walks on four legs and has black scales; others, two legs and green scales. Still others insist it doesn't have scales at all, but a reflective carapace. Everyone agrees it's at least 100 feet tall.

- A group of dwarves have found a concealed underground lair of enormous size, which they suspect is the creature's home. This cave complex is currently empty.

Swearing to kill one big monster may seem a safe bet for such high-level characters, but if any agreed to the *quest*, the consequences of their choice soon become clear. Don't just tell the players that the PCs are under the influence of a spell. Let them act as they will until they try to renege on their oath—then hit them with the penalties.

Palmides, male human F10: AC 0 (*chainmail* +2, shield, Dex bonus); MV 9; HD 9+1; hp 78; THAC0 10 (7 with *longsword* +2, specialist bonus); #AT 2 (*longsword* +2) or 3/2 (footman's mace); Dmg 1d8+5 or 1d6+2; SD immune to *fear* effects; SZ M (5'10" tall); ML champion (15); Str 17, Dex 16, Con 15, Int 11, Wis 13, Cha 13; AL LG.

Special Equipment: ring of warmth, gauntlets of swimming and climbing.

Notes: Palmides has seen his homeland destroyed. His only remaining concern is to kill the Horned Beast, even if that means he goes down fighting against his nemesis. If that happens, make sure he lingers long enough to urge the questers to honor their oath to a dying man.

The Horned Beast

A sure sign that the end times are near is the reappearance of the dreaded tarrasque. Only one of these creatures is known to exist, and it is rumored to have spelled the end of at least one other civilization. The removal of the *Stone of Corbinet* awakened the tarrasque from its long sleep, and it has been rampaging across the region ever since. This is, of course, the “Horned Beast” of Palmides's quest, though you should not just tell your players that. Let the PCs discover this nugget the hard way!

Players have a bad habit of reading the MONSTROUS MANUAL tome and ruining all the fun. To keep the nature of their opponent a mystery, at least for a while, try not to refer to this beast by name; call it the Horned Beast instead.



You head out across the snow with the frenzied Palmides in the lead, hoping that his skill matches his fervor for battle. After walking for an hour, you begin to come across undeniable signs of the Horned Beast's passage: trees stripped of vegetation, herds slaughtered and devoured.

Continuing on, you see a burning tower in the distance. It is clearly the source of the smoke plume. As you watch, you see a gargantuan, bipedal monster rise up and smash the tower with terrific force. The structure crumbles, sending flaming debris throughout the surrounding village. Small figures run in the distance, desperately seeking escape. You have never seen this monster's like. It is easily over 50 feet tall and has horns as thick as tree trunks. Powerful claws rip and tear, and a gaping mouth destroys villager and village alike. Palmides cries out, "There is the Horned Beast. In the name of Justice, attack!"

The creature, not quite done destroying the village, is occupied with smashing the last few buildings and hunting down the survivors. The PCs can approach the battlefield in relative safety. Even if they stop to cast a few spells, though, Palmides rushes forward as quickly as possible to attack.

Joining battle with the Horned Beast proves to be a daunting proposition. The creature is immune to almost everything and regenerates besides, so most of the staple combat spells are useless. Its sheer size and fearsome bite also make it a dangerous opponent. Even if the creature does finally go down, it only plays dead; it lies motionless until it has regained at least half its hit points. By that time, the PCs will likely have left the scene, having fulfilled their oath with honor (or so they think).

Herein lies the problem with making such a rash oath: The tarrasque is nearly impossible to kill permanently. According to legend, this can be accomplished only by reducing the creature to -30 hit points and then using a *wish* spell. Otherwise, even the smallest surviving bit of the beast can regenerate and restore the monster completely. The party may later learn of renewed destruction by the Horned Beast. At this point, they'll have to decide whether to chase it down again or continue on their current course. This continues until the PCs actually destroy the creature, all the questers decide to accept the penalty in the name of the greater good, or the world ends. Undue recklessness has consequences.

The Horned Beast (Tarrasque): AC -3; MV 9, rush 15; HD 70; hp 300; THAC0 -5*; #AT 6 (claw/claw/tail/bite/horn/horn); Dmg 1d12/1d12/2d12/



5d10/1d10/ 1d10; SA sharpness bite, terror, rush attack; SD immune to heat, fire, and psionics, magic weapons to hit, reflection, regeneration (1 hp/round); SZ G (50' tall); ML champion (15); Int animal (1); AL N; XP 107,000.

Special Abilities: SA—bite acts as a *sword of sharpness* (severs a limb on a roll of 18 or better); rush attack once per turn (move 15, double damage with horn attacks, trample anyth for 4d10 damage); terrifying presence causes those with less than 3 HD to be paralyzed with fright until out of visual range and those with 3–6 HD to flee in panic (no save), while those with 7 or more HD must save vs. paralyzation to resist; SD—hide reflects magical bolts and rays for no damage (on a roll of 1 on 1d6 it reflects back at the caster, otherwise causes collateral damage).

Notes: When brought below 0 hit points, the creature falls to the ground as if slain but continues to regenerate 1 hp per round.

* A creature with a negative THACO still misses on a natural attack roll of 1.

The Survivor

If the party made the wrong choice and did battle with the Horned Beast, the avatar appears in the form of an elderly villager once the creature is down.

From the rubble of the tower totters an old man in ragged clothing. Scowling, he immediately begins to castigate you. "Just like adventurers, charging in without thinking! Someday that recklessness is going to get you killed. Mark my words, youngsters, you'll never get where you want to go if you keep acting like that!

"Look at that dead beast over there," he says, pointing at the body of the Horned Beast. "That thing didn't have half a brain—but it had a plan. Smash this village and move on to Glennry. More'n you did, I'd say! Eh? What's your plan, and where are you going?"

The old man won't talk about the attack, nor will he leave the tumbled village. "You don't worry about old Mal, I'll be fine. You'd best start worrying about yourselves."

After a few minutes of conversation, he turns his back on you and says, "It's time you were off. Don't you have a world to save or something?"

The PCs can explain their actions any way they like. The old man's response is the same regardless: "Bah!" The PCs can find out from him only that Glennry is another village, located about three days' travel away. He doesn't say how he knows that was the beast's destination, just that "it was plain." No matter how the conversation turns, "Mal" will not betray his godly origins or speak plainly.

The Right Choice

If the party was able to resist the temptation of "cheap" experience points and did not pursue the Horned Beast, the avatar appears in another form to hint that they chose correctly.

As you are traveling along, you are approached by a youth in ragged peasant clothing. Through the dirt and matted hair, it's hard to be sure whether the child is a boy or a girl.

"Thank heavens, sirs and ladies!" cries the peasant youth. "At last I've found somebody who isn't trying to be a hero—not like that crazy old knight who's running all over the countryside. He can't stop the Horned Beast; nobody can. But he's wrecked my village and others besides in trying. Is that what heroes do?"

The avatar asks to accompany the party to the village of Glennry: "I feel safer with you." If they allow this, they can hear stories of bold "heroes" who tried to kill the creature but were only destroyed themselves, or worse, led it in their pursuit to another village. Some even put the monster down only to have it rise again after the would-be rescuers had departed. If the PCs press, they can learn that Palmides raised several such groups but has never succeeded in his mission. "He's barmy," the child says flatly.



The PCs won't be able to get much more information than they could from Mal. At a convenient moment as they travel to Glennry, perhaps during a night's encampment, the "child" disappears without a trace. No amount of searching can turn up a trail or any evidence of foul play.

The Second Test: Honor

Adventurers are often mercenary. It usually takes no more than a mysterious figure with a big bag of money to get them into a dungeon, risking their lives. Honor goes by the wayside when the price is high enough. This test is meant to remind the PCs of the difference between a hired sword and a hero.

After the old man (or peasant child) departs, the PCs are left with little more information than before, other than the name of Glennry. Having no other clues, they'll probably head that way. Even if they don't, you can put the village in whichever direction they end up going, since its location is entirely up to you. (You can always chalk it up to divine influence, if anyone asks.)

When they are several miles into the snow-covered plains, the PCs receive a bit of a surprise.

After traveling for a while, you see two groups of cavalry approaching from either side. The ground rumbles as they draw near at a gallop. They come at you from opposite sides, and you are all too aware of your vulnerability on the plain. When the groups get closer, you can see that you were mistaken: These are not cavalry at all. Approaching on your left is a band of centaurs fifty strong, with an equal number of wemics on the right. Both are heavily armed and grip their weapons in anticipation of conflict.

When they are about fifty yards away, the two groups come to halt. One centaur and one wemic leave the ranks and approach. They say, in near unison, "Are you the heroes that slew the Horned Beast?"

If the party did not fight the tarrasque, or could not defeat it, the leaders instead ask if they are "the mighty heroes of whom we have heard so much." If the PCs answer in the affirmative, a stir arises in the ranks, and one more from each group approaches. These two are obviously the leaders, from their superior arms and the deference with which the others treat them.

The centaur gallops up first. He bangs his long lance on his shield and says, "I am Chief Cabo, and my cause is just. These wemics have been hunting our game, causing our children to go without food. Today we will settle our quarrel with blood. The honor would be ours if you fight by our side."

While the centaur is speaking, the wemic leader runs up. Before you can respond, he addresses you. "I am Chief Prachu, and my cause is just. The Horned Beast drove my people from their lands, so we traveled to the centaur woods. Although they have more food than they can eat, the centaurs would not share. We took what we needed, lest our children starve. They will now pay for their greed with blood. We would be honored to have such heroes at our side."

Here begins the test. The PCs are unlikely at first to want to get involved in the squabbling of the two tribes. Some may even want to act as peacemakers. Roleplay this out as you see fit, but remember that both sides are quite angry and unlikely to accept a peace treaty. If the PCs refuse to take sides, each leader tries to sweeten the pot by offering them riches. The longer the bidding goes on, the more extravagant the treasures become. The PCs pass the Test of Honor if they refuse all the offers and go on their way.

If the PCs support one side or the other, the winning bidder honors his agreement and delivers all the promised treasures in exchange for the party's oath to aid his side. Then the two leaders ride back to their followers and prepare for battle. Both sides line up facing each other and charge. The PCs are bound by their oath to intervene on the side they chose—another *quest* from the avatar.



By choosing to act as killers for hire, the PCs have of course failed the test. Neither centaurs nor wemics are challenging opponents for characters of this level. The PCs clearly outmatch the opposition, which is why the leaders were so keen to outbid each other. You should make that point clear as the PCs gleefully hack their opponents apart. A good way is by describing the battle in horrific detail—it's bound to be a slaughter.

If the PCs were so base as to renege on their oath after grabbing the goodies, they not only fail the Test of Honor but suffer the penalty for an unfulfilled *quest* (courtesy of the avatar once again).

Chief Cabo, male centaur leader: AC -2 (*shield* +4, *ring of protection* +2); MV 18; HD 5; hp 30; THAC0 16 (14 with *lance* +2); #AT 3 (*hoof/hoof/lance* +2);

Everyone Has a Price

This test offers temptations so strong that only the purest of hearts can resist them. Each chief offers the party up to five treasures as payment for their support. This should be enough to carry the scene, but you can make up more if your adventurers are particularly greedy.

Read aloud or paraphrase the script below, moving to the next treasure if the PCs manage to resist.

Chief Cabo (centaur): "Great heroes, I offer each of you a fine jewel as big as a lion's eye." He unrolls a cloth, revealing beautiful red gemstones. Each is easily worth 500 gp.

Chief Prachu (wemic): "Noble heroes, I offer you jewelry fit for the queen." He opens a lacquered box full of stunning goldspun jewelry. The total value is roughly 3,500 gp.

Chief Cabo: "You are right to refuse; such base items are beneath you. Heroes of your valor deserve only the best. Let me offer you a near perfect star ruby. Its purity is unmatched." The star ruby is indeed impressive. It is worth 6,000 gp.

Chief Prachu: "A colored rock has nothing to do with purity. Look at what I have for you: a golden statue of the God of Justice with scales of silver." The statue is a foot and a half tall. If made entirely of gold, it would be worth at least 10,000 gp.

Chief Cabo: "The wemics should know better than to barter with the image of a god! Forget his statue and look upon this scroll. It appears to be of little value, but it contains a mighty ritual that protects against magic. Surely, heroes such as yourselves could

benefit from this!" Any wizard can confirm this is a scroll of *protection from magic*.

Chief Prachu: "Can you believe such impudence? Why, the suggestion that great heroes would need the cowardly protection of magic is insulting! Here is a weapon worthy of you. This ax is called *Manetaker*, and it can sever a head with one blow!" Prachu presents a battle-ax that is exceptionally sharp and well balanced, its handle wrapped in red leather adorned with wemic hair. It is in fact a *vorpal battle-ax* +3.

Chief Cabo: "That is indeed a fine weapon, but warriors need different tools in different circumstances. I can offer you four weapons in one!" Cabo reveals a simple rod and presses a button. The rod changes into an impressive battle-ax. As he presses the button again, it becomes a spear, then a mace, and finally a sword. Any seasoned adventurer should recognize this as a *rod of lordly might*.

Chief Prachu: "I can see that you are heroes of taste and distinction. I offer you this staff. It was given to me by a dying wizard who said that any practitioner of the magical arts would recognize its name. He called it a staff of the magi." Prachu holds up a simple staff; *detect magic* confirms it is a potent item indeed.

Chief Cabo: "One last appeal: Along with all my other gifts, I offer you this precious draft. One sip will restore the drinker's youthful vigor." Indeed this can be confirmed as an *elixir of youth*.

Chief Prachu: "I too offer all of my previous gifts. Such generosity should go without saying. In addition, I offer a gift beyond price: wisdom. Keep this pearl for one month and your understanding will increase tenfold." Cabo is exaggerating for effect, but he is holding up an authentic *pearl of wisdom*.



Dmg 1d6/1d6/1d8+3; SA double damage with lance if charging; SZ L (9' tall); ML champion (15); Int average (8); AL N; XP 270.

Centaurs (50): AC 5; MV 18; HD 4; hp 22 each; THACO 17; #AT 3 (hoof/hoof/club) or 2 (short-bow); Dmg 1d6/1d6/1d6 or 1d6/1d6; SZ L (8' tall); ML elite (14); Int low (6); AL N; XP 175 each.

Chief Prachu, male wemic leader: AC 0 (*shield +5*); MV 12; HD 6+4; hp 39; THACO 14 (11 with *scimitar +2*); #AT 3 claw/claw/*scimitar +2*); Dmg 1d6/1d6/1d8+2; SD -2 initiative modifier; SZ L (7' tall); ML champion (15); Int average (10); AL N; XP 420.

Wemics (50): AC 5 (leather shield); MV 12; HD 5+8; hp 36 each; THACO 15; #AT 3 (claw/claw/club) or 1 (javelin); Dmg 1d4/1d4/1d6 or 1d6; SD -2 initiative modifier; SZ L (7' tall); ML steady (11); Int average (8); AL N; XP 270 each.

Druidic Advice

As the PCs are leaving the scene, a female human figure suddenly appears in front of them. Garbed all in white, she is so well concealed against the snow that no one notices her until she reveals herself. She greets the PCs and says that her name is Fallia. This is the avatar once again, disguised as a local druid.

If the party resisted temptation and left the warring tribes to fight their own battle, Fallia says, "Thank you, heroes, for maintaining the balance. Your weight on either side would have broken the scales of Justice. Your honor becomes you."

If the PCs actually patched up the differences between the tribes, she is impressed. "I bow before you, for you have proven yourselves great peace-makers as well as warriors. I could not reconcile the two tribes, but you outdid me. Your honor is beyond reproach."

If the PCs backed one side and took the shiny baubles, Fallia waxes wroth: "The two tribes were in balance until you tipped the scales of Justice. Shame on you, so-called heroes! The treasure you coveted is stained with innocent blood. You have strayed far from the path of honor!"

Fallia does plan not stick around very long, claiming she has either wounded to tend to or peace to ensure. If the PCs are in a mood to argue, she tongue-lashes them about their pitiful performance until they leave.

The Third Test: Mercy

Mercy is a trait rarely seen in the game environment. If something is evil, most PCs kill it without a thought. This test is an opportunity for the characters to show mercy to someone who's not only evil, but damned as well. Do they believe in redemption, or is evil just evil forevermore?

It's a three-day journey to Glennry, and the PCs had traveled only a few miles before the warring tribes approached them. Thus they have some time to rest and recover spells. Tying up dangling plot threads from your campaign is best done at this time. This is also a good place for additional encounters specific to your ongoing storyline, if you have any in mind.

Once they get going, the PCs come to a hilltop shrine at the end of the second day. From below, they can see a small structure that is roofed but without walls and open to the elements. Silhouetted against the evening sky is a lone figure, kneeling in prayer before a winged statue. If the PCs move closer, read aloud or paraphrase the following text.

As you climb the hill slowly, your boots crunch in the frozen snow, making it impossible to conceal your approach. But the figure in the shrine is motionless; he does not seem to notice you. He kneels in silent prayer, sword point-first in the frozen earth. You hear only a faint bubbling from an ornate basin in the statue's hands.

Finally, you reach the top of the hill and near the shrine. One look explains the figure's rigid pose: You stare into the skeletal face of a dead man. Frost covers his grim death mask and obscures the device on his platemail. How did he come to die in this place?



Suddenly your study is interrupted with a shock—the “corpse” lurches to his feet. Bones creak as he stands up and empty eyesockets fix you. From deep within his armor, a booming voice echoes. “So. You have come at last.”

The man is a death knight, a former hero doomed to undeath by the gods for his transgressions. His appearance is fearsome, but he makes no move to attack the PCs. His sword is still stuck into the frozen earth, and his hands rest on its pommel. Thus begins the third test, to prove the heroes’ capacity for mercy.

Should the PCs attack, the death knight defends himself immediately but tries to reason with them as the fight develops. This is not the outcome he desires, he asserts. He says he’s been waiting at the shrine for a sign from the gods and believes that they are that sign. If they will listen, he has a tale to tell and a boon to request.

If the PCs continue to attack, play the combat out. All through the fight, the death knight insists that slaying them is not his goal. Though a formidable opponent, a single death knight cannot stand up to a party of high-level adventurers. If the PCs continue the fight and lay him low, they have failed the Test of Mercy scarcely before it has begun. If they agree to at least listen to him, he tells them his story.

“My name is Lucius. I was born nearly a thousand years ago, and in my youth I was a hero like you. I fought against orc hordes and demonic infestations. I was honored by kings and celebrated by soldiers. At forty years of age, I heard about a divine test for heroes, and I knew it was my destiny.

“I set out with two young companions. We spent years in the wild, and I grew old, losing a little bit of skill each day. But my friends thrived on our quest. They honed their skills until I knew they were better than I. And that I could not have. I was the hero from the songs, I was the champion of good. If anyone completed this quest, it would be me.”

At this point, Lucius stops and bows his head. In a quieter voice, he continues. “So I killed them. At camp, in the mountains, I killed them as they slept and buried them deep in the earth. None would know of my shame, I thought. I would simply say they had died on the quest. But the gods—they knew what I had done. The God of Justice appeared before me and damned me for all time. Since that night, I have walked the lands as this abomination.”

Lucius looks at each of you as he speaks. Is he searching for pity in your faces? “I will not lie to you. I have done evil over the centuries. I blamed the gods for my curse, and I worked against them at every opportunity. I tried to drown my misfortune in a sea of blood, but in the end I could not escape the simple truth: I had murdered my friends, and I was justly punished. Five years ago I came to this shrine and asked the gods for forgiveness. I have waited since that time. Now they have sent you to me.

“I know that these are dark days, but I would once again raise my sword in a righteous cause. I will join you, if you will have me, and prove myself worthy of redemption. What say you?”

Anyone with the Ancient History proficiency can make a roll at –4. If successful, the character remembers a famous hero from centuries ago called Lucius the Hammer. He is credited with defeating an orc invasion and then rooting out an evil cult. Characters who quiz Lucius about those long-ago events find his answers detailed and accurate. Either he is the man he claims to be, or he really knows his history.

Casting a *detect evil* spell on Lucius has a strange, ambiguous result. He is no longer chaotic evil, as is usual for a death knight, but has switched back to a lawful alignment. However, he has not regained his goodness yet. He seems intent on redemption, but evil is still within him.

The party now must make a choice. Lucius is sincere, but the characters may suspect trickery and question him closely. Portray him as a man of honor who lost his way and is trying to find it again. He is forthright about his past and his desires for the



future. He is even willing to swear oaths of loyalty (though the cynical may point out that his word isn't worth much).

If the PCs do agree to Lucius's request, he thanks them humbly. He swears by the God of Justice to aid them to the best of his ability and never betray them. He then dons a great helm, which covers his skeletal features. So clad, he cuts an imposing figure, 6½ feet tall and encased in black clothing and tarnished armor; it is not immediately apparent that he is an undead creature.

Should the PCs reject his request, they have two further options. They can leave him at the shrine, in which case he returns to his vigil with great sorrow. Or they can attack him, having convinced themselves that evil is irredeemable and must be destroyed. In that case, Lucius defends himself with skill and honor (hopeless though the fight may be). He does not want to die before he can find redemption.



Lucius (Death Knight): AC 0; MV 12; HD 9; hp 70; THAC0 8 (3 with *two-handed sword* +4); #AT 2; Dmg 1d10+12; SA *fear* (5' radius), spell-like powers; SD cannot be turned, spell reflection; SW dispelled by *holy word*; MR 75%; SZ M (6'6" tall); ML fanatic (17); Int genius (18); AL LE; XP 6,000.

Special Abilities: SA—spell-like powers (as 20th-level caster) at will—*detect magic*, *detect invisibility*, *wall of ice*; 2× per day—*dispel magic*; once per day—*fireball*, *power word* (*blind*, *kill*, or *stun*), *symbol* (*fear* or *pain*); controls undead as 6th-level evil priest; SD—on successful resist magic roll of 11 or less, spell is reflected back at caster.

The Shrine

Regardless how they deal with Lucius, the PCs may want to investigate the shrine.

The place is simple enough. It contains a statue of a winged female figure holding a large stone basin in her outstretched hands. Water seems to flow through the statue somehow, bubbling out into the basin. The water is clear and warm, and steam rises from its surface into the crisp air. The statue has obviously been here for a long time. Although once ornate, its detail has been eroded by time and weather; the shrine's wooden roof is comparatively recent.

Lucius can tell the PCs about the shrine, if they think to ask him. Otherwise, a successful Ancient History proficiency check reveals the following information:

- The place dates back to Lucius's time and was the site of a great miracle. A priest of the God of Justice healed a stricken king on this spot with the waters of the natural spring.
- The statue was erected in the priest's honor, and since then many have sought the spring's healing powers.
- It is said that the waters heal only the righteous, and few people proved truly deserving—at least, they were not healed. Lucius came here in hopes of his own miracle, but for five years he has found no release.



The PCs can drink from the basin if they wish. If they have passed all three tests so far, those who taste its waters are completely healed of all injury and disease, and feel their fatigue and stress washed away. If they passed two tests, drinkers receive the benefits of a *cure serious wounds* spell, while those who failed two or more of the tests feel nothing at all.

To cure King Alain of his madness, the PCs need to take some of this water with them. You might have to encourage them to do this if they don't recognize its value. Perhaps Lucius expands upon the water's healing capabilities, or someone in the party knows of the shrine's history (fudge the Ancient History check if you need to). Play up the image in the shared dream and the certainty that a wounded man awaits their help.

A Sign

Weakened by the previous tests, the avatar of Justice is no longer able to appear "in person" by the time of the Test of Mercy. From this point on the heroes must prove their worthiness without guidance. However, the avatar can indirectly show favor or disfavor. When the PCs have concluded their business with Lucius, one way or another, they receive a sign.

As you are leaving the shrine, you hear squawking and screeching coming from overhead. Looking up, you see what at first seems to be two giant eagles fighting to the death. One has feathers of gold and the other of dark green. The two birds dive and rake at each other, and as the dark bird comes closer you can see it is in fact a peryton, with stag's head and sharp, curved antlers. As the two struggle, green and gold feathers, spattered with blood, fly like the snow.

If the PCs have acted nobly and displayed mercy, they have passed the third test and in so doing perhaps saved a damned soul. The divine eagle kills the peryton, and the evil bird drops from the sky like a stone. If, however, they behaved cruelly, they have failed the test and their world. The malevolent peryton kills the eagle, goring it savagely in midair, and howls

a victory cry. The golden eagle crashes through the roof of the shrine in a shower of wood, blood, and feathers. Even the healing waters cannot restore it.

The Fourth Test: Justice

Adventurers have a tendency to make their own justice. Even though they are usually outsiders and unfamiliar with a situation, they intervene when they think themselves morally superior. The avatar obviously wants to see justice done, but such ham-fisted tactics can do as much harm as good. This test will answer the question: Do the PCs really want to do what's right, or do they simply make their own rules?

This late in the testing, the avatar can only watch, no longer able to advise.

The shrine of Justice is a day's journey from the village of Glennry. The day after undertaking the Test of Mercy, the PCs finally arrive at their original destination.

You have come to the village of Glennry at last, for reasons that are still not entirely clear. The place seems typical at first glance: three dozen thatched houses in the shadow of a large hill. Strangely, no structures are present on the hill at all. Watchtowers are common in the wild lands, but for some reason Glennry is doing without. The outskirts of the place are deserted, but you can hear the noise of a crowd up ahead.

The entire populace seems to have gathered in the center of the village. More than a hundred villagers are here, many holding pitchforks and torches. The object of their attention is a wooden cage swinging from a scaffold. The crowd is hurling rocks and rotten fruit at the cage's abused occupant, a middle-aged woman in homespun clothes. "Burn the witch!" the crowd screams as one. Only one person stands against the mob, a woman in priestly robes atop the scaffold. You can see her mouth moving, but her voice is lost amid the cries for vengeance.



The scene is chaotic, with the angry mob demanding the death of the so-called witch. This test requires that the PCs care enough about justice to intervene, but also that they see the matter settled properly. Their first task is calming the crowd, whether through intimidation, oratory, bards' soothing music, or magical means. The mere presence of a group of heavily armed adventurers might be convincing enough on its own to defuse the situation. Only one villager stays angry, and he stalks off to his home fuming.

Once things have settled down, the PCs can talk to the priest and the villagers and establish the following:

- The woman in the cage is named Etana. She has lived near the village for many years, making herbal remedies for the villagers and their animals.
- Etana has been accused of witchcraft after several unusual occurrences of late. A few weeks ago, the village's cows started producing sour milk. Then four farm animals were found mutilated in the fields, their internal organs missing. Lastly, a young boy (Elie, age six) has gone missing; the villagers suspect the worst.
- The robed woman is Pratt, a priest who serves the God of Justice and is the only religious figure of note in Glennry. While not entirely convinced that Etana is innocent, she will not give in to mob rule and insists on confirming the woman's guilt before administering any punishment.

Pratt asks the party to help with an impartial investigation of the case. The villagers agree to await its outcome but will not accept the immediate release of Etana. They still believe she's a witch, after all, and they expect the investigation to prove that. The PCs could refuse to get involved, of course, though such a pitiful tableau is hard for adventurers to resist. You can play on their natural inclinations by using a more neutral term than "witch" as you describe Etana and her story.

If Lucius is with the party, his disturbing presence is likely to interfere with any investigation. He is willing to act as a bodyguard or try to scare Etana into confessing. (He is certain she's guilty but is unwilling to press the issue, especially since he fears

his evil side is eager to watch her burn.) If the party prefers that he not enter the village, Lucius stands watch on the hilltop just in case the Horned Beast or Moloch come back for seconds.

If they do agree to investigate the case, unraveling this little mystery leads to more difficulty. Superficially, the facts seem to support Etana's innocence. If the PCs dig deep enough, however, they'll discover that the mob is right. Etana is in fact a witch—a very clever one.

Finding the Clues

The characters have several avenues of investigation open to them. They can track the movements of the boy, Elie; interview the lone villager who left the scene; examine the farm animals; interrogate the accused; or search Etana's premises. With a bit of detective work, they can learn the basic facts of each situation.

Their findings at first indicate Etana is innocent, although the animal mutilations remain unexplained. On the strength of these findings, the PCs may advocate letting her go. Only a closer investigation shows that the facts don't add up, revealing some deeper truths.

Where's the Boy?

Elie is in fact neither dead nor in any way connected to Etana. He wandered away from the village and fell down a hole, where he is trapped and hurt, but still alive. The boy's parents last saw him heading for a grove of trees outside the village; their neighbors can't provide any more information.

Although the ground is covered with snow, the crisscrossing tracks of villagers and animals make it difficult to discern those of the boy. Characters with the Tracking proficiency can make a roll at -2: A successful check allows the tracker to find Elie in about an hour. He is in a hole 12 feet deep, and his ankle is sprained. A *cure light wounds* spell will set him right, though he won't calm down until he sees his mother again.

Who Was That Man?

The angry villager who left the scene is named Joffre. Anyone in the crowd can tell the party how to



find his home. If they interview him, they learn that his wife died several years ago from a fever. Etana tried several remedies on the woman, but none of them worked—or so she says, he sneers. Joffre has slandered Etana ever since, and he was the first one to blame the recent events on her.

How Now, Brown Cow?

The village's animals are kept in a communal barn. If the PCs investigate, they find the beasts ill treated. Any character making a successful Agriculture or Animal Lore proficiency check notices that their feed is moldy and foul. If this is the cows' regular diet, it more than explains their bad milk.

Most of the mutilated animal carcasses have been destroyed and eaten. One, that of a goat, survives. The villagers plan to cut it up for the evening meal, so the PCs need to examine it before night falls. Any character making a successful Spellcraft proficiency check can tell that something is wrong. First, the goat's throat was cut open, a frequent feature of ritual magic. Second, the body is missing a lot of blood, a known component of ritual magic. Lastly, the missing internal organs are used in several summoning rituals.

What's in the Bag?

Etana was stripped of her pouches and bags when she was carried into town. Pratt has these items in her shrine but hasn't had the chance to look at them yet. The PCs are welcome to examine these. A successful Herbalism proficiency check confirms that their contents are medicinal herbs.

Etana protests her innocence. She says that she's a simple herbalist and that her poultices and remedies have done much to keep the villagers healthy. A *detect evil* spell cast on her does not reveal evil intent. However, she is still wearing several hidden charms, among them an *amulet of proof against detection and location*. This covers up her true, lawful evil alignment. If her amulet is removed, her devil-tainted nature becomes plain. (See "The Village Witch" below for more about her diabolic association.)

Etana also has a crow familiar, which settles on her cage in the dark of night. If the PCs haven't

resolved the matter by the end of the day, Etana instructs her familiar to deliver some spell components. She uses these to *charm* her guard, whom she then urges to set her free.

Is Anybody Home?

Like the rest of the villagers, Etana lives in a thatched cottage. Inside are a bed, fire pit, cupboard, several sacks of foodstuffs, and many bottles of herbs. No one from Glennry has searched her dwelling. They stormed in, grabbed her, then headed back to the village. If the PCs check out the place, they can turn up several clues that her story is not as simple as it seems.

- The fire pit has several charred pieces of meat in it. Closer examination shows these to be animal hearts, whose tough muscle tissue was not consumed by the flames.
- A successful Spellcraft check reveals that many of the herbs are useful as spell components or to brew poisons. If the PCs search the house after nightfall, they may find the crow, knocking over bottles and grabbing bits of various herbs in its talons.
- Most damning, one of the sacks contains the body of a small boy. Etana snatched the child from another village and killed him here. She had not had a chance to dispose of the body more effectively before the villagers took her away.

The Village Witch

In truth, Etana is every bit what she's accused of being and has been practicing her craft for the better part of two decades. Early on she contacted a powerful devil, Anthedes, who became her patron. She learned sorcery from her new master and occasionally did errands for him. She covered her activities by providing herbal remedies to Glennry, practicing her dark arts in secret.

Since the *Stone of Corbinet* was removed, Etana hasn't been able to contact her patron. To make matters worse, she had concealed her spellbook in a *bag of holding*, which has now ceased to function and thus rendered the book unreachable. In a panic, she tried to summon Anthedes through bloody rituals.



She tried animal hearts first, but when that didn't work, she kidnapped a child and sacrificed him to her dark master. When this also failed to produce results, she despaired and began making plans to quit the village. Unfortunately for her, the mob arrived shortly thereafter.

If confronted with evidence of her wrongdoing, Etana cries out to Anthedes for aid. But far away in Hell, cut off from the Prime, her patron cannot hear her. When it's clear that she is doomed, she confesses and begs for mercy. The villagers raise the cry again to burn the witch. Pratt is willing to go along with this (though she plans to strangle Etana once the wood starts smoking). If the PCs want to show mercy, they'll have to oppose the priest and deal with an angry crowd. Should they actually free the witch from her bonds, she immediately casts a *fly* spell and leaves the village, never to return.

The PCs pass this test if they investigated the charge of witchcraft, discovered the truth about

Etana, and saw justice done. If they worked with Pratt to achieve this, so much the better. However, if they take matters into their own hands, even after a successful investigation, they fail the test.

Etana, female, human M7 (Witch)*: AC 8 (Dex bonus); MV 12; HD 7; hp 19; THAC0 18; #AT 1 (unarmed); Dmg 1d2; SA brew potions, spell use**; SZ M (5'2" tall); ML steady (11); Str 9, Dex 16, Con 13, Int 16, Wis 14, Cha 12; AL LE; XP 1,400.

Special Abilities: brew potions—calmative (acts like a *sleep* spell) and poison (class L contact); potions require 1 hour to create and wear off in 24 hours.

* See the *Complete Wizard's Handbook* (TSR2115, 1990) for more on the Witch kit.

** Etana has lost the following remaining memorized spells: *charm person*, *burning hands*, *stinking cloud*, *fly*.





The Fifth Test: Generosity

Most players expect a steady flow of treasure from the DM. Their characters rarely, if ever, give away potent magical items, even when the need is acute. This test is aimed squarely at your PCs' greed. Can they give up some of their precious booty for a just cause, or will they solve this problem like typical adventurers—with violence?

Once the matter of Etana has been dealt with, Pratt invites the party to stay the night and enjoy the hospitality of the village. She is grateful for their aid and, having no other form of payment, can at least feed and entertain them for their trouble. She's also trying to butter them up, since she faces a much larger problem than a lone witch.

The next morning Pratt asks the PCs to come to her shrine for morning prayers. The shrine is at the edge of town, right next to the hill, and looks to have been built around an ancient cairn. When everyone is inside, the priest offers a short prayer to the God of Justice and then addresses the party.

"I want to thank you again for your help with the Etana problem. It was much appreciated. However, I do have an ulterior motive in asking you here. I apologize for the ruse, but I didn't want to alarm the villagers further.

"The cairn at the heart of this shrine is the final resting place of the wizard Caermas, who died three hundred and twelve years ago after performing many heroic acts in this region. His final encounter was with two behir. These mighty serpents were terrorizing Glennry and had already killed many of the villagers when Caermas arrived. He flung deadly spells at them, but the beasts shrugged them off and tore into him with their wicked claws. Caermas, bloody but defiant, channeled his remaining life energy into a powerful spell that imprisoned the behir under the hill.

"Caermas's lifeless body was brought here and buried. One of the duties of this shrine is attending to his cairn, which is the focus of the

magic. The enchantment on the behir has held firm for the past three centuries. Every decade a magical item is sacrificed in Caermas's name, renewing the enchantment and ensuring the continued confinement of the beasts. Recently, though, something has gone wrong.

"Several months ago the enchantment began to fade prematurely. The shrine has always kept an extra item on hand in case of emergency, so I promptly sacrificed it. It was a minor trinket, but it should have done. Only two months later the enchantment started to fail again, and the hill shook as the behir stirred. I sacrificed the only other item I had, a magical helm that was a personal possession, but I fear that even its power won't last long. Without another influx of energy, the enchantment is going to fail within a week.

"This village may not seem very significant to you, but it is my home as well as my charge, and I could not bear to see it destroyed. If you would willingly give any magical items to the shrine, I can ensure our safety for a little longer. The more potent the gift, the more time we will have. Can you help Glennry once again?"

The PCs are, of course, being tested. They have three choices: give Pratt magical items to sacrifice, stay in Glennry until the behir emerge and then fight them, or leave Glennry to its fate. To pass the test, the PCs must give generously to the town. Rating their generosity is up to you, but as a rule of thumb, at least half the members of the group should contribute an item, and at least one of these should be +3 or better (or a miscellaneous item of similar worth, such as *gauntlets of ogre power*). Tossing a couple of +1 daggers to Pratt is hardly generous for 15th-level characters.

Pratt gratefully receives whatever the PCs wish to give. She takes the donated items to the cairn and performs a short ceremony, washing each in holy water and invoking the God of Justice. The sacrifices disappear, causing the cairn of Caermas to glow slightly. A *detect magic* spell reveals that the both the cairn and the hill are powerfully enchanted.

Lucius, if present, waits until the PCs have chosen. Regardless of their decision, he approaches Pratt and presents his *two-handed sword* +4 without a



word. If asked about his action, he says, "I have taken much from the world. Now I would give something back."

Fighting the Behir

The PCs may decide that sacrificing items is foolish. They are mighty heroes after all, and a couple of behir shouldn't be too tough to handle. This answer is eminently logical, but the avatar is not testing their logic. By demonstrating possessiveness (not to mention unnecessary violence), the PCs fall short of the heroic ideal. They may also know that behirs are prized for their magical body parts; mages and priests can both benefit from their horns and talons. The PCs have well and truly failed the Test of Generosity if they opt to kill the behir for profit.

If the PCs wait for the behir to break free, they have to stick around two more days (while the Armageddon Clock ticks). The wait is long and boring; time seems to pass very slowly. Pratt helps

the villagers pack up, and they sadly leave their homes. The priest will not allow them to stay for the showdown, knowing that even if the PCs win, the village is likely to be destroyed.

At sundown on the second day of your vigil, the hill begins to shake. The tremors quickly spread to the surrounding area, causing many of Glennry's buildings to fall in on themselves. Then the top of the hill explodes, showering everything with a spray of dirt and rock. Beastly roars echo through the village as two twelve-legged, serpentine shapes slither out of the hill. The two behir, one red and one white, race down the hill and into the town, powered by their many legs. Glennry seems doomed.

The PCs now have a tough fight on their hands. The two behir work together and stymie any attempt to concentrate on one of them. They make a point of trampling through the village as they fight and smashing up the buildings. Wood-and-thatch dwellings are no match for 40-foot-long serpents.

Behir (2): AC 4; MV 15; HD 12; hp 96 each; THAC0 9; #AT 2 (bite/squeeze) or 7 (bite/claw x6); Dmg 2d4/ 1d4+1 or 2d4/1d6 (x6); SA *lightning bolt*, squeeze, swallow; SD immune to electricity and poison; SZ G (40' long); ML champion (15); Int low (5); AL NE; XP 7,000 each.

Special Abilities: SA—*lightning bolt* once per 10 rounds (20' long, damage 24 points, save vs. breath for half); on successful squeeze attack, victim is subject to six claw attacks the following round; a natural roll of 20 on the bite attack indicates that the victim has been swallowed whole (swallowed creature loses $\frac{1}{3}$ of starting hp per round until dead, totally digested after 12 rounds; interior AC 7, with cumulative -1 to damage dealt by victim each round).

The Castle Achieved

Once the Test of Generosity is over, the avatar has finished examining the PCs. If they passed at least





three of the tests, they have proved themselves worthy of Castle Pescheour and are transported there. If not, they have no chance to restore the lost *Stone*, and nothing can stop their world's destruction.

Of course, even if the PCs gain the castle, it is now a pile of rubble as a result of their earlier actions. But the answers they crave are waiting for them in the ruins of Castle Pescheour and its ruler. If they can cure King Alain of his madness, they can unravel Garloth's machinations and discover their own role in bringing about the end of the world—as well as their chance to save it.

Journey's End

Shortly after the last test, assuming they were judged worthy, the PCs are overcome with a strange feeling of lightheadedness. The avatar is ready to take deserving heroes to the castle at last.

You feel dizzy and oddly weightless, then see the village of Glennry fade out of sight. For a moment you are engulfed in total blackness, but it passes quickly. You find yourself under the noonday sun in a range of rolling hills, with ragged mountains looming close by. The scene is familiar, reminding you of the vision you all shared. You look up at the top of the nearest hill, expecting to see the glorious castle of your dream, but you are disappointed. A fortress must have stood there once, but now it is only a graveyard of rubble.

Nonetheless, you feel compelled to climb the hill. It takes a few minutes to reach the top, and what you find there gives you pause. The ruins are a mishmash of black and white stone. You've seen an edifice of obsidian and marble only once before, and the sight of the twisted iron doors confirms your worst suspicion. These are the ruins of the castle from the island, the one you destroyed in your earlier quest. But how did it get here, and why have you come?

The PCs can look about the ruins for clues. A short search turns up the following important pieces of information.

The Wages of Failure

The PCs may well prove themselves unworthy of achieving Castle Pescheour. This, to say the least, is a major obstacle to the developing story. If you're not willing to destroy the world (or don't want to blow it all up *just yet*), consider one of these two possible solutions to this problem:

You can choose to take pity on your players and decide that the tests were really just about valor. In most cases, failing the test meant getting into a fight. If you say the fights were the tests, suddenly the party's actions look a lot more positive.

If you prefer to make them suffer the consequences of failure (as they really ought), have the avatar show up after the final test and tell them that they have doomed the world. You can cook up a desperate quest to find an escape from the impending catastrophe (for example, trying to find the *Stone* without any help from King Alain). Even if they succeed, which should be nearly impossible, they may well be punished by the gods for their arrogance and greed (see Chapter 6: DM Advice for more ideas about this). And if they fail—game over. Now those are consequences!

- The wreckage contains several large pieces of adorned stonework. All of them feature the device of the kingfisher, identical with that on the signet ring given them by the golden knight.
- Many bodies lie in the rubble, but none match the monsters the party slew in the castle. Instead, the PCs find the corpses of knights in dented golden armor (identical with that worn by Garloth), ladies in courtly finery, and servants in work clothes. The bodies are all remarkably well preserved, and their faces are twisted in horrible grimaces. It is clear that their deaths were violent and painful. (To augment the horror, note how the PCs killed particular monsters on the island, so that the corpses they find reflect this. For instance, those killed by *fireballs* are burned, while victims of an *ice storm* are battered and bruised.)
- The carcasses of several small animals are scattered about the area. They look half eaten, with



obvious toothmarks. It seems that someone—or something—has been living in the ruins.

The Wounded King

After the PCs have searched the ruins and discovered the clues, have each character make a Tracking proficiency check (or a Wisdom check if no one has Tracking). Success turns up a faint trail of blood that leads into the rubble. This ought to recall the image in the shared dream; play up this detail as you see fit.

Following the trail is easy enough. It leads to a dark hole in the ruins, beyond which seems to be a room of sorts. If the PCs investigate, read aloud or paraphrase the following.

Hunching down, you climb through the hole and into the room, which has been left relatively intact within the collapsed structure. As your light washes over it, you can see a twisted mass of platinum and steel at its center. You realize

that this is the very room in which you found the shining stone.

But an even stranger discovery awaits. Lying on a pile of dirty blankets and rags is the crazed wizard who attacked you in this room. He stares at you with vacant eyes, and fingers a dented crown with filthy hands. His cracked lips move, but you can't hear what he's saying. As you move closer, it becomes clear. "Doomed," he mumbles. "We're all doomed."

King Alain makes no hostile move toward the party. If they examine him, they find that he still suffers from the wounds they inflicted. He has also apparently lost what little was left of his mental faculties. He continues to croak about doom, occasionally whispering, "The Stone . . . I have failed."

The PCs can try to heal the king's wounds, but they won't have much luck with traditional methods. *Cure* spells or *potions of healing* can relieve some of his fatigue, but the injuries themselves can



Questions and Answers

Though it's impossible to predict everything the PCs will want to ask Alain, a number of questions are obvious. Below are some of the most likely, followed by the appropriate answers; read aloud or paraphrase these as needed.

Who are you?

"My name is King Alain, and I am the ruler of Castle Pescheour. My family has reigned here since the world's earliest days."

Why didn't your wounds heal?

"My fate is tied to that of the *Stone of Corbinet*. My wounds will not heal until the *Stone* is brought back to Castle Pescheour."

What is the Stone of Corbinet?

"The *Stone* is the linchpin of our world; it connects us to the planes. With the *Stone* gone, the world has lost that connection. That is also why priests are losing their spells: Their gods simply cannot hear them."

Why are we doomed?

"Our world is drifting out of alignment with the cosmos. Without access to the Elemental Planes, the building blocks of our world will fall apart. Our only hope is to return the *Stone* here and pray it is not too late."

Who built this castle?

"It was built by the gods, and its sole purpose was to protect the *Stone*. My ancestor, Pescheour, won the right to be the castle's guardian and was crowned king by the God of Justice. My family has ruled the castle and guarded the *Stone of Corbinet* ever since. But now I have failed, and the *Stone* is lost. Words cannot describe my shame."

How did the castle get here?

"Castle Pescheour's greatest defense has always been secrecy. To maintain this, the castle moves every few weeks. The new location is always remote, such as the island you visited. I don't understand how it works, but it has to do with how the castle was built. It is the point in our world nearest the other planes, and this somehow helps it move.

Who is this Garloth who told us to take the Stone?

He said he was a scion of Pescheour.

"That is my elder brother, a cruel and unscrupulous man who tricked you into making a terrible mistake. I inherited the crown because my father decided Garloth was an unsuitable heir; my son, Eric, was next in line for the kingship. Garloth left the castle and built one of his own. After many years, he came home, saying he wanted to reconcile. Like a fool, I believed him—the blackheart! He used his magic to drive me mad and turn all of my family and staff into horrible monsters—the same monsters you slew. It breaks my heart to think of their fate."

Why didn't he just take the Stone himself?

"Every member of my family swears an oath at age fourteen in the shrine of the God of Justice. Among other things, we swear to never remove the *Stone* from the castle. Failure brings down a terrible curse. However, the oath did not prevent Garloth from tricking others into doing his dirty work."

Why would Garloth take the Stone if doing so would doom the world?

"He did not know. Only the king learns the full mysteries of the *Stone of Corbinet*."

What is Garloth's castle like?

"My brother has always wanted what he could not have. Since my father denied him this castle, he tried to build one like it. He chose a remote location and tried to give his copy some of this castle's properties. Lacking the power of the gods, he failed, of course."

Where is Garloth's castle?

"I could show you on a map, but it doesn't matter. Each of us wears an enchanted jewel by means of which we can contact one another. As a precaution, I had mine specially ensorcelled so that I may travel to the others' location if necessary. Take it now; you are the world's last hope. If you hold the jewel and say Garloth's name backward, you will be transported to his castle. Speak my name backward to return here." The jewel is part of a pendant around King Alain's neck, and he gives it to you. It too has the kingfisher emblem deep within its facets. The jewel can transport groups if everyone joins hands.

be healed only by the water of Lucius's shrine. If this is administered, Alain convulses and cries out. His physical wounds close up but do not heal completely. More importantly, the effects of Garloth's spell are erased, and Alain is restored to sanity. As clarity returns to his eyes, he begins to weep. He

knows that he has failed in his duty and so brought about the end of the world. It takes a few minutes to master himself enough to speak to the PCs.

The PCs no doubt have many questions for King Alain, as he does for them. First, though, he wants to look around the ruins of the castle. His wounds are



still painful, and he winces with every step. Nonetheless, he insists on surveying his family's ruined home before sitting down to talk and eat something. The king remembers his time of insanity, seen as if in a dream, so he already has a good idea of what happened. However, he wants to hear the PCs' side of the story.

One Last Fight

Once the PCs have found out what they need to know through the conversation with King Alain, it's time for them to take action. Their only chance of saving the world is to go to Garloth's castle, retrieve the *Stone of Corbinet*, and return it to Castle Pescheour.

As if to punctuate the dire situation, an earthquake rocks the area. More of the castle falls in on itself, and the mountains rumble as avalanches race down their slopes. King Alain gathers everyone together and suggests a prayer to the God of Justice.

The monarch kneels, despite his pain. He entreats the God of Justice to bless the quest you are about to undertake. You know that this is your last chance. If you fail, the world ends. It is a humbling responsibility.

As King Alain prays, you feel as if a spirit has entered your body. It washes over you, cleansing away the confusion and fatigue of these last few weeks. It focuses your mind and ignites your soul. For the first time since you took the *Stone*, you feel whole.

The avatar of Justice, no longer able to guide the PCs, can at least fortify them for the task ahead and expends the last of its strength, destroying itself in the process, to infuse them with divine essence. After the prayer session, they are back in peak condition, fully healed and free of all malignant magics. Clerics and paladins, regardless of their patron deity, have access to all their spells and abilities, as do wizards and bards.

The adventurers are as ready as they will ever be to face Garloth. They need only link hands and activate the jewel to travel instantly to his castle.

A New Hope

If Lucius was with the PCs when they completed their tests, he too is transported to Castle Pescheour. He can't quite believe that he has finally achieved his quest after a thousand years and is elated, but he is also saddened to learn that the castle has been destroyed. King Alain knows of his story and is sympathetic to the cursed knight. He hopes Lucius can find redemption, although it is not in Alain's power to give it to him.

Lucius volunteers to go with you to Garloth's castle, saying, "I have achieved my quest in finding the castle, but I am not yet redeemed. I will fight by your side, in hopes of a better tomorrow." He also kneels down to pray to the God of Justice.

A death knight praying before battle is a strange sight indeed, but Lucius knows who is giving him this chance. He cries out as the avatar enters him, then collapses in a heap. When he rises again, he looks at you. "The God of Justice spoke to me. The god told me I could find final rest if I so wish, or I could continue on and achieve redemption. I choose to remain here with you and face Garloth in our final hour."

Lucius takes off his great helm, and you are shocked to see that flesh covers his aged bones. For the first time in a thousand years, Lucius sees through human eyes.

In addition to the physical rejuvenation, Lucius's alignment also changes to lawful neutral. Cleansed of evil, but not yet redeemed, he will become good once again if his actions contribute to saving the world.



Chapter 5: The Keep at the End of the World

DM Background

This is it. The end. The final confrontation. With the help of King Alain, the heroes have arrived at the lair of the world's enemy. Inside the Black Keep he has built, protected by his chosen champions, the traitorous Prince Garloth weaves a potent magic ritual. He hopes that, on completion, the spell will transport his tower and himself off this world before it is completely destroyed. But Garloth's spell won't save him or anyone else.

When he embarked on his scheme, Garloth sought only vengeance for his father's slight: He did not foresee this outcome. His arrogant nature precluded simply returning the *Stone of Corbinet* to Castle Pescheour and setting things right, so now he desperately seeks a magical means of escape. (He will transport his castle and servants if possible but is primarily concerned with saving himself.) Though he does not yet realize it, Garloth has been undone by his own foul deeds. Cut off from the planes, neither he nor his keep is going anywhere.

Never before has so much been at stake. Here the PCs will either redeem their earlier mistakes and avert the impending apocalypse, or seal the world's doom and their own as well. Here too is where you decide the fate of your campaign, once and for all. Does it end with a glorious and satisfying—but shattering final—climax? Or does it rise like the proverbial phoenix to become something new and distinctly different? Perhaps it fades into an uncertain future, to be determined at a later time.

Now is the time, before the final battle begins, to decide what's right for your campaign. Without some plan in mind, you'll be hard-pressed to conclude the adventure in a way that's satisfying for your players and yourself. By now you should have a good idea of the range of possible outcomes; see "The End Is Nigh" at the end of this chapter for some suggestions.

The Bleak Shore

The jewel transports the characters to another distant, wasted region of their world, a barren coast pounded by a cruel sea. When they materialize before Prince Garloth's stronghold, it is obvious they arrived not a moment too soon.

It happens more quickly than thought can perceive. One moment you are all in Castle Pescheour with King Alain; the next, you stand under a night sky on a windswept finger of rock that arcs from the mainland behind you out into the restless sea. Bolts of searing flame streak angrily from the sky above, to fall hissing into the dark waves.

Some 200 yards away before you, squatting atop the jumble of rock where land meets sea, is the grim shape of a dark keep with three angular, crenellated towers. A nimbus of pale green fire plays eerily about the battlements, filling the sky above the keep with a baleful luminescence; lights of the same sickly hue dance madly in the upper windows, waxing and waning in time to the unnatural aurora overhead.

The fiery rain is none too subtle evidence that the world's end draws near. Time is of the essence. Play up the urgency of the moment: The PCs should not dally to make elaborate plans—they must retrieve the *Stone* swiftly, or all is lost!

The Black Keep

Constructed entirely of smooth, polished black marble and crowned with greenish-white flames, the Black Keep is an awesome, terrible sight. It is considerably smaller than Castle Pescheour, the main keep and its adjacent towers boasting only two levels each, and has no curtain wall, barbican, bailey, or any other type of outer defense. Nor is there any sign of a watch on the battlements.



This apparent vulnerability is not a trick, though the PCs will probably suspect one. The exterior approach to the keep is free of obstacles: Nothing prevents the characters from marching straight up to the front gate, without fear of being observed or intercepted. But getting inside is another matter entirely, since the Black Keep is magically fortified against attack. Garloth and his minions are deep within, the latter trying to maintain their composure while the former tries frantically to escape the impending conflagration.

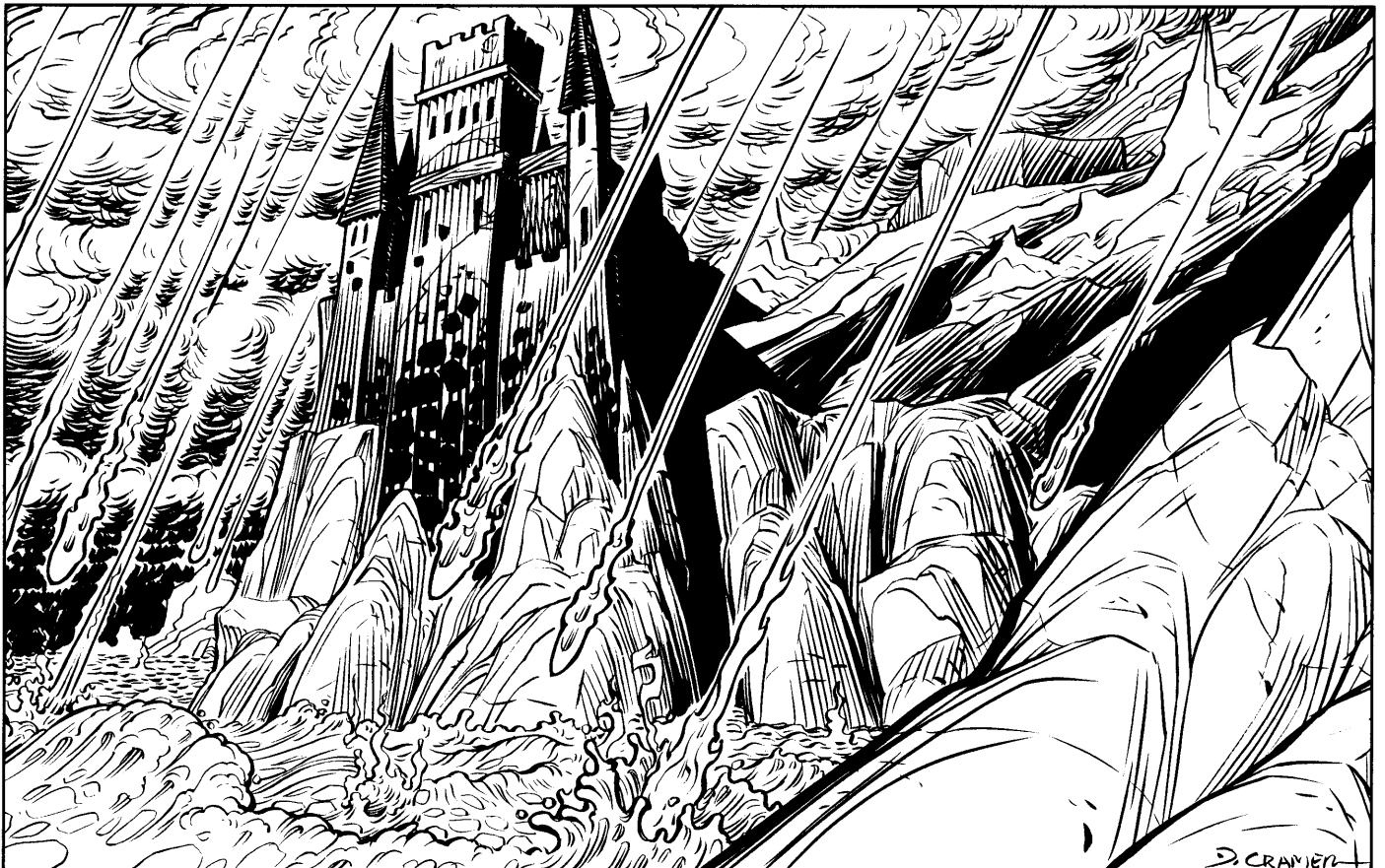
Ground Level

1. Living Portal

The keep does not seem to have a visible door or gate of any kind, but this is in fact an illusion of its making. A *true seeing* spell, *gem of seeing*, or the like will see past the illusory facade. Part of the outer rampart is actually a solid mass of rotting tissue and

bone: a living wall. Characters who do not see through the illusion but approach within 5 yards of the wall (area 1 on the map) can hear low moans emanating from it. Anyone within 2 feet of the wall is subject to grabbing attacks, albeit weak ones, by its appendages as the entombed beings piteously beg for release.

Garloth created the wall, and it must serve his will—only he may command it to let persons pass safely through its horrifying mass. The PCs have not been invited in, so to enter by this route they must force their way through with might or magic, and the sounds of battle will almost certainly alert Garloth's minions inside. The wall hates its master intensely, but it fears him too and will defend the portal against intruders to the best of its ability. It does not initiate combat, but when attacked it fights until destroyed or until the PCs have created an opening through its body.





A Mighty Fortress

Drawing on the energy bound up in the *Stone of Corbinet*, Garloth has woven a magical shield about his home that will deflect almost any assault, at least for a time. The keep is nearly immune to any physical or magical effect directed at its exterior, or at something or someone that can affect it. Attempts to target the keep with magic dissipate in a spectacular and colorful display of useless energy; spells fade from memory, weapons glance off harmlessly, and magical items lose charges without effect. Inside, however, spells and physical attacks that target the keep function normally. Thus the PCs cannot use a *wand of lightning* or a *meld with stone* spell to get inside the keep, but they could do so to break out. The only exception to this effect is the keep's main (and only) doorway. See "The Living Portal" below.

Note that spells that do not affect the keep's structure function normally. The shield will not, for example, prevent a character from casting a *fly* spell to peer in a window or gain the top of one of the keep's towers.

Living wall: AC 5; MV nil; HD 70; hp 300; THAC0 variable (see below); #AT 6; Dmg variable (see below); SA spell use; SD immune to *passwall*; SZ H (25' long); ML fearless (20); Int 18; AL CE; XP 64,000.

Special Equipment: The wall has absorbed the following magical items. Those providing magical protection have improved its original AC from 8 to 5, and it can use offensive items at will.

- *eversmoking bottle*
- *wand of frost* (13 charges)
- *chainmail* +4
- *cloak of protection* +3
- *ring of protection* +3
- *shield* +2

Special Abilities: This wall has absorbed six creatures, so its return attacks use the THAC0 and damage of the respective creatures (described below); it can also cast spells memorized by the absorbed wizard.

- **Heavy warhorse (Horse):** THAC0 17; #AT 2 (hoof/hoof); Dmg 1d8/1d8.
- **Male dwarf F10:** THAC0 8; #AT 2 (*longsword* +3); Dmg 1d8+6/1d8+6 (*longsword* +3, specialization bonus, Str bonus).
- **Male human M11:** THAC0 17; #AT 1 (unarmed); damage 1d2; SA spells (4/4/4/3/3), 1st—*chill touch*, *color spray*, *magic missile* ×2, 2nd—*blindness*, *detect invisibility*, *stinking cloud* ×2, 3rd—*fireball* ×2, *lightning bolt*, *slow*, 4th—*ice storm*, *stoneskin* ×2, 5th—*cloudkill*, *monster summoning III*, *wall of force*.
- **Female elf T9:** THAC0 12; #AT 1 (*dagger* +4); Dmg 1d4 +4.
- **Owlbear:** THAC0 15; #AT 3 (claw/claw/bite); Dmg 1d6/1d6/2d12; SA hug (successful attack roll of 18 or better holds victim for 2d8 additional damage per round).
- **Giant crocodile (Crocodile):** THAC0 13; #AT 2 (bite/tail); damage 3d6/2d10.

2. Lower Hall

Beyond the living wall is an irregularly shaped, roughly octagonal hall that makes up the better part of the keep's ground level. Its floor is made of the same polished black marble that forms the keep's exterior, but it also bears an inlaid gold and silver design: the Pescheour coat of arms with its kingfisher emblem.

Four doors stand along the hall's perimeter, all made of some dark, almost black wood and reinforced with iron studs. A bright glow emanates from several crystalline orbs suspended from the walls. Near the wall opposite the entry is a free-standing wrought-iron staircase, and coming from the opening above it is a flickering, greenish-white glow identical with that flaring atop the keep.

The glowing orbs are worthless glass globes with *continual light* spells cast on them.

When the PCs arrive at the keep, Garloth's minions are all in their quarters, trying to sleep or nervously discussing recent events. They are alert for any sound of intrusion: Garloth has warned them that if his spells are interrupted, their chances of getting away are greatly reduced. Therefore, they



quickly respond to any evidence of assault, assembling in the keep's lower hall (area 2) and preparing their defenses. They can't see through the living wall, but they can hear any loud noise beyond it. They keep a safe distance from the monstrosity, which they neither like nor trust.

Should the characters force their way inside, they find Garloth's minions ready and waiting for them in the hall, weapons at the ready. All of them know their fates hinge on keeping intruders away from Garloth, so they fight with an abandon born of fear and desperation. Moreover, these are some of the most ruthless and cunning individuals in the world—they've survived the cataclysm thus far and have no intention of allowing anyone to foul up their escape. They will stop at nothing to prevent the PCs from reaching the upper hall.

Garloth retains the services of seven individuals. Full details can be found under "Minions' Quarters" below.

Minions' Quarters

Garloth's followers can be found in these chambers when not performing a task for their master or defending the keep against intruders. Their quarters are well appointed, filled with ill-gotten gains and luxury items they have looted from this dying world. These evil followers are desperately hoping that Garloth will preserve them and aren't about to let upstart adventurers spoil their chances. They will fight ruthlessly and to the death.

3A. Dromond, Bondor, and Fetch

This trio of deadly devotees all share the largest of the three guest quarters. Bondor and Fetch are followers of the God of Death, while Dromond is a ruthless killer who'll do anything for the right price.

Looking inside the room, you see an utter mess. It looks like a whirlwind has swept through the place and scattered articles of clothing and footwear, belts, scabbards, and swords, along with heaps of adventuring equipment (rope, grappling hooks, backpacks, sacks, torches, etc.). The stuff is piled, hung, and tossed all over the floor, walls, and furniture, without distinguishing ownership.

Under this jumble are many fine appointments, though clearly not in regular use. Heaped with clothing and the like are a trio of comfortable wooden beds with thick feather mattresses and comfortable blankets; near them are three matching hardwood, iron-bound storage chests containing even more personal items. Pushed up against a wall are two matching mahogany chairs encrusted with precious gems (these appear to have been thrones at one time); and in the middle of the room is a small round table with three matching chairs. The table is littered with stacks of gold, silver, and platinum coins having a total value of 4,133 gp.

Bondor, male human P10: AC -2 (*platemail* +3, *ring of protection* +2); MV 6; hp 68; THAC0 14 (10 with *scythe* +3, Str bonus); #AT 1 (*scythe* +3); Dmg 1d10+6; SA *inspire fear* (as the spell, 3x per day), spell use; SZ M (6' tall); ML champion (16); Str 16, Dex 14, Con 16, Int 10, Wis 17, Cha 15; AL NE; XP 7,000.

Special Equipment: *helm of teleportation*, *scarab of death* (in small metal container).

Spells Memorized (4/3): 1st—*bless*, *cure light wounds* x2, *protection from good*; 2nd—*aid*, *chant*, *withdraw*.

Notes: At the moment Bondor is effectively a 3rd-level priest as far as spellcasting goes. The PCs may not even realize that he's a priest at first, since he's

Tidying Up

You can use the Black Keep to wrap up a few loose ends in your campaign if desired. Has a powerful recurring villain in your story plagued the PCs since they were green youths? Did an adversary they faced during the events in Chapter 3: Interlude, or an apocalyptic side trek, escape them? Such a character would make a superb employee for Garloth.

Substituting familiar NPCs from your campaign for those named here lets you personalize the storyline. Encountering long-term adversaries is a great way to set up a penultimate showdown, a warmup before the main event, and reinforces just how high the stakes are. It also gives the players a sense of closure, even if their characters ultimately fail to rescue their world.



likely to just wade into combat. (The scythe may give it away, though.)

Bondor is a priest of the God of Death, drawn to Garloth's castle by the stench of slaughter. Although he has lost most of his spells as the world drifts away from the Outer Planes, Bondor is not afraid. He knows that this is the origin of the great cataclysm about to sweep over the world. Even out of contact with his god, this is where he must be when the world ends. Bondor awaits the single second that will reap millions of souls and send him on to commune with his deity.

Fiona presented Bondor to Garloth as just another killer for hire. Bondor plays the part well. Few know death as well as he.

Dromond, male dwarf F13: AC -3 (*chainmail +4, shield +3*); MV 6 (24); hp 91; THAC0 6 (1 with *battle-ax +4, specialist bonus, Str bonus*; 5 with *light crossbow of speed*); #AT 5/2 (*battle-ax +4*) or 2 (*light crossbow of speed*); Dmg 1d8+11/1d8+11 or 1d4+1/1d4+1; SD resistant to poison and spells (+4 save); SZ M (4'7"); ML champion (15); Str 18/91, Dex 11, Con 17, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 10; AL NE; XP 10,000.

Special Equipment: boots of speed, ring of regeneration.

Notes: Dromond likes to surprise opponents. He plods forward slowly, then flanks his foes with a tremendous boost from his *boots of speed*. He is particularly good at catching spellcasters off guard and chopping them into pulp.

Dromond is a renegade dwarf mercenary. Kicked out of his clan at the tender age of 35 for killing his cousin in a duel, Dromond went out into the world and made a living doing what he did best: killing people. He rates himself the best ax-and-shield fighter alive, and he might not be wrong. Garloth hired him as a bodyguard a year ago, and he pays the dwarf well. Dromond has stayed on because he hopes the wizard can save him from the impending disaster—certainly no one else will.

Fetch, male human T8: AC 0 (*bracers of defense, AC 3, Dex bonus*); MV 12; hp 34; THAC0 17 (15 with *shortsword of quickness*); #AT 1 (2 with *short-*

sword of quickness); Dmg 1d6+2; SA backstab (3× damage); SD *invisibility*, thieving skills; SZ M (5' tall); ML steady (11); Str 15, Dex 17, Con 14, Int 7, Wis 8, Cha 8; AL LN; XP 5,000.

Special Equipment: ring of invisibility, potion of strength.

Special Abilities: Thieving skills—CW 95%, DN 66%, F/RT 70%, HS 75%, MS 89%, OL 20%, PP 25%, RL 0%.

Notes: Fetch is set up for one good backstab. He'll use his *ring of invisibility* to sneak up on an appropriate target, drink the potion, and drive his sword home. You should choose a victim for Fetch before the battle begins, representing the preferred target assigned by Garloth (for example, "the most dangerous warrior"). If that PC is killed (by him or someone else), Fetch slips away to his master for new orders.

Fetch was brought up within the walls of a monastery. The priests of the God of Death bought him from a slave trader and raised him in their compound. From his earliest days in the monastery, he served the priests and got them whatever they needed. They taught him how to sneak, steal, and kill. He may have had a name once, but now he is known only as "Fetch."

Fetch's monastery was recently attacked by an angry mob and destroyed. He survived the attack but was lost without the priests to tell him what to do. Garloth found him there and took him back to his castle; since then he has found Fetch very useful. The man may be a simpleton, but he is dogged once given an order.

3B. Xeron and Nogliblis

Two wizards share this chamber, and its contents reflect their profession.

The room smells faintly of sandalwood and sulfur, and a haze of smoky incense hangs in the air. Two long hardwood tables, covered with a multitude of unusual objects, dominate the room. Most of the objects are nonmagical equipment of the sort used in researching arcane spells: beakers and retorts filled with strangely colored liquids; phials and periapts containing unknown viscous fluids; skulls of various creatures, many



incised with astrological symbols; tiny glass and clay jars full of powdered herbs; an hourglass containing red sand; clay and metallic kettles; sticks of colored chalk; ink pots and quill pens; a great number of white and black candles; and three mortar-and-pestle sets of varying sizes. A pair of simple wooden beds, their covers unmade, are set against opposite walls. Several finely sculpted marble, stone, and bronze statues of mythical creatures stand on columns around the room, each worth a small fortune.

Xeron, male human Tra9: AC -3 (*bracers of defense*, AC2, *cloak of displacement*, *staff of power*, Dex bonus); MV 12; hp 42; THAC0 18 (16 with *staff of power*); #AT 1; Dmg 1d6+2; SA targets of Alteration spells get -1 save, spell use, *staff of power*; SD +4 to all saving throws, +1 additional save vs. Alteration spells, spell use, *staff of power*; SZ M (5'4" tall); ML elite (13); Str 13, Dex 15, Con 16, Int 16, Wis 11, Cha 9; AL NE; XP 6,000.

Special Equipment: *staff of power* (23 charges), *amulet of life protection*.

Spells Memorized (5/4/4/3/2) 1st—*burning hands*, *charm person*, *jump*, *magic missile*, *shocking grasp*; 2nd—*detect invisibility*, *improved phantasmal force*, *invisibility*, *levitate*; 3rd—*fireball*, *fly*, *hold person*, *slow*; 4th—*ice storm*, *phantasmal killer*, *stoneskin*; 5th—*cone of cold*, *teleport*.

Notes: Xeron knows how to use spells to best effect. If warned of the PCs' approach, he prepares for battle by casting *stoneskin* and then *invisibility*.

Xeron is Garloth's apprentice. Garloth found him living on the streets and took him to the castle. At first the boy was no more than a domestic servant, but eventually Garloth began to train him in the magical arts. Xeron was smart and had a natural aptitude, especially for Alteration magic. As he grew in power, he was able to aid Garloth in his research. It was he who was tasked to drain Garloth's blood in making the *armor of lies* (see the Appendix); this act of trust sealed Xeron's loyalty forever.

Xeron is concerned about the signs of the end times but trusts Garloth to make good their escape.

Despite Garloth's utter evil, Xeron is loyal unto death. The prince rescued him from a cruel fate and gave him the power of magic. These are gifts he cannot forget.

Nogliblis, male gnome Ill11: AC -2 (*robe of the archmagi*, *cloak of protection* +3, Dex bonus); MV 6; hp 37; THAC0 18; #AT 1 (*dagger*); Dmg 1d4; SA targets of Illusion spells get -1 save, spell use; SD +1 to all saving throws, +4 additional save vs. wands, staves, rods, and spells, +1 additional save vs. Illusion spells, spell use; SW 20% failure chance when using magical items; MR 5%; SZ S (3'7" tall); ML steady (12); Str 9, Dex 18, Con 15, Int 16, Wis 8, Cha 5; AL CN; XP 8,000.

Special Equipment: *gloves of missile snaring*, *robe of the archmagi*, *wand of wonder*.

Special Abilities: SW—failure chance 20% when attempting to use magical items other than armor, shields, and illusionist gear.

Spells Memorized (5/5/5/4/4): 1st—*burning hands*, *change self*, *color spray*, *phantasmal force*, *spook*; 2nd—*blindness*, *blur*, *improved phantasmal force*, *invisibility*, *levitate*; 3rd—*delude*, *flame arrow*, *invisibility*, 10' radius, *Melf's minute meteors*, *spectral force*; 4th—*fire shield*, *illusionary wall*, *phantasmal killer*, *stoneskin*; 5th—*advanced illusion*, *feeblemind*, *passwall*, *teleport*.

Notes: Nogliblis is unbalanced and thus hard to predict. One round he might flee in seeming terror, only to turn around and unleash a *flame arrow* on the next.

Nogliblis has always been a little crazy. He took up Illusion magic so he could finally show others what he saw in his mind, proving beyond a doubt that he was not at all normal. Nogliblis specializes in the creation of monsters: His feverish imagination creates eldritch horrors, which he makes seem real with magic.

Garloth hired the mad gnome because he found the little illusionist amusing. Nogliblis performs for the prince and is happy to have found someone who appreciates his vision. However, he is hardly a steadfast follower. In the face of determined opposition, he's likely to flee.



3C. Fiona and Lyssana

Garloth's two female followers, a fighter and a thief, share this chamber, which is decidedly more orderly and more richly furnished than the other henchmen's quarters.

Two enormous teakwood beds inlaid with gold and platinum, a matching wardrobe, and two matching storage chests take up one side of the room. Also here is a lacquered-wood folding screen decorated with the inlaid silver image of a crane taking flight; a full-length oval mirror in a gold frame encrusted with pearls; and a mahogany washstand with a platinum basin and matching water jug. Costly silk tapestries, worked with gold thread and depicting various landscapes, drape the walls; luxurious, thick rugs cover the marble floor.

Lyssana, female elf T11: AC -3 (*leather armor* +5, *cloak of protection* +2, Dex bonus); MV 12; hp 47; THAC0 15 (13 with *short sword* +2, 8 with *dagger of throwing* +4); #AT 1 (*short sword* +2) or 2 (*daggers of throwing* +4); Dmg 1d6+3 or 2d4+5/2d4+5; SA backstab (4x damage); SD thieving skills, 90% resistant to *sleep* and *charm* spells; SZ M (5'2" tall); ML elite (13); Str 16, Dex 19, Con 11, Int 11, Wis 13, Cha 16; AL NE; XP 7,000.

Special Equipment: two *daggers of throwing* +4, *slippers of spider climbing*.

Special Abilities: Thieving skills—CW 90%, DN 95%, F/RT 50%, HS 95%, MS 95%, OL 55%, PP 75%, RL 20%.

Notes: Lyssana's favorite tactic is to climb a wall and lurk in shadows or on the ceiling (easily done with the *slippers*). She then uses her two *daggers of throwing* to pick off targets.

Lyssana is an outcast, shunned for her indifference to the great achievements of elven civilization. Idealistic from an early age, she advocated that her people come out of the forest and interact with the world. She actually dared to suggest that elves might learn from humans and other races. For that she was stripped of her status and exiled.

Once in the outside world, Lyssana was forced to turn to petty theft to survive. An elven woman

alone on the backstreets is an easy mark, so she learned to use daggers for fighting off brutes and panderers. She was later able to turn a profit from her hard-won skills, becoming well known as a master thief. Garloth hired her for intelligence work but won her over by treating her with respect.

Fiona, female human F14: AC -3 (*platemail of fear*, *cloak of the bat*, Dex bonus); MV 6; hp 75; THAC0 6 (1 with *two-handed sword*, +4 *defender*); #AT 5/2 (*two-handed sword*, +4 *defender*, specialist bonus); Dmg 1d10+7/ 1d10+7; SA *net of entrapment*; SD +2 to all saving throws; MR 10%; SZ M (5'11"); ML fanatic (18); Str 17, Dex 17, Con 15, Int 13, Wis 14, Cha 14; AL LE; XP 10,000.

Special Equipment: *amulet of life protection*, *eyes of the eagle*, *net of entrapment*, *potion of fire giant strength*.

Notes: If she hears intruders approaching, Fiona will immediately drink her *potion*. Throughout the battle she shouts apocalyptic slogans, which may lead the PCs to believe that Garloth planned the end of the world. In fact, the prince would be just as surprised to hear the fanatical battle cries of his "mercenary."

Fiona is right where she always knew she'd be. Her parents belonged to an apocalyptic cult that predicted an end to the world within 50 years. Using complex astrological formulas, they calculated the exact date and time to conceive their daughter. According to the signs, their progeny would herald the end. They may have been crazy, but they turned out to be right.

Brought up in the cult, Fiona never knew another life. She was trained in combat and inured to death and bloodshed from childhood. She knows that she is destined to play a role in the end of the world. In fact she is very special, born with a natural resistance to magic and malign effects.

Garloth has no idea of Fiona's background. She found him by posing as a simple mercenary. Her skills were amazing, so he hired her immediately. She has since lurked in the background, watching the signs reveal themselves one by one. These are the end times, and she is in the right place.

4. Staircase

This freestanding wrought iron spiral stair winds from the lower hall to the upper level. The



greenish-white luminescence spills down the stairwell, and the sound of a single voice rising and falling in a rhythmic chant can be clearly heard by anyone at the foot of the stair. (This is the sound of Garloth's current spell in progress.)

5. Treasure Vault

Garloth calls this chamber his "treasure vault," but it is really more of a storehouse for his vast collection of stolen art and looted riches. You may want to include famous relics, works of art, and the like from your campaign that the PCs are familiar with, from rumor or personal experience. Untold wealth is here, but if the PCs stop long enough to catalog it, they risk losing everything. If necessary, remind them that the fate of their world hangs in the balance and that they can count their newfound riches later.

Upper Level

6. Spiral Staircase

The wrought iron staircase connects this floor to both the ground level and the roof. An iron trapdoor, bolted from this side and enchanted with a *wizard lock* spell, is set in the ceiling at the top of the stairs.

The party may have decided to bypass the keep's apparently solid wall and its living portal for a straightforward airborne assault. Entry through the roof is considerably easier—with a spellcaster or item powerful enough to overcome Garloth's *wizard lock*. On opening the trapdoor from the roof level, the PCs are greeted by a burst

of flickering, greenish-white luminescence and the sound of a chanting voice.

7. The Captive Stone

The octagonal upper hall is filled with the same sickly greenish-white glow that plays about the upper levels of the keep's exterior; it emanates from the captive *Stone of Corbinet*. The *Stone* is imprisoned in a multifaceted crystalline globe approximately 3

feet across, suspended several feet above the marble floor by a framework of what looks like wrought iron studded with 3-inch-long iron thorns.

Before the *Stone* stands the party's quarry, Prince Garloth, chanting and gesturing as he works a mighty enchantment. His face is drawn and haggard as he frantically draws on the *Stone's* divine powers to complete the spell, which he hopes will take him to safety. Even if he hears the PCs pounding up the stairs or breaking through the trapdoor to confront him, he will not cease unless physically interrupted. He has cast a *contingency* spell to trigger

improved invisibility should anyone enter the room, giving him time to cast his suite of defensive magic. (See "Garloth's Tactics" below.) If interrupted, he flies into a rage, berating his attackers for "ruining his last chance."

8. Garloth's Private Chamber

It is doubtful that the PCs will have the opportunity to inspect this room before the final confronta-



Prince Garloth Pescheour

20th-level human mage

Alignment: Chaotic Evil

AC: -4

Move: 12

THAC0: 14

Hit Points: 54

Strength: 11

Intelligence: 18

Dexterity: 16

Wisdom: 10

Constitution: 15

Charisma: 13

Size: M (6'3" tall)

Magic Resistance: Nil

Morale: Champion (16)

Age: 41

Weight: 190 lbs.

Hair/Eyes: Black/Gray

Weapon Proficiencies: Dagger, darts, staff.

Nonweapon Proficiencies: Ancient History (17), Ancient Languages (18), Armorer (16), Astrology (18), Dancing (16), Engineering (15), Etiquette (13), Heraldry (18), Herbalism (16), Reading/Writing (19), Religion (10), Riding (13), Swimming (11), Spellcraft (16), Stonemasonry (9).

Languages: Common, dwarven, elven, gnome.

Armor: *Armor of lies*, ring of protection +4

Weapons: *dagger of venom* (6 doses), four darts of homing

No. of Attacks: 1 (*dagger of venom*) or 3 (*darts of homing*)

Damage: 1d4+1 or 1d6+3/1d6+3/1d6+3

Magical Items: *girdle of many pouches*, *ring of fire resistance*, *wand of lightning* (48 charges)

Special Attacks: A hit with the *dagger of venom* requires the target to make a successful saving throw vs. poison or die.

Special Defenses: The *armor of lies* grants its wearer the ability to cast *polymorph self* at will (*true seeing* or a *gem of seeing* has no effect). The armor also protects Garloth from all attempts at scrying, detection, and mind reading.

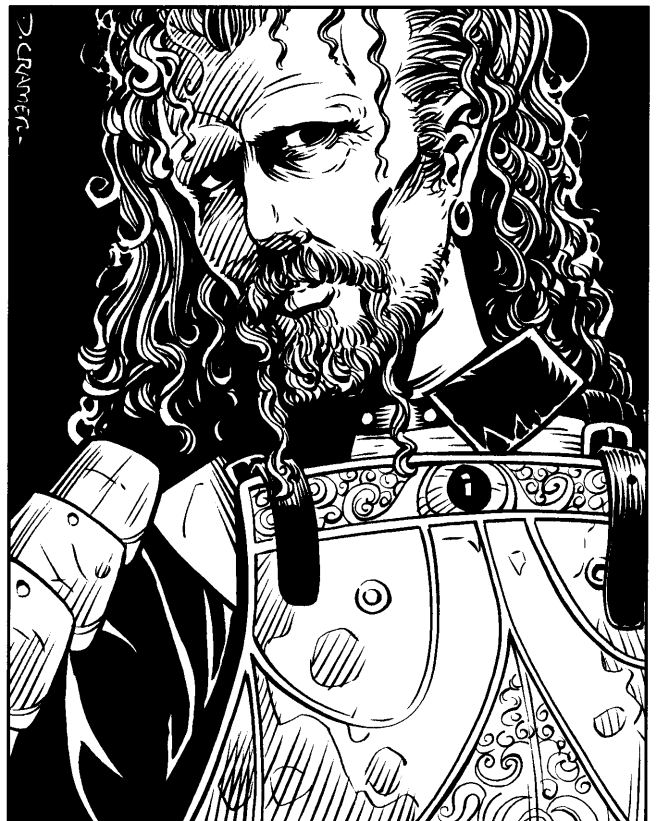
Spells/Day: 5/5/5/5/5/4/3/3/2

Spells Memorized: 1st—*burning hands*, *hold portal*, *magic missile* ×2, *protection from good*; 2nd—*blur*, *detect good*, *invisibility*, *mirror image*, *web*; 3rd—*dispel magic* ×2, *fireball*, *protection from*

normal missiles, *slow*; 4th—*confusion*, *fire shield*, *ice storm*, *Otiluke's resilient sphere*, *stoneskin*; 5th—*cone of cold* ×2, *feeblemind*, *transmute rock to mud*, *wall of force*; 6th—*chain lightning*, *death spell*, *globe of invulnerability*, *flesh to stone*; 7th—*finger of death*, *power word stun*, *prismatic spray*; 8th—*power word blind*, *prismatic wall*, *symbol*; 9th—*meteor swarm*, *power word kill*.

Garloth is a classic spoiled brat. As he grew up, sure of his place as the crown prince of Castle Pescheour, his every need was catered to. Unlike Alain, he never learned that such privilege has a price. Garloth never cared a whit for the castle, the *Stone*, or his family's honor. He saw the *Stone* as nothing more than a token of kingship and failed to recognize the duty his family had to the gods. He wanted only the king's power, which is exactly why his father passed him over in favor of Alain.

After he left Castle Pescheour, Garloth abandoned what little conscience he had possessed to pursue a path of utter evil. Considering the kingship his birthright, he was ready to do anything to make it his. Garloth fell into a world of dark passions and darker magic, which culminated in his plan to steal the *Stone of Corbinet*. Even when it was clear that his actions were bringing about the apocalypse, he refused to consider bringing the *Stone* back to Castle Pescheour. If he can't be king, then the whole world can burn.





tion—what are they doing rummaging through Garloth’s bedroom when the world depends on them? But should they have occasion to examine it, perhaps after the fact, they find that its interior is evidence of their foe’s excellent taste.

The room reflects the best of everything the world has to offer, from the furniture to the rugs, the tapestries to the sculptures, the clothing to the wine. The opulence that Garloth has crammed into such a small space truly boggles the mind. To any collector of the world’s very best appointments and art objects, the total worth of the contents of this room would be impossible to measure. The massive, hardwood four-poster bed is covered in the skins of some of the world’s most exotic and rare creatures.

9. Private Treasure Chamber

Like Garloth’s private room, this chamber is simply stuffed with magnificent treasures. Instead of art objects and sumptuous clothing, though, this is the repository of the world’s finest magical creations. This door too is sealed with a *wizard lock*.

Garloth almost never enters this room or uses the fabulous items within; a true miser, he takes pleasure in simply hoarding them. The trove of artifacts can serve to wrap up parts of your storyline without unduly disrupting the game—the world is ending anyway! Is there a famous lost treasure in your campaign world? Place it here as the answer to an ancient mystery. Do you want to introduce legendary items such as the *Mighty Servant of Leuk-o*? Here’s its long-lost resting place.

Should the PCs achieve the nearly impossible goal of restoring the *Stone* and saving the world, it would not be a good idea to have them running about with artifacts of godlike power. Some of them may vanish again among the planes when the world is restored; a particularly significant item can be a hook to begin the next campaign; or the characters can be “retired” to join the Pescheour family in defending the *Stone of Corbinet* and the world.

Garloth’s Tactics

Garloth, despite his great power, has the problems all wizards share: low hit points and vulnerability in combat. However, as an archmage, he is adept at using magic to offset his weaknesses. If the PCs break into Garloth’s castle through the ground level, the noise of their entry and subsequent combat with his minions will alert him to prepare his potent defenses (although, as mentioned above, he will not break off his ritual until the intruders enter his chamber). The best approach the PCs can take is a quick entry through the roof, though Garloth will call his minions to assist him.

The *contingency* spell triggers *improved invisibility* as soon as anyone enters the chamber (which could be a problem if Fetch needs to get new orders!). Once aware of the intruders, Garloth casts *prismatic wall* as they approach. Thus protected, he casts these spells in the following order: *stoneskin*, *fire shield*, and *globe of invulnerability*.

Now that the jig is up, Garloth has no qualms about offering the PCs a deal. (It’s also a good way to buy time so he can complete his defenses.) He promises that if they don’t attack, he will help them escape their world’s destruction. He means what he says, but even if the PCs trust him it avails them nothing, for Garloth can no more escape this sun-drenched world than they can, whether he possesses the *Stone* or not.

If a battle starts, though, Garloth does not waste time. He opens up with a *meteor swarm* targeted at the toughest fighter in the party. He follows up with a *power word, kill* aimed at the most powerful wizard. Since Garloth studied the PCs before choosing them as his dupes, he is very knowledgeable about what they can and cannot do. So, for instance, if your group has foiled you repeatedly with classic tricks, be sure that Garloth has an appropriate counter.

After his initial volley, Garloth lets loose with as many high-damage, area-effect spells as he can, including *prismatic spray*, *cone of cold*, *fireball*, *ice storm*, and *lightning bolts* from his wand. Particularly irksome opponents are the recipients of *power word, stun* or *finger of death*.

If things are going badly for the traitor prince, he may have to make a getaway and hope to recapture the *Stone* from the party later. This would delay his



plans intolerably, though, so Garloth will stick around as long as he can without endangering himself.

The End Is Nigh!

What you plan for the future of your campaign affects the outcome of this confrontation more than any other factor. If you've played through the adventure this far without deciding how it ends, it's time to make some tough choices. Here are three options, including suggestions for using each: End the campaign completely, leave its fate uncertain, or use this adventure to change your world and springboard to a whole new campaign. For a more detailed discussion, see Chapter 6: Apocalyptic Advice.

Option 1: Out with a Bang

The PCs struggle with Garloth over the captured *Stone* in the ultimate confrontation. Whether or not they defeat him, though, the outcome is unimportant. It's simply too late to stop the fabric of the world from tearing itself apart, even if they manage to lay their hands on the *Stone*.

Powerful tremors rip through the castle foundation as battle is joined, and the fight continues only until the moment everything shatters. The rain of fire consumes what little is left, and the world swirls away into the cosmic dust from which it was created.

Option 2: As Good As It Gets

It's possible that you *don't* want to end your campaign, but you do want to impress upon the PCs that they have the power to prevent or assure their world's destruction. In this scenario, they defeat Prince Garloth, retrieve the *Stone of Corbinet*, and return it to Castle Pescheour. There, King Alain draws on its divine energy to heal himself and set things right. The world recovers from its near apocalypse and things return to normal, or nearly so. The campaign continues.

This does not, however, guarantee that the lives of the PCs also return to normal. Even though unwitting, their role in and contribution to Prince Garloth's plans nearly destroyed the world: They might well be obliged to atone for their sin before one or more

highly annoyed deities. Alternatively, they might be rewarded for saving the world and elevated to the status of avatars, demigods, or even lesser powers, becoming part of their world's pantheon. They could join or even replace the Pescheour family as the guardians of the *Stone of Corbinet*. These last two effectively retire the PCs and are particularly appropriate if you still want to bring the campaign to an end but do not wish to destroy the game world.

Option 3: Brave New World

All good things, as the aphorism goes, must come to an end. Sometimes you just want something more than what your current campaign offers. This option does not completely destroy your campaign world but does change it irrevocably, opening up a fresh campaign to share with your players.

This adventure's climax has the PCs either defeating Prince Garloth or forcing him to flee. They recover the *Stone of Corbinet* and return it to Castle Pescheour, where it heals King Alain and halts the impending disaster. Despite this heroic outcome, the PCs discover they were too late to reverse the damage already wrought: Their world is irrevocably changed, and already a new order is rising from the old. The former campaign ends at this point and the next one begins, set against this new, yet still familiar, backdrop.

The fate of the PCs can be a pivotal issue in the new round of stories. With extraplanar communication restored, the world's deities assess the damage and decide how to deal with those responsible for this situation. Many of the suggested outcomes from Option 2 above are possible. The PCs might even enter the world's pantheon to replace gods who were cut off from the world through some planar rupture.

Now What?

One way or another, you're probably going to start another campaign. With either Option 2 or 3, this means keeping the existing world; the players might continue running their current characters or create all-new personas starting over at 1st level. Chapter 6: Apocalyptic Advice contains more details on how to make the switch, and suggestions for how the world's altered state affects the player characters.



Chapter 6: Apocalyptic Advice

This adventure is unlike anything you've previously run for your players. The characters have experienced heroism on a grand scale, but they have never before seen their world end. While most adventures are but chapters in the characters' lives, this one ends the book. Since it is the finale of the story you've spun over the years, this climax must be both fitting and satisfying. When the campaign is over, you want your players to look back on it with fondness and a little bit of sadness. What follows is some on advice on how to make this adventure a story to remember and a suitable end to a long-running campaign.

Going Out with Style!

Killing Player Characters

This adventure is for keeps—it's the apocalypse, after all. Even though characters of 15th level or higher are very powerful, some of them are going to die.

You may be tempted to do things the usual way and ease up on the players when everything is going against them. Resist this urge. When PCs start to drop, your players will get the idea that something is wrong. And when clerical magic begins to fail and *raise dead* spells are no longer readily available, you can bet they'll panic. This is exactly the tone you want. When the accepted rules of the game start to break down, the characters *and their players* know fear. That's what the end times are all about.

Remember, though, that no one likes to lose a character. One way to assuage the loss is to ensure that he or she dies heroically. A PC who's about to die should get one last opportunity to do something important and self-sacrificing, such as holding off a monster while the rest of the party escapes, or tumbling off a cliff clutching a villain. Play up the drama of these situations and let the character do some good before his or her demise. If you make it matter, your players are more likely to accept death's finality with grace.

Making It Yours

This adventure has been designed with no particular world in mind, keeping locations and references deliberately vague so it can be used nearly anywhere. However, it will benefit you and your players greatly if you take the time to integrate it properly with your campaign and fit it seamlessly into your world.

You should try to wrap up dangling plot threads in your campaign, before or during this adventure. There won't be a chance to resolve that long-running feud after the world ends! The middle section of the adventure (Chapters 3 and 4) provides an excellent place to conclude these stories. As the PCs wander the world trying to find Castle Pescheour once again, you can throw plenty of additional encounters or side adventures their way. This would also be a great time for the PCs' nemesis to show up and start causing trouble.

Be mindful of your group's power level. No one knows better than you how strong they are and what resources they have at their disposal. Try to gauge how the PCs would fare against the opposition presented here. If you think the encounters are too easy, by all means make them more difficult—or vice versa. Above all, make sure to challenge your players at every step.

After the End

If you're not ready to end your campaign, you don't have to. Either Option 2 or 3 in the previous chapter will let you blow up the world and still provide current characters with adventures aplenty. In this situation, the apocalypse merely closes one chapter; to continue the story, you just need to start a new one.

The PCs could survive the destruction somehow and live to fight another day. Maybe they take Prince Garloth up on his offer to save them, and he actually manages to complete a *wish* spell at the last second, transferring himself and them to a remote location. As the PCs come to terms with the fact that their world is gone, they may experience guilt or shame at their failure and be forced to live with the



knowledge of what they've done. If that seems too melodramatic, have them safely reach a new world where they can atone for their failure by becoming its dedicated guardians. If Prince Garloth also survives, they'll have to figure out what to do with this archcriminal: Punish him, execute him, or force him to join their redeeming activities. Below are some suggestions for continuing your campaign after the apocalypse. (All of these assume that the PCs' home world is destroyed.)

The Great Escape

The PCs might find a way to travel the planes through Castle Pescheour, which is the *axis mundi*: the metaphysical center of the earth.

Through its nature, the castle (actually, its ruins) could very well relocate to the Outer Planes when this world is destroyed. If they can get back there in time, the PCs might travel with it. The ruins can then serve as an excellent base for planar exploration, shifting to a new plane of existence every few weeks. The PCs can explore their surroundings, identify and neutralize any threats, and perhaps try to rebuild the castle. King Alain might remain (possibly replacing a player character lost during the adventure) or leave to find his own peace.

The PCs already have two potential allies—and at least one implacable enemy—on the planes. The God of Justice is inextricably bound up with the castle's history, and the god's avatar did usher them through the tests. That deity might reveal more of the castle's secrets to help the PCs rebuild it, perhaps even offering the chance to restore their original world. Their second ally is not so obvious. They were instrumental in detaining the archdevil Moloch on the Prime, thus ruining his invasion

plans and benefiting Malagard, the Hag Countess of Malbolge. She may be willing to grant the PCs a favor or two in return for their service, inadvertent though it was. Of course, getting involved with archdevils is always a dangerous proposition—especially if their archenemy, Moloch, survived the end of the world along with them. The fiend would be most displeased to find out that the PCs are alive and well on the planes, and he'd be more intent than ever on hunting them down and making them pay.

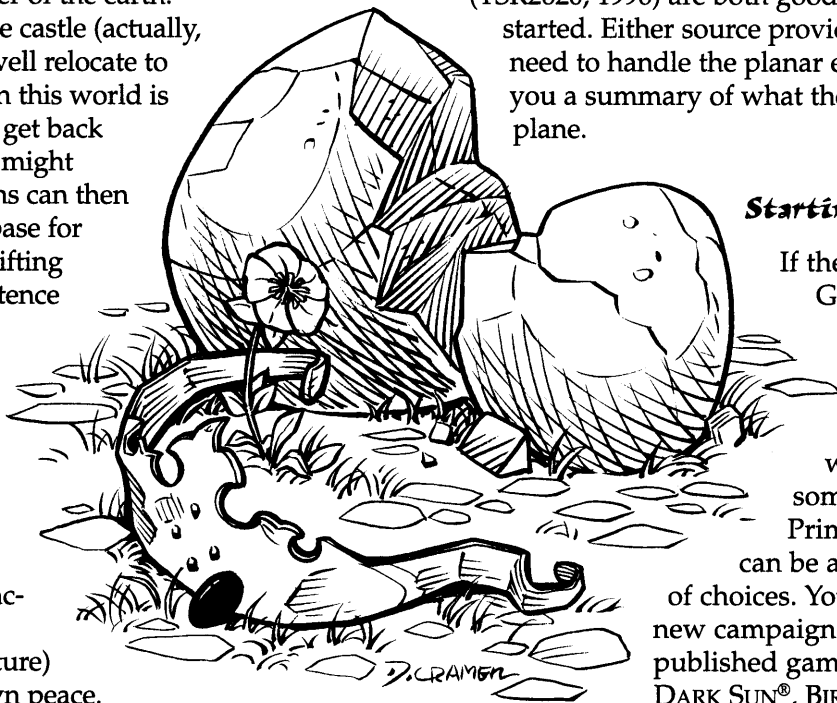
Should you decide to run a planar campaign, you'll probably want to invest in some PLANESCAPE® campaign material. The PLANESCAPE boxed set (TSR2600, 1994) and the *Planewalker's Handbook* (TSR2620, 1996) are both good choices to get you started. Either source provides all the rules you'll need to handle the planar environment and gives you a summary of what the PCs can find on each plane.

Starting Over

If they have defeated Garloth and recovered the *Stone of Corbinet*, the PCs might be protected by the artifact as their world ends, propelled somewhere else on the Prime Material Plane. This can be any Prime world—a lot of choices. You might want to start a new campaign in one of the many published game worlds, such as the DARK SUN®, BIRTHRIGHT®, or

FORGOTTEN REALMS setting. An especially cruel punishment for destroying their own world is pulling the PCs into the RAVENLOFT® demiplane, especially if Lucius is with them. The mists descend on Garloth's castle or the ruins of Castle Pescheour, perhaps taking the entire place with them. The PCs are unlikely to enjoy their new, gloomy home—especially when they realize they can never leave.

Regardless of what world you choose or create, the PCs have a challenging road ahead. They'll be in





a world foreign to them, full of peoples and customs about which they know nothing. They'll need to rely on the *tongues* spell until they can learn a local language, and it will take some time to acclimatize to their new environment. The upside is that the PCs also have a whole new world to explore. If your campaign was getting stale, this is a great way to make a new start.

Divine Retribution

As any student of mythology knows, gods are not always benevolent toward their creations. They can be petty, cruel, and tyrannical; oftentimes the worst thing you can do is call yourself to their attention. The gods rely on worshipers for their power, so you can imagine how delighted they are at having a worldful of followers eradicated. They would be most interested in getting their hands on the fools responsible, and the God of Justice just happens to know who did the deed.

Shortly after the world ends, the PCs are scooped up by the gods and brought before them for judgment. The God of Justice presides over a divine convocation to examine, and ultimately punish, the PCs' crimes—no doubt over the strident objections of your players. With divine power backing it up, though, there is no limit to what you can do. Some examples are listed below, for use or inspiration.

Atonement

The PCs must make amends for their failure. In fine mythic tradition, the gods set them a number of tasks to complete before they can have their freedom back. These won't be easy, and they probably require travel throughout the planes. The advantage to this setup is obvious: It's an easy way to start adventures. Who's going to say no when the gods tell you to do something?

Curses!

The gods curse the PCs and then cast them out, perhaps even setting a mark upon them in the manner of Cain. The curse can be poetic ("You will never find a home again"), practical ("The gods will never grant you spells or powers again"), or cruel ("Your world ends with you; you cannot have

children"). Another possibility is consigning the PCs to one of the prisons of the multiverse, such as Tarterus or Ravenloft.

A horrific curse would be transformation into death knights. This could be deliciously ironic depending on the PCs' interaction with Lucius, but it's also difficult to pull off. Characters with identical statistics and abilities would make for a rather boring party, so you'll need to convert them to their undead equivalents. See the Appendix for guidelines.

Diminishing Returns

The gods may punish the PCs in the cruelest possible way, at least as far as the players are concerned: making them less than they were. If you're feeling kind you can "just" strip them of their magical items; if you're in a very good mood, you might even let them choose one item each to keep. The rest go into the godly coffers as tribute. Much more nasty is to drain the PCs of levels and make them claw their way back up to their former heights. The cruelest (but a convenient start to a new campaign) is to knock them back to 1st level, though it takes really mature players to handle such a transition. Of course, players will complain no matter how many levels their characters lose, but reducing them to 10th level or so is about right. They'd still be potent but greatly diminished, with a long hard road to regain their lost glory.

The Postapocalyptic Campaign

You may decide to let the PCs save the world after all. This doesn't have to mean things immediately return to normal. Too much has happened—there must be consequences. In a postapocalyptic campaign, the PCs have to deal with the changes they have wrought on their world.

Knights of Corbinet

The PCs save the world by returning the *Stone of Corbinet* in time to the ruins of Castle Pescheour. As the world realigns with the cosmos, contact with the planes is reestablished, and its inhabitants



breathe a collective sigh of relief. However, Castle Pescheour is still in ruins, and Alain is king in name only. The PCs have slain his knights and his family, and he cannot protect the *Stone* alone. Though he might not yet have forgiven them their sins, he realizes that the PCs have already passed the divine

tests and are the natural choice to defend the castle. He calls upon them to swear the oath and form the core of a new group of knights. He will need their aid in the days to come.

The first task is to secure the safety of the *Stone*, preferably by rebuilding the castle—difficult when

The Pescheour Family

Depending on how the PCs dealt with Castle Pescheour in the false test, some of the royal family may still be alive. With the world restored to its planar alignment, resurrecting those who were slaughtered becomes possible once more. If you are planning to use the castle as the focus of a postapocalyptic campaign, you may find members of the Pescheour family useful as NPCs or even replacement characters.

There were four members of the royal family proper, excepting Garloth, before the events of this story took place.

King Alain

Alain has been king for ten years and in general has been a capable monarch. He took care of the castle's security and his subjects' needs admirably, at least until Garloth's treachery. His fatal flaw was naïveté. In the castle's closed environment, Alain had very little experience with the real world's intrigue and deceit. He certainly had suspicions about his elder brother, but he never thought that Garloth was capable of destroying his own family. The madness that overtook him was nearly as much the result of disillusionment as it was of Garloth's malign magic.

The actions of Garloth have opened Alain's eyes. Though cured of his madness, in the wake of the apocalypse he looks at the world differently: Paranoia and distrust linger still. Perhaps this is for the best, since Alain will not be fooled so easily again. But if his paranoia grows out of control, the PCs may face their greatest challenge in trying to contain it.

Princess Jeshute

The youngest sibling of Alain and Garloth, Jeshute pursued a spiritual path and left worldly problems

to her brothers. She became a priest of the God of Justice and keeper of the family shrine. Over the years, she attempted to reconcile Alain and Garloth on several occasions and was overjoyed when Garloth returned to Castle Pescheour. Her joy was short-lived.

Jeshute has been traumatized by her time as a naga. She feels as if her soul has been tainted, and this has driven her even deeper into her religion. She is on the edge of becoming a zealot, and Alain fears for her.

Elaine, the Queen Mother

Elaine is the mother of Alain, Garloth, and Jeshute. Her husband died seven years ago, and she has since retreated from courtly affairs. She pursued her interest in the arts, filling her suite with paintings and sculptures before Garloth's spell ruined everything.

The apocalypse turned out to be a galvanizing event for Elaine. After her husband's death, she had felt as though she were no longer needed. Now, with the castle destroyed and Alain bereft of followers, Elaine has found a new purpose. She is using her decades of experience to help Alain rebuild what was lost.

Eric, the Crown Prince

Alain fathered Eric accidentally during a teenage tryst. The mother, a daughter of one of the castle's ladies-in-waiting, died in childbirth, something that Alain is still deeply guilty about. Since Alain never married or fathered any other children, young Eric is the crown prince. Now sixteen years old, he has blossomed into a vigorous young man. Well educated and skilled at arms, Eric seems a worthy successor to his father. It's a pity his inheritance may consist of a pile of rubble.



its location is constantly shifting. The PCs may want to bring in whatever followers still remain to them. King Alain might resist a new garrison simply moving in, and he'll likely demand that the soldiers also swear the oath.

Once basic defenses have been set up, the campaign can go in many directions. Alain could turn the knights into a questing group like the Knights of the Round Table. Rather than just waiting for enemies to attack the castle, the PCs go into the world and root out evil before it became a threat. Alternatively, they could concentrate their efforts on improving the castle's defenses. This could lead to a series of quests to bring back powerful artifacts. One of the *TOMES*[®] series of adventures, such as *Axe of the Dwarvish Lords* (TSR11347, 1999), would serve well for this.

Rebuilding the World

As the PCs observed during their dealings with Moloch and their second test, the social order collapsed in the end times. Even though the world didn't actually end, the ramifications of these cataclysmic events were vast. Entire nations simply ceased to exist. With the breakdown of authority, warlords were quick to spring up; orcs and goblins, needing little reason as always to march to war, sent armies out in their thousands. More organized states sent their forces to grab land from unstable nations and imposed harsh regimes.

Many regions also fell to revolution: border provinces that longed for independence, cities chafing under foreign rule, and nations too dependent on slavery. The revolts in these last were bloodbaths, with former slaves taking vengeance for years of abuse. They are now several "free states" with few resources but plenty of zeal. These are in danger of being gobbled up by larger empires or being taken over by warlords.

As DM you have a big job ahead deciding what happened in your world. With the old order thrown down, it is a realm of limitless opportunity. What role do you want the PCs to play? As powerful heroes, they can really affect the way the world develops. The more lawful among them may want to help restore order in lawless lands, while others

may take advantage of the chaos to carve out new nations of their own. Whether they take the roles of saviors, opportunists, or spectators, their choices will set the tone for the continuing campaign.

Renegades

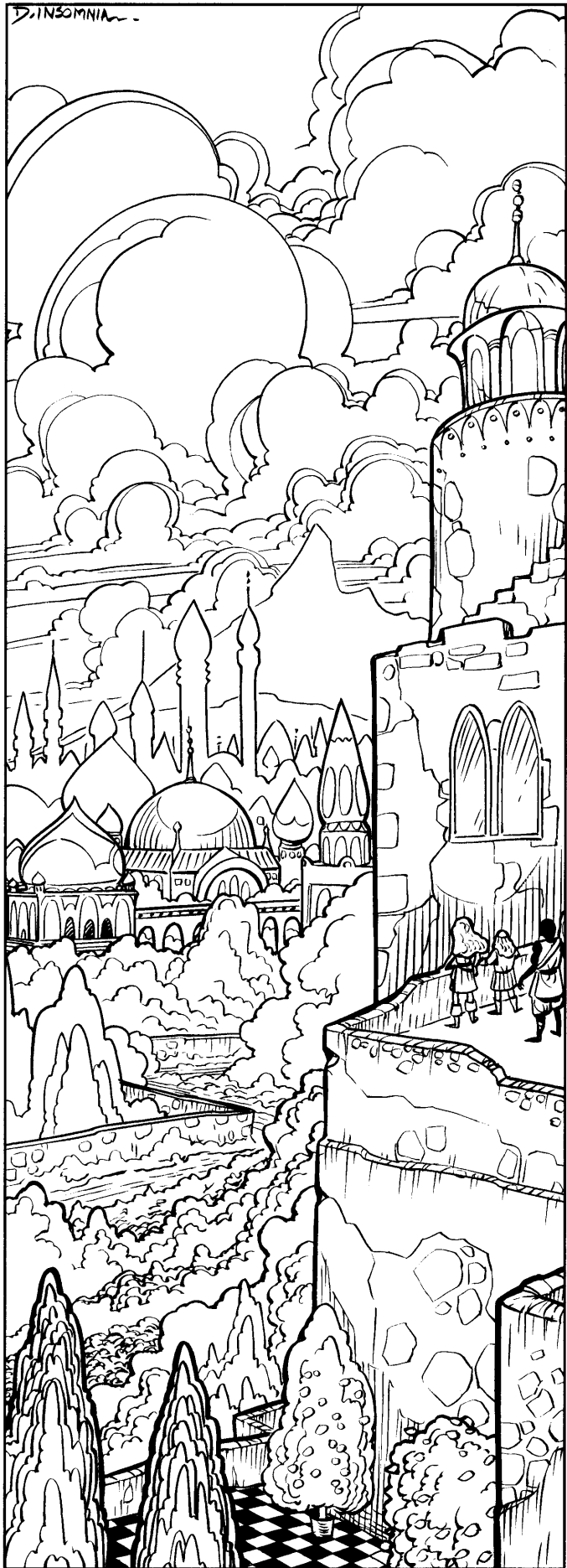
In this scenario the PCs' biggest secret becomes common knowledge. Somehow their role in the apocalypse is discovered, perhaps leaked by Garloth or even Moloch (if either survived). Before they know it, songs of their failure are spread from town to town by troubadours. The adventure began with a feast in their honor, but they are now roundly reviled wherever they go for plunging the world into chaos. Former friends in high places distance themselves from the erstwhile heroes, and even thieves think twice before getting involved with them. If their fall from grace is too painful to deal with, the PCs may decide against remaining in their former lands. This leaves them with a few options.

Seclusion

The PCs retreat from the everyday world, perhaps to contemplate or simply to be unmolested. (Clerics and wizards frequently choose to live on the boundaries of civilization anyway.) The PCs' hidden stronghold becomes the base for new adventures—on their own, since no one is likely to hire them. In remote regions they are much less likely to be recognized, though the threat of discovery is always a concern.

Forward Ho!

The PCs decide to leave all their troubles behind and explore a distant part of the world. Their infamy has not spread to the other side of the planet (at least that's what they hope). Characters in the FORGOTTEN REALMS setting, for instance, may decide it's time to visit distant Kara-Tur. Inhabitants of Ansalon may travel across the ocean to fabled Taladas. After spending a few years in self-imposed exile, the PCs might be able to return and begin life anew. On the other hand, they may find they enjoy their new home.



This World Stinks!

The other side of the planet may not be far enough away from their disgrace for the PCs. They move to a different Prime world or travel out into the planes. Of course, news of their inglorious adventure may follow them even out of their world. . . .

Redemption

The PCs may decide that hiding is for cowards and weaklings. They are going to regain their former glory no matter what it takes. They run around the place madly doing good deeds—and doing them very publicly. It's the medieval version of a marketing campaign, and the PCs are selling themselves. If they pile up enough successes, the public might just forget they almost blew up the world.

Converting the Campaign

If you're planning to change your AD&D campaign over to a different kind of activity, or use a different set of rules for its basis, the apocalypse is the best excuse you'll ever find. The loss and recovery of the *Stone of Corbinet* fundamentally altered the way the world works: It was cut off from the planes long enough to affect physical and magical laws. This gives you an in-game rationale for the changes that came over your world. Following are a few examples of how to explain major changes in the campaign multiverse.

Characters and Skills

After losing access to the Outer Planes and the gifts of their gods, the world's inhabitants had to become more self-reliant. Those who survived the apocalypse all came out a little bit tougher. They also learned to be more versatile.

The most active of the humanoid raiders were the orcs. They looted and burned their way across huge swaths of land, then settled in to stay. Whether as a result of assault or intermarriage, the population of half-orcs has swelled and become more or less accepted in society.



Arcane Magic

During the end times, wizards desperately looked for a magical way to save the world. Their research failed to produce the answer they were looking for, but it did lead to new discoveries, among them metamagic. Wizards now have a better understanding of how magic works and have learned to manipulate the intensity and speed of their spells. They also learned how to enchant more powerful magical items.

As well, with the old order breaking down and teachers vanishing, some spellcasters turned to the power within.

Divine Magic

The gods are concerned that their temporary disappearance did permanent damage to the faith in their churches and cults. To help convince worshipers that the gods have returned in all their glory, they grant more powerful magic to the faithful. Miracles in general also become more abundant as the gods bestow new abilities on their priests.

New Character Classes

Other survivors judged that the world was almost destroyed by its own corruption. They retreated to the mountains to contemplate the nature of existence and the cycles of life and death. Spiritual communities sprang up in remote locations, and some have built monasteries to seek the blessing of the gods. The result is the emergence of several orders of monks. The martial arts, at first developed to keep bodies active and minds clear, soon blossomed into full fighting styles whose teachers were much in demand. In no time at all, monks have become a permanent fixture of society.

Evil humanoids were not the only marauders to invade during the end times' civil breakdown. Hordes of barbarians swept down from the north to plunder and raid. Some settled the new lands, while others became mercenaries or adventurers. Barbarians are now much more commonly encountered in the civilized world.

Appendix

Here you'll find optional rules and more details about the new artifacts introduced in *The Apocalypse Stone*.

PC Death Knights

If you want your campaign to continue with the same PCs, but cursed by the gods, have them share Lucius's dreadful fate. The following rules will help you simulate their new undead existence. Such transformed PCs don't have all the powers of a full-fledged death knight as described in the *MONSTROUS MANUAL*, but they can gain levels and associated benefits.

These rules expand the idea of the death knight to "fallen hero," encompassing all classes. This approach ensures differences between each type of character and preserves the adventuring party dynamic. Each class group forms a death knight "kit," except that in this case the character type is not optional. Once one is cursed by the gods, there's nothing to be done about it.

All death knights are subject to the following rules.

- A death knight's alignment begins as chaotic evil. The character can attempt to change this in the course of the game, but the temptation to do evil always remains.
- A death knight has an AC of 0 regardless of armor or Dexterity. This cannot be improved in any way.
- Ability scores remain as they were in life, with the exception of Charisma, which drops to 8.
- A death knight character starts at 9th level in the appropriate class, with the minimum number of experience points needed to reach that level. However, paladins and rangers are now simply fighters since they no longer abide by their original classes' alignment restrictions. Levels can be gained as normal, with the usual benefits.
- A death knight can use the following spell-like powers at will: *detect magic*, *detect invisibility*, and *wall of ice*. All are cast at 20th level, including those gained at higher levels.
- A death knight has a magic resistance equal to 25% plus 1% per level. Thus, beginning death knight characters resist magic 34% of the time.



- A death knight constantly generates *fear* in a 5-foot radius.
- A death knight character loses all but 1d4 of his or her previously possessed magical items. The DM chooses which remain.
- A death knight character loses the benefits of any previous kit. Instead, he or she uses one of the kits detailed here and cannot change kits without the intercession of a god.

Death Adept (Priest)

Cursed priests are known as death adepts. They are disowned by their former deities and become servants of the God of Death. They usually carry scythes in homage to their new god and take great delight in the reaping of souls. Their servitude is endless: Death never runs out of work.

Benefits: Death adepts can control undead as if they were two levels higher. Starting at 11th level they can create *symbols* once per day: *symbol of fear* at

11th level, *symbol of pain* at 13th level, and *symbol of death* at 15th level.

Hindrances: Death adepts lose all divine powers granted to them in mortal life. They serve Death now, regardless of their previous status. Even druids lose the powers of nature to serve their new, dark master.

Death Knight (Warrior)

The original death knights were warriors fallen from grace, represented by this "classic" kit. They wander the planes, singing dreadfully of their crimes by night and leaving slaughter in their wake. Death knights use their incredible strength and battle prowess to further the cause of evil.

Benefits: Death knights possess fearsome undead strength. The character's Strength score is now 18/00, which grants +3 to hit and +6 damage. Starting at 11th level they can use spell-like powers once per day: *fireball* at 11th level, *stoneskin* at 13th level, and *death fog* at 15th level.





Hindrances: Death knights are always fighters. Former rangers and paladins retain none of their previous abilities, which were wiped away by the gods in retribution. Death knights also do not gain followers as normal fighters do.

Death Stalker (Rogue)

While warriors become looming figures in black armor, cursed rogues are animate shadows. They stalk the city streets, bringing terror to the mortal world. They also serve as assassins, slipping in where others cannot and snuffing out the lives of the servants of good. Death stalkers are the terror in the shadows: Just one can paralyze a city with fear.

Benefits: Death stalkers gain +30% to their Hide in Shadows skill because of their new form. They can also *change self* at will. Starting at 11th level they can use spell-like powers once per day: *wraithform* at 11th level, *shadow magic* at 13th level, and *finger of death* at 15th level.

Hindrances: Death stalkers lose the ability to pick pockets. It's simply not possible to lift something delicately with skeletal fingers.

Bards can still influence reactions, but only negatively, causing hate but not love, or fear rather than loyalty. They also lose the ability to inspire allies. However, they can use their haunting melodies to cause *fear* three times per day.

Death Warlock (Wizard)

Cursed wizards become death warlocks. They look similar to liches, but, unlike those driven mages, did not choose their undead state. They remain masters of the arcane, and their spellcasting abilities are fearsome. Of all the fallen heroes, death warlocks have the least defined role. They can be found supporting the cause of evil nearly anywhere, and their magical ability is much sought after by necromancers and evil champions.

Benefits: Death warlocks can cast *dispel magic* twice per day. Starting at 11th level they can use new spell-like powers once per day: *power word, stun* at 11th level, *power word, blind* at 13th level, and *power word, kill* at 15th level.

Hindrances: Death warlocks cannot spend time researching spells or making magical items. Their curse was meant to torment them, not provide endless time to do research.

The Stone of Corbinet

In the adventure as written, the *Stone of Corbinet* is not in the PCs' possession long enough for them to learn its full capabilities. Once the PCs get it they immediately hand it off to Garloth. By the time they lay hands on it again—if they do—the world ends, or they rush back to replace it in the ruins of Castle Pescheour. In neither case do they have the time to investigate what powers the *Stone* might have. This situation might change, however, depending on how you use this adventure.

Origin

The origin of the *Stone* is known only to the gods. Even the Pescheour kings have never understood where it came from. Although well protected, the *Stone* has always been a danger to the world; a few have even dared to question the gods' wisdom in forging such a weak link to the cosmos. If its removal could end the world, why make such an artifact to begin with?

The answer is simple. The *Stone* is more than the linchpin that holds the world in place—it is the seed from which the world grew. Without it the world would not have existed, nor can it exist with the *Stone* removed from its proper place. This is a truth only the gods are privy to, though they might let the PCs know in the right circumstances.

Primary Powers

The *Stone of Corbinet* has two primary powers. The first has been used only once, and only the gods could repeat it. That is the ability to create a new Prime Material world. Considering the fate of the first, the gods might be loath to try this a second time (although this is a fine basis for a new campaign).

The second and most relevant power of the *Stone* is its ability to anchor a world in the cosmos. It can



hold a Prime world in contact with the planes, facilitating both elemental balance and communication with the gods. This power can only be used if the *Stone* is at the *axis mundi*.

Secondary Powers

Mere mortals have no chance of harnessing the *Stone's* highest functions. However, its secondary powers are also quite impressive, though usable only by the *Stone's* sworn guardians. During the adventure, these guardians are the Pescheour family; afterward, they could very well become the PCs.

- **Sustenance:** The *Stone* can feed up to 5,000 people per day. Those it nourishes have the most satisfying meal they can imagine and feel utter contentment afterward.
- **Communication:** Spells that contact other planes or summon extraplanar creatures automatically work in the *Stone's* presence, as long as it is either in its rightful place or on a different world or plane.
- **Protection:** The guardians of the *Stone* have a 10% resistance to hostile magic. They also regenerate 2 hit points per turn as long as they remain alive.

Tertiary Powers

Anyone who carries the *Stone* for longer than a month becomes aware of its lesser powers. These require no special knowledge to use, but they can be activated only by the person bearing the *Stone*. Anyone who wants to use these powers must bear the *Stone* for at least one month (note that Garloth did *not* do this).

- **Healing:** The bearer can cast a *heal* spell once per day.
- **Divine Wrath:** Once per week, the bearer can utter a *holy word*.
- **Holy Power:** By revealing the *Stone* to a crowd, the bearer makes manifest its divine nature. This acts as a *symbol of persuasion*, changing the

witnesses' alignment to lawful good. This power can be used once per month.

Limitations

Such power is not without its price. Those who become guardians of the *Stone* must abide by the following restrictions:

- They must have a good alignment.
- They must swear an oath that acts as a *geas*. By so swearing, they cannot harm the *Stone*.

Anyone who bears the *Stone* for at least one month becomes attuned to it and is subject to the following side effects:

- The bearer's alignment is changed to lawful good, if it is not already.
- The bearer immediately loses 50,000 xp as the price of attunement.
- The bearer must keep the *Stone* on his or her person at all times. A moment of separation means that he or she loses access to the *Stone's* powers and must reattune.

The Armor of Lies

Garloth's master creation as a mage was this personal artifact. He forged the *armor of lies* from the metal of a fallen meteor and enchanted it with his own god-touched blood to imbue it with semi-divine power.

The armor normally appears as a set of gray, steel platemail, and it provides an AC of 2. But since it was saturated with Garloth's blood, it retains his wizardly power, allowing him to cast spells even with the armor on. Furthermore, the armor grants its wearer the ability to cast *polymorph self* at will. The change is so complete that even a *true seeing* spell or a *gem of seeing* does not reveal the wearer's true form. The armor also protects the wearer from all attempts at scrying, detection, or mind reading.

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Adventure

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Fason Carl and Chris Pramas

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