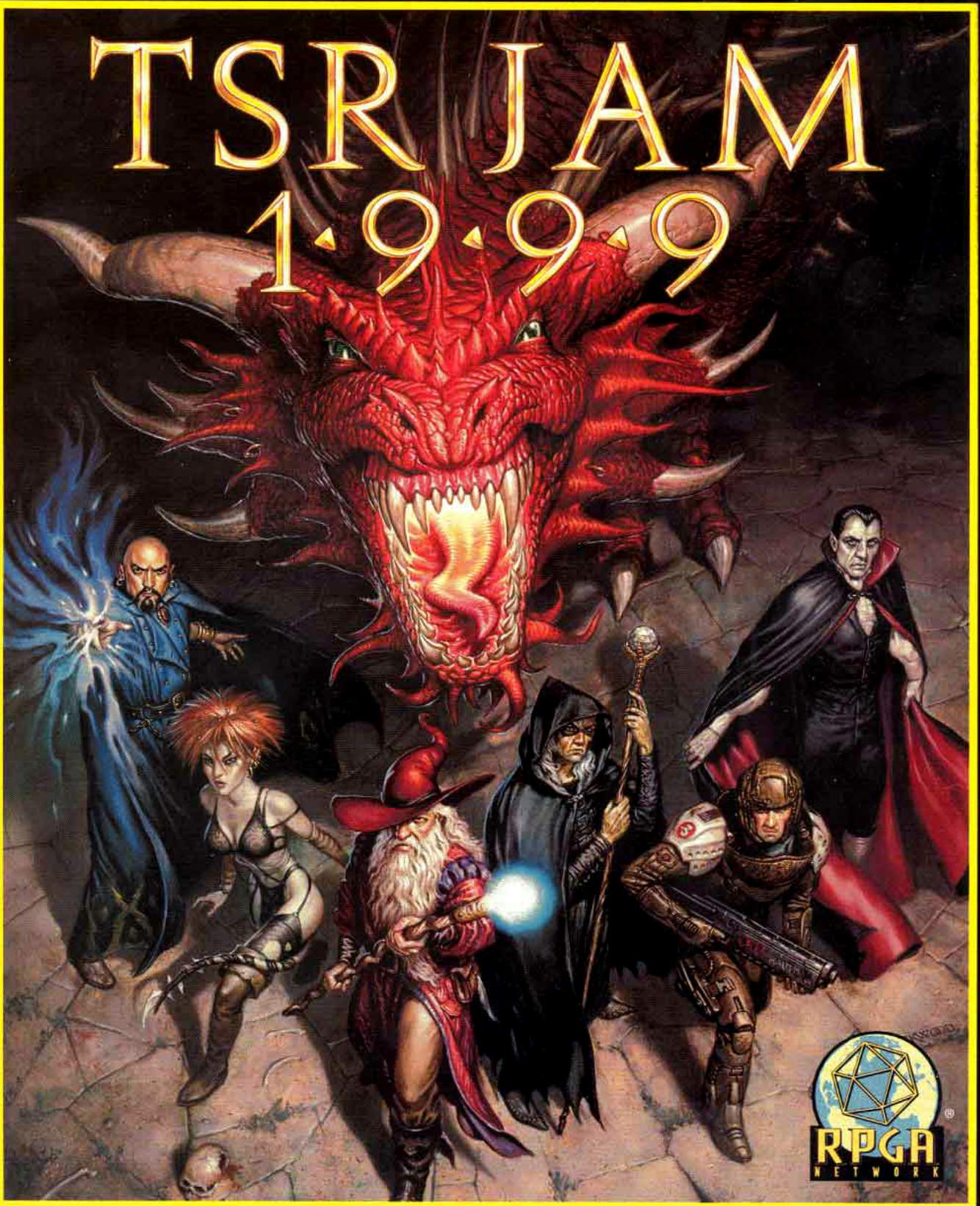




Advanced Dungeons & Dragons

Adventure

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Advanced Dungeons & Dragons



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An ADVENTURER'S GUILD™ Adventure Anthology

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Vale of the Dragon Oracle

An ADVENTURER'S GUILD adventure
set in the FORGOTTEN REALMS campaign world
for four to six characters of 5th to 7th level

by Bryon Wischstadt

Special Acknowledgments: Eric L. Boyd, Ed Greenwood, and Steven Schend

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Vale of the Dragon Oracle" is intended for use as a companion adventure to the FORGOTTEN REALMS campaign setting sourcebook *Cult of the Dragon*. Some spells memorized by NPCs in this adventure are drawn from various sources such as *Cult of the Dragon*, *Powers & Pantheons* (TSR #9563), *PHBR4*, *The Complete Wizard's Handbook* (TSR #2115), and *The Complete Book of Necromancers* (TSR #2151); a DM lacking these resources will need to make substitutions as he or she sees fit.

Setup

The village of Volkumburgh has seen some strange happenings in the past 20 years, but never so many in such a short period of time. Mysterious disappearances of livestock have been increasing, and a shepherd who went to look for his sheep over a tenday ago has yet to return. Although many would consider you crazy, you and your companions have come to dispatch the scourge of the village, perhaps gaining fame and fortune in the process.

The player characters can easily learn the way from Volkumburgh to the Vale of the Dragon Oracle and the general location of the old Temple of the Dragon Oracle from anyone in the village.

DM's Background

The Cult of the Dragon has decided to reestablish itself in the southern Thunder Gap region in hopes of adding to the ranks of dracoliches (or "night dragons," as it calls them), horrible undead evil dragons with legendary powers. Given the prevalence of dragons in the Thunder Peaks and the number of dracoliches both past and present that have called these mountains their home, this area is still a prime location for a cult cell.

The Cult of the Dragon has been active in the area, to varying degrees, since its initial offshoot cells left Sembia (c. 905 DR, the Year of the Rotting Word). The cell that established itself here carried with it one of the original copies of the cult's holy book, the *Tome of the Dragon*. About 200 years ago (c. 1151–1174 DR, between the Year of the Molten Man and the Year of the Agate Hammer), the temple was overrun by evil forces—rumored to have been a horde of orcs—that eventually swept down into the Dales.

In the Year of the Serpent (1359 DR), the Cult returned to the valley to reestablish a regional power base. Necrophants (specialty priests of Velsharoon) from the Crypt of the Arisen Army arrived at the stronghold in the Year of the Gauntlet (1369 DR), answering the call of the increasing number of Velsharoon worshippers among Cult necromancers. The following year a temple of Velsharoon in the name of "St. Sammaster" was constructed across the valley from the old temple, and the copy of the *Tome* was recovered from the old ruins. The relatively innocuous (to the uninitiated) name of this new temple and a concerted effort to maintain a low profile as the extent of their presence served to distract the people of the area while the Cult reconstructed the body of the dracolich Aghaztarn. But the Cult's renewed activity in the area has not gone completely unnoticed by the forces of Zhentil Keep

The Village of Volkumburgh

Founded in 999 DR, the village of Volkumburgh has remained a small, rustic mining and farming community of hard-working, dedicated folk. The village itself is located nearly 100 miles down a weaving trail

south of Thunder Gap. Nearly 50 miles north-northwest lies the Chantry of St. Sammaster. The ruins of the Cult of the Dragon's old stronghold, the Temple of the Dragon Oracle, are across the valley from the cell's current headquarters.

The village has a general store that stocks common items at standard prices (use the lists in the *Player's Handbook*). If the PCs need to spend the night, the Crimson Wyrms Tavern has plenty of space for them. The cottages of the somewhat friendly local shepherds dot the countryside surrounding the village.

Volkumburgh Vale

Lychor the Thunderwizard (a self-proclaimed title), a naug-adar (a minor Zhentarim mage; the name loosely translates as "devil dog"), is also aware of the arrival of the Cultists in the valley. He has been watching the area for some time, and his local activities to gain control of the area have been suspiciously thwarted over the years. This time, he has sent a small detachment of Zhentilar soldiers and Zhentarim wizards to investigate the rumors of renewed Cult of the Dragon activity in the area. If the rumors prove to be true, he intends to destroy the Cultists and use his victory to gain the attention of the Black Network's Inner Circle. The unit has been ordered by Lychor to test the strength of the cell by infiltrating and destroying as much of the Chantry as possible.

The trek from Volkumburgh to the Vale of the Dragon Oracle (where both the Chantry and the ruins of the old temple are located) takes the player characters three days of hard hiking. The countryside seems settled and safe, not to say dull (the better to lull them into complacency). On the third day out of Volkumburgh, have the PCs roll for surprise (apply a -2 penalty to the roll). Then read or paraphrase the following:

In the middle of the afternoon, a monstrous shadow passes over your group. Looking up, you see a gargantuan, dark brownish-gray shape with an enormous wingspan turning back to fly in your direction. It brings its claws forward as it dives to attack.

Wyvern: AC 3; MV 6, fly 24 (E); HD 7+7; hp 36; THAC0 13; #AT 2; Dmg 1d6/1d6 (talons) or 2d8 (bite)/1d6+poison (tail sting); SA poison (save vs. poison or die, suffering 20 additional points even on a successful save), snatch, surprise (-2 penalty to opponents' surprise rolls on first dive attack); SZ G (35' long); ML elite (14); Int low (6); AL N; XP 1,400.

Note that the wyvern avoids combat on the ground when possible, preferring to swoop down with its great talons and snatch up its target. It can carry off Large targets if both talon attacks succeed; Medium and Small targets can be carried off with only one successful talon attack. Snatched victims are held firm in the wyvern's talons, where they are stung and bit each round (at a +4 bonus to each attack) until they cease thrashing and become motionless, whereupon the wyvern drops its prey and returns to the attack. Should a dive miss, a wyvern takes a full round to circle for another pass.

After the fight with the wyvern, survivors of the attack are hailed by a grizzled man in homespun and leathers who calls out to them from the trail behind. Ol' Whistkins (LE hm T7, Dex 17), a spy for the Cult of the Dragon posing as a miner hailing from Volkumburgh, saw the PCs struggle with the wyvern but claims he was too far away to be of any help. If the PCs are severely hurt from their run-in with the

wyvern, he can supply them with *potions of healing* for a price; he has one fewer potion than there are PCs. He says he found these bottles on the dead body of one of "those interlopers" (the Cultists) who obviously had a fatal encounter with the wyvern.

Ol' Whistkins acts like he does not know the true value of such items; if the PCs are willing to bargain, he parts with the potions for a mere 25 gp each. If asked, he says he is aware of the arrival of "those darn dragon lovers" but doesn't know where they have established a stronghold; he recommends they ask at the Chantry of St. Sammaster, just over yonder.

In truth, Ol' Whistkins is a native of Volkumburgh recruited as an agent by a rival Cult of the Dragon cell in Sembia. He was sent to watch the Thunder Peaks cell and periodically report its progress and activities. Once the player characters arrive, he realizes that sending a party of adventurers into their midst is the worst fate he could wish upon anyone and so gladly points out the way. He uses a *ring of invisibility* to follow the party into the Chantry, snatching up unguarded cult items as possible. If events compromise his position, he heads for one of the exits and makes his escape. He has retained a *potion of flying* and two *potions of extra-healing* beyond any *potions of healing* he sold to the PCs.

Assuming the PCs resume their trek, on the fourth day after a few hours on the trail the party can see the dirt and rock tailings from the new excavations the Cult has made, as well as the shattered, volcanic peak across the valley containing the remains of the older temple. The heroes arrive in the middle of a struggle for control of the site; over half of the Cult cell have left the vale to seek out the lair of the red dragon Nevalarich to the west, and the observing Zhentarim saw this as an opportunity and attacked.

The trail you are on widens and the scrub-covered valley opens before you. The morning sun is still low in the sky when you first see the signs of activity in the area. There is a low-lying smoky haze floating in the air that smells faintly of sulfur and burning wood. On the slope of a hill ahead to the left, on the far side of the valley, you see the slide of newly turned earth. Following it up the hillside, you can barely make out the entrance to a cave. The shattered hilltop of the old ruined Temple of the Dragon Oracle is just visible, but no one mentioned anything about new mining activity in the area.



If the PCs decide to move forward quietly, read the following:

No more than fifty paces away in a small clearing among the brambles, you catch a glint of steel reflecting the morning sunlight. Looking closer, you see people wearing chainmail and standing in a group, talking.

If the PCs simply continued ahead without any effort to be quiet, read the following instead:

No more than fifty paces away in a small clearing are several warriors clad in chainmail. They obviously hear you and turn toward you. They raise their swords over their heads and charge, yelling "Kill them! In the name of the Brotherhood, kill them all!"

The Zhentilar were watching for members of the Cult cell to return from their expedition to Nevalarich's lair and mistake the PCs for the Cultists. These warriors should outnumber the PC party by about two-to-one. If combat lasts seven rounds, one of the guards tries to slip away to the cave entrance to alert the others. All the warriors carry 1d4 gp and 1d6 sp each. One of the men wears a necklace with Cyric's holy symbol on it (a jawless skull). If captured and interrogated, none of these guards reveal anything to the PCs, fearing the naug-adar's wrath.

Zhentilar guards (male & female human 3rd-level Fighters):
AC 5 (chainmail); MV 12; hp 18 each; THAC0 18; #AT 1; Dmg 1d8 (longsword); SZ M (average 5'6"); ML average (10); Int average (11); AL LE; XP 65 each.

If the PCs trek to the Temple of the Dragon Oracle, skip to that section (page 10). If the PCs head toward the Chantry of St. Sammaster, proceed with the following:

From the clearing where you are now standing, you see a narrow trail leading up the hillside to the mouth of a cave—the obvious source of the freshly turned dirt and rocks. Walking up the trail, you see a large flagstone-paved shelf in front of a carved stone temple entrance across the valley from you. At the end of the trail above you see only a gaping cave entrance.

The Chantry of St. Sammaster

The Chantry of St. Sammaster (see map on page 5), located on the north-facing slope of a mountain in the Thunder Peaks, is dedicated to Velsharoon, god of necromancy, lichdom, and undeath. It is named for one of the foremost necromancers of all time, Sammaster, fallen Chosen of Mystra and founder of the Cult of the Dragon. The head of the Thunder Peaks cell of the Cult (Maezra, Wearer of the Purple) is currently away, seeking to lure the red dragon Nevalarich into a closer relationship with the Cult. She has left less than half of her fledgling cell behind under her second-in-command and fellow Keeper of the Secret Horde, Saerin Fiene.

Setting

The Chantry temple complex is still under construction by its current tenants, the Cult of the Dragon and the church of Velsharoon. The rooms and corridors are magically carved into the dark igneous rock of the hillside, with additional stonework being done with native rock taken from the excavations. The fine sculpting and carving work is all done by hand, as spells cannot commonly achieve the detail required, nor does the use of them convey the proper reverence and humility of spirit that their creators wish to lavish upon the carvings decorating holy areas. The entire complex is dimly lit by torches set in the sconces mounted every twenty feet on alternating sides of the corridors. All doors within open away from the corridors into the rooms unless otherwise specified.

Inhabitants

While exploring the corridors of the Chantry, the PCs have a 2-in-6 chance to encounter members of the Cult of the Dragon or the Zhent patrol. Roll

Random Encounters Table

Roll twice on this table for each encounter. If opposing forces result, the PCs walk in on a fight.

1d8	Encounter
1	3 Zhentilar soldiers.
2	Zhentarim mage.
3	1 Zhentarim mage, 2 Zhentilar soldiers, and Ardalis
4	2 Cult of the Dragon guards.
5	Velsharan specialty priest.
6	1 Cult of the Dragon mage and 2 Cult guards.
7	1 Velsharan specialty priest, 1 Cult of the Dragon guard, and Saerin.
8	Roll twice. If opposing forces result, the PCs walk in on a fight.

Zhentilar Soldiers (6 male & female human 4th-level Fighters): AC 6 (scalemail); MV 12; hp 28 each; THAC0 17; #AT 1; Dmg 1d8+1 (longsword, Strength bonus); SZ M (average 5'6" tall); ML steady (11); AL LE; XP 120 each. Str 16, Int 10. Each soldier carries 1d4 gp and 1d6 sp.

Zhentarim Mages (2 male human 5th-level Mages): AC 7 (*bracers of AC 7*); MV 12; hp 16, 18; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4 (dagger) or 1d6 (quarterstaff); SA spells; SD spells; SZ M (5'6", 5'7"); ML elite (14); Int very (12); AL LE; XP 420 (650 for the one with the wand). Spells (Mage #1): *burning hands*, *color spray*, *magic missile* (x2); *Melf's acid arrow* (x2); *lightning bolt*. Spells (Mage #2): *affect normal fires*, *color spray*, *burning hands* (x2); *flaming sphere*, *web*; *fireball*. Special Equipment: Mage #2 has a *wand of magic missiles* (43 charges).

Ardalis the Bent (male human 10th-level Mage): AC 2 (*bracers of AC 5*, *ring of protection +1*, Dexterity bonus); MV 12; hp 26; THAC0 17; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6 (quarterstaff); SA spells; SD *ring of protection +1*, spells; SZ M (5'1" tall); ML elite (14); AL NE; XP 4,000. Str 10, Dex 16, Con 13, Int 18, Wis 12, Chr 9. Spells: *charm person*, *comprehend languages*, *detect magic*, *magic missile*, *blindness*, *ESP*, *invisibility*, *web*; *fly*, *lightning bolt*, *protection from normal missiles*; *enervation*, *polymorph other*; *animate dead*, *cloudkill*. Special Equipment: *potion of healing*, *elixir of madness*, *wand of fear* (8 charges). Personality: Excessive magic use has torn Ardalis's body, bending his back (hence his name) as well as prematurely graying his hair and wrinkling his skin. He rarely travels without guards, but if he is ever cornered he bargains for his life, only to betray those he struck a deal with later. He has no qualms about killing some of his own forces if it furthers his ends.

Cult of the Dragon Guards (8 male & female human 5th-level Fighters): AC 3 or 4 (platemail or chainmail and shield); MV 9 (platemail) or 12 (chainmail); hp 31 each; THAC0 16; #AT 1; Dmg 1d8 (longsword); SZ M (average 6' tall); ML elite (14); Int average (9); AL NE; XP 175 each. Each guard is carrying 1d6 sp and 1d10 cp.

Cult of the Dragon Mage (female human 3rd-level Mage): AC 9 (Dexterity bonus); MV 12; hp 7; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4 (dagger); SA spells; SD spells; SZ M (5'4" tall); ML elite (14); AL CE; XP 175 each. Dex 15, Int 14. Spells: *chill touch*, *magic missile*; *scare*. Special Equipment: *potion of extra-healing*.

Necrophants (4 male & female human 3rd-level Specialty Priests of Velsharoon): AC 10; MV 12; hp 14, 20, 17, 14, 16; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6+1 (mace) or 1d6 (quarterstaff); SA spells, access to necromantic wizard spells; SD spells, access to necromantic wizard spells; SZ M (average 6' tall); ML elite (14); Int high (13); AL NE; XP 420 each. Spells: *cause light wounds*, *cure light wounds*; *death armor**. Specialty Powers (each once per day): *chill touch*, *speaking with dead*, *spectral hand*. Special Equipment: One of the necrophants has a *potion of gaseous form* and another has a flask of *oil of impact* (3 applications). *spell from the *Cult of the Dragon* sourcebook. The necessary preparations for casting have already been made.

Saerin Fiene, Keeper of the Secret Horde, Second-in-Command (male human 10th-level Mage): AC 8 (*ring of protection +2*); MV 12; hp 35; THAC0 17; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6 (quarterstaff); SA spells; SD *ring of protection +2*, spells; SZ M (5'10" tall); ML champion (15); AL LE; XP 3,000. Str 11, Dex 12, Con 15, Int 14, Wis 11, Chr 13. Spells: *detect undead*, *magic missile* (x2), *wall of fog*; *blur*, *hypnotic pattern*, *Melf's acid arrow*, *mirror image*; *ray of paralysis**, *slow*, *vampiric touch*; *improved invisibility*, *Sammaster's lash**, *cone of cold*, *undead summoning III**. Special Equipment: *potion of healing*, *pouch of accessibility*. Personality: Although a formidable opponent, if things start to look bad Saerin breaks off combat and runs to the top exit (area 16), using his defensive spells to aid his escape.

*spell from the *Cult of the Dragon* sourcebook.

1d6 once for each major hallway intersection. In addition, there is a 2-in-10 chance that the PCs encounter opposition in unlocked rooms. If an encounter occurs, roll 1d8 and consult the table in the sidebar. If a fight breaks out, there is a 1-in-6 chance that more people hear and come running to assist their fellows or at least investigate the noise; roll on the chart to determine the type of group attracted by the clamor. There are only a limited number of Zhentarim and Cultists currently in the Chantry, some of whom will be encountered in set locations (see rooms 10, 13, 20, and 22). Remember to check off any slain from the following tally: thirteen Zhentilar soldiers and five Zhentarim mages (including Ardalis) vs. thirteen Cult guards, two Cult mages (including Saerin), and six Velsharan specialty priests (including Jagdish and Yerian).

Once the PCs enter the cave, read or paraphrase the following:

The once natural-looking cavelike entrance has been widened, allowing up to six people to walk abreast comfortably. The walls themselves are apparently still in the process of being carved to resemble the narthex of some great stone building. The rocky ground is covered with chips of stone from the walls and an occasional stoneworking hammer and chisel. Completed sections remind you of a crypt or mausoleum. A repeating symbol of a crowned skull is carved into the rock at regular intervals. The air here is cold, dry, and stale, smelling of embalming fluids and decaying flesh with an earthy undertone.

Once the PCs are about 60 feet into the cave, allow those with the ability to detect secret doors to make their rolls (checks are at a -1 penalty due to poor lighting); those who succeed notice either the one-way secret door on the west side of the main entrance corridor or the arrow slits on the east side, depending on where they are looking.

1. The Chapel of Sammaster

This nave is dimly lit by six shimmering braziers. Light dances across the sculptured stone walls of the high-ceilinged chamber, and the entire scene set before you sends a chill up your spine. The walls here are in various stages of completion, but they all depict scenes of the same theme—death, decay, and undead—in graphic detail.

The pillars that reach to the ceiling make you think the bones of some incredible beast have been brought here to serve this vile church from beyond the grave. On the wall farthest from you is a huge tattered tapestry hanging above a stepped dais. By the light of the braziers, you can see the monstrous laughing skull portrayed on the rotting banner above the altar staring back at you from its black hexagonal field. Flickering torchlight plays off the silver threads that make up the crown placed upon the skull's head.

Flanking the large banner are two large ragged tapestries emblazoned with two different scenes. The scene on the left portrays a robed man mounted on a horse. Silver fire streams from his body, striking down soldiers in dark armor. On the right is the same man shown as a gaunt and drawn figure, ravaged by age, leading a force of dragonlike beasts and people both living and dead against many noble-looking warriors under a blood-red sky.

On the dais is a tall wooden podium with a small table sitting beside it. Both are draped with rotted, threadbare cloths. Several rows of heavy benches are crowded near the dais. You hear the sounds of combat from beyond the smashed double doors on the east side of the room.

The eastern double doors were broken off their hinges by the Zhents, who have split into two groups. One group has gone deeper into the complex, while the other is currently fighting the guards in the two guard barracks (areas 13) and the hallway between them.

2a, 2b. Sacristies of the Grim Skull

This same description applies to both sacristies:

This room serves as storage for sacred vestments, objects, and books. The south walls are lined with small pegs draped with what were once opulent robes, now all in varying stages of decay. On the other walls, several rough niches are carved into the rock.

Most of the niches are empty, but a few shadowy recesses contain books, weapons, and small religious items (icons and the like). The books are sacred *orison books of the church of Velsharoon*. The weapons are two silver and five iron maces. The silver maces (merely plated, not solid silver) are normally used for ceremonial functions, but they are quite capable of dealing out normal damage (1d6+1) if used in combat. One of the iron maces stands out from the others, being fashioned to look like an emaciated humanoid forearm, its clawed hand clutching a large ribbed sphere. This is the Fist of Velsharoon. The Fist radiates a dim enchantment if checked for magic, but it does not exhibit any alignment orientation to anyone using *detect good*, *detect evil*, or *know alignment*.

In the hands of a good or neutrally aligned character, the mace works like an ordinary, nonmagical iron footman's mace. If used by an evil character, it functions as a *mace +1*. If wielded by a priest of Velsharoon, it becomes a *mace +2*, and its true powers are revealed: a priest wielding the Fist can control undead as if he or she were two levels higher. Any active touch spells can be delivered through it to the person struck. If grasped while a *spectral hand* spell is active, it increases the range of the spell to 30 yards+10 yards per level of the caster (it also adds an additional one round per level of the caster to the duration). If *lich touch* (described in *Pages from the Mages* [TSR #9491] and also the *Wizard's Spell Compendium, Volume Two* [TSR #2168]) is cast while the mace is held, the spell's duration is doubled and the damage increased to 2d6 points.

Those dealt a killing blow by the Fist of Velsharoon rise as zombies under the control of the wielder. These victims cannot be brought back by *raise dead*, *resurrection*, or *reincarnation* spells; only a full *wish* can return life to a being slain by the Fist.

3. The Refectory

Serving as a small kitchen and dining hall, this room has a large cooking fireplace against the southern wall. On the northern wall is a hexagonal black banner with the same laughing skull emblem you saw in the nave. Beneath it stand two hefty wooden tables covered in dishes, pans, pots, and *partially prepared food*; another nearby has been tipped on its side, its top facing the door. Four dining tables

with bench seats dominate the main part of the room, two of them covered with fine linens. Large, hand-carved chairs sit at the head of each of these tables.

There are two cooks in this room, cowering behind the upturned table. They fight only if cornered and threatened, surrendering with alacrity if given that option.

Cooks (2 male & female human zero-level Fighters): AC 10; MV 12; hp 3, 2; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg 1d3 (carving knife); SZ M (5'7", 5'10" tall); ML unsteady (7); Int average (8, 10); AL NE; XP 7 each.

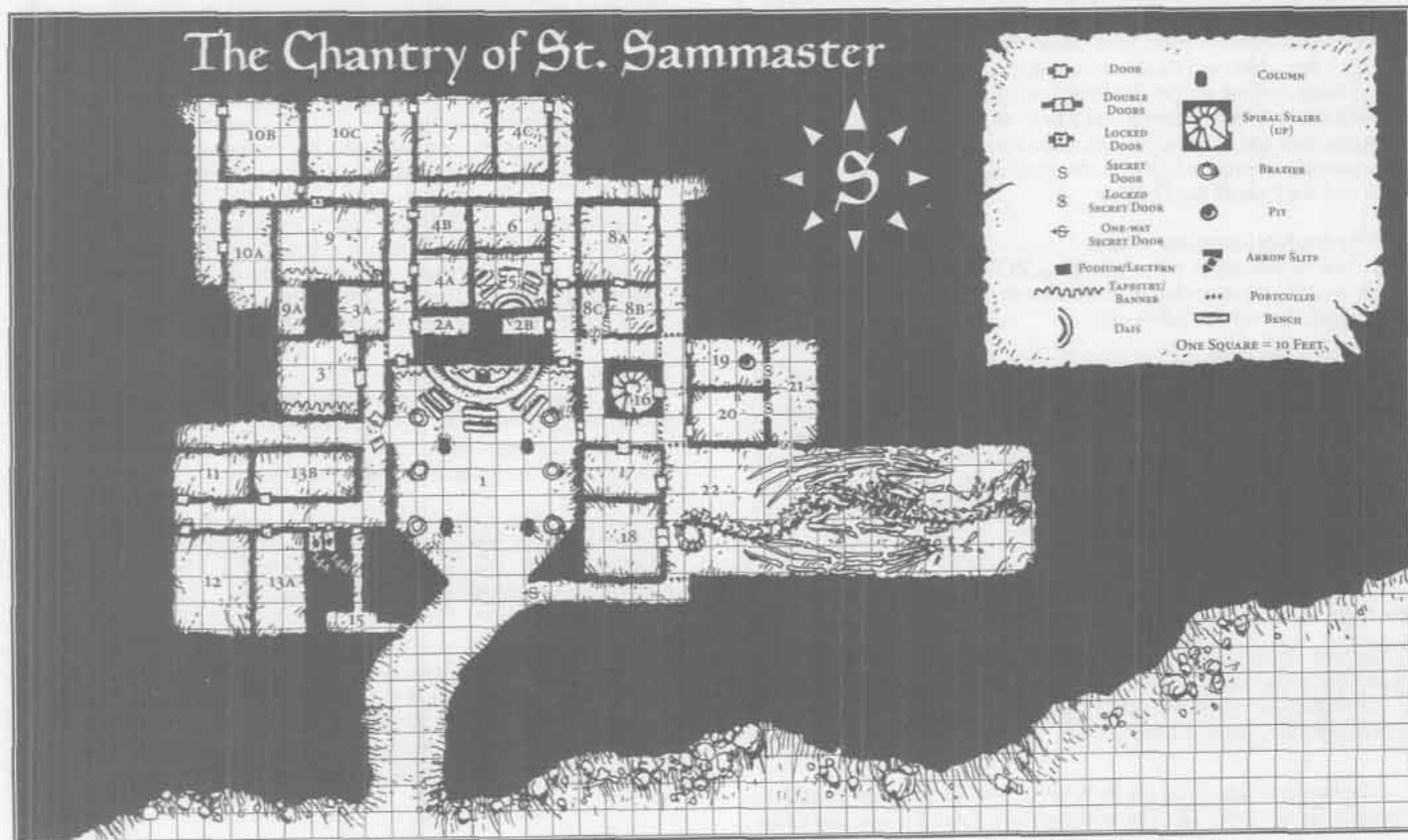
3a. Storage Room

This room serves as general storage for the kitchen and is filled with several crates of apples and potatoes and a few large barrels of wheat. Small racks hold five kegs of ale and three of wine. A large tun has been built into the east wall to store water. A few baskets of dried herbs rest on the floor near the table; a slab of meat and several fowl hang on hooks dangling from the ceiling. From the smell, the fowl have hung here for some time.

4a, 4b, 4c. Priests' Private Quarters

This simple room seems furnished to provide the most function with the least amount of comfort. The bed in the corner is merely a rope-strung frame, the chair and table rough-hewn utilitarian pieces. On the table are a quill pen, an ink bottle, and many sheets of parchment. Coarse wool blankets are folded at the ends of the beds. Except for the laughing skull image painted on the wall opposite the door, the walls and floor are bare.

These three rooms all house the priests of Velsharoon, with plenty of room for future new recruits. The southernmost room (4c) has room for four people, their beds, and their desks. The other two (4a and 4b) can house three each. There is a 3-in-20 chance that a specialty priest of Velsharoon lies in wait in each room.



5. The Altar of Bones

This room has ten simple wooden benches arranged in two columns facing a small lectern on a raised platform. The walls are all covered in scenes of dying humans and demihumans, graveyards, battlefields, and images of death. Across the front on either side of the lectern is a ragged banner depicting the same crowned, grinning skull visage from the main chancel.

This chamber serves as a private chapel for the clergy of Velsharoon. On the lectern is the *Incanabula of Velsharoon*, a priestly prayer book sacred to the Velsharan faith that details the steps involved in performing the Pact of the Everlasting (*Velsharoon's death pact*; a 7th-level clerical spell detailed in *Powers and Pantheons*). Like many items in the Chantry, the tome appears older than it truly is.

6. Acolytes' Cells

As you enter, your nose is assaulted by the smell of embalming fluids. It is a fitting smell for the finished mausoleum decor of this area. This room is subdivided into small cells by flimsy partitions, and the contents of each cell are very simple: a cot, a small table, and a stool. Some unidentifiable gory items on the tables, perhaps rotten giblets of meat, seem to be the source of the vile smell.

There is nothing of interest in this chamber.

7. The Church Library

This room has two large shelves lining the walls opposite and to the right of the door. On the shelves are many tomes and books, all of differing sizes with differing bindings, and quite a few huge scrolls in scroll cases. In the center of the room are four desks with two worn wooden chairs pulled up to each of them. A stack of paper, an ink well, and a few quill pens are neatly placed on top of each table.

The books and scrolls in this room detail religion, anatomy, and necrology. Any PC who studies these books along with cadavers (such as those stored in area 19) for three months gains knowledge sufficient learn the Anatomy proficiency (from *The Complete Book of Necromancers*). An additional two months spent studying would enable that PC to learn Necrology (as described in that book or in the entry on Velsharoon in *Powers & Pantheons*). The books detailing religion are not complete enough to allow the learning of a new proficiency, although they provide an eerie insight into the ideology of the church of Velsharoon and the Cult of the Dragon.

8a. The High Necrophant's Suite

The door to this room is locked. If the PCs attempt to pick the lock, apply a -10% penalty due to the lock's fine construction. Once they have entered, read the following.

The interior of this room is filled with all sorts of items, dirty and clean, arranged around a central examination table: books, embalming equipment, knives, and scalpels. The corpse of a bear cub, flayed open and partially dissected, lies on the table. Its face is pulled back in a grimace of pain and terror, and its eyes stare wildly into the void. Obviously whoever killed it was not possessed of much sentiment for fellow living creatures.

8b. High Necrophant's Bedroom

The mass of horrific utensils overflows from the last room to here, leaving barely enough space for the small pallet bed in the corner. More books are piled on top of a small table and the empty wine casks near the bed and door.

The books in this room are from the church library (area 7) and the research library (area 17). The varying texts detail human and demi-

human anatomy and necrology. Also in this room are two books of note—*Draconic Magic: A Study on the Effects on the Nondraconic Mind* by Belgos of Selgaunt and a copy of *Evolution and Creation* by Terrance Balancehand of Scornubel; the latter is open to the section detailing theories on dragons and their place in existence.

8c. High Necrophant's Cache

Cobwebs break apart as you open the secret door to this dusty room. There is a small dust-encrusted shelf along the far wall with a few steel vials on it. To your left, you can see the push-plate to release the mechanism that holds closed a door—a door you don't remember seeing from the outside.

This room serves as High Necrophant Yerian's final refuge if he is cornered. Three of the steel vials contain *potions of extra-healing*. The fourth and last vial contains a *potion of gaseous form*. The one-way door to area 16 is obvious from this side but very well hidden from the outside (-1 to all locate secret door checks).

9. The Wearer of the Purple's Private Chambers

Maezra, the leader of this Cult of the Dragon cell, left with the other absent members to solicit the cooperation of Nevalarich with the Cult of the Dragon. In her absence, her door has been *wizard-locked* (17th level) and barred shut to ensure her privacy. A decorative dressing screen shields the secret door; the secret room (9a) beyond is empty (it is intended for use as a bolt-hole in case the Chantry is overrun). Should the PCs defeat the *wizard lock* or break down the door to Maezra's room, read or paraphrase the following.

In stark contrast to the other rooms in the complex, this room has a luxurious four-poster bed covered with fine linens; plush rugs line the floor. A tall bronze brazier illuminates the room with its warm light, and the room itself smells strongly of an overpowering, sweet incense. A fine desk with a matching chair plumply upholstered in velvet sits in one corner of the room. A folding dressing screen blocks off the rear right corner of the room from your vision.

You hear the shuffle of footsteps from inside as four people who were standing out of your line of sight on either side of the doorway stagger slowly in your direction. Their mouths move in silent screams as they lurch for you with claws ready to rake across your bodies.

Maezra left these zombies here to look after her quarters while she is away. She has permeated the room with perfumed incense to cover up the smell of the rotting zombie flesh. The brazier is currently lit by a *continual light* spell in the form of dancing flames that give off no heat.

Zombies (4): AC 8; MV 6; HD 2; hp 15, 11, 12, 9; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1d8 (fist); SD immune to *sleep, charm, hold, death magic, poisons, and cold-based spells*; SW holy water (2d4 points of damage per vial), always attack last in a round, may be turned; SZ M; ML fearless (20); Int non (0); AL N; XP 65 each.

10a, 10b, 10c. Empty Quarters

These rooms are empty, in anticipation of more Cult members joining the cell at this location. As the PCs are passing down one of the nearby corridors, they encounter two Zhentarim wizards who are searching this area for more Cultists or Velsharan priests.

Around the corner come two fierce-looking wizards in heavy robes. Without a blink, they both start a low chant and move their hands in an intricate pattern.

Zhentarim Mages (2 male human 5th-level Mages): AC 10; MV 12; hp 14, 13; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4 (dagger); SA spells; SD spells; SZ M (5'6", 5'4" tall); ML elite (14); Int high (13); AL NE; XP 650 each. Spells: *affect normal fires, burning hands, color spray, magic missile, Melf's acid arrow, web, lightning bolt*.

11. Guard Meeting Room

This chamber is filled with chairs and a large table. The table has been pushed aside, several of the chairs are knocked over, and all of them bear fresh scratches and slices, obviously due to a recent melee. There is blood on the floor but no bodies to be seen. On the table is a map.

The map is a regional map showing the lairs of living, dead, and undead dragons in the Thunder Peaks area. Also represented are the locations of the village of Volkumburgh and its high pasture and the two Cult of the Dragon strongholds at the Chantry of St. Sammaster and the Temple of the Dragon Oracle. The map may be used as a springboard for further adventures involving dragons or the Cult of the Dragon.

12. Training Room

The floor in this room is covered with a thick layer of straw. The stench of offal saturates the air. Choking back rising bile, you look in to see various weapons in the racks near the door and several shields mounted on brackets on the walls around the room. On the floor are the scattered bones and remains of what you presume were red sheep. A large lionlike body rises from a giant bed of straw in the corner.

The training room is currently being used to contain a young green mantidrake that has turned on the Cultists. She is extremely hungry and rushes the PCs at once; roll initiative to see if she attacks before they have a chance to close the door (if the PCs win, they can either close the door or attack). Only an immediate offering of large amounts of fresh meat will cause her to break off her attack. Note, however, that the mantidrake cannot fit through the doorway; she was brought in here when much smaller and the Cult plans to use magic to move her out of the room once they have reasserted their control over the errant beast.

Green Mantidrake: AC 0; MV 12, fly 18 (E); HD 6+3; hp 30; THAC0 13; #AT 3; Dmg 1d3/1d3/1d10 (claw/claw/bite); SA breath weapon (chlorine gas, 30 points of damage, 4x per day), tail spikes (1d6 spikes, 1d6 points of damage each, 4x per day); SD immune to green dragon breath and all gas attacks (including poison gas); SZ H (20' long); ML elite (13); Int low (6); AL LE; XP 4,000.

13a, 13b. Guard Barracks

These two rooms provide living space for the twenty-eight foot soldiers of the cell (fourteen double-bunked in each room), over half of whom are gone on the Nevalarich mission. Inside the two rooms and outside in the hallway between them, the forces of the Cult of the Dragon and the Zhentilar guards are locked in battle when the PCs arrive. If the player characters decide to wait out the battle or simply leave, the Cult of the Dragon wins this skirmish, killing all the Zhentilar but losing three guards before the fight is done. If the PCs decide to join the fight, they have four rounds before survivors of both two sides join forces to destroy the "do-gooder interlopers." If the PCs retreat after fighting, the two groups resume their battle, with the Cult of the Dragon eventually winning and the surviving Dragon Guards pursuing the PCs.

Zhentilar Soldiers (8 male & female human 4th-level Fighters): AC 6 (scalemail); MV 12; hp 28 each; THAC0 17; #AT 1; Dmg 1d8+1 (longsword, Strength bonus); SZ M (average 5'6" tall); ML steady (11); AL LE; XP 120 each. Str 16, Int 10. Each soldier carries 1d4 gp and 1d6 sp.

Cult of the Dragon Guards (7 male & female human 5th-level Fighters): AC 3 or 4 (platemail or chainmail and shield); MV 9 (platemail) or 12 (chainmail); hp 31 each; THAC0 16; #AT 1; Dmg 1d8 (longsword); SZ M (average 6' tall); ML elite (14); Int average (9); AL NE; XP 175 each. Each guard is carrying 1d6 sp and 1d10 cp.



14a, 14b. Privies

From the odor permeating the immediate area around these doors, you conclude that the jakes beyond need better drainage and ventilation.

15. Chantry Guard Post

Two chairs and an inverted crate sit in this otherwise bare, dark little room. A deck of fortunetelling cards sits atop the crate. The musty smell in this room leads you to believe that guards have spent many hot hours here. The back corner of the room veers off to the left out of your line of sight.

If the PCs venture deeper into the room they see the hidden lookout post.

At the end of the narrow passage are two thin slits opening onto the entrance hall to this complex. To the left of the slits, a loaded crossbow and a loading strap hang on a hook. A full quiver of bolts leans against the wall.

This light crossbow is in excellent condition; the quiver holds 20 bolts. No guard is currently stationed here.

16. Spiral Stairs to the Top

This stairwell ascends 80 feet to the surface and opens to the outside via a concealed trap door. This entrance allows Cult agents arriving via an airborne mount (say, a dragon) to easily land and enter the Chantry. Ol' Whistkins uses this route to escape if he succeeded in following the PCs this far, waiting invisibly until any activities or melee below ceases before venturing back into the complex. PCs who ascend the stairs find they lead to a large oval-shaped ledge (about 100 feet across at its longest axis) on the mountainside.

17. Research Library

This room, obviously a library, is brightly lit, the illumination coming from several fist-sized rocks in small hanging cages suspended from the wooden ceiling. The air is especially dry and smells of musty paper.

Many books line low shelves placed flush against the paneled walls. Two reading tables in the center of the room about a large empty table; on one of the reading tables rests an open book. The western door is open.

PCs who enter by the southern door can see a kneeling figure through the western door. This is Yerian the High Necrophant, who has been using this room as a research reference area for researching dracoliches and their eternal resurrections. He is currently fully intent on reconstructing the shell for Aghaztarn's spirit.

The east and west walls to this room have been designed to be removable, allowing the eventually reconstituted dracolich to pass through from the dracolich reconstruction room (area 22) to the entry hall (room 1). Note, however, that the eastern wall is stuccoed and frescoed on the nave side to appear to be stone like the rest of that chamber.

Most of the books here are from the church library (room 7). This room is where the *Tome of the Dragon* has been stored by the Cult since this cell's members retrieved it from the ruins across the valley; currently, however, Yerian has taken it to the dracolich reconstruction room (area 22).

18. Workroom Storage

Crates, boxes, and assorted small tools fill most of the floor space in this room. Though there are a lot of items for a relatively small space, an overall sense of compulsive organization prevails. Some labels are visible on the containers, saying things such as "Dorsal Plates 4, 5, 7" and "Right Wing Foreclaw."

These boxes and crates were used seven years ago to transport the remains of Aghaztarn from his resting place to this valley. Most are now empty, but some are still full of scales and bones carefully wrapped in gauze soaked with preservative ointments.



19. Storage Room

Though the rest of the Chantry seems chilly, this room is freezing. The room is dimly lit by a few scattered candles just within the door. In their light, you glimpse shelves lining the walls as well as forming a central divider in the room—shelves filled with bottles, jars, and canisters. The labels of their contents are obscured by a fine sheet of frost. Light dazzles on small crystals of ice, covering everything in sight in a sparkling sheen.

The morbid contents of this room serve as instructional aids and samples of completed work for the priests. The clergy of Velsharoon also use this room to store the remains of fallen comrades for later use in defending the temple. PCs entering the room are set upon by thirteen crawling claws and one zombie (the latter wearing a smashed and bent Harper pin). A pit to the rear of the room contains a well-tended brown mold that keeps the room cold and helps preserve the specimens.

Upon closer investigation of the containers and the shelves, you see they hold the remains of beasts and people meticulously stored in groups according to size and type—body parts preserved like pickles in jars, cadavers stacked like rime-crustured cordwood on the lower shelves. You also hear the squeaky crunch of ice crackling beneath slow, heavy footsteps.

Eyes dulled over by a thin layer of ice stare at you as a walking corpse with a ravaged noble visage approaches. Some of the severed hands on the shelves also begin crawling toward you, "walking" on their fingertips.

Crawling Claws (13): AC 7; MV 9, leap 15; HD 1/2; hp 4, 3, 2, 2, 4, 3, 2, 4, 3, 3, 4, 3, 2; THACO 20; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4 (vs. armored foes) or 1d6 (vs. unarmored foes); SA strangle victim; SD cannot be turned, immune to death magic, *raise dead*, *charm*, *sleep*, *hold*, control undead spells, and holy water, half-damage from edged weapons, magical weapons gain no damage bonus; SW rendered immobile by *resurrection* (one turn per level of caster), brittle with prolonged exposure to cold (suffer +1 damage per die); SZ T (6' to 12" long); ML fearless (20); Int non (0); AL N; XP 35 each. All these claws share a limited telepathic link; when one finds a victim, the others move to help it.

Zombie: AC 8; MV 6; HD 2; hp 18; THACO 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1d8 (fist); SD immune to *sleep*, *charm*, *hold*, death magic, poisons, and cold-based spells; SW holy water (2d4 points of damage per vial), always attacks last in the round, may be turned; SZ M (6'2" tall); ML fearless (20); Int non (0); AL N; XP 65. This zombie was Tanlathan, a ranger Harper agent out of Deepingdale. The Cult keeps him here to guard the freezer against any other uninvited guests. They have pinned his Harper pin directly into his chest; the badge is no longer magical.

Brown Mold: AC 9; MV 0; HD none; hp none; THACO none; #AT 0; Dmg nil; SA heat absorption (drains 4d8 points from any warm-blooded creature within 5 feet); SD grows when exposed to heat (doubles in size when near torch, quadruples when splashed by flaming oil); SW killed by direct sunlight or ultraviolet light, forced into dormancy by *ice storm* or *wall of ice* (5d6 turns), killed by white dragon breath, *cone of cold*, or *wand of cold* attack; SZ S (3' wide patch); ML none; Int non (0); AL N; XP 15.

20. Lab

The stench of embalming fluids is overwhelming here. The contents of many an alchemist's workshop seem to have been crammed into this single large room. From the corner a dark figure rushes toward you.

The Cult and the followers of Velsharoon have been using this room to distill and mix the ingredients necessary for their research. The attacker is Jagdish, one of the fanatical acolytes of Velsharoon. She has hidden herself in here at the request of Yerian the High Necrophant in order to distract and possibly drive off the invaders. Jagdish

defends the Chantry with all the fanaticism of a would-be martyr. If she is defeated and the room searched, among the bottles and canisters can be found a jug of sulfuric acid, a crucible of melting (described in the *Tome of Magic*), several pounds of bat guano, a high-quality scale, a small quantity of rotting meat (elf-hearts), a sealed copper flask containing a dracolich potion (described in the "Dracolich" entry in the *Monstrous Manual*), several bottles of thick black fluid (which can be mistaken for dracolich potions but are actually miscellaneous necromantic concoctions), and some fine alchemical instruments.

Jagdish the Necrophant (female human 7th-level Specialty Priest of Velsharoon):

AC 9 (Dexterity bonus); MV 12; hp 33; THAC0 16; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6+1 (footman's mace); SA spells, access to necromantic wizard spells; SD spells, access to necromantic wizard spells; SZ M (5'10" tall); ML fanatic (17); AL NE; XP 2,000. Dex 15, Int 14, Wis 15. Spells: *cause light wounds* (x2), *cure light wounds* (x2), *darkness*; *death armor**, *ghoul touch* (x2)***, *silence 15' radius*; *ray of paralysis**, *undead summoning I**; *assume undead form****. Special Abilities (each once per day): *chill touch*, *speak with dead*, *spectral hand*, *animate dead*, *wraithform*. Special Equipment: a pouch with continual darkness cast within it in which are stored two vials upon which *deathmaster's vial** was cast a tenday ago by a fellow Cultist gone to locate Nevalarich. They will remain active for 10 more days. Each *deathmaster's vial* can be hurled as a grenadelike missile, inflicting 2d8+3 points of rotting damage with a direct hit or 1d4+1 points of rotting damage for a miss that lands within 5 feet of its intended target. *spell from the *Cult of the Dragon* sourcebook (necessary preparations for casting have already been made) **spell from PHBR4, *The Complete Wizard's Handbook* ***spell from *Powers & Pantheons*.

If any creature other than a dragon consumes any portion of a dracolich potion, he or she dies an agonizing death in 1 to 2 rounds as the flesh literally boils from his or her bones (no saving throw). Only a *dispel magic* cast on the victim before death occurs will neutralize the potion and save the victim. The Chantry's Followers of the Scaly Way have brewed this potion to be used on Nevalarich (unbeknownst to them, he serves Aurgloroasa and may not be willing to go through the transformation; see the *Cult of the Dragon* sourcebook for more information on Aurgloroasa).

21. Treasure Storage Room

The secret doors to this room are locked, and only the Keepers of the Secret Hoard have the keys to them: the wizard Saerin and Maezra, Wearer of the Purple. If the PCs attempt to pick the lock, apply a -35% penalty to their lockpicking rolls due to the excellence of the locks. The doors can only be broken down if attacked with a pick, axe, or hammer and chisel for no less than three solid turns OR with two successful Bend Bars/Lift Gates rolls (not necessarily from the same person).

Several small coffers and chests huddle on the floor of this room. A pair of large, oblong, flat objects covered in an equally large sheet of cloth lean against a wall. A small gold statuette of a dragon peers at you with blue painted eyes, and a harp rests against it.

The Cult of the Dragon cell has acquired a large sum of money for Aghaztamm's future hoard (see room 22) and to bribe Nevalarich: the money is for Nevalarich, the magical items for Aghaztamm. If the PCs can get past the locks on the secret doors, they see a large treasure of gems, coins, and works of art. In all, the hoard contains 1,488 cp, 5,543 sp, 3,076 gp, and 918 pp. There are also 43 gems: three moonbar gems worth 1250 gp, 1,000 gp, and 750 gp; five adventurines worth 50 gp each; seven cleophanes worth 4 x 50 gp and 3 x 75 gp; seventeen jargoons worth 7 x 75 gp, 7 x 100 gp, and 3 x 150 gp; nine pieces of amber totaling 750 gp in worth; and two matched rubies worth 4,500 gp each. Finally, there are seven art pieces: two paintings of ancient kings, a golden statue of a perched blue dragon, a harp inlaid with mother-of-pearl, and three coffers (containing some of the coins and gems previously listed, but valuable works of art in themselves). Each of the art objects is unique: the DM should determine their individual worth.

22. Dracolich Reconstruction Room

This room is where the Cult of the Dragon has brought together the focus of years of covert work. After the battle with Shandril Shessair the Incantatrix on the eastern slopes of the Thunder Peaks, word eventually got back to the main cell in Sembia of the fall of the Sacred Ones Rauglothgor, Aghaztamm, and Shargrailor, as well as the human wizard Symgharyl Maruel the Shadowsil. Knowing that not all dracolich deaths are final, they returned to the scene of the battle to gather the remaining pieces of Aghaztamm. They reverently removed the charred remains with them to this remote valley, where they set about reestablishing their power base and waiting for a sign from Aghaztamm. They know, according to the *Tome of the Dragon*, that if there was a reptilian corpse near the scene of Aghaztamm's fall, he will return here seeking out his true remains. If there was no host, his phylactery will hold his essence until the Cult cell can locate it and bring it here.

It has been left up to the DM as to whether the cell has found the phylactery or Aghaztamm has found his way here prior to the close of the adventure. If he or she desires a truly dramatic closing scene, have the bones of the once-fallen dracolich stir, rise, and break forth from the Chantry to disappear into the north.

The portcullis doors that block the passages into this huge room are locked in place. In the room's center lies a gigantic dragon skeleton with scraps of dull blue dragon hide attached to it. A figure with his back to you is methodically cleaning the body with some kind of chemicals that you can smell from where you stand. You can see him hand the bowl and cloth he was swabbing the remains with to the skeleton standing impassively next to him. He mumbles to himself and slowly turns toward you, revealing the face of a long-dead corpse.

Yerian's corpse-face is caused by a *corpse visage* spell. Characters seeing his face must roll for surprise at a +2 penalty; characters who are 1st-level or lower, or creatures with 1 HD or less and with an Intelligence score of 5 or more must successfully save vs. spell when first viewing the *corpse visage* or flee in terror for 1d4 rounds. In this case, the effect lasts 12 more rounds and then fades. When the false-face dissipates, Yerian's true face can be seen: that of a human male in his late middle age with a cruel-looking twist to his mouth.

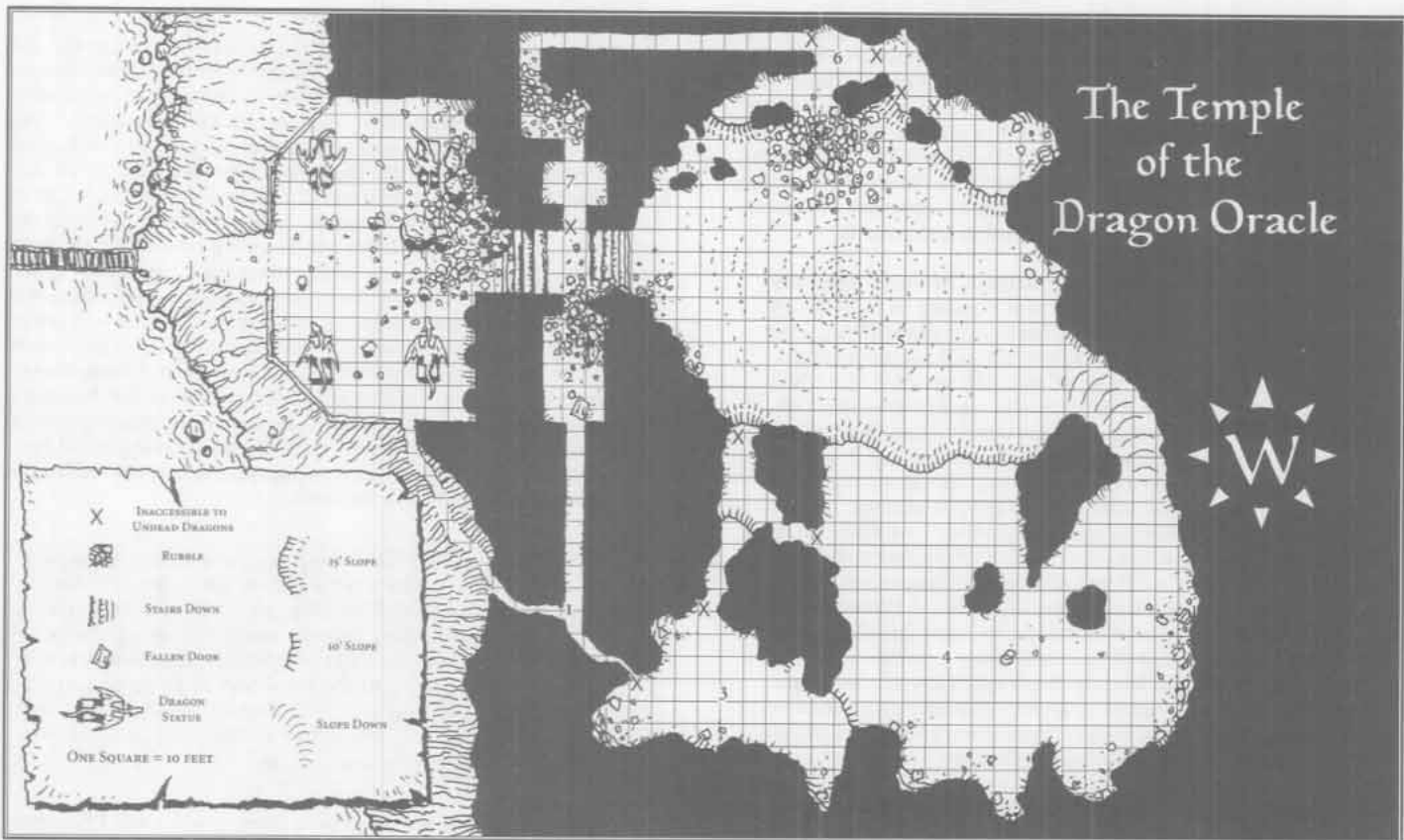
Allow a standard Pick Lock or Bend Bars/Lift Gates rolls to bypass the portcullises. Note that Yerian is a fearsome foe, who immediately starts casting spells through the *spectral hand* he has just summoned; PCs might be well advisable to retreat from the High Necrophant. If they do overcome him, they are in for a surprise. Yerian has undergone the Pact of the Everlasting ceremony and had *Velsharoon's death pact* (described in *Powers & Pantheons*) cast upon him: therefore, if he is reduced to fewer than zero hp, he and all his immediate possessions disappear, transported to a distant place of safety where he returns to life. The PCs have just gained a long-term enemy, who at some point in the future will track them down and thereafter make their lives miserable with constant harassment from his undead minions.

Yerian, High Necrophant (male human 13th-level Specialty Priest of Velsharoon):

AC 4 (robe of defense AC 6, Dexterity bonus); MV 12; hp 58; THAC0 14 (13 with *staff of the serpent*); #AT 1; 2d2+poison (*staff of the serpent*); SA spells, necromantic wizard spells, *staff of the serpent* (on a successful hit, save vs. poison or die; no damage on a successful save); SD spells, necromantic wizard spells; SZ M (5'9" tall); ML elite (14); AL NE; XP 7,000. Str 9, Dex 16, Con 15, Int 14, Wis 16, Chr 10. Spells: *cure light wounds*, *corpse visage*** (just cast), *locate remains****, *protection from good*, *putrefy food & drink*, *sanctuary*, *undead servant** (already cast); *choke***, *death armor**, *embalm**** (already cast), *ghoul touch***, *resist cold*, *resist fire*, *spectral hand*, *withdraw*; *dispel magic*, *ghastly hands**, *meld into stone*, *negative plane protection*, *undead summoning I**, *undead torch**; *assume undead form*****, *spell immunity—magic missile* (already cast), *cure serious wounds*, *undead summoning II**; *gaseous form*****, *undead summoning III**; *dead man's eyes***, *undead summoning IV**. Special Abilities (each once per day): *chill touch*, *speak with dead*, *spectral hand* (just cast a round ago), *animate dead*, *wraithform*, and *gaseous form*.

*spell from *Cult of the Dragons* (the necessary preparations for casting have already been made). **spell from PHBR4, *The Complete Wizard's Handbook*.

The Temple of the Dragon Oracle



spell from *The Complete Book of Necromancers*. *spell from *Powers & Pantheons*.

The Temple of the Dragon Oracle

Not much is left of the former glory of the Temple of the Dragon Oracle. The two dragons currently here are undead abominations created through the actions of this cell of the Cult of the Dragon from failed attempts to create dracoliches. Both are nearly mindless and attack the PCs when encountered. A wight also dwells in the ruins with the encouragement of the Velsharan priests in this Cult cell, serving as a guardian of the two undead dragons' dignity and endowed with the ability to command them to best protect themselves and the ruins from impious intruders. PCs who attack the inhabitants of the ruins could well die if they are careless or fail to retreat when overmatched, unless they hold some special ace up their sleeves. For the areas keyed in this section, see map, above.

Walking up the trail has taken longer than you expected because of the rough ground and razor-sharp rocks. A small moundlike island peeks out from a foul-smelling sulfurous lake at the end of the trail. Carrion birds are picking at some unidentifiable leathery mounds near the receding shoreline. A new rope-and-plank bridge has been constructed to traverse the murky waters and boggy ground.

Read the following when the PCs cross the hanging bridge and approach the temple:

Walking up the short ramp at the end of the bridge to the stone-paved plaza, you are greeted by an awesome sight. The rocky ledge has been carved to resemble a building in the style of years long past. The plaza forms the setting for four exquisite statues of dragons, one with a wing broken by an ancient rockslide—it looks as if one of the support pillars framing the temple's entrance collapsed, releasing many tons of loose rock onto the plaza and partially blocking the opening. However, even with the debris, the ancient entrance is still passable.

Allow each PC to make an Intelligence ability check. The PC who makes the lowest successful check spots a precarious trail that leaves the plaza to the right and makes its way along the cliff face for some 70 feet; this leads to a secret entrance. Characters wearing bulky armor such as chainmail or platemail must remove it if they wish to squeeze through.

The statues, originally designed to attract dragons from afar, no longer function as a magical focus due to the rockslide that broke one of them. The remaining statues are suitable for re-enchantment, weigh three tons each, and are worth around 5,000 gold pieces apiece to an art collector. They are also firmly emplaced on their pedestals and would require organized work crews or very strong magics to move.

1. The Back Way In

The precarious trail you have taken has led you to a narrow shaft that wanders into the rock.

The natural cleft in the rock continues to the right (leading to room 3) but gives way to a hand-hewn corridor to the left (leading to room 2).

2. The Priests' Quarters

The walls here are roughly chiseled out of volcanic rock. In olden times this may have served as the private quarters of the shamanic priests of the temple, but now it's just an empty room with a collapsed wall.

If the PCs dig for three turns they can connect this room to the main corridor to the west, but the risk of a cave-in while doing so is 4-in-10 unless the walls and ceiling are somehow shored up with magic or structural bracing. The collapsing ceiling here inflicts 3d6 points of damage (half-damage on a successful Dexterity check) and can potentially trap its victims, causing them to eventually starve or suffocate unless rescued.

3. Larghauseth's Lair

A huge rocky shape blocks your view deeper into the cavern. Slowly, it moves, and you realize it's a dragon—and dead one at that!

Larghauseth, known to humans as “Flashfire,” died some time ago from unsuccessfully quaffing a dracolich potion. The Cult cell, experimenting with some of the knowledge revealed to it by its copy of the *Tome of the Dragon*, transformed his corpse into a zombie dragon. While deprived of his intelligence, his *fear* aura, his spellcasting ability, and his breath weapon, Larghauseth is still quite deadly operating on his primitive instincts. The primary instinct, reinforced by Kamal the wight’s orders, is to attack anything that moves that is not Karnal, Oskurouh, or a being prominently displaying a symbol of the Cult or Velsharoon’s holy symbol. This is a rather complicated order for Larghauseth’s residual brain, and the dragon-zombie has a 2-in-10 chance of attacking anyone except Karnal or Oskurouh (whether they display the correct symbol or not) unless Karnal is there to reinforce the order.

Larghauseth (Zombie Dragon, Young Adult Red): AC -4; MV 5, jump 1; HD 17; hp 77; THAC0 1; #AT 3+special; Dmg 1d10+5/1d10+5/3d10+5 (claw/claw/bite); SA kick (replaces one claw attack, 1d10+5 damage, creature struck who fails a Dexterity check is kicked back 1d6+5 feet and must save vs. petrification at -5 penalty or fall prone), wing buffet (may only be used against target alongside the dragon, 1d10+5 damage, creatures struck who fail a Dexterity check are knocked prone); SD keen senses (can detect invisible objects and beings within 50 feet), *clairaudience* (100 feet, in lair only), immune to fire and magical fire, *sleep*, *charm*, *hold*, *paralysis*, and *poison*, saving throws as 16th-level priest; SW may be turned (as Special Undead), holy water (2d4 points per vial), *slow reflexes* (last to attack in a round); MR 30%; SZ G (70’ body, 55’ tail); ML fearless (20); Int non (0); AL N; XP 14,000. Special Abilities: *affect normal fires* and *pyrotechnics* (each thrice per day).

4. Wight’s Lair

A large skeletal draconic shape lifts its head from the rocky cavern floor and turns its bony head your direction. It shifts its unseeing gaze from side to side, and a humanoid-sized shape with burning yellow eyes moves toward you from the deep shadows behind it.

Karnal the wight and the skeleton dragon he commands, in an effort to move farther away from the painful sunlight, have burrowed deeper into the mountain. The wight can be found farthest from the main entrance, against the back walls. He orders Oskurouh to attack any intruders he does not recognize on sight. Presenting a symbol of the Cult or of Velsharoon prominently causes him to order Oskurouh to stop, but unless the symbol is backed up promptly by knowledge or communication that proves a person’s allegiance, the attack recommences.

Karnal (Wight): AC 5; MV 12; HD 4+3; hp 20; THAC0 15; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4+energy drain; SA touch drains 1 level (no saving throw); SD immune to nonmagical weapons, immune to *sleep*, *charm*, *hold*, *cold-based spells*, *paralysis*, and *poison*; SW holy water (2d4 points of damage per vial), destroyed by *raise dead* (no saving throw), silver weapons (inflict full damage), avoids bright light; SZ M (6’5” tall); ML elite (14); Int average (10); AL LE; XP 1,400.

Oskurouh (Skeleton Dragon, Juvenile Blue): AC -1; MV 5, burrow 3; HD 14; hp 63; THAC0 7; #AT 3+special; Dmg 1d8+4/1d8+4/3d8+4 (claw/claw/bite); SA kick (replaces one claw attack, 1d8+4 damage, creature struck who fails a Dexterity check is kicked back 1d6+4 feet and must save vs. petrification at -4 penalty or fall prone); SD keen senses (can detect invisible objects and beings within 40 feet), *clairaudience* (80 feet, lair only), immune to *electricity*, *sleep*, *charm*, *hold*, *paralysis*, *poison*, and *cold-based spells*, half-damage from edged and piercing weapons, saving throws as 14th-level priest; SW may be turned (as Special Undead), holy water (2d4 points per vial); SZ G (40’ body, 30’ tail); ML fearless (20); Int non (0); AL N; XP 11,000. Special Abilities: *create or destroy water* (thrice per day), *sound imitation* (at will).

5. The Lava Dome

The volcanic rock that forms the floor of this chamber obviously flowed outward from the three-foot-tall mound in the center of the room. A fine dust covers the once-molten rock.

A small mound of frozen lava protrudes from where once gaped an offering pit. This mini-eruption, the result of a small change in magma pressure, caused the rockslide that collapsed the temple entrance (see area 1). Characters who step out onto the new floor stir up a cloud of fine dust but suffer no ill effects from it (other than possibly coughing and giving away their presence). The fragile surface of the new rock cracks with each step they take, like brittle ice on a shallow puddle.

6. Rock Shelf

This rock ledge overlooks the main floor of the chamber fifteen feet below. One of the natural columns here has collapsed, leaving an unstable yet traversable route between the ledge and chamber floor.

The undead dragons, because of the collapse, can reach significant portions of either end of this ledge.

7. Empty Chamber

Reachable either from the main hallway or the rock shelf (area 6), this room is empty and of little note. The adjacent room beyond has collapsed, leaving only a crawlspace to link it with the passage to room 6.

Conclusion

Once the PCs have explored the Chantry and eliminated this cell of the Cult of the Dragon (and the Zhentarim interlopers), the adventure is over. It is not necessary to clear the ruined Temple as well, but thorough adventurers will no doubt want to do so, making it more difficult for the absent members of the Cult cell to re-establish themselves in the area once they return from their current mission. The DM can craft further adventures for characters who want to track down the missing cultists or trail Ol’ Whistkins and recover any items he escapes with. Note that surviving Cult members, both of this and other cells, will spare no effort to retrieve any sacred items player characters carry off from the Chantry.



Return of the Pick-Axe

An ADVENTURER'S GUILD adventure
set in a distant corner of the GREYHAWK campaign world
for four to six characters of 7th to 9th level

by Christopher McKitterick

Return of the Pick-Axe" is a stand-alone AD&D® adventure for use with the GREYHAWK campaign setting. It was conceived and structured in such a fashion that most groups should be able to complete this adventure in a single game session. Familiarity with the basic World of Greyhawk setting is helpful for the Dungeon Master, although enough background material is provided in the text that such knowledge isn't strictly necessary. Dungeon Masters looking to use this scenario as the starting point for a campaign will find the chapter titled "Geography of Oerth" in the GREYHAWK Adventures rulebook (TSR #2023) helpful; the recent *Player's Guide to Greyhawk* (TSR #9578) and *GREYHAWK: The Adventure Begins* (TSR #9577) are valuable resources as well.

Adventure Overview

In "Return of the Pick-Axe" the player characters (PCs) are recruited by the dwarves of Clan Highforge to retrieve the mysterious Pick-Axe of Highforge. The dwarves keep the particulars of their mission secret to the very last minute . . . and then mishap strikes and the particulars are never revealed. Armed with a bare minimum of information, the PCs must penetrate the undead-infested tunnels of the cursed Azak-Zil mines in order to complete their mission. This is a deadly adventure, intended for characters of levels 7-9.

Dungeon Master's Background

In CY 519, Clan Highforge discovered one of the richest mineral deposits known on Oerth, only to abandon it five years later. Exactly what drove away one of the mightiest dwarven clans from such wealth is something they refuse to comment on. Truth be told, they aren't exactly sure what happened.

Today, sixty-seven years after the mines were abandoned, reports of great armies of ghouls and ghosts working the Azak-Zil mines by moonlight are well-known folklore. The truth is that anyone who dies within five miles of the mines rises up again with the next full moon as one of the undead, unless the corpse is blessed before reanimation occurs. All those who rise again are consumed by greed and the desire to personally acquire all treasure unearthed from the mines. This double-edged curse is brought on by a magical artifact possessed by a lich, an 18th-level evil cleric who has chosen the mines as its lair and now controls the undead.

Until recently, Clan Highforge was willing to cut its losses and forget about its defeat at Azak-Zil. However, problems surrounding the opening of a new mine have forced the clan leaders to reconsider this position. A living artifact called "the Pick-Axe of Highforge" was presumed destroyed in Azak-Zil. This albino ape, enchanted long ago by Highforge's forest deity, drove away evil and undead beings from the mineshafts where it worked alongside its fellow miners. When the clan's priests recently attempted to create a new Pick-Axe, they found they couldn't. A brave dwarf named Burek dared the dangers of the abandoned mine and found evidence that the original Pick-Axe still lives. Highforge needs the Pick-Axe returned, and the PCs are the chosen agents of the clan leaders.

Player's Background

When the players are ready to begin, read or paraphrase the following.

Out of the many missions your team has performed for Clan Highforge, this one has been shrouded in the greatest mystery—and it promises to be the most dangerous and possibly the most profitable. You meet your regular Highforge contact, craggy old Zhalkaft, and another dwarf in a pub on the sea. Without preamble, Zhalkaft asks you to retrieve the Pick-Axe of Highforge, defender of the mines, from the shadowy depths of Azak-Zil.

"It is believed that any mine where the Pick-Axe has broken stone will remain forever free of evil. It was last used in one of the mines at Azak-Zil," he explains. "Our newest mine is infested with ghouls. Since we never plan to return to Azak-Zil, it is not needed there. We had assumed it destroyed, but recently Burek here" (he gestures to the silent dwarf who sits beside him) "ventured to that ill-fated place and found evidence that the Pick-Axe still, er, exists."

Zhalkaft leans forward across the tavern table to stare into your eyes. "We must have it back," he whispers. "You'll have no trouble recognizing it," he adds, tugging thoughtfully at his beard. "You'll recognize your goal because it's inscribed with the words, 'Pick-Axe of Highforge' in dwarven runes. Burek here will serve as your guide; he has seen what you seek and can give you details if necessary, when the time is right. But tell no one; no one must know the true nature of the Pick-Axe, lest that knowledge be used to destroy it. I neither can nor will say more."

If the topic of payment is raised, Zhalkaft seems relieved to be discussing money, a topic that usually pains him greatly. He pulls a large purse from inside his jacket and passes it to the characters. He tells them that Highforge pays 2,000 gold now and 10,000 gold upon the Pick-Axe's return. The clan also provides the player characters with twelve camels for use as pack animals; these are theirs to keep. If the group debates the mission's merits and dangers, Zhalkaft adds the following inducement together with a warning:

"Aside from the Pick-Axe, you may keep any treasures you find there, but do not linger longer than necessary. Vast numbers of undead roam the region during the dark hours, and you could lose your soul to their leader if you should die. Follow Burek's direction and you will return, mission accomplished, rich enough to build fine homes or taverns for yourselves."

The promise of adventure and wealth—not to mention glory—in addition to accomplishing an important mission for the dwarven people should make it easy for the group to accept the commission. Read or paraphrase the following account of their journey to the mines.

For the past many days, as you trek through the Abbor Alz, your primary concern has been worrying if the camels can carry all your loot. To pass the time, Burek tells you about the history of Azak-Zil, saying, "It's important to know, and it'll prepare you for the dangers we are about to face."

"In CY 198, a giant falling star struck Abbor Alz somewhere between the Bright Desert and the Nesser River. Sages knew that such astronomical events frequently resulted in rich deposits of iron, platinum, mithral, and adamantite. Of all the kingdoms and powers which later sent expeditions to pinpoint the starfall and stake a mining claim, only the dwarves of Highforge succeeded. In CY 519, we built the secret mining city of Azak-Zil—'Pureheart' in Dwarven.

"For five years, Clan Highforge worked the richest mines in all of Oerth. Then, without warning, our good fortune collapsed. A mysterious calamity claimed Azak-Zil, and even the mighty expeditionary force sent to re-take it from whatever unknown enemy had seized it vanished into mystery. We were forced to cut our losses and abandon the rich site and its attendant cities. In the chaos, the Pick-Axe was assumed lost.

"Those adventurers who have dared explore the region have brought us reports of undead miners still working the tunnels, and I myself have seen them. Several of our old cities now reportedly serve as nomad base camps; I myself had a close call and barely escaped them on my previous scouting expedition. There are also whispers of a mighty lich living somewhere in the mines. But I think I know where he might be hiding, and we can easily avoid him. We are here for the Pick-Axe, not to pick a fight."

That was the most he would say. Even now, as you establish the last camp before your destination, with the Mines of Azak-Zil a mere five miles away, he tells you only, "When the time is right, you will know." He promises a thorough briefing in the morning on the daring daylight raid that he wants to conduct. As you turn in, Burek takes the first watch, as has been the pattern for the entire journey.

The Adventure Begins

In the dead of night, have each player roll a Constitution check for his or her character. Those who succeed are awakened by the sounds of struggle outside their tents. When they venture outside, they see Burek's unconscious form being dragged into the night. Before they can pursue the abductors, each character who emerges is attacked by three nomad warriors.

If the characters in battle cry out, those still sleeping automatically wake up and can join in the fight the following round, unless they decide to take time to put on their armor. Those who enter battle immediately are each attacked by three nomad warriors like the first group. A priestess stands apart from the battle and casts *hold person* at whichever PC(s) seems to her to pose the greatest threat. Any character who fails his or her saving throw vs. spell is subsequently ignored by the nomads, who turn their attention to those who are not *held*.



Human nomad warriors (3 per PC): AC 10; MV 12; HD 1; hp 7 each; THAC0 20 (19 with Strength bonus); #AT 1; Dmg 1d6+1 (spear, Strength bonus); SZ M (average 6'3" tall); ML elite (13) so long as priestess remains alive and uncaptured, thereafter unsteady (5); AL N; XP 35 each. Str 17, Int 11.

Jagery, nomad priestess (3rd-level Cleric): AC 6 (leather armor, Dexterity bonus, ring of protection +1); MV 12; hp 17; THAC0 20; Dmg 1d6+1 (mace); SA spells; SD spells; SZ M (5'9"); ML elite (14); AL N; XP 175. Str 14, Dex 16, Con 12, Int 14, Wis 12, Chr 17. Spells: *command* (x2); *hold person*.

Once the battle is over, a search of the area allows them to find Burek's dead body, staked to the earth and eviscerated, with the heart removed. His killers have already fled with the heart, making *raise dead* attempts futile. If any of the nomads are captured alive, they inform the PCs that a hidden nomad scout recognized Burek on the previous day. Their leader had decreed that the intruder should be taught not to trespass twice on their lands; hence the dwarf had to die to satisfy their tribe's honor. Unless they choose to abandon their mission, the characters must now proceed without his specific information or guidance. *Speak with dead* provides them with the following poem, slowly chanted in Dwarven (note that this poem is also written on Burek's map; see map, above):

*Mining tools are best kept dry.
One by two is near the sky.
Stay away from the big Y.
Unless, of course, you wish to die.*

If the PCs search Burek's tent, they find the following: a sleeping bag, a small chest containing three *potions of healing*, a notebook with most of its pages torn out, various ordinary travel items, and a leather necklace with an orange metal pendant in the shape of a shield. The pendant is a dwarven *amulet of protection from undead*, which adjusts its dwarven wearer's appropriate saving throw by +4 against undead special attacks (non-dwarves gain only a +1 bonus). It does not provide protection against spells cast by undead nor their physical attacks.

The notebook turns out to be a personal diary written in what



Azak-Zil Monster Encounter Table

Roll 1d20 for each 10 minutes the party spends in or near the mines, for each 30 minutes they spend within a mile of Poison Lake, and per hour they remain within five miles of the site. Add +1 to the roll when the PCs are exiting the mines and +5 if they wait until next light.

1-5: During the day, no encounter.*

*If the Pick-Axe is dead, the party encounters 2d8 ghouls and 1d4 ghouls OR 2d12 lacedons; use stats on page 14.

6-9: Giant Centipedes.

Giant Centipedes (2d12): AC 9; MV 15; HD 1/2; hp 2 each; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg nil (bite); SA poisonous bite (save vs. poison at +4 bonus or be paralyzed for 2d6 hours); SD protective camouflage; SW suffer -1 penalty to all saving throws; SZ T (1' long); ML unsteady (6); Int non (0); AL N; XP 35 each.

10-11: Fire Beetles.

Fire Beetles (3d4): AC 4; MV 12; HD 1+2; hp 8 each; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 2d4 (mandibles); SZ S (2 1/2' long); ML steady (12); Int non (0); AL N; XP 35 each. Their "fiery" glands are cold to the touch and can be removed and used as a light source, continuing to glow (10' radius) for 1d6 days after removal.

12-14: Giant Spiders.

Giant Spiders (1d8): AC 4; MV 3, web 12; HD 3+3; hp 17 each; THAC0 17; #AT 1; Dmg 1d8+poison (bite); SA web, poisonous bite (save vs. poison or die); SZ L (8' diameter); ML elite (13); Int low (7); AL CE; XP 420 each.

15-16: Desert Troll.

Desert Troll: AC 4; MV 12; HD 7+7; hp 36; THAC0 13; #AT 3; Dmg 1d4+2/1d4+2/1d8+2 (claw/claw/bite); SA camouflage (-2 penalty to opponents' surprise rolls); SD regeneration (3 hp per round), keen senses (1-in-10 chance of being surprised), immune to heat, cold, and normal fires; SW acid and magical fire damage cannot regenerate, water (1d4 damage per vial, 2d4 per flask, 4d4 per waterskin; double damage from holy water or purified water), *decanter of endless water* (25 points of damage per round, successful attack roll required), *potion of sweetwater* (6d6 points of damage, troll must save vs. poison or die); SZ L (9' tall); ML fanatic (18); AL CE; XP 1,400.

17-18: Nomad Warriors.

Nomad Warriors (2d6): AC 10; MV 12; HD 1; hp 7 each; THAC0 19 (Strength bonus); #AT 1; Dmg 1d6+1 (spear, Strength bonus); SZ M (average 6'3" tall); ML steady (11); AL N; XP 35 each. Str 17, Int 11.

19: Human Swordwraith Platoon.*

*This encounter only takes place once and only if the party is underground or at night; otherwise, treat as "no encounter."

Swordwraiths (2d4): AC 3; MV 9; HD 7; hp 48, 20, 29, 35, 36, 43, 27, 32; THAC0 13; #AT 3/2; Dmg 1d10 (various weapons); SA each successful hit drains 1 point of Strength from victim (regained at the rate of 1 point per day of complete bedrest, can only be magically restored by *wish*, *limited wish*, or similar potent magic); SD immune to weapons of less than +2 bonus, immune to *sleep*, *charm*, and other mind-affecting magics; SW may be turned (as vampires); SZ M (average 6' tall); ML fearless (20); Int average (9); AL N; XP 650 each.

The swordwraiths break off combat if they learn that the PCs have been killing mindless undead or if the PCs call for a parley. They may even join in an attack on the lich's lair if the PCs fought well and impress these long-dead Suel soldiers with their battle prowess.

20: Ghost of a Dwarven Miner.*

*This encounter only takes place once; if rolled again, treat as "no encounter."

Ghost: AC 0; MV 9; HD 10; hp 50; THAC0 11; #AT 1; Dmg special (touch); SA ghastly visage (sight ages viewer 10 years and on failed save vs. spell causes panicked flight for 2d6 turns), touch ages target by 1d4x10 years (no save), *magic jar*; SD ethereal (immune to all spells cast by non-ethereal opponents), immune to nonmagical weapons, half-damage from silver weapons; SW holy water, may be turned, characters of 8th level and above (or clerics of 6th level and above) are immune to visage; SZ M (4'4" tall); ML champion (16); AL LE; XP 7,000. May be laid to rest if party promises to slay lich, appearing again only if they fail to do so.

21+: Above ground during daylight, no encounter.*

*Underground or at night, the party encounters 2d8 ghouls and 1d4 ghouls OR 2d12 lacedons; use stats on page 14.

seems to be an indecipherable code (actually, it is written in an obscure language and all the words are spelled backwards to boot); if somehow deciphered, each day's entry is extremely laconic and unhelpful, consisting of only a word or two ("mule," "shoes," "weather"). Of more interest, however, is a hand-drawn map (Map Three); this shows the central pits region of the lost mines. Note that although the map has no key, a half-inch on the map equals one mile. The Dwarven runes around the edges of the map can only be read on a successful Reading/Writing—Dwarven proficiency check, at a -2 penalty, or on a successful Read Languages attempt by a thief or bard (in this case at a -10% penalty). The runes spell out the poem given above, the refrain of a ballad Burek was planning to write about the brave deeds of the party in the mine. It also provides an oblique clue, telling the party to not enter the mine near the lake (if they do, they will find themselves in the lair of the lich) but instead to enter the top-most tunnel in the Red Butte.

The Mines of Azak-Zil

Characters who find and correctly decipher Burek's poem should be able to avoid the lich's caverns. If the PCs misinterpret the clue on the map, or if they choose to go looking for trouble, continue the adventure with the section titled "Lair of the Lich" (page 18). Otherwise, continue with this section.

Searching the camp and deciphering the clues on the map takes time; once the PCs are ready to move on, it is daybreak. They have ten hours until sunset. It will take an hour to bury Burek, if the group chooses to do so. It takes an additional hour to cover the territory between the camp site and the mines on camel back. Once the party is within sight of the mines—they can see the pits and strip-mines about half a mile away, appearing like huge sores on Oerth—the camels refuse to go any closer, biting and spitting if prodded.

The mines near Poison Lake are infested with all manner of subterranean monsters, especially ghouls and ghosts. If the party chooses to enter one of these tunnels, use the monster encounter table in the sidebar. The ghosts and ghouls of Azak-Zil are greedy miners, so they possess double normal treasure in caches in these tunnels. Note that because they are under the influence of the lich's artifact that created them, all these undead are Lawful Evil rather than Chaotic Evil in alignment. All tunnels, except the one protected by the Pick-Axe of Highforge, are connected underground in an endless maze of mineshifts. By contrast, the tunnel that holds the Pick-Axe can only be entered through the topmost opening in Red Butte.

If the PCs judiciously steer clear of these caverns, they still must avoid the shallow strip-mines where many undead spend the daylight hours (2d8 ghouls and 1d4 ghouls per pit, with 2d12 lacedons in the occasional flooded pits and the poison lake—use ghouls stats). If the party approaches within sixty feet of one of these, they are attacked. In addition, the undead become increasingly difficult to deal with as the characters near the lich's lair. Within five miles of Krakev the lich's lair, all turning attempts suffer a -1 penalty; within four miles, this rises to -2; within three miles, to -3; within two miles, to -4; within one mile of the lair, the penalty rises to -5.

Ghouls (2d8 per pit) or Lacedons (2d12 per flooded pit): AC 6; MV 9; HD 2; hp 14 each; THAC0 19; #AT 3; Dmg 1d3/1d3/1d6 (claw/claw/bite); SA paralysis (1d6+2 rounds, save vs. paralysis to resist); SD immune to *sleep* and *charm* spells; SW may be turned by priests, held at bay by *protection from evil* (unless attacked); SZ M (4' to 5'); ML steady (12), fearless (20) if within sight of the lich; Int low (5); AL LE; XP 175 each.

Ghosts (1d4 per pit): AC 4; MV 15; HD 4; hp 22 each; THAC0 17; #AT 3; Dmg 1d4/1d4/1d8 (claw/claw/bite); SA paralysis (1d6+4 rounds, affects even elves, save vs. paralysis to resist), carrion stench (-2 penalty to attack rolls on a failed save vs. poison); SD immune to *sleep* and *charm* spells, held at bay by *protection from evil* only if used in conjunction with cold iron; SW may be turned, double damage from weapons wrought of cold iron; SZ M (4' to 5'); ML elite (14), fearless (20) if within sight of the lich; Int very (11); AL LE; XP 650 each.

Finding the Pick-Axe

This section describes the encounters the PCs have in the mine-tunnels, and the traps they must overcome; it is keyed to the map on page 17. The party can only reach this area through the top-most tunnel on the side of Red Butte, either by climbing up the bluff face or by walking up the sloped side of the butte and then down a stairway carved into the stone.

The Entrance

When the party reaches the entrance to the home of the Pick-Axe and its Keeper, they are faced with a heavy wooden door with a permanent *protection from evil 10' radius* engraved in the floor in front of it. The lock can be picked by anyone so skilled, or the door can be smashed down. If it is not opened with the proper key (a duplicate of which was lost when Burek was attacked; the Keeper in the Inner Sanctum within has the original), the opening or smashing down of the doors releases weights hung from chains deep in the stone. The PCs hear an extremely loud but muffled clanking and groaning, and the entire butte begins to vibrate. After a minute or so, the weights hit bottom, sending up a *whump!* the PCs hear and a shudder they feel. Now that they have set the butte's protective machinery into action, all the defenses built by the Keeper of the Pick-Axe run automatically for two days. He of course at once begins winding the weights back up so the equipment will not slow down unless it is all destroyed or the weights are cut free of their chains.

Just beyond the door stands the Clockwork Warrior, a giant black-iron construct with dwarf-like proportions that is broad enough so none can pass into the tunnel beyond. It hums with the sound of gears turning. Its ornate armor plating is scored with weapon damage and stained with what could only be dried blood. Inscribed across its chest (in partially effaced dwarven runes) is "Guardian of the Highforge Pick-Axe"—proof that the party is on the right track.

Clockwork Warrior: AC 3; MV 4 (or less; see below); HD 16; hp 70; THAC0 5; #AT 1; Dmg 30 points (punch); SA +1 attack bonus; SD recharge to full power, immune to *charm*, *sleep*, *hold*, *poison*, *paralyzation*, *illusions*, and spells that affect only organic beings, immune to nonmagical weapons, repaired by fire (see below), edged weapons used against it have cumulative 10% chance per strike of breaking; SW loses energy when detached from power source (see below), retreats momentarily from electrical attacks; SZ L (10' tall); ML fearless (20); AL N; XP 11,000. Str 23, Int 4 (actually mindless but programmed to operate as if semi-intelligent).

Creaking and whirring, the Clockwork Warrior takes a step toward the PCs and extends one finger. If they look closely, they see a keyhole set into the fingertip. If the Keeper's key is inserted into the keyhole, the Warrior steps aside. A PC who attempts to pick the lock suffers a -30% penalty to his or her Open Locks roll and has only three rounds to complete the task before the golem attacks, striking out against whoever is nearest. Any attack immediately provokes the golem to attack in response.

When it attacks, the Clockwork Warrior moves toward the nearest aggressor and punches. The second step it takes severs it from its winding sprocket in the floor, which goes on spinning free until the golem returns to power up again. Only magical weapons can damage this sprocket; it absorbs 30 damage before breaking. The creature must periodically return to its power source or lose power, eventually becoming immobile and unable to fight. After one turn its movement drops to three, then two, and so on. Its attack damage also drops 1d10 per turn during combat, but only if it attacked the previous turn (it won't waste energy swinging at empty air).

The Clockwork Warrior breaks off its attack if necessary to concentrate on anyone who tries to sneak past into the tunnel beyond. For purposes of smashing or lifting things, its strength is 23, and it gains a +1 attack bonus because of its long reach and the close quarters. Engaging the drive sprocket with the transmission hole in either of its feet completely recharges the creature in one round. It never runs down if allowed to fight while "plugged in."



The Clockwork Warrior is immune to all magic that affects organic beings and cannot be influenced in any way. Because of its heavy iron plating, it can only be damaged by weapons of +1 or better magical bonus, and each blow delivered to it by an edged weapon has a cumulative 10% chance of breaking that weapon. Electrical attacks cause the golem to back away from the spellcaster (though it will never leave the mine), but fire attacks repair 1 point of damage for each 8 points inflicted.

If only one nimble PC attacks and no one tries to sneak past the Clockwork Warrior, it can be lured away from the tunnel entrance and forced to run out of power without grave injury to the party members (let them figure this out themselves!). As long as it is within the Warrior's movement ability to do so during the turn before it would run down, it breaks off all engagements and returns to its drive gear to recharge. The only way to stop it from doing so is to deal it more than 20 points damage during its retreat (which causes it to fight back) or to enter the tunnel it was set to guard (which causes its guardian function to override its self-preservation function). Remember that the PCs will have real trouble getting out past this mountain of metal if it runs down in the tunnel itself.

After any part of the Clockwork Warrior's body (such as an arm, chest region, or so on) receives 10 or more points of damage, the PCs can see that only the outer armor plating is made of iron. Inside, the golem's clockwork of gears, cogs, levers, and so on are fashioned of platinum and gold: The Keeper could imagine no better form for treasure to take than the machine-works he loves, so he has spent the past 60 years or so forging precious metals into components for the machinery the PCs will encounter.

Note: Most devices that operate the traps that await the PCs contain a number of removable gears (a convenient shorthand for treasure); these gears are each worth 8 gp if sold as metal or 80 gp if sold to the right buyer as a specialty item. Disassembling a device requires two minutes per gear, something for the PCs to consider since time is an issue. Hacking a device into easily transported bits reduces its gear-treasure to the lower value. The Clockwork Warrior contains 130 such gears.

The Lower Level: Six Decades of Traps

Once past the Clockwork Warrior, the PCs have to avoid or defuse numerous deadly traps built over six decades by the Keeper and his small army of apprentices that he gradually lost as they ventured outside the butte's safety for supplies. He has grown paranoid (and rightly so!) because all the other dwarven miners have perished and become undead since he took up his post.

After the party has gotten past the Clockwork Warrior, roll 1d20 for every ten minutes of game time to determine what, if any, roaming creatures the PCs encounter during that period. Monsters always attack from behind, coming from the outer tunnels now that the Clockwork Warrior is no longer there to keep them out.

Trap A: A hundred feet into the tunnel, the PCs find another locked, iron-reinforced door. If it is smashed or thrown open quickly, 12 four-foot-long iron spikes launch from behind the door at the party, half below the waist and half above. Have every party member make a Dexterity check or be struck by 1d4 spikes. Each is propelled with great force so that it deals 1d8 damage to each person it hits. Note that the spikes are long enough, and ejected with enough force, to go through a character and into the person behind him or her.

Cautious characters who open the door less than a foot can see the spikes loaded into their wooden rack just beyond the door. If a light source is brought close, they will also see that the tunnel ends here, at a stone staircase leading down. Most importantly of all, they can see a large iron lever set into the wall just inside the doorway. If this lever is pulled upright, the spike rack rotates so as to pose no danger; pulling the lever down has no effect. Opening the door a foot or more without pulling the lever upright sets off the spikes.

The lever mechanism has nine gears and the spike rack has sixteen.

Trap B: Halfway down the spiraling staircase, three steps that look just like the others are designed to hinge open beneath the weight of any creature weighing 100 pounds or more. A successful Find Traps roll allows a character to notice the hollow sound of each step's surface before putting his or her full weight on it. Any character who plunges through the trap falls 30 feet down a square, smooth-walled shaft onto an iron plate that gives slightly under the PC's weight, then begins to vibrate. The only way out is to climb chimney-style (very difficult; characters of less than human size have their Climb Walls abilities cut in half for purposes of this climb). The hinged stone lid to the trap locks back in place after a character falls through and must be broken open (AC 0, 20 hp). To make matters worse, the walls—six-foot-thick stone backed by iron plates and driven by giant iron rods—immediately begin to close in on the victim with a rumble and whirl of gears. If the PC has not exited the shaft within six rounds, he or she is crushed to death unless the character can become noncorporeal or transform into a small creature no bigger than a normal snake. The shaft walls reopen after the crushing is complete and the stone lid unlocks, ready to tempt the next victim into the trap.

Each of the three hinged steps has six gears.

Trap C: The landing at the bottom of the stairs is another iron plate, plainly visible, that sinks an inch or so when stepped on and then vibrates for several seconds. This plate is ten feet by ten feet and comprises the entire floor area of the landing, which ends at a very narrow locked door. Beside the door is a lever which can be moved up or down.

If stepped on, the plate releases a trap door set into the ceiling of the stairway. Through this trap door swings a huge pendulum blade that sweeps silently down from behind the party, stopping just short of the door and swinging back up again. Moving either direction, it deals 1d12 damage upon striking a party member, and its momentum is such that each PC needs to roll a Dexterity check to avoid the blade even if it already struck someone that round. The pendulum continues to swing back and forth until the lever is moved upright. If the lever is moved down, two more blades join the first; avoiding all three requires a Dexterity check at a -8 penalty.

For each 30 points of damage dealt to the pendulum or its mechanism in the ceiling, one blade will stop; opening the door or flipping the lever up causes all three retract back up into the ceiling.

This door hides no trap, but some 60 feet beyond it splits into three tunnels from which the PCs must choose their direction (their goal lies to the left).

Each pendulum mechanism contains twenty-two gears, and the lever contains nine.

Trap D: If the party follows the center tunnel, they see two pickaxes lying on the floor (ask if any of the characters take them—they are useful for escaping the next trap!). They can pass through two more locked doors without incident (these doors close and relock behind the PCs unless broken or propped open). Opening the third door sets off an enormous groaning of metal and grinding of stone all around them as a forty-foot length of the tunnel rises one level. The only way to reverse this is to flip the lever on the other side of the door upright before the floor has risen more than one foot (two rounds). If they managed to throw the lever in time, the tunnel settles down and the PCs discover the dead end. Failure to do so traps the party in the now-sealed tunnel for two days or until they mine their way out. There is no outside air supply, and torches quickly use up what air is trapped with them, making suffocation a real problem. The two-foot-thick stone floor is the only way out, assuming they have mining equipment or the appropriate spells with them. Roll only once to see if trapped characters have a random encounter in the enclosed tunnel.

If the characters manage to burrow their way through the floor, they find themselves in a tunnel much larger than it had been. Tree-thick shafts of iron that vibrate to the touch support the suspended tunnel unit from deep below. They can now see that the direction they were headed is a dead end and can retrace their steps back to the junction without difficulty. The lever mechanism has nine gears.

Trap E: Taking this turn leads the party into a maze of abandoned mineshafts, dressed up to appear important by having locked doors sprinkled throughout. None of the doors are trapped. This is the ghost's lair, and if it hasn't been encountered yet they will certainly meet it here before long.

Trap F: After they have walked more than ten paces past the last door of this return passage, stone blocks begin to crash down behind them—one, two, three, four—driving them onward to the top of the tunnel. If they do not move out of the way of the two-ton stones, they are crushed, but they have plenty of warning to run forward in time. After the last block has fallen, the floor slides open, dropping the PCs sixteen feet onto the floor of the entrance (the ceiling then slides shut over them). Characters who reach this point find they have made their way back up to the Clockwork Warrior, which if still intact reacts as described on page 15. The PCs cannot cut their way back up into the ceiling, since the sliding stonework is ten feet of solid granite.

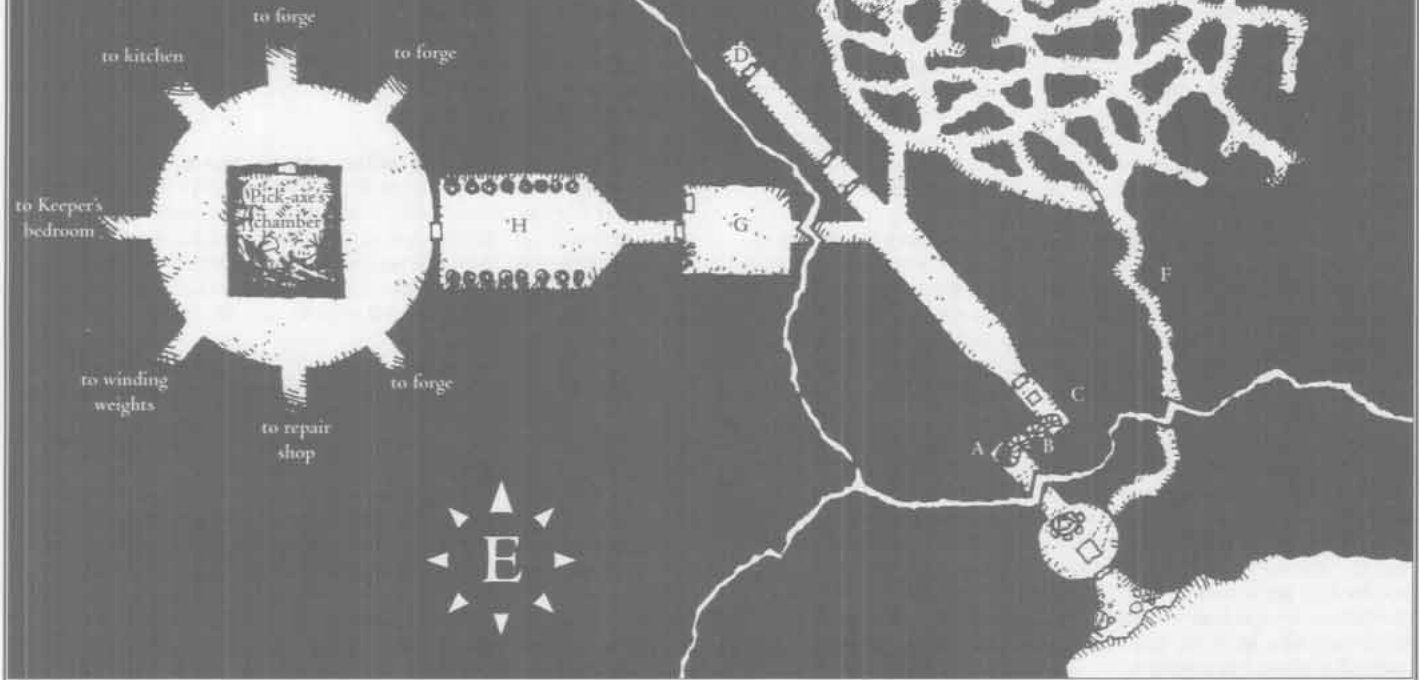
Trap G: At the end of a large tunnel which bears recent mining marks (the very walls glisten with ore deposits), the characters find an iron door set into an iron wall. If they test the wall, they discover the plating is dozens of layers of riveted iron and, behind that, stone. Only behind the door can they sense an opening, but the door is over a foot thick and reinforced inside with mithral plates. It cannot be broken open short of a miracle, and there is no keyhole or handle.

Beside the door is a gold plaque with engraving that reads (in Dwarven runes): "Subtract R from U and multiply the result times N. U is the year Highforge founded Azak-Zil, R is the year the falling star struck this place, and N is the year the Great Kingdom was founded. Leave now if you cannot solve this! If you can, then try again, and try again."

Seven levers protrude from the wall near this plaque, each with a different number inscribed: 0, 16, 48, 277, 321, 752, and 3081. The correct answer is 321 (519-198×1=321). If this lever is pulled, a ten-foot-long, three-ton block of stone falls forty feet behind the door and drops just fast enough so that anyone beneath it can move out of the way. Large letters carved into its face read, in Dwarven runes, "The Great Kingdom was founded in CY 1." This stone also falls if any other lever is pulled—a safety feature to hinder monsters from following the party into the sanctum. From now until

The Keeper's Lair

1 inch = 30 feet



the stone is raised, only rolls of 6-14 on the random monster encounter table yield any monster encounters (they live here).

Pulling the 321 lever a second time drops a second stone of equal size just this side of the first. Carved into this one are the words (again, in Dwarven), "Highforge founded these mines in CY 519." Pulling the same level a third time sets off a humming behind the wall, and the door slides open with a great grinding. If it is not pulled three times, nothing happens except that the air supply eventually runs out; only the Keeper can reset this trap. Pulling a wrong lever always drops another stone until the entire mine shaft is filled, crushing all who remain inside. The third stone says, "The falling star struck Abbor Alz in CY 198." The fourth says, "You are not clever enough to be a dwarf;" the fifth—which crushes anyone corporeal in the mine shaft—says, "Take that, elf!"

As soon as the PCs walk through the doorway, the door slides closed behind them. Each lever contains nine gears, and the plaque itself is worth 100 gp.

Trap H: This mine shaft opens out into a room, at the far end of which is a locked door similar to the one at the Entrance. Ranged along the walls are sixteen miniature versions of the Clockwork Warrior—each no bigger than a normal dwarf, and each holding a steel pick-axe. They stand motionless unless activated by the Keeper, or until a member of the party tries to pick the door's lock. Attacking any of them makes all sixteen attack, as does battering either door.

One round after the PCs have entered, the Keeper says through a booming voice-tube in the ceiling, "Who are you?" The magnified voice is so loud that it hurts their ears when the Keeper yells. If no one answers within a minute, the Clockwork Warriors attack. If they answer his question, next he asks, "Why are you here?" The DM should add appropriate questions based on the PCs' answers, but remember the Keeper never answers any questions they may pose to him, other than perhaps to ask another question of his own.

At the end of the interview, he shouts, "Leave now!" and opens the door behind the PCs (he trusts no one he can't see). If they leave, he closes the door from Area H behind them and raises the stone blocks barring their exit. If they do not leave or insist on entering, he begins to rant angrily about his duty to keep the Pick-Axe secure, then sets loose the Clockwork Warriors on them. The

only way to stop the Warriors short of destroying them all is to threaten the Keeper or the Pick-Axe. He immediately calls them off if the inner door is opened. Beyond this room, do not roll for monster encounters unless the Pick-Axe dies.

Small Clockwork Warriors (16): AC 6; MV 4 (or less); HD 4; hp 25; THAC0 15; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6+3 (pick-axe) or 10 points (punch); SD recharge to full power, immune to *charm*, *sleep*, *hold*, *poison*, *paralyzation*, *illusions*, and spells that affect only organic beings, immune to nonmagical weapons, repaired by fire, edged weapons used against them have cumulative 5% chance per strike of breaking; SW lose energy when detached from power source, retreats momentarily from electrical attacks; SZ M (4' tall); ML fearless (20); AL N; XP 650 each. Str 21, Int 3 (actually mindless but programmed to operate as if semi-intelligent).

These smaller versions fight as does the Clockwork Warrior but lack its +1 attack bonus and have only half the chance of weapons breaking upon their metallic exterior. It is impossible to distract all of them from returning to their winding sprockets. If they lose their pick-axes, they punch their targets with their steely fists. For purposes of smashing or lifting things, their Strength score is 21. Each golem contains 45 gears.

The Inner Sanctum

The only way through the door is to beat it down or pick the lock (superior quality, -40% penalty to thieves' Open Locks rolls). The door absorbs 40 points of damage before collapsing. Just beyond is a 120-foot-wide domed chamber cut into the rock. At the room's center is a windowless mortared-stone structure and one locked door. The Pick-Axe is kept here. Mining tools are strewn everywhere, including several made of precious metals. None of the mining tools bear the proper inscription. Small mineshafts lead away toward the various defensive workings and to several forges. One mine shaft is littered with rotten clothes and tattered books, terminating in the Keeper's personal apartment. Another leads to a kitchen. Everywhere the floor is covered with mis-cast or damaged gears (600 total) worth no more than their component gold and

platinum metal, and rat skeletons.

As soon as they enter the room, the Keeper himself leaps out of hiding and attacks with a howl. He is a venerable old dwarf with a floor-length beard. Since he is skinny, insane, ill-armored, and armed with a battle-axe that is barely more than a dull slab of gold, the PCs should have no trouble disarming him without injury. The biggest problem they encounter is the risk of falling into the pit traps that the Keeper has concealed under the discarded gears. After his first charge, the Keeper begins engaging in fighting retreats. Roll 1d6; if the result is 1, all PCs fighting or pursuing him must roll 1d20. If the result is less than 5, they fall in one of the pit traps and tumble 10 feet to the bottom in a shower of broken gears for 1d6 points of damage. Characters in a pit trap cannot climb out on their own without help unless they have the Climb Walls skill.

Keeper of the Highforge Pick-Axe (12th-level Dwarven Fighter): AC 10; MV 6; HD 10+; hp 27 (due to age and malnourishment); THAC0 9 (11 due to weakness); #AT 3/2 (normal) or 3 (when manic—see next section); Dmg 1d4-1 (golden pick-axe) or 1/1/2 (punch/punch/bite); SW weak from age and poor diet; SZ M (3'9"); ML elite (14); AL LG; XP none. Str 4 (old age and poor diet), Int genius (18).

When defeated, captured, or coaxed to surrender, the Keeper hugs his wasted frame with skeletally thin arms and cries, "Oh, I'm so hungry! Did you bring any food?" From now on, the Keeper babbles on unendingly with frequent mention of undead, starvation, and great slaughters. If the PCs listen closely, they'll figure out that the mines were attacked by waves of nomads. These were repulsed at great loss of life, weakening the dwarven defenses so that when a mercenary army of humans attacked, Azak-Zil fell. When the lich arrived, the mercenaries it had hired left. Soon, undead seethed everywhere.

Assuming the party treats him kindly, the Keeper cooperates with them (it helps, naturally, if at least one PC is a fellow dwarf). He carries a key which fits all locks in the butte's workings. If asked about the Pick-Axe, he opens the door to the central stone chamber, revealing the greatest secret of the Highforge Clan.



The Highforge Pick-Axe

This central room is filled with tree trunks and carpeted with straw. It contains more mining tools, also rotted and unmarked, and heaps of rat skeletons. But most important, it is home to an extremely old albino carnivorous ape bearing a tattoo on its chest that says in ornate (not to say florid) dwarven runes, "Highforge Pick-Axe." Describe the creature but do not tell them what the runes say until someone fluent in Dwarven can study it. Once the Keeper has opened the room for them, he won't understand such questions as, "Well, where is the Pick-Axe?"; the PCs have to figure this one out themselves.

Pick-Axe of Highforge (albino carnivorous ape): AC 6; MV 9, brachiation 6; HD 5; hp 20; THAC0 15; #AT 3; Dmg 1d6/1d6/1d8 (pick-axe/pick-axe/bite) or 1d4/1d4/1d8 (fist/fist/bite); SA rending (extra 1d8 damage if both fist attacks hit same creature); SD repels evil creatures (thousand-foot radius); SW poor eyesight and creaky joints from age; SZ L (7' tall and very broad); ML steady (12); Int low (7); AL LG; XP none.

If the Keeper is well and cooperating with the party, the ape is docile. If the characters are threatening or attack, the ape picks up two pick-axes and chops away at the party until it is killed or subdued. If they kill it, they have failed in their mission (unless they belatedly realize their mistake and arrange for it to be magically raised). Seeing his charge threatened causes the Keeper to go wild; he grabs up the nearest weapon and attacks until dead; he cannot be rendered unconscious in this manic state and taking away his weapon only reduces him to punching, kicking, and biting. He gets three attacks per round when manic. Only the ape's recovery settles him down. Note that leaving the ape's body behind causes it to rise as undead in the lich's service at the next full moon; should this occur the clan's artifact is irredeemably corrupted and lost to them.

If all goes well, however, the ape obeys its Keeper, and the Keeper is more than happy to leave his dungeon if promised a new job in a mine full of living beings.

Lair of the Lich

This section is optional, and wise PCs will stay well away from this location. However, if the PCs want a big brawl, here it is, in the form of a battle of attrition with only a meager chance of killing the lich or destroying its relic (and a good chance of the whole party ending up dead and then undead). Make sure to stress that the PCs take this detour at their own peril! If all they need is a good scare to return to their quest, have a bunch of undead swarm up out of the water at them the moment they step onto the dock—just enough to give them a taste of what they'll face if they press on (if they realize they're in over their heads and retreat, allow them to do so without being massacred).

The entrance to the lich's lair is hidden underwater beneath the dock on Poison Lake. The lake contains 3d20 lacedons, half of which attack anyone who spends longer than one turn on the dock, or anyone who enters the lake. The other half arrive two rounds later. Note that these are in addition to any encountered as wandering monsters.

Once the party has located and entered the tunnel leading to the lich's lair (the tunnel itself is air-filled, despite its underwater location), roll 4d12 to determine how many ghouls and 2d4 to determine how many ghosts the PCs encounter on their way to the lair. The lich's lair is 400 feet up the passage's right fork.

The lich casts *obscurement* when the party is within 100 feet of its throne room, filling 180 feet of tunnel and the lair itself with a dark cloud that lasts 72 rounds. This does not obscure the lich's vision, however, and when the first party member enters its line of sight, it casts *slay living* on that unfortunate. If the victim saves against death magic, he or she suffers only 2d8+1 hp damage; otherwise, the character dies instantly. The room also contains 3d12 ghouls and 2d4 ghosts. The lich casts *slay living* every round until the PCs are within touching range, when it will cast *destruction* (a reversed *resurrection*). The target gets a -4 penalty on his or her savings throw against death magic; if the PC succeeds, he or she takes 8d6

hp damage; otherwise he or she dies instantly and crumbles to dust. Should the lich face defeat (an unlikely prospect), it offers the party all its riches if they cease their hostilities, lifting its *obscurement* so they can see and be tempted by the massed wealth.

Though the lich ceases its attacks, it has already silently summoned all undead within its five-mile sphere of influence to converge on this room. The creatures arrive in groups of 2d8 ghouls and 1d4 ghouls every three rounds until at total of 400 ghouls and 50 ghouls have arrived, or the lich's artifact is destroyed (see below). If the party demands the lich to call off its undead troops, it will do so, but only if its survival depends upon obedience at that point. It is far more likely to *meld with stone* and allow its undead minions to pile in upon the intruders in what seems to them like an endless wave.

The lich's lair is a vast underground throne room heaped with a half-ton total of unprocessed nuggets of platinum, gold, mithral, and adamantite from the fallen meteor—as well as 5,000 gp worth of such finished pieces as wine goblets and coins minted with his name (Krakev the Ominous). Tattered purple-and-gold tapestries line the walls, and banners of the same color hang behind a raised stone platform supporting a great throne made of gold and glass.

The artifact that is causing the dead to rise, and granting the lich additional powers of control over them, is stored inside a hidden cabinet under the lich's throne, in a treasure chest filled with gold nuggets. It can only be found if the nuggets are brushed aside. Near the bottom of the chest is an ellipsoid of bluish metal about a foot long and some three inches in diameter, within which may be found a large amethyst crystal: the two together make up the artifact (neither has any effect if separated, but the artifact reactivates when the crystal is returned to its casing). The origin of this artifact is unknown, but the DM should be aware that the casing emits unseen but malign radiations that cause all living things within 50 feet to suffer 1d10 points of damage per round, beginning three rounds after the crystal is removed; this damage ceases three rounds after the crystal is restored.

Krakev the Ominous (clerical lich): AC 0; MV 6; HD 11+; hp 64; THAC0 9; #AT 1, Dmg 1d10+paralysis (touch); SA spells, *fear* aura (characters of less than 5th level flee in terror for 5d4 rounds on failed save vs. spell), touch paralyzes target (on failed save vs. paralyzation, permanent until *dispelled*); SD immune to nonmagical weapons, immune to *sleep*, *charm*, *enfeeblement*, *polymorph*, cold, electricity, insanity, or death spells, phylactery preserves life-force if body destroyed; SW may be turned; SZ M (4'11" tall); ML fearless (18); AL LE; XP 8,000. Int 10, Wis 20. Spells: *cause light wounds* (x6), *curse*, *protection from good* (x2), *sanctuary* (x2); *heat metal* (x4), *know alignment*, *obscurement* (x3), *silence 15' radius* (x3); *bestow curse* (x2), *cause blindness*, *cause disease*, *dispel magic* (x3), *meld into stone*, *prayer*, *speak with dead*; *cause serious wounds* (x2), *divination*, *free action* (x2), *poison* (x2), *spell immunity—magic missile*, *spell immunity—fireball*, *spell immunity—lightning bolt*; *dispel good*, *flame strike*, *slay living* (x4); *blade barrier*, *forbiddance*, *harm* (x2); *destruction*, *unholy word*.

Return of the Ape

Assuming the PCs were clever enough not to kill the ape or its Keeper, they still need to remove them from these caverns, cross the treacherous (and possibly now-dark) Pits of Azak-Zil, and return to Highforge. The Keeper tries to convince them to remain inside until next light, but this advice is poor; should they follow it, more monsters fill the exit chambers while they delay—after all, many of the traps have been defused and doors broken down. Remember that as long as the ape is alive, most evil creatures (except the lich and ghost) cannot approach within 1000 feet of its home. The ghost has a 60% chance of leaving the party in peace if the Pick-Axe is with them, since it remembers the ape fondly from its living days.

Wrap-Up

So you made the return trip through the desert and mountains and sea, battling nomads and monsters along the way, and arrived back in Highforge—all without Burek's help, and burdened with an insane dwarf and a decrepit, albino ape. Victory and rich rewards are yours!

The Keeper has promised to build you any device (within reason) you might need. Zhalkaft pays the 10,000 gold he promised. . . and throws in another 10,000 gp in gems for your determination to keep going despite losing Burek. In clean air and eating a normal diet, the ape becomes much healthier (as does its Keeper). Highforge throws you the biggest welcome-back party you have ever seen, and the feasting and drinking goes on for seven days.

In addition, if the party managed to destroy the lich and deactivate (or at least remove) the artifact, they are declared "Champions of Highforge." The Clan will try to reclaim what they view as their territory; if they are successful, each party member will receive 1,000 gp per year for as long as Highforge works the Pureheart Mines.

The End

Blood Feud

An ADVENTURER'S GUILD adventure
using the AD&D MONSTROUS ARCANA™ supplement *The Illithiad*
for four to six characters of 7th to 8th level

by Sean K Reynolds
with the author's special thanks to Paul DeMars, Dan Cormier, and Mike Murray

Ancient Blood Debt

Ages ago, the mind flayers conquered a race of humans, enslaving their minds and bodies for labor and for food. Countless generations passed while the humans remained in servitude, until a leader known as Gith rose to the fore and brought the terror of a slave revolt to the illithids. This revolution shattered the multi-planar empire of the mind flayers and gave their slaves their first taste of freedom in thousands of years. In time, the followers of Gith split into two subraces—the githyanki, evil followers loyal to Gith, and the githzerai, studious followers of Zerthimon. Each still bear a grudge against their former masters, no matter how humbled the illithids might have become since.

The githzerai form hunting parties (called *rakkma* in their tongue) of thirty to sixty individuals to hunt illithids wherever they are found in the planes. Occasionally, a *rakkma* is lucky enough to strike a decisive blow against a mind flayer community and completely wipe it out. These attacks usually result in the deaths of virtually all the githzerai in the *rakkma*, but if they achieve the destruction of an entire mind flayer city (which might support almost 2,000 of the monsters) the githzerai consider these acceptable losses.

Very recently, a *rakkma* attacked the illithid city of Kawarlenaa and managed to kill almost every mind flayer present. After the attack reduced the band to only eight githzerai, the *rakkma*'s sergeant decided that her surviving forces could not possibly kill every last one of the fleeing denizens of the city. Sensing the pressures of time, she chose to leave two of her band to stalk the last of her foes, while she and her fellows teleported to the closest human civilization to hire assistance in defeating their prey. Whether or not the people they find can be of any real help is not the issue—the main purpose of the hired help is to serve as a distraction for the illithids so that the githzerai can move in and strike a fatal blow against their mortal foe.

The City of Dohc

Dohc is a medium-sized city bordering a large untamed forest. Logging, fishing, and occasional forays by adventurers into the more feral parts of the forest support the local economy. At least two high-level mages live in the city, and a total of three different temples service the population's religious needs, with an active band of druids making sure the forest doesn't become depleted. Humans, elves, and dwarves are all common sights in the town. The humans and elves from this area tend to be of medium-dark coloration.

When the adventure begins, the player characters are spending some time in Dohc recuperating from their last adventure and planning their next one. This scenario works best if the heroes got rather mangled during their last foray into the wilds—perhaps a character died and the party pooled all their resources to have him or her *raised* at the local temple. At any rate, they should be restless and in need of funds. Fate is about to intervene in the form of a gang of psionic extraplanars. Read or paraphrase the following to the party:

Your favorite hangout, the Green Griffon Inn, bustles with activity this late afternoon. The light breeze from outside brings the scent of green leaves and fresh sawdust through the open front door and into the inn's common room. Davin, the resident bard, seems to be gearing up to tell his tale of how he once met the great wizard Drawmij, and it looks like the early dinner crowd has just about settled in.

A tall female figure darkens the doorway momentarily. Stand-

over six feet tall, the woman is fair-skinned and has vaguely noble features. She enters the inn and waits a moment for her five companions to follow. Wearing simple clothing of conservative colors, the two women and four men might be mistaken for monks of some ascetic order, except that monks normally don't carry two-handed swords on their backs, as this woman does. Her eyes wander the room for a moment until they come to rest on your table. She pauses and then approaches with a straightforward walk that quickly puts her near you. Giving a slow bow that goes no lower than her shoulders, she speaks, using an unfamiliar accent. "My people have come a far way; might we talk with you? We need to hire help, and soon."

If the party refuses her, she frowns and asks again.

"Please . . . I am gifted in the powers of the mind. I can sometimes see what is my best choice for things. Coming here was the right one for us. We have many valuables that we will give you if you agree to assist us. How can I convince you to help us?"

If the party eventually agree to listen, she procures a chair and sits, while the others with her remain standing, warily eyeing the doors and scanning the room as if they expect assassins to materialize out of thin air at any moment. Taking a deep breath, she tells the player characters the following:



"My name is Ravda. My comrades and I are all that is left of our war-group. We left our home to seek out the illithids—you may also know them as "mind flayers"—and crush any that we find. We located one of their underground cities and attacked; we killed or drove away almost all of them, although most of us died in the battle.

"Now, we wish to catch the last few stragglers from the city. The eight of us who still live are too few. We wish to hire others to help us. We have many valuable gemstones that we will give you in exchange for your help." She draws forth a pouch from inside her cape and opens it, revealing the sparkle of almost a king's ransom in jewels.

Ravda is willing to trade the entire pouch of gems (25,000 gp's worth) to the party in exchange for their assistance, as well as letting them take whatever loot they desire from the illithids (she will truthfully say that her people are concerned with the slaughter of their ancient enemies, not with material goods). She explains that time is of the essence, and that she would like to leave as soon as possible—preferably that very evening. If the party agrees, she will give them gems worth 1,000 gp with which they can equip themselves and tells them to meet her outside the western town gate at sundown.

Ravda willingly answers some questions that the player characters may ask. If the heroes ask about the war-group, she tells them that it consisted of sixty individuals. Now, only eight remain. Unfortunately, enough mind flayers remain to give the group of eight a lot of trouble. Ravda feels strongly that she and her group should eliminate every last mind flayer. More details on this question will be revealed once the adventurers agree to help and show up outside the gate.

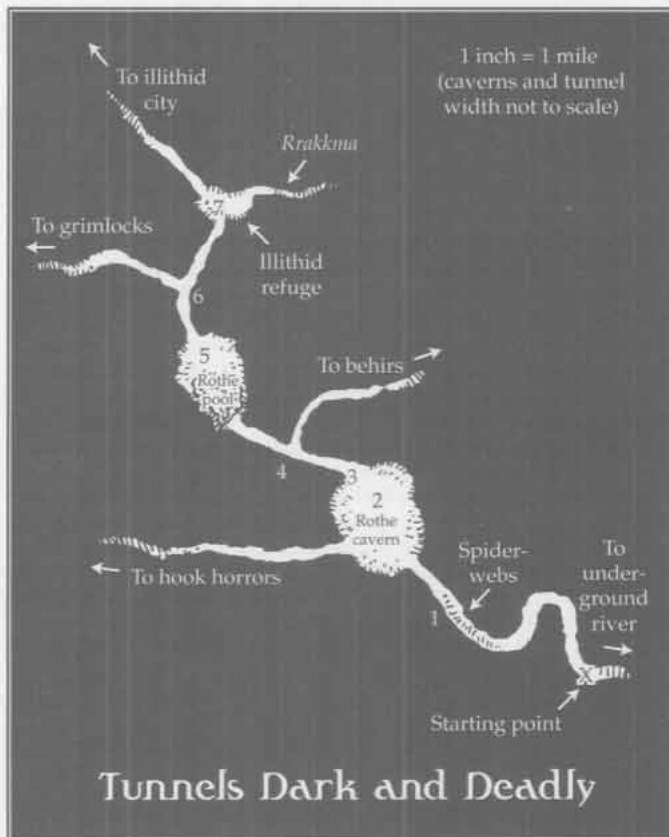
If the adventurers question Ravda about their reasons for attacking the mind flayers, she merely states that her people hate the illithids. She will not mention that she is githzerai unless the heroes ask her outright, as she knows some people have a negative impression of her race. At the same time, she is proud of her race and makes no attempt to hide this fact. If the heroes realize that Ravda is a githzerai and react negatively to this revelation, the githzerai leader does her best to assure the party that the githzerai are an honorable people who hate mind flayers above all things. These githzerai feel that they have bestowed the highest honor on the player characters by asking them to join their rakkma. Should the heroes balk completely, Ravda offhandedly mentions that honor demands honor, by which she means that the remaining members of the rakkma would owe a debt of honor to the heroes which the player characters could call in at some later date.

Outside the Gate

Assuming the characters keep their rendezvous, Ravda's rakkma meets them outside the gates as planned. Once the adventurers are ready, she asks them to join hands with her followers so that they can journey to a location near the illithids. Then she activates the *teleport without error* function of her *rod of passage*.

The forest and city walls swim dizzily and fade to darkness. A few moments later, a faint glow shines from the shortsword of one of Ravda's warriors. There is just enough light to make out that you are in some sort of natural passage that smells slightly of wet stone and mold. Out of the shadows step two warriors, a man and a woman, who resemble your new companions and wear similar gear. Ravda nods at them and talks to them briefly in a strange tongue—no doubt her own language.

Then she turns to you. "This is as close as we can teleport without them sensing it," says the rakkma leader. "We believe that no more than ten mind flayers are left alive, plus their thralls—mentally dominated slaves—which number no more than thirty. Our scouts," Ravda indicates the two newcomers, "have followed them to a place where they have holed up temporarily. It is about two miles from here, if you follow this passage in that direction." She points further into the gloom. "It is best that we split up, so that they can escape by neither route. We will take the longer way and seek to come in from the other side."



Tunnels Dark and Deadly

Before the groups part ways, though, Ravda lowers her voice and tells the party some more information. First of all, she informs them that illithid cities are ruled by the preserved brains of all resident illithids that have died. All accumulated knowledge of those illithids is stored in something called the "elder brain." When the rakkma found this city's elder brain's pool of brine, some of the brain was gone. This is unusual; normally the elder brain, when threatened, pulls itself entirely onto the Astral Plane, leaving nothing of itself behind. However, they detected no residue of such a transportation.

The second point Ravda makes is that the githzerai believe that the last few illithids took the core tissue of the elder brain and carried it with them when they fled. Should the remaining members of the rakkma fall in battle and the player characters succeed, Ravda warns them to be sure that they destroy the remains of the elder brain. Otherwise it will grow again and rebuild what it had lost.

"If you have the choice between killing illithids and killing the mind of the city, the elder brain is the more important target. Without it, the illithids lose their reservoir of knowledge and the focus of their devotion, and they become easy targets. In any case, when you reach their lair, be cautious—even when fleeing for their lives, they are crafty and dangerous. If you must get away, try to do as much damage as you can before you go.

The woman converses briefly in her own tongue with one of her warriors, then turns back to face you. "Jhadaiya says that she has scouted ahead—the tunnel you'll be taking splits several times. Go right, then left, then right again, and you will be heading straight for the target. Try to get there as soon as you can."

Ravda answers any questions about these mind flayers that she can. She knows that they have grimlocks as mind-controlled slaves. Also, she knows that these last illithids aren't particularly unusual for their species and that they prefer *mind blast* and *charm* attacks when possible. She then *teleports* her people away to approach the lair from a different direction, blocking off the mind flayers' escape.

The Passage

The tunnel is fairly large—often exceeding 50 feet or more in diameter. A majority of it lies entirely in darkness, although spots of it are faintly illuminated by glowing fungus, strangely sharp crystals (which fade if removed from the stone), and the occasional phosphorescent pool. Tasteless but edible lichens and moss coat much of the floor, walls, and ceiling, partly muffling the sound of footsteps. Occasionally, small blind lizards can be seen scuttling about on all surfaces; these things feed on insects and other vermin and flee if disturbed or attacked.

If the group travels in the opposite direction than Ravda indicated (i.e., away from their destination), after approximately a mile they reach a turbulent, smelly underground river. The river cuts diagonally across a small cavern, leaving a crevasse at least 20 feet deep. The passage continues beyond the river for another half-mile, at which point the party would be in the territory of a huge nomadic group of grimlocks (over 150 males, with at least as many females and young). Unless the characters use expert tactics, attacking a tribe of grimlocks in their home territory is likely to get the entire party killed.

Most of the passage from the heroes' arrival point to the temporary illithid lair is the feeding ground of two herds of rothe—short, sturdy subterranean cattle which feed upon the growths of the caves. The rothe wander back and forth in the tunnels seeking food and water; their presence makes this tunnel contested territory for several different carnivorous Underdark species. See page 21 for a map.

Area 1: Spider Webs

This area is home to several large spiders. Characters have a 2-in-6 chance to notice the earlier strands of web in the tunnel as they approach (only 1-in-6 if traveling with no light source). If the lead character fails this check, read the following:

While moving down the rough tunnel, you feel as if something has touched your face. Startled, you stop, and realize that diaphanous strands of spider web cling to your skin! You almost walked face-first into a nest of spiders; their webs can be seen ahead, strung all around a small pool of water.



If the lead character makes the check, read the following:

A strange disturbance in the air distracts you enough to bring you to a halt. Several gossamer lines criss-cross part of the tunnel. Peering forward, you see a small pool of water, around which large cobwebs have been strung to catch unwary insects and other vermin.

Characters who proceed with caution easily avoid the larger webs beyond unless they want to investigate the pool. The pool itself is about five feet across and filled with nothing more unusual than fresh water. The spiders do not leave their web unless threatened.

Large spiders (8): AC 8; MV 6, web 15; HD 1+1; hp 2, 4, 7, 2, 9, 4, 4, 3; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1+poison (bite), SA poisonous bite (save vs. poison with +2 bonus or suffer 15 points of damage, no damage on successful save); SW webs cannot hold characters of Str 19 or greater; SZ S (2' diameter); ML unsteady (7); Int non (0); AL N; XP 175 each.

Area 2: Rothe Cave #1

The wandering tunnel opens up into a much larger area, certainly well over 60 feet long and as wide; the ceiling soars to about 60 feet above you. Several short cow-like creatures can be seen grazing on subterranean vegetation; upon noticing you, they calmly wander away. Like the rest of this underground realm, it is mostly dark here, although two patches of lichen glow nearby. Another large, faintly glowing area lies on the floor at the edge of your vision.

This cave is over 200 feet long, almost as wide, and about 20 feet high. Two other passages wind their way out of the far end of this area, which is the main grazing ground for a herd of 35 rothe. A large pool of fresh water and a glowing pool of stagnant poisonous water take up part of the floor space. Should a character drink from the stagnant pool, he or she must make a successful saving throw vs. poison or have a -2 penalty imposed on all attacks for the next 24 hours due to nausea.

There is a 50% chance that when the party first arrives in this cavern, a group of four hook horrors sit near the left passage, calmly eating a newly slain rothe. They remain quite aware of the party and will not attack unless the party threatens them or seeks to go down the left tunnel (which leads toward the hook horrors' lair). If the group takes care to go around the opposite end of the chamber, the hook horrors drag their prey back toward their home and out of the party's sight. Should the heroes choose to pursue, the horrors fight to defend their tunnel; four more hook horrors arrive 2d6 rounds later to assist them.

Hook horrors (8): AC 3; MV 9; HD 5; hp 24, 32, 21, 17, 34, 40, 23, 30; THAC0 15; #AT 3; Dmg 1d8/1d8/2d6 (hook/hook/beak); SA beak automatically hits each round on any target snagged by both hooks; SD acute hearing (only 1-in-10 chance of being surprised), echolocation; SZ L (9' tall); ML steady (12); Int low (6); AL N; XP 175 each.

Rothe (35): AC 7; MV 9; HD 2; hp 14 each; THAC0 19; #AT 3; Dmg 1d3/1d3/1d8 (horn/horn/bite); SZ M (4' long); ML elite (13); Int animal (1); AL N; XP 35 each.

The horrors have no personal treasure. The entire tribe consists of a total of 25 hook horrors; their joint treasure is only a few hundred coins of mixed types left over from grimlock raids. For their part the rothe, if attacked or approached with bright light, flee down the closest exit. Rothe meat is quite tasty, even to surface dwellers.

Area 3: Carrion Crawlers

Three carrion crawlers used to live farther up the tunnel, but the recent arrival of a young behir (see area 4) has forced them out of their regular territory. Driven away from the rothe herd they normally feed upon and hemmed in on the other side by the hook horrors (whose exoskeletons proved immune to the crawlers' paralytic

secretions), they haven't eaten in several days and are very hungry. Upon seeing or smelling intruders, they'll rush forward, their stink heralding their approach. They continue to attack as long as any of their foes are unparalyzed. The crawlers have no treasure, as the behir claimed anything left in their old lair.

The foul stench of decay suddenly assaults your nostrils, reminding you of the reek of the dead. A squid-like head appear at the limits of your vision. However, instead of a humanoid body, the head is attached to an ugly insectoid worm, scuttling forward on numerous tiny legs. Two creatures like it scurry forth from the dark, their facial tentacles writhing furiously.

Carrion crawlers (3): AC 3 (head)/7 (body); MV 12; HD 3+1; hp 18, 9, 13; THAC0 17; #AT 1 (bite) or 8 (tentacles); Dmg 1d2 (bite) or paralysis (tentacles); SA tentacles paralyze anyone they touch (2d6 turns, save vs. paralyzation to resist); SZ L (9' long); ML fearless (20); Int non (0); AL N; XP 420 each.

Area 4: Tunnel Split and Behir Territory

An immature behir, driven out of its parents' nest about a year ago and bounced from region to region by other predators, has come to this area of the caverns. After chasing out the resident carrion crawlers (the behir doesn't like their taste, and its scales protect it from the crawlers' tentacles), it has made this immediate section of tunnels its home. Being only partially grown, it has only eight legs and cannot swallow whole any opponents of human-size or greater. However, it is still quite a fearsome opponent and will not hesitate to attack anything it perceives as food, an intruder, or a threat.

This area also reeks with the smell of decaying matter; obviously this was some sort of lair for the disgusting crawlers you've already encountered. Refuse, bones, and scraps of flesh lie strewn about this area. Occasionally, a coin glints amid the filth. The hallway continues forward from here, but a slightly smaller side passage juts off to the right at a perpendicular course to this one. Another one of the squid-worms lies dead nearby, its body split open along its length.

The behir's *lightning blast* killed the dead carrion crawler, and any character who makes a successful Intelligence roll or Spellcraft check can deduce that some sort of electricity was the cause. There is a 50% chance that the behir is attracted by the party's arrival or searching of this area. If so, it sends its *lightning bolt* toward anyone standing near the right-side exit:

A bright burst of light streaks forth from the right tunnel, hitting like a thunderclap. A reptilian head like a crocodile's peers forth from that passage, then the beast slithers forth to continue its attack.

Immature behir: AC 4; MV 15; HD 12; hp 34; THAC0 9; #AT 2; Dmg 2d4 (bite)/1d4+1 (constriction); SA *lightning bolt* (24 points of damage, once per turn, save vs. breath weapon for half-damage), swallow whole (Small-sized creatures only, death occurs in six rounds), constricted creatures may be attacked by six talons per round (1d4+1 damage each); SD immune to electricity and poison; SZ L (10' long); ML champion (15); Int low (5); AL NE; XP 7,000.

If searched, the refuse contains a total of 221 cp, 170 sp, and 11 gp. The behir has not swallowed any treasure in its recent travels.

Several miles down the right-hand corridor is the edge of the behir's parents' territory; the branching passages between that location and this one house various underdark creatures, with rothe, spiders, and grimlocks the most common among them.

Area 5: Rothe Cave #2

Much like the last large cavern, this area rapidly widens to form a spacious room. Not quite as large as the other, this chamber is unusual in that the large pool in the middle is dominated by four large crystalline growths that give off a bright green glow—almost as bright as the full moon. Several more of the strange underground cattle peacefully crop the mossy undergrowth that coats the floor.

This cave is about 150 feet long and 80 feet wide and serves as home for 18 rothe. Water from the shallow (one-foot-deep) freshwater pool covers half of the floor space. The four large crystals are each about two feet long and three inches thick; numerous smaller growths surround the large ones. Unlike any crystals found elsewhere in these caverns, these four continue to glow for up to 24 hours after they are removed from their mineral bed. Anyone holding or carrying one of these crystals who is the recipient of any spell that restores lost hit points (for example, *cure light wounds*) will gain an additional hit point of curing due to a strange resonance with the stone. Note that this effect is not obvious to the characters, nor that the crystal is its source. The additional healing ceases when the crystal loses its inner glow. A sage in the city of Dohc would pay up to 500 gp for each crystal.

If the party has not already defeated the behir from area 4, there is a 25% chance that it will be here, chewing on its latest meal (a grimlock from a tribe further up the tunnel). When the party approaches, it attacks with its *electric bolt* and then moves in to use its natural weapons.

Area 6: Tunnel to the Grimlock Lair

After a few sharp corners, the tunnel comes to a T-intersection. There doesn't appear to be anything out of the ordinary about this area.

Going left takes the group toward a small tribe of grimlocks; going right brings them closer to the refuge of the mind flayers. This grimlock tribe numbers 45 males, 40 females, and 50 young; they will not hesitate to kill (and eat) any intruders in their territory. The grimlocks are aware of the collapse of the illithid city Kawarlenaa and cautiously have been sending out scouts through the nearby tunnels to see what they can find. If the party waits around here for longer than a turn, a scouting pair of grimlocks quietly approaches them. Under no circumstances do these two creatures attack; if noticed, they run back and inform their tribe, which forms a hunting party to track, kill, and eat the surface-dwellers. If the party leaves this area before a turn passes, the grimlocks can smell that the adventurers were present, and the tribe sends out a hunting party when the scouts return. The hunting party catches up to the group about three hours after they leave the intersection.

Grimlocks (21): AC 5; MV 12; HD 2; hp 14, 13, 7, 6, 8, 12, 13, 4, 11, 10, 10, 8, 9, 9, 8, 10, 8, 13, 10, 8, 2; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6 (handaxe) or 1d8 (longsword); SA +1 bonus to surprise opponents; SD immune to sight-based magic, make saving throws as 6th-level Fighters; SW totally blind (detect prey through sound and scent); SZ M (5½' tall); ML elite (13); Int average (8); AL NE; XP 35 each. Each carries 3d6 sp, 2d6 ep, and 2d4 gp.

Grimlock leaders (2): AC 4; MV 12; HD 3; hp 15, 17; THAC0 17; #AT 1; Dmg 1d8 (battleaxe) or 1d10 (two-handed sword); SA +1 bonus to surprise opponents; SD immune to sight-based magic, make saving throws as 6th-level Fighters; SW blind (detect prey through sound and scent); SZ M (6' tall); ML elite (13); Int average (9); AL NE; XP 120 each. Each has 3d6 sp, 2d6 ep, and 2d4 gp.

Area 7: Illithid Hideout

The refugee illithids have camped temporarily in this splitting of the tunnel; it gives them two escape routes should they be attacked and has enough space that the illithids can rest without being pressed against their slaves. Their entire company numbers 8 mind flayers, a



and then wades in with its weapon in hand. The Abysmal's strategy is much more cruel, seeking to inspire terror and disgust in any that see it in action.

Tamer illithid: AC 5 (AC 3 with *potion of invulnerability**); MV 12; HD 8+4; hp 48; THAC0 10 (Tamer training; 9 with *bastard sword +1*); #AT 1 (sword) or 4 (tentacles); Dmg 2d4+1 (*bastard sword +1*) or 2 points+extract brain x4 (tentacles); SA *mind blast*, *suggestion*, *charm person*, and *charm monster*; SD ESP, *levitate*, *plane shift*, *infravision*, *potion of invulnerability** (+2 bonus on all saves, immune to non-magical weapons); SW -10% penalty to all Hear Noise checks; MR 90%; SZ M (6' tall); ML champion (15); Int genius (17); AL LE; XP 9,000.

This Tamer has focused its training on the arts of war; thus its THAC0 is 1 point better than most *mind flayers*. The price of such expertise is that it never developed its innate *astral projection* ability common to most others of its kind. It has a *potion of invulnerability** and a *bastard sword +1*, preferring the blade to its other attacks.

Abysmal illithid: AC 5; MV 12; HD 8+4; hp 36; THAC0 11; #AT 4; Dmg 2 points+extract brain x4 (tentacles); SA *mind blast*, *suggestion*, *charm person*, and *charm monster*; SD ESP, *levitate*, *astral projection*, *plane shift*, and *infravision*; SW -10% penalty to all Hear Noise checks; MR 90%; SZ M (6' tall); ML champion (15); Int genius (17); AL LE; XP 9,000.

The Abysmal steps into view, uses its *charm person* ability on a foe, and then telepathically commands its victim to approach it. The illithid then casually bores into its victim's skull through the face with its tentacles and extracts the brain, all within view of its meal's former comrades. Each ally of the affected victim should make saving throws vs. paralysis; failure indicates that character suffers a -1 penalty to his or her attack rolls for the next five rounds (although this saving throw and penalty can be ignored if the players accurately roleplay their reactions). The monster will continue its attack using its *mind blast* ability, *plane shifting* away if death seems near.

7C: Illithids Asleep

Three sleeping *mind flayers* lie here on pallets of moss. They awaken one round after combat begins anywhere near here, having been startled by a telepathic warning from their kin. Two of the sleepers belong to the Nourishers Creed, which takes care of the city's thralls. The third is of the Creative Creed, which builds psionic items and researches new psionic disciplines.

Nourisher illithids (2): AC 5; MV 12; HD 8+4; hp 39, 38; THAC0 11; #AT 4; Dmg 2 points+extract brain x4 (tentacles); SA *mind blast*, *suggestion*, *charm person*, and *charm monster*; SD ESP, *levitate*, *astral projection*, *plane shift*, and *infravision*; SW -10% penalty to all Hear Noise checks; MR 90%; SZ M (6' tall); ML champion (15); Int genius (17); AL LE; XP 7,000 each.

If the Nourishers can keep any more of the precious thralls from being killed, then they will do so; it is most likely that they will try to *charm* opponents into attacking each other or *mind blast* their foes into incoherence. If the thralls have been dispatched, the Nourishers move in to consume the brains of those that killed their pets. One of the Nourishers has a *potion of healing*; if it can aid a thrall that is injured without endangering itself, it uses the potion on the slave.

Creative illithid: AC 5; MV 12; HD 8+4; hp 44; THAC0 11; #AT 4; Dmg 2 points+extract brain x4 (tentacles); SA *mind blast*, *suggestion*, *charm person*, and *charm monster*; SD ESP, *levitate*, *astral projection*, *plane shift*, and *infravision*; SW -10% penalty to all Hear Noise checks; MR 90%; SZ M (6' tall); ML champion (15); Int genius (17); AL LE; XP 7,000.

The Creative assesses the situation for a moment, then spends the next 2 rounds quaffing half of its *potion of fire breath* and vomiting forth a cone of dull flame (40 feet long, 20 feet wide, 2d10+4 damage, save vs. breath weapon for half-damage). If seriously injured, it uses

mimic, 2 derro, and 25 grimlocks. The derro and grimlocks have been enslaved for months and are suicidally loyal to their monstrous masters. The mimic is similarly charmed, although if brought close to death and given the chance to flee it will do so.

The illithids have directed the grimlocks to scrape up all of the glowing fungus in this part of the cave and throw it far down the passageway from which they came. They have stationed grimlocks at each tunnel entrance and left the derro and mimic to guard the elder brainling. Now, the illithids are taking turns resting. See the map on page 25 for placement of the illithids and their minions.

Note that many of the *mind flayers* in this group carry potions. Most of these are not actually magical potions, but psionically enhanced illithid mucus. These potions are marked with an asterisk (*) and do not radiate magic. Furthermore, non-illithids that drink these potions must make a saving throw vs. poison; failure means that the potion doesn't work and the imbiber is nauseated for 2d4 hours (-2 penalty to attacks and saving throws). Note also that all saving throws against illithid mental attacks (*charm person*, *suggestion*, *charm monster*) suffer a -4 penalty.

7A: Grimlock Guards

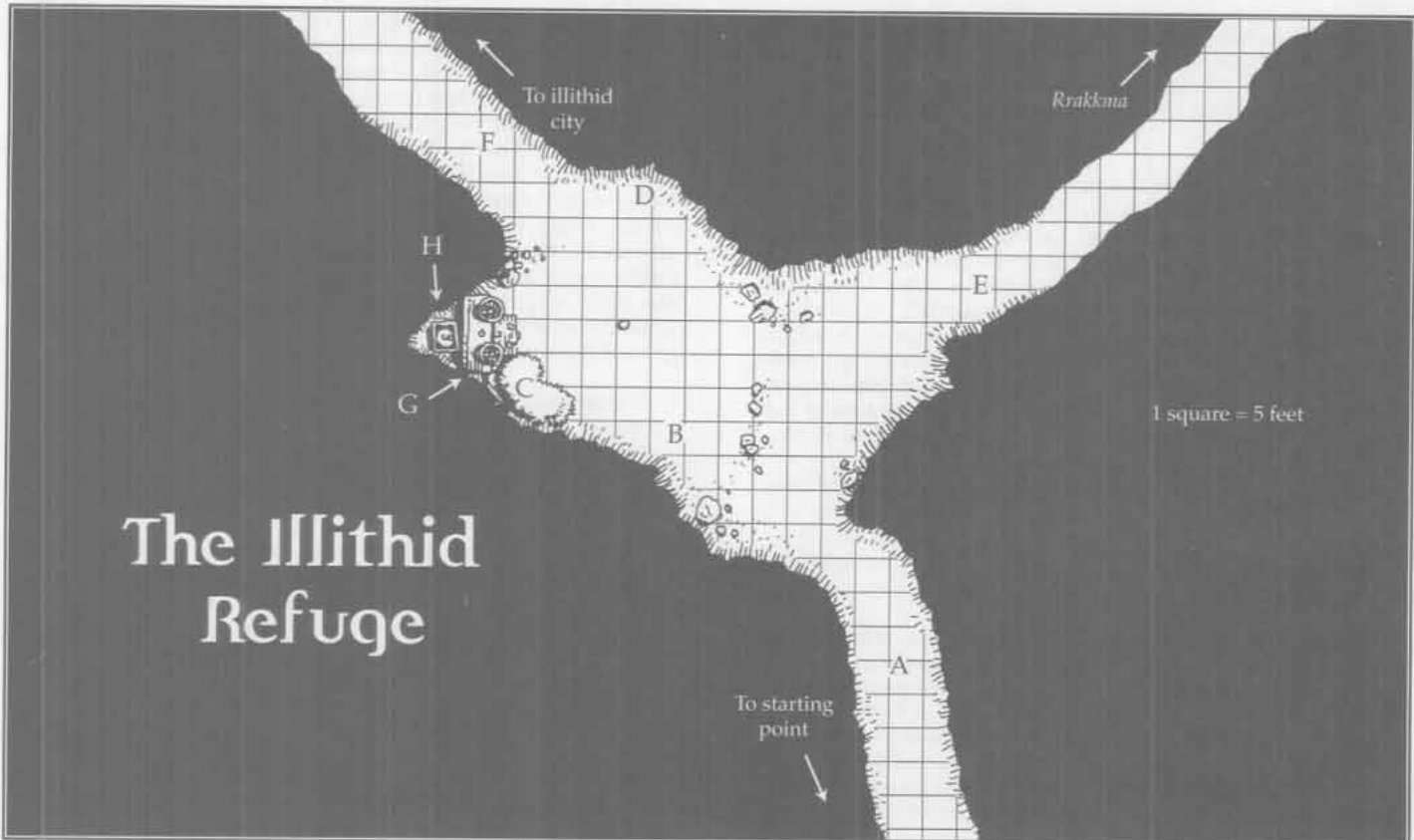
Nine grimlocks wait in this area of the tunnel. One sits about 20 feet ahead of its fellows, ready to sound a silent (to non-grimlocks) alarm and bring on a blind horde of slashing blades upon any intruder. Remember that due to their ability to blend into darkness and their exceptional senses, grimlocks gain a +1 bonus to surprise their foes.

Grimlocks (9): AC 5; MV 12; HD 2; hp 15, 11, 9, 5, 11, 15, 5, 8, 6; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6 (handaxe) or 1d8 (battleaxe); SA +1 bonus to surprise opponents; SD immune to sight-based magic, make all saving throws as if 6th-level Fighters; SW totally blind (detect prey through sound and scent); SZ M (5½'); ML steady (11); Int average (8); AL NE; XP 35 each.

7B: Illithids on Watch

Two illithids remain on watch while their fellows rest. One is from a militia-minded *mind flayer* Creed (or faction) called the Tamers, the other from the terror-minded Abysmal Creed. If an attack comes, the Tamer drinks its potion, waits for the invaders to come close enough,

The Illithid Refuge



plane shift to get away, drinks its *potion of extra healing** and the rest of its *potion of fire breath*, then shifts back 5 rounds later to continue the attack with renewed vigor.

7D: Illithids Brooding

The three mind flayers in this area are planning, not sleeping. All three are members of the Ariser Creed, which is the faction most vehement about accelerating plans to conquer the surface world. They are discussing how the fall of the city might actually be to their benefit—with so few members of opposing factions present among the survivors, it might be possible to take steps toward acting on their desires to conquer. These three illithids can respond almost immediately to any attack on their temporary lair.

Ariser illithids (3): AC 5; MV 12; HD 8+4; hp 41, 34, 31; THAC0 11; #AT 4; Dmg 2 points+extract brain ×4 (tentacles); SA *mind blast*, *suggestion*, *charm person*, and *charm monster*; SD ESP, *levitate*, *astral projection*, *plane shift*, *infravision*, *glaregoggles* (not blinded by *light* or *continual light* spells); SW -10% penalty to all Hear Noise checks; MR 90%; SZ M (6' tall); ML champion (15); Int genius (17); AL LE; XP 7,000 each.

When the party attacks, one Ariser drinks a dose of its *potion of invisibility** (5 doses), passes the bottle to one of its creedmates, and vanishes from view. The second illithid also drinks a dose and disappears. The third telepathically commands the two groups of grimlocks in areas 7E and 7F to attack the invaders, after which it fights with its ranged attacks. The two invisible ones wait to see the outcome of the battle. If the intruders defeat the other mind flayers, these two wait until the adventurers seem least likely to expect an attack; then they make decisive strikes with *mind blasts*, following this up with tentacles. Each Ariser carries a set of glaregoggles, which are wrap-around lenses designed to allow an illithid to travel about in regular light or even sunlight without penalty.

7E: More Grimlocks

As in area 7A, nine grimlocks wait here, with one posted farther out as a sentry. They remain here unless attacked or until directed to move by their masters. Early in the combat, an Ariser from 7D will

command these slaves to engage the enemy coming from area 7A. Unknown to them, the githzerai have been waiting a few hundred feet further up the cavern for this opportunity. Once the grimlocks move away from the tunnel, Ravda's band begins stealthily creeping toward the lair, arriving 6 rounds after combat with the player characters starts (see "Githzerai Attack" on page 27).

7F: Sleeping Grimlocks

The illithids are fairly confident that nothing has followed them from the ruin of their city, so they have left their exit path slightly less guarded than the other tunnels. Seven grimlocks are sleeping in this passage, spread out over about the first 60 feet. Any noises or strange scents in this area awaken them and incite them to attack. They ignore sounds from other parts of the cavern unless a mind flayer orders them to investigate.

Grimlocks (7): AC 5; MV 12; HD 2; hp 15, 13, 4, 7, 11×2, 9; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6 (handaxe) or 1d8 (longsword); SD immune to sight-based magic, SZ M (5½'); ML steady (11); Int average (8); AL NE; XP 35 each.

7G: Guardian Slaves

An upended small wagon blocks the view into some sort of alcove; a large chest braces the wagon in its current position. In front of the chest are two female four-foot humanoids that look like a cross between a human and a dwarf. Each wears armor of studded leather and holds a strange crossbow; each has her crossbow trained at your midsection!

The two derro are the charmed guardians of the precious cargo that waits in area 7H. If the heroes attack them, or if any of the party comes within 30 feet, they begin firing their repeating light crossbows until their foes are dead. They will not leave the area that they have been assigned to guard.

Derro (2): AC 4 (studded leather, Dexterity bonus); MV 9; HD 3; hp 18, 16; THAC0 17 (15 with repeating crossbows and Dexterity bonus); #AT 2 (repeating crossbow) or 1 (dagger); Dmg

1d3+poison/1d3+poison (bolt/bolt) or 1d4 (secari [dagger]); SA poisoned bolts (2d6 additional points of damage on failed save vs. poison, no damage on successful save); SD infravision (30-foot range); SZ S (4'); ML fearless (20); AL CE; XP 975 each. Dex 17, Int 14.

Each derro's crossbow can fire six shots before needing to be reloaded; it fires at a rate of two bolts per round. Note that the bolts are coated with poison (see above). Derro infravision does not reach beyond 30 feet, and so they will not fire into a general melee in darkness for fear of displeasing their terrible masters. They do have very keen hearing, granting them the equivalent of the Blind-fighting proficiency (-2 penalty on attacks in darkness rather than -4 penalty). If their opponents come close enough to force them into melee combat, they step away from each other and use their ornamental daggers. This strategy may seem as if the derro wish to move behind their opponents, but it's actually to make room for the mimic to attack.

Mimic: AC 7; MV 3; HD 8; hp 40; THAC0 13; #AT 1; Dmg 3d4 (pseudopod); SA glue (holds fast any creature touching or touched by the mimic); SD camouflage (-4 penalty to opponent's surprise rolls); SZ L (roughly 3'x6'x8'); ML champion (15); Int average (9); AL N; XP 1,400.

What appears to be a large chest is actually a mimic that the mind flayers charmed a few weeks earlier. It must also attack any foes that approach area 7H. The mimic sprouts a pseudopod (roll for surprise, assigning a -4 penalty to the PCs) and attacks any of the party members within reach. The mimic knows several Underdark languages and Common; if seriously wounded (say, below 10 hp), it releases anyone held by its glue and begs for mercy in every language it knows. If all of the mind flayers are killed, it snaps out of its charmed state and befriends anyone that gives it food (dead foes work just fine).

7H: Faded Glory

The upturned wagon acts as a barricade to a small alcove, but removing this obstacle is a simple matter. Resting in the alcove on a bed of moss is an open-topped wooden box, inside of which can be seen what looks like an enormous covered stewpot, well over three feet across. Resting on the cover, just in front of the pot's handle, is a strange sculpture, seemingly made out of wax and shaped vaguely like a mind flayer's head.

The "wax" figurine is actually congealed illithid mucous; it has been imbued with psionic circuitry and now acts as a psionic seal. Anything that approaches within five feet of it without thinking the proper sequence of thoughts ("Wisdom, Dominion, Thrall, Darkness") suffers 10d6 points of mental pain (successful saving throw vs. death magic for half-damage). This item requires 24 hours of recharging before it can strike again. As it is little more than thickened protoplasm, a good whack from a weapon can easily destroy it.

The stewpot is just that—a stewpot, normally used to make meals for thralls. It was necessary to find a container quickly to hold the new budding growth of the city's elder brain, and the stewpot was all that was available. Removing the lid reveals the elder brain.

The briny smell of seawater wafts upward from the pot, and you see that it is full of liquid and frothing a bit at the edges. A grayish shape lies beneath the surface, filling the container—the convoluted and marbled flesh of a mass of illithid brain tissue, kept alive through some horrible monstrous process.

"Greetings, sentient," calls a voice in your brain. "I am Kawarlenaa, archive of a thousand years of illithid knowledge and study. How may I serve you?"

Kawarlenaa is in a very precarious position. Rather than stranding itself on the Astral, as many of its kind do when threatened, it chose to separate out what it thought its most essential knowledge and form a bud containing that information from its main mass—a bud that would be limited in power for a time but strong in knowl-

edge and experience. According to the plan, some of its servants would transport it to safety, where it could think and plan and build a new city. Now, however, it lays exposed and vulnerable—its life within the hands of a few transient mortal surface-dwellers.

The elder brain tries to convince its captors that it is a valuable asset and should not be destroyed. It offers valuable information in order to hint at the depth of knowledge it has (the DM should allow it to give part of the answer to some problem that has long plagued the PCs, letting them realize that given more time and information it might solve the entire riddle). Tempt them mightily. The elder brain pretends to be totally passive, lacking any will of its own, in the hope that they will preserve it as their own private sage-in-a-box. Later, when it is safely away from this disaster, it can *dominate* its captors and use them to its own advantage.

Kawarlenaa, elder brain: AC 10; MV nil; HD 8; hp 33; THAC0 nil; #AT 0; Dmg 0; SA suggestion, charm person, charm monster, telekinesis; SD telepathy, ESP, potion of extra healing* (see below); SW immobile and helpless; MR 90%; SZ S (1' diameter); ML fearless (20); Int supra-genius (20); AL LE; XP 10,000.

In this reduced form, the elder brain's powers are reduced in range: it can sense beings only within 50 feet of itself, communicate telepathically with creatures within 10 feet of itself, and use its powers on victims within five feet of itself (note that a *charmed* victim that leaves this five-foot range is still *charmed*... it's just that Kawarlenaa cannot establish control on a target who does not come within its attack range). If it seems that the party is going to attack, the elder brain uses its limited powers to *charm* one of them and orders its new slave to protect it at all costs. The briny water it rests in has already been mixed with a *potion of extra-healing**, so immediately after it is wounded the first time, it heals 3d8+3 points of damage. It also has a bottle of *oil of slipperiness* stashed in a niche on the wall above; if it sees no other option, it telekinetically spills the oil at the party's feet, then uses telekinesis to move its container to safety, hiding for as long as is necessary.

The only other treasure the mind flayers had in addition to the potions is tucked underneath the stewpot: a silk bag with 785 gp (all they could grab while fleeing from the city).



Githzerai Attack

When the githzerai arrive (which should be after 6 rounds of combat or at the DM's discretion), Ravda will have invoked a *mind bar* upon herself; this keeps anyone from succeeding at any mind-control attempts made on her. Their first goal is to kill any mind flayers in their way and, once the illithids are no longer an immediate threat, find and destroy the piece of elder brain. They ignore any pleas for assistance from the party unless helping them involves killing mind flayers. Thus, if the PCs are being decimated by the grimlocks, derro, or mimic and think the githzerai arrival is "cavalry coming to the rescue," they will no doubt be dismayed when the githzerai ignore them, focusing their attention on killing their ancient foes. Only when no other illithids remain standing will the rakkma help their mercenaries. Rather than foolishly wasting their time in psionic combat with the much more experienced brain-eaters, the githzerai fight hand-to-hand with as much ferocity as a thousand years of vengeful hatred can muster.

Note that the githzerai Syomm, with his *wand of enemy detection*, would be very helpful in finding any enemies that have escaped or turned invisible. If any of the illithids vanished during the battle and any of the githzerai saw it, Ravda orders him to use the item (she also does this if any of the PCs tell her they saw one disappear).

Should any of the githzerai be alive when the elder-brain is found, they move to upset the pot and kill the thing immediately. If the PCs try to prevent them from doing this, the rakkma warriors are not above using lethal force to get the adventurers out of their path (the githzerai assume that anyone behaving so foolish must be dominated by the elder brain's power). Once the elder brain is destroyed, the githzerai pull themselves out of their genocidal frenzy and tend to their wounded. They also pay the PCs the balance of the gems that they are owed for their services. If asked, they *teleport* the adventurers back to the outskirts of Dohc; they also point the way to the ruined illithid city (should the PCs want to explore or loot it) and can even give rough directions to the closest way back to the surface. Of course, the party is free to wander about the Underdark if they choose. As far as the githzerai are concerned, the task is done, the party has been paid, and the time has come for the two groups to go their separate ways. This does not mean that they no longer have any concern over the fate of the PCs; githzerai honor demands that the debt of assistance in time of need be repaid, but Ravda will be astonished if the PCs squander the debt of honor for company in a little dungeon-delving.

The End

The Githzerai

In an effort to stay away to keep things simple and avoid using an optional system, psionics Disciplines and Sciences are not listed for the githzerai detailed below. A DM who is comfortable with the use of psionics in his or her campaign should certainly add psionic abilities to both the illithids and their githzerai foes. For purposes of this adventure, however, these githzerai do not willingly use psionics against the illithids because the mind flayers' mental powers are far more developed; the strengths of the rakkma lie in physical attack instead.

Ravda, rakkma leader (female githzerai, 7th-level Fighter/7th-level Mage): AC 0 (silver chainmail +3, Dexterity bonus); MV 12; hp 33; THAC0 14 (11 with silver sword); #AT 3/2; Dmg 1d10+3 (silver sword); SA *plane shift*, spells; SD psionics (uses *mind bar* to prevent illithids from using mind powers on her), spells; SZ M (6'3" tall); MR 35%; ML steady (12); AL CN; XP 5,000. Dex 16, Int 17. Spells: *comprehend languages*, *enlarge*, *magic missile* (x2); ESP, *mirror image*, *ray of enfeeblement*; *lightning bolt*, *vampiric touch*; *phantasmal killer*. Special Equipment: *silver sword* (two-handed sword+3), *rod of passage* (18 charges), spellbook. Personality: straightforward and practical.

Jhadaiya (female githzerai, 5th-level Fighter): AC 2 (chainmail, Dexterity bonus); MV 12; hp 26; THAC0 16; #AT 1; Dmg 1d8 (longsword); SA *plane shift*; SD psionics (*mind bar*), *ring of regeneration*; SZ M (6' tall); MR 25%; ML steady (12); AL CN; XP 975. Dex 17, Int 15. Personality: silent, watchful.

Omax (male githzerai, 5th-level Mage): AC 8 (*ring of protection* +2); MV 12; hp 18; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4 (dagger); SA *plane shift*, spells, SD psionics (*mind bar*), *ring of protection* +2 (+2 bonus to saves), spells; SZ M (6' tall); ML steady (12); AL CN; XP 975. Int 16. Spells: *comprehend languages*, *magic missile* (x3); *mirror image*, *ray of enfeeblement*; *lightning bolt*. Personality: flamboyant, malevolent.

Khevith (female githzerai, 6th-level Fighter/6th-level Mage): AC 4 (*chainmail* +1); MV 12; hp 23; THAC0 15; #AT 1 (*shortsword* +1) or 2 (*short bow*); Dmg 1d6+1 (*shortsword* +1) or 1d6/1d6 (arrows); SA *plane shift*, spells; SD psionics (*mind bar*), spells; SZ M (6' tall); MR 30%; ML steady (12); AL CN; XP 3,000. Int 16. Spells: *chill touch*, *color spray*, *light*, *magic missile*; *invisibility*, *web*; *dispel magic*, *lightning bolt*. Personality: quiet, serious.

Zaruud (male githzerai, 5th-level Fighter/5th-level Mage): AC 10; MV 12; hp 22; THAC0 16; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6 (*shortsword*); SA *plane shift*, spells; SD psionics (*mind bar*), spells; SZ M (6' tall); MR 25%; ML steady (12); AL CN; XP 1,400. Int 15. Spells: *armor*, *burning hands*, *magic missile*, *shield*; ESP, *Melf's acid arrow*; *dispel magic*. Special Equipment: *potion of extra-healing*. Personality: unrelenting, brusque.

Neiron (male githzerai, 4th-level Mage): AC 10; MV 12; hp 15; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4 (dagger); SA *plane shift*, spells; SD psionics (*mind bar*), spells; SZ M (6' tall); ML steady (12); AL CN; XP 420. Int 15. Spells: *magic missile* (x2), *shield*; ESP, *Melf's acid arrow*. Special Equipment: *potion of gaseous form*. Personality: precise, methodical.

Syomm (male githzerai, 3rd-level Fighter/3rd-level Mage): AC 4 (silver chainmail +1); MV 12; hp 13; THAC0 18; #AT 1; Dmg 1d8 (longsword); SA *plane shift*, spells; SD psionics (*mind bar*), spells; SZ M (6' tall); MR 15%; ML steady (12); AL CN; XP 420. Int 15. Spells: *magic missile*, *shield*; ESP. Special Equipment: *wand of enemy detection* (11 charges). Personality: conservative, ferocious.

Trugal (male githzerai, 4th-level Mage): AC 10; MV 12; hp 14; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4 (dagger); SA *plane shift*, spells; SD psionics (*mind bar*), spells; SZ M (6' tall); ML steady (12); AL CN; XP 420. Int 16. Spells: *magic missile* (x2), *shield*; ESP, *strength*. Special Equipment: *scroll of protection from possession*. Personality: insightful, severe.

The Manxome Foe

An ADVENTURER'S GUILD adventure
set in the PLANESCAPE campaign
for four to six characters of 8th to 12th level

by Christopher Perkins

"The jaws that bite,
the claws that catch"

The Manxome Foe" is a stand-alone PLANESCAPE module inspired by the *Tales From the Infinite Staircase* adventure anthology (TSR #2632). This adventure takes heroes through one of the many doors on the Infinite Staircase, transporting them to one of the twin layers of Bytopia. For more information on Bytopia and the ways of its inhabitants, refer to pages 28 to 45 of the *Liber Benevolentiae*, one of the books in the *Planes of Conflict* boxed set (TSR #2603). Enough information about the plane is provided herein to run the adventure without this resource.

The Door to Dothion

The Infinite Staircase is exactly that—endlessly spiraling stairs and landings marked with doors that lead to countless places. The Infinite Staircase is guarded by the benevolent lillendi (described in the *MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM® Annual, Volume III* [TSR #2166] and in the *Monstrous Supplement* in the *Planes of Chaos* boxed set [TSR #2603]). It connects only to places where creativity and creative thoughts exist. Bytopia has more than its fair share of craftsmen and thus has many hidden doors linked to the Infinite Staircase. One of the more newly formed doors on the Infinite Staircase appears in the side of a large tree trunk on the Bytopian layer of Dothion. Characters who pass through the portal find themselves standing in Brillig, a village of centaurs located in a secluded domain known as The Hidden Knoll. Not far from the door lies the cozy hovel of a gifted centaur weaponsmith whose skilled craftsmanship is responsible for the formation of the portal that connects this place to the Infinite Staircase.

The adventure begins as soon as the heroes enter Brillig. They might do so out of curiosity, or perhaps because the lillendi have discovered the new door and ask the heroes to find out what lies on the other side.

The Pastoral Splendor of Bytopia

Referred to as "The Twin Paradises" by primes and leatherheads, Bytopia is a haven from the evils and angst of the multiverse. The plane has two layers (Dothion and Shurrock) held apart by three enormous pillars of rock, called the Spires. The two layers face inward; one can look straight up and see the verdant forests, lush meadows, rolling pastures, and windswept peaks of the other layer.

During the day, the sky between the two layers of Bytopia glows with warm, ambient light that fades with the fall of night. The "stars" seen at night are, in truth, campfires and the like on the surface of the plane's opposite layer.

The people of Bytopia are hearty, simple folk. They're not gentle or timid or charitable. They expect everyone to earn his or her keep. A body without skills or the will to work won't find much comfort here. The Bytopians are artisans and craftsmen, and they fervently believe in taking care of themselves.

Magical Conditions on Bytopia

Bytopia imposes few restrictions on spellcasters. Only the following schools have altered effects:

Conjuration/Summoning: The only items and creatures that can be summoned are those that already exist on the plane. *Evard's black tentacles*, for example, automatically fails, since "black tentacles" are not indigenous to Bytopia.

Divination: All scrying spells (*clairvoyance*, *clairaudience*, and so on) must involve the elements of this plane or its products. For example, to use *clairvoyance*, a character would need to look in some reflective surface (like a pond) to receive the information. A caster who wanted to use *clairaudience* on a group of NPCs in a thicket of trees, would need to place an ear against a tree to eavesdrop on the distant conversation.

Necromancy: Life-sustaining spells of this school are enhanced; the spell functions as though the caster were one level higher than the character's actual level. Damaging or killing spells are diminished; the spell functions as though the caster were one level lower than his or her actual level. Damaging spells don't function at all if they're 5th level or higher.

Elemental: Any elemental spell with wide-ranging effects (*control weather*, *part water*, *move earth*, and so on) requires a successful saving throw vs. spell on the part of the spellcaster to succeed. If the saving throw fails, the spell fails. Otherwise, elemental spells are cast normally on Dothion (and enhanced on Shurrock).

Adventure Background

The tale begins with Vhawn, a capricious armanite tanar'ri. Some time back, Vhawn was captured and plucked from the Blood War by a movanic deva named Toves. The deva sensed that Vhawn was unlike other armanites and, true enough, she wasn't. The dark is that Vhawn was created from the remnants of a fallen bariaur paladin whose soul was lost to the Lower Planes. Although Vhawn has no memory of her past life, Toves sensed a shred of the paladin's goodness in the armanite and refused to destroy her. Against the wishes of his peers, Toves brought the armanite to Bytopia and fitted her with a radiant collar designed to negate the armanite's magical abilities. The deva then left Vhawn with the centaurs of Brillig, who watched the armanite during Toves' absence.

Toves has given Vhawn an opportunity to choose between her current existence—an evil grunt fighting an eternal war against the baatezu—and her previous existence as a paladin fighting for the cause of good. In her own mind, Vhawn considers herself a prisoner of war, ready to play the deva's game until she can escape and return

to her unit. Toves is aware of the armanite's desires. Regardless of which path Vhawn chooses, she will remain a prisoner on Bytopia until she performs a good deed for the benevolent centaurs of Brillig. The confident if meddlesome Toves believes the armanite will have a

harder time choosing the path of evil over the path of good after completing this good deed, thus rekindling the spirit of the fallen paladin.

Toves chose to leave Vhawn at Brillig because, for several months, the centaurs of Brillig have felt threatened by a ferocious creature living in the nearby Tulgey Wood. They have not been harmed by it, but it has devoured the occasional woodcutter and wild elf hunter. The centaurs call this beast the jabberwock, and the wood elves believe it lairs in the Whimsy Caves, carved from the hillside near a cascading waterfall.

The jabberwock is not a native of Bytopia. It crawled through a one-way portal connecting to the Lower Planes. The portal, located deep within the Whimsy Caves, also brought forth a number of other creatures that now stalk the woods, including the bandersnatch and the jubjub bird.

"Planewalkers, huh? Ever do an honest day's work?"

—a Dothion centaur horseherder

Only vorpal weapons can harm the jabberwock. To make Vhawn's task fair, Toves has paired the armanite with a centaur master weaponsmith named Orbion, who lives a peaceful life in Brillig. With Orbion's assistance and Toves' magic, Vhawn must craft for herself a vorpal weapon capable of slaying the jabberwock. If the armanite succeeds in killing the beast that plagues Brillig, and she agrees to give up her tanar'ri existence and become a champion of good, Toves has promised to restore Vhawn's paladinhood and bariaur form. All of this hinges on Vhawn's success. The heroes' timely arrival gives them the chance to accompany Vhawn on her quest to slay the jabberwock and to help her overcome the other threats in the Tulgey Wood.

'Twas Brillig

You walk through the door and emerge from the side of a tree. The door leading back to the Infinite Staircase blends indistinguishably with the trunk except for a small, woody knob to pull the door open.

The tree stands on one side of a grassy knoll. Behind the knoll, a gigantic rocky spire rises like some huge stalagmite into the sky. Clouds drift lazily by, but you can see mountains and rivers directly above you—another landscape suspended miles over your head. Below you, the side of the knoll is dotted with trees. Small groups of centaurs snooze in the shade, while groups of younger ones play on the slopes. You see a sizable cave mouth in the hillside, nearer to the centaurs than to you. Sparks leap from the opening, and periodically there emerges the ringing sound of metal striking metal. The centaurs don't seem to notice.

The jabberwock has made the centaurs cautious about entering the woods, but they feel safe on the Hidden Knoll. The centaurs are flighty creatures, traipsing over pastures seemingly without a care in the world. They look after their own, of course, but to most outsiders the centaurs are a lazy lot (at least, that's the way the other inhabitants of Dothion feel about it). The exception to the rule is Orbion, the centaur weaponsmith. Orbion, a perfectionist, has crafted only three weapons in his lifetime (his spear, a hammer for some barmy of dwarfen lord from Shurrock, and Vhawn's vorpal sword), each one a marvel to behold.

Currently, Orbion is teaching Vhawn how to craft a vorpal sword. Vhawn stands stupidly beside the centaur with a look of contempt burned into her ashen face, infuriated by the centaur's unhurried methods. Vhawn cannot tell whether Orbion is being deliberately slow to tax her patience, or if the deva made the centaur that way to punish Vhawn further. Either way, the characters arrive just as Vhawn's temper finally snaps and she begins to throttle Orbion; the party hears the centaur's smothered cry.

Peering into the cave, you see two creatures—one of them a centaur. The other creature is similar but much larger. Wicked horns jut from her hideous bovine face, and a shimmering silver collar is fixed about her neck. The horned beast is strangling the smaller centaur, who reaches feebly for a hot, gleaming sword atop a nearby anvil.

Once Vhawn becomes aware that others are looking on, she unclenches her talons, releases the centaur, and turns sulkily away. The centaur, gasping for breath, says, "Ah, what good timing! Stay, I pray you. My name is Orbion, and this irritable creature is Vhawn. Have you come to purchase a weapon, or are you just passing through?"

Orbion welcomes the PCs to Brillig and tells them anything they want to know about where they are. If the characters inquire about the incident with the armanite, Orbion laughs and says, "Vhawn is here against her will. She must remain on Bytopia until she completes a quest, at which time she is free to return to the Abyss, or wherever her kind comes from." Orbion can provide details about the "angel" who brought Vhawn here, but this only infuriates Vhawn. The incensed armanite grabs the sword from the anvil and threatens anyone she thinks is mocking her. Toves has not yet endowed the sword with vorpal qualities, but it is otherwise a *bastard sword* +3.



"Tanar'ri are revolting, true, but not beyond redemption."

—Toves the deva, pitying Vhawn

If combat erupts between the characters and the armanite, Orbion retreats into a safe corner, snatches up his spear (just in case), and stands clear of the melee until Toves appears the following round.

Orbion (centaur): AC 5; MV 18; HD 4; hp 24; THAC0 17 (13 with spear +4); #AT 3; Dmg 1d6/1d6/1d6+4 (hoof/hoof/spear+4); SZ L (8' tall); ML elite (13); Int average (9); AL CG; XP 175.

Vhawn (armanite Knecht): AC 0; MV 21, fly 21 (C); HD 8; hp 55; THAC0 13; #AT 3; Dmg 3d6/3d6/2d4+10 (hoof/hoof/bastard sword +3, Strength bonus); SA crushing hooves (destroys shield or breastplate on roll of natural 20); SD immune to weapons of less than +2 bonus, immune to cold, electricity, and poison; SW holy water (3d6 per val); SZ L (10' tall, 6' at the haunches); ML champion (16); AL CE; XP 7,000. Str 19, Int 8. The armanite's innate tanar'ri powers are negated by the silver collar around her neck; this collar absorbs magic and cannot be removed by anything short of a *wish* spell.

The Slithy Toves

Toves, the barmy deva, has tremendous magical abilities and uses them to keep watch over the captive armanite. The instant there is trouble, Toves leaves his sanctuary on the central spire of Bytopia and teleports to the scene, appearing as a silvery, radiantly beautiful young man with feathered silver hair, a two-handed sword strapped to his waist and a talisman around his neck. He does not usually appear in his natural form, except when he's going for the shock value. Since this is the first occasion the characters have had to meet him, he prefers not to deceive them with illusions.

The deva takes special pleasure meddling in the affairs of mortal creatures. He views the tanar'ri, the centaurs, and even the characters as willful children in need of firm guidance. Toves' attitudes hasn't won him many friends among his own kind, so he wanders the planes looking for ways to amuse himself while smiting evil in all its forms.

Toves appears if the armanite attacks the characters, or if the char-

acters try to leave the plane via the Infinite Staircase. He uses a *wish* spell to temporarily seal the portal to the Infinite Staircase, effectively trapping the party in Dothion for reasons he explains below:

The graceful deva glances at the armanite with crisp blue eyes, then smiles warmly. "The armanite possesses the etiquette and demeanor of a true tanar'ri, but you can't fault her for that which was imposed upon her. You see, my planewalking friends, in her previous existence Vhawn was anathema to the reprehensible denizens of the Lower Planes. My kind are gifted with the ability to peer into the soul of any living being, and the behemoth standing before you was not always a minion of evil, but once a champion of good. A shred of paladin's essence from her former self burns in her heart, trapped by hate. I see the brute wince at that thought, but she knows I am right. Before she fell and became what you see, she was a bariaur paladin from the rocks of Mount Celestia, sent forth to battle that which she has since become."

The deva steps forward, and Vhawn bares her strong yellow teeth and takes a step back. "Your arrival, my friends, is serendipitous. The armanite is preparing to atone for her evils by completing a quest on behalf of the benevolent centaurs of Brillig. She shall rid the Tulgey Wood of an unnatural menace with bat-like wings and beaming eyes. The beast in question lurks deep in the Whimsy Caves, where magic is dictated by the whims of the moment, not by the hands that cast it.

"The beast is impervious to damage from any weapon other than that which Orbion has crafted—a vorpal blade of most perfect composure. But that alone does not ensure the armanite's victory against so manxome a foe, for the same portal that brought the creature to this plane has brought other creatures which ravage the Tulgey Wood. I ask that you accompany Vhawn on her journey, ensuring that she completes her quest and faces her choice."

If the characters inquire about the "choice" to which Toves refers, the armanite snaps out the answer: "The chance to leave this dismal plane!" Toves gives a more informative response:

"Once Vhawn completes this valorous duty, I intend to offer her a choice. She may return to fight the hordes of Baator, toiling amidst the futility and turpitude of the Blood War, or be reborn into that which she once was—a bariaur paladin fighting evil in all its forms. A choice between condemnation and salvation, for the price of one benevolent act. Either way, once the choice is made, she will be free."

The deva believes his plan is inspired. Others might dismiss the scheme as misguided, twisted, or manipulative, but Toves expects the characters to aid Vhawn in any event. Toves does not accept "no" for an answer. If this adventure is being played as part of the *Tales From the Infinite Staircase* adventure, the deva might entice the party by promising to help them in some fashion once Vhawn's quest is finished. The deva might know some information concerning the Iron Shadow, the mysterious "plague" infecting the planes. The characters might avail themselves of Toves' vast spell repertoire; the deva would be happy to cast a spell or two, or even teach a new Invocation spell to a studious PC mage, but Toves is flighty and won't offer much beyond that.

Before leaving, Toves summons forth a magical scroll. Written on the parchment is a modified permanent *enchant an item* spell. The deva reads the scroll (which is written in a secret tongue known to aasimons) and touches the sword, endowing it with vorpal qualities. Hereafter, the sword behaves as an unintelligent *vorpal bastard sword* +3.

Toves (movanic deva): AC -1; MV 12, fly 30 (B); HD 8; hp 63; THAC0 13 (12 with *two-handed sword* +1); #AT 2; Dmg 1d10+1/1d10+1 (*two-handed sword* +1, *flame tongue*); SA spells and spell-like abilities, *talisman of pure good*; SD parry (automatically successful, even against spells such as *magic missile*), double-strength *protection from evil* aura; immune to weapons of less than +2 bonus, regeneration (2 hp per round), immune to cold, electricity, petrification, poison, normal fire, gas, and *magic missiles*, half-damage from magical fires, cannot be surprised; SW

acid causes full damage; MR 40%; SZ M (7' tall); ML fearless (20); Int genius (18); AL CG; XP 14,000. Spells: can cast any wizardly invocation/evocation spell, each once per day. Special Abilities: *antimagic shell*, *cure disease* (x3), *cure light wounds* (x7), *detect lie*, *detect snares & pits* (x7), *dispel magic* (x7), *heal*, *infravision* (always active), *invisibility 10' radius*, *light*, *polymorph self*, *protection from evil*, *protection from normal missiles*, *remove curse*, *remove fear*, *spell turning*, *tongues*.

The Tulgey Wood

As the characters accompany Vhawn through the Tulgey Wood, they encounter some of the local flora and fauna. Other beings, such as the bandersnatch and the jubjub bird, are not native to Bytopia and radiate strong auras of evil. The encounters are not restricted to particular areas of the forest and can be played in any order. DMs may temper or remove encounters that are too overwhelming for the characters.

From the time they leave Brillig, the characters are watched by the jubjub bird. The creature uses its *ring of invisibility* and flies overhead. The bird is a minor evil menace that emerged from the Whimsy Caves' portal. It has a *medallion of ESP* which it uses to study Vhawn's thoughts. Realizing that the armanite is being held against its will, the jubjub bird has decided, for lack of anything better to do, to thwart the party's quest and help Vhawn escape. The jubjub bird begins meddling in the PCs' affairs in encounter C.

If by some happenstance Vhawn is slain in the course of the adventure, the armanite's remains molder into a pool of ichor. She cannot be *raised*, *reincarnated*, or *resurrected* on this plane. All that remains is the shining collar, which winks out of existence the following round. At that moment, Toves appears and tut-tuts sadly over the failure of his little plan. Then he gets the bright idea of imposing Vhawn's quest upon the party, asking that they slay the jabberwock in her stead. If they succeed, Toves allows them to leave Bytopia whenever they desire and might offer a "token" of his gratitude (see "Frabjous Day?" on page 36 for details). If they refuse, he leaves them trapped on this plane until they "see reason" (that is, agree with his way of thinking).

A. The Grumbling Grove

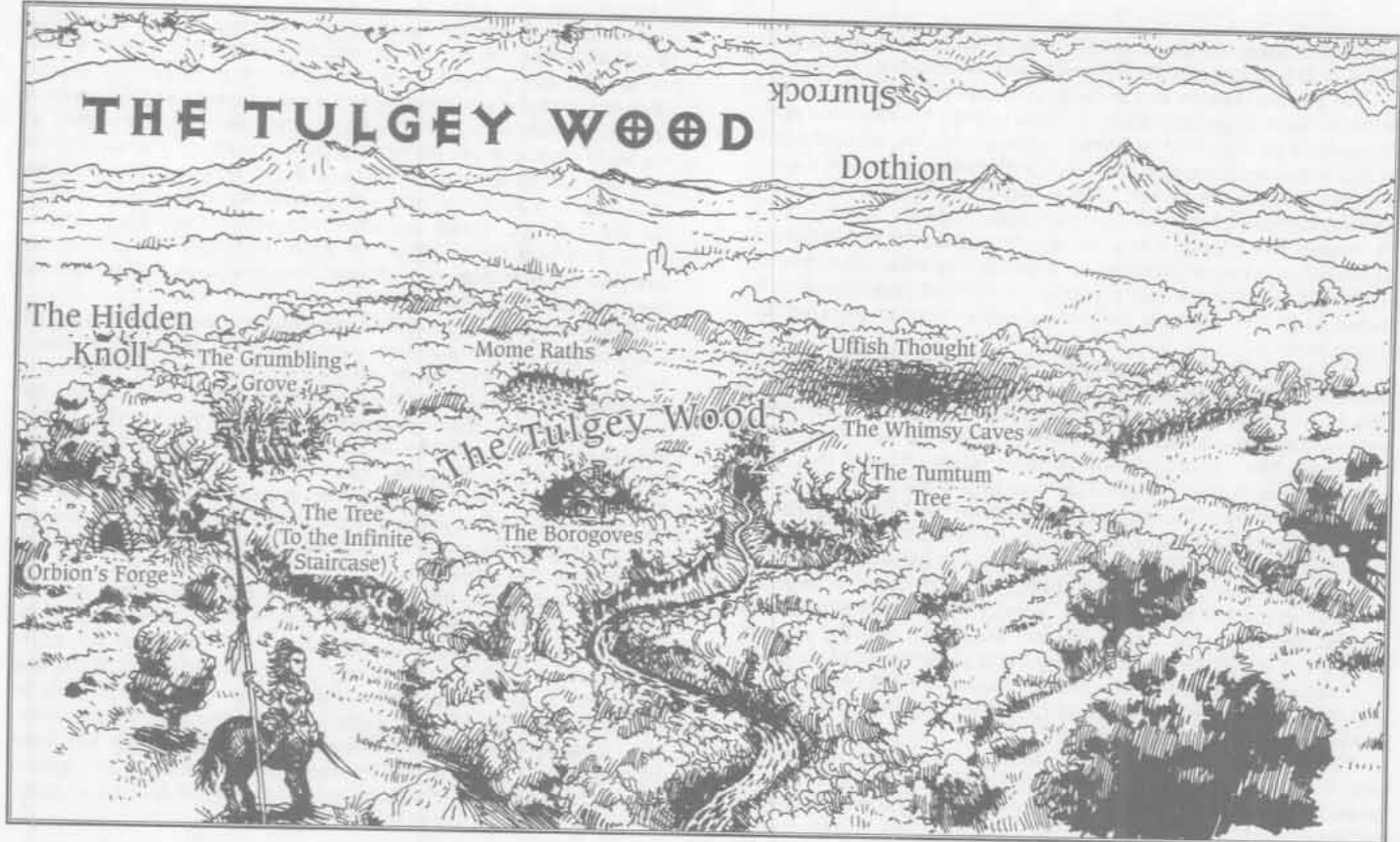
Entering the Tulgey Wood, you suddenly get the feeling that someone—or something—is watching you. Then, quite unexpectedly, a tree next to you twitches and yanks its roots from under your feet. A disgruntled face appears on its trunk and growls, "Watch where you walk, you bumbling clods! How'd you like *your* roots to be galumphed upon by a bunch of addle-coves?"

The characters have disturbed one of six treants that live in this grove. As soon as the first treant reveals itself, the others do the same. "Humph! So much for being discreet!" mutters one of the other treants. If the PCs apologize to the treant for stepping on its roots, it grudgingly accepts their apology and inquires, "Where do you travel in such haste that you barely mind your step?" If the PCs answer, the treant dismisses their reply with a yawn and bids them a frabjous journey. If they request directions to the Whimsy Caves, it replies as follows:

"Look ye for the Tumtum tree, twisted and gnarled its limbs. Its trunk slick with moss thick, alas and woe is him. Stand ye on the highest bough but three, and the Whimsy Falls you'll see. Ah, but there's a catch—" ("A catch! A catch" echo the other treants) "the tree can eat your every thought, make you forget what you sought."

The treant alludes to the true nature of the Tumtum tree and the obliviax moss that grows on its gnarled trunk (see area D for details). If the characters act rudely or openly carry torch and axe, the treant does not provide them with any clues before sending them on their way. The treants of the Grumbling Grove are grumpy and old. If attacked, they animate twelve of the surrounding trees and use them to drive the strangers out of Tulgey Wood.

Treants (6): AC 0; MV 12; HD 11; hp 75 each; THAC0 9; #AT 2; Dmg 4d6/4d6 (branch/branch); SA animate trees (HD 12, 4d6/4d6, MV 3); SD never surprised; SW fire-based attacks (+4



attack bonus, inflict +1 point of damage per die, -4 penalty to treant's saving throw); SZ H (18' tall); ML champion (15); Int very (12); AL CG; XP 6,000 each.

B. The Borogoves

Nestled in the woods ahead, tucked away behind patches of thickets and wildflowers, is a quaint house with a round wooden door and flower boxes under each window. A bent metal chimney pokes through the thatched roof. A small wooden cart is parked next to a large rock about 30 feet from the house. Leaning against the cart is a wooden staff.

The house belongs to a family of halflings who enjoy the quiet life as berrypickers in the Tulgey Wood. A small cedar sign mounted over the door announces in quaint lettering "The Borogoves," while the mat in front of the door reads "Welcome."

Thomas and Hilda Borogove have three adorable children—Lucky, Petal, and baby Clover. Their pet mule, Mr. Trotsalott, went missing after being chased away by the bandersnatch, a creature that has made its lair near the Borogoves' home after the jabberwock drove it out of the Whimsy Caves.

After narrowly escaping the bandersnatch, the Borogoves locked themselves inside their house. When he hears the approach of strangers, Thomas peers through the window, half expecting to see the bandersnatch. From about 60 feet away, the PCs can see a halfling's face appear at the window. The figure makes faces at them and points frantically toward the wagon, but only PCs with the Lip Reading proficiency or ESP can tell that he is actually warning them to stay away. The large rock next to the wagon is actually the bandersnatch in disguise. Characters who approach within 10 feet of the rock or the wagon are attacked. The monster's sudden movement imposes a -5 penalty to surprise rolls.

This bandersnatch takes the form of a deathwatch beetle. It has gathered bits of rock and dust and cemented the material to its body using its sticky saliva. The beetle can vibrate its carapace very rapidly, creating a deadly sonic vibration known as a death rattle. One round after the beetle begins its rattle, anyone within 30 feet must roll a successful saving throw vs. death magic or be instantly slain (the

Borogoves' sealed house provides the halflings with shelter from the effects). Those who succeed still suffer 5d4 points of damage, as well as cramps and tingling sensations in their limbs for 1d6 hours. The beetle can produce its death rattle once every 1d4+1 hours.

If the characters slay the bandersnatch, the Borogoves rush out of the house to greet their saviors. Hilda Borogove treats the heroes to slices of juneberry pie before they head deeper into the woods. Each slice heals 1d4 points of damage; there are eight slices altogether. If any of the PCs were slain by the beetle's death rattle, Thomas suggests that they take their fallen comrades with them in case they should happen upon a patch of mome raths—wild purple flowers whose pollen has an aroma strong enough to wake the dead (literally). Thomas can direct them to the nearest patch, just over a mile away (see encounter C). He also asks that the PCs keep their eyes open for his mule, Mr. Trotsalott, who ran off into the forest after the bandersnatch tried to devour him. Thomas would appreciate the mule's safe return.

Thomas' wooden staff (leaning against the cart) is magical and has the ability to *repel insects* thrice per day and *locate object* once per day. Given to him by a druid friend, the staff was out of Thomas' reach when the bandersnatch appeared and forced him and his family to seek sanctuary inside the house.

Bandersnatch (deathwatch beetle): AC 3; MV 12; HD 9; hp 72; THAC0 11; #AT 1; Dmg 3d4; SA death rattle (see above); SD camouflage (-2 penalty to opponents' surprise rolls); SZ M (7' long); ML elite (14); Int animal (1); AL N; XP 2,000.

C. Whispers of the Mome Raths

Hacking through the twisted thickets of the Tulgey Wood, you are stopped by a disturbing sensation. A gentle breeze creeps upon you, carrying with it a whispered message in a shrill, inhuman voice. "Callooh! Callay! Strangers come! Callooh Callay! Aren't they dumb! They stride with vorpal sword in hand, uffish berks from the centaurs' land. Callooh! Callay!" The zephyr dissipates, and up ahead you spot a small clearing rampant with purple flowers.

The gentle breeze was created by the jubjub bird's *whispering wind* spell. The creature is two miles away, waiting for the heroes

elsewhere, but it couldn't resist the urge to taunt them at this point. The jubjub bird can cast the *whispering wind* once a day.

The purple flowers in the clearing are called mome raths. One *whiff of their fragrance* offers the equivalent of a *raise dead* spell. However, a flower must be brought within a few inches of the individual's nose for the magic to work, and the victim must make a successful System Shock roll. Once someone benefits from this restorative power, he or she can never again smell the lavish scent of the mome raths. Hence, a berk can only be raised once in this fashion. Once picked, a mome rath lives for only a few rounds before turning white and withering to dust. However, its fragrant pollen can be contained in *jars of preserving* and brought elsewhere to work its life-giving power.

The mome raths are guarded by the ethyks—small, one-eyed lemurlike omnivores with prehensile tails, sharp teeth, and claws. Ethyks are native to Bytopia and make fine domestic pets. However, these ethyks are wild and fierce, feeding on the mome raths when it suits them. They do not take kindly to intruders, although they have tolerated visits by the Borogove children in the past.

The ethyks have the ability to influence others' emotions, driving their victims to great anger. Each ethyk can use this ability six times a day, affecting any intelligent target within 100 feet for 3d4 rounds. The target creature is allowed a saving throw vs. spell to resist the effect. Affected creatures become angered and argumentative with another random target within 100 feet (excluding the ethyks themselves). An influenced creature might attack the object of its anger. The creature must make a successful Wisdom check to resist attacking; in the case of beings like *Vhawn*, who have no Wisdom rating, an Intelligence check is made instead.

The ethyks use their emotion manipulation to turn the PCs against one another, and *Vhawn* against the PCs. The ethyks continue to do this until the party leaves or they are discovered, at which point the ethyks attack until they fail a morale check and are forced to retreat. The ethyks hide in a rotted, hollow log lying amidst the mome raths. Tucked in the log are the ethyks' treasures: 11 pp, 14 gp, 35 ep, a silver necklace adorned with five hollow silver horns (worth 250 gp; each "horn" holds one dose of a *potion of stone giant strength*), a curved dagger +3 (crafted on Bytopia), and a small black velvet pouch that holds a *gem of seeing*.

Ethyks (4): AC 4; MV 12; HD 1+3; hp 8 each; THAC0 19; #AT 3; Dmg 1d2/1d2/1d3 (claw/claw/bite); SA induce anger; SD superior senses of hearing and smell (cannot be surprised), *infravision* (10' range); SZ S (1' long); ML average (10); Int animal (1); AL N; XP 175 each.

D. The Tumtum Tree

You have found an iridescent stream, and following it has brought you to the deepest reaches of the Tulgey Wood. You can see that the stream ahead flows under the twisted roots of a large, gnarled tree that stands over the brook. The dead tree's branches are devoid of leaves, and clinging to its crumpled trunk are several patches of dark green moss. Nibbling on one of the mossy patches, oblivious to the precarious footing that the roots provide, is a mule wearing a leather bridle. It seems quite content munching on the tree and hasn't paid any attention to your arrival or the darkening night sky overhead.

The party has found the Tumtum tree—the remnants of a treant who died of extreme old age. The treant's ancient visage, nearly worn away with time, is still visible upon close inspection. The mule is Thomas Borogoves' missing mount, Mr. Trotsalott. After being frightened by the *bandersnatch*, the mule eventually found something worthy of its attention in the form of memory moss (*obliviax*). It has been dining on *obliviax* for the last several hours and has acquired the memories of a passing druid, a centaur huntsman, and countless small animals. It has even learned how to speak, although this ability will only last for another hour before the moss's effects wear off.

Once the mule becomes aware of the party's presence, it looks toward the PCs, a string of moss hanging from its maw. It says, "If you don't mind, I'd like to snack in private. Go find your own tree to munch on."

Should the characters mention the Borogoves and the possibility of returning to them safe and sound, Mr. Trotsalott replies in a droll voice, "The Borogoves? I think not! I'm weary of pulling Master Thomas's cart and standing out in the rain. And those children are a dreadful nuisance! Do you know how many times they've tugged on my tail? Thank you, no. I think I'll stay here a while." Eventually, Mr. Trotsalott will return to the Borogoves, if only for an apple or two, but until then he plays the stubborn mule and cannot be coaxed without the aid of magic. Spells that affect normal animals (for example, *animal friendship*) do not affect him while the heightened intelligence lasts, but spells that affect intelligent creatures (such as *charm person*) have their normal effect.

PCs who come within 60 feet of the tree are susceptible to the six remaining patches of memory moss that grow beyond the mule's reach. Each patch of moss can attempt to drain the spells and memories of a single individual each round. Wizards are the preferred targets, then other spellcasters. A victim who fails a saving throw vs. spell loses all memories of the last 24 hours, including memorized spells. If an *obliviax* is attacked, it retaliates by casting any spells it has absorbed from the PCs. Lost memories can be regained by eating that particular patch of moss and making a successful saving throw vs. poison; those who fail become too ill to move for 3d6 turns.

Anyone who climbs the highest boughs of the tree sees the Whimsy Falls less than one mile distant. The forest beyond the Tumtum tree is disorienting, and without any bearings the party becomes hopelessly lost and always ends up traveling in circles and returning to the Tumtum tree. If the characters know roughly in which direction the Whimsy Falls is located, any PC with the *Direction Sense* proficiency can find the way (Tracking simply lets them identify their own tracks as they come upon them again and again). Heroes can also use *find the path* spells or *arrows of direction* to guide them safely and quickly to the Whimsy Caves.

Mr. Trotsalott (mule): AC 7; MV 12; HD 3; hp 15; THAC0 17; #AT 1 or 2; Dmg 1d2 (bite) and/or 1d6 (kick); SZ M; ML unsteady (6); Int normally animal (1), currently very (12); AL N; XP 65.

Obliviax (6): AC 10; MV 0; HD 1/4; hp 2 each; THAC0 20; #AT 0; Dmg nil; SA steal memories and spells; SD poisonous; SZ T (6' patch); ML average (9); Int average (8); AL NE; XP 35 each.

E. Uffish Thoughts

Night has fallen. The forest becomes a den of shadows, darker than the starlit sky and far more menacing. Strange noises issue from the brambles as the woods come alive with the sounds of crickets, owls, and other things.

If the characters decide to make camp, *Vhawn* protests. The armanite does not require rest and sees no reason to delay her quest. Persuading her to stay requires a successful Charisma check at a -6 penalty, a successful *charm monster* or *hold monster* spell, or some form of subterfuge or entrapment.

Before the PCs reach the Whimsy Caves or before they lie down for a good night's rest, they are beset by the jubjub bird, who tries to steal the vorpal sword. The eblis uses its *ring of invisibility* to spy on the party from a distance of 1d4×10 feet (see ring description below for the chance of malfunction). After using its *medallion of ESP* to identify which characters are the most intelligent (based on their surface thoughts), it then uses the medallion (if necessary) to determine who is guarding the vorpal blade.

First, the jubjub bird casts its *audible glamer* spell, creating a disturbance in the woods (away from itself but within the party's hearing.) The disturbance might be cackling laughter, the sound of footfalls through the brambles, or the whispering of some would-be ambushers. The jubjub bird then casts *blur* on itself and moves toward the individual with the vorpal sword. Next round, it casts a *hypnotic pattern* to enthrall the sword-wielder and all other beings within range (affecting up to 24 levels or HD in a 30' cube). Once the *hypnotic pattern* is set, it persists for two more rounds, during which time the jubjub bird tries to seize the sword from its dazed possessor. If attacked, it reserves its

spook spell for its most powerful attacker, counting on its Armor Class and blur spell for defense.

If the jubjub bird succeeds in snatching the sword, or if the sword is clearly unattainable, the jubjub bird becomes invisible (see below) and flies toward the Whimsy Caves to awaken the jabberwock from its slumber.

"The bad news is we lost the wizard. Granted, he makes a fine statue."

—the Whimsy Caves work their magic

Jubjub bird (eblis): AC 3; MV 12, fly 12 (C); HD 4+4; hp 29; THAC0 15; #AT 4; Dmg 1d4/1d4/1d4/1d4 (pecks); SA spells, *ring of invisibility*, *medallion of ESP*; SD flame-resistant feathers (+1 bonus to saves, -1 point of damage per die); SZ M (8' tall); ML champion (16); Int very (12); AL NE; XP 2,000. Spells (each once per day at 3rd level): *audible glamor*, *blur*, *change self*, *hypnotic pattern*, *spook*, *whispering wind* (already cast).

Cursed Ring of Invisibility

Anyone who dons the jubjub bird's *ring of invisibility* benefits from its primary power of invisibility (which behaves like the 2nd-level wizard spell, rendering the wearer visible upon "attack"). The ring's power can be used up to three times a day.

Each time the ring's power is employed, there is a non-cumulative 10% chance that the ring behaves like a *ring of delusion*, misleading its wearer into believing he or she is invisible when, in fact, the wearer is not. The delusion uses up one daily charge.

XP Value: 500

GP Value: 2,000

The Whimsy Caves

Deep in the Tulgey Wood, embedded in a lush, wooded hillside a few miles from the Tumtum tree, is this network of caves that serves as the lair of the fearsome jabberwock. Luckily for the characters, the jabberwock has entered a period of deep sleep, dreaming its unpleasant dreams in the cave behind the waterfall. It will only be awakened by the absence of the nereid who lives in the pool at the base of the waterfall (see area 2 below

for details) or if disturbed by the jubjub bird.

The Whimsy Caves are justly named, for the area in and around the Caves radiates a peculiar, wavering magical aura. Any spell cast within range (that is, from

any location on the map) has a 25% chance of not working as expected. Use the table below to determine what happens. All effects are centered on the spellcaster unless noted otherwise. Note that only spells (including spells cast from scrolls) are affected. Spell-like effects generated by other magical items (rings, wands, potions, and so forth) are not affected by the Whimsy aura.

1d100 Random Spell Effect

01-10 *Slow*, lasting one turn.

11-18 *Deludes* wielder for one round into believing the spell functions normally when, in fact, the magic simply fizzles out.

19-25 *Teleports* all of the spellcaster's possessions to a random location within 100 feet.

26-30 *Stinking cloud*, range 30 feet.

31-36 *Fog cloud*, range 60 feet

37-42 Summon ethyk (01-25), centaur (26-50), or naked nymph (51-00)

43-45 *Fireball*, inflicting 6d6 points of damage. Spellcaster saves at -4 penalty.

46-52 Stream of 600 butterflies pours forth and flutters about for three rounds, blinding everyone within 30 feet.

53-57 *Enlarge* spellcaster to 10x normal size, lasting one turn.

58-63 *Darkness*, 15'-radius hemisphere centered around spellcaster, lasting 1d4+2 turns.

64-68 *Entangle* (if terrain has foliage) or *Maximilian's earthen grasp* (if terrain lacks foliage), lasting 1d6+4 rounds.

69-74 *Teleport* with all belongings to a random location within 100 feet.

75-81 *Diminish* spellcaster to one-tenth of normal size, lasting one turn.

82-86 *Invisibility*, lasting one turn.

87-93 *Shatter*, affecting all breakable items and containers within 30 feet.

94-97 Permanently increases one ability score, determined randomly.

98-00 *Flesh to stone*, permanent until reversed.

Encounter Areas

The following encounters occur at the locations noted on the Whimsy Caves map on page 34.

1. The Alluring Maiden

Approaching the caves leading to the jabberwock's lair, you are drawn by a beautiful melody to the nearby pool where the water from the falls cascades and swells before trickling off into the Tulgey Wood. Swimming in the pool is a slender, pearl-skinned girl with golden hair.

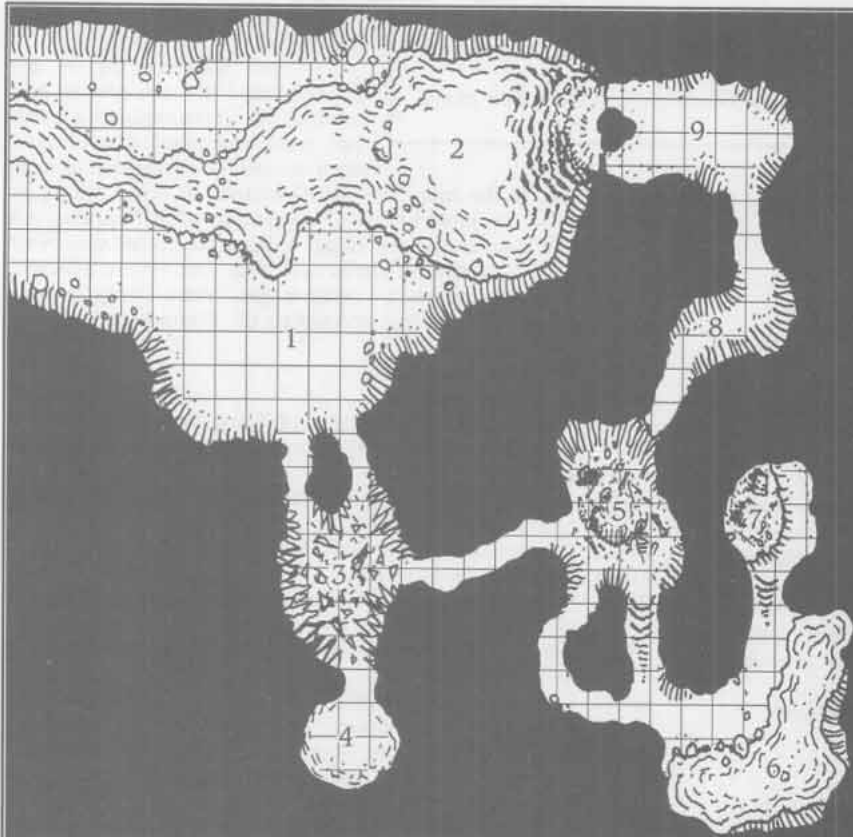
The figure in the pool is described in more detail below (see area 2). If the PCs choose to ignore her, they can continue unimpeded to the cave entrance (area 3).

2. Aquiel

The young girl is frolicking in the glistening white froth from the cascading waterfall. When she sees you, she smiles but does not introduce herself. Instead, she swims toward the center of her small pond. Watching her moving unclad through the bubbles and waves, you spot the gleam of gold at the bottom of the pool.

Aquiel is a Chaotic Good nereid who lulls the jabberwock to sleep with her melodious voice. She knows that the monster is malevolent, but so far it has taken no interest in her. Aquiel hides her shawl in a small crevasse at the bottom of her pristine pool, where it





THE WHIMSY CAVES

1 square = 5 feet

is guarded by her pet water snake. The snake has camouflaged itself to blend with the surrounding rock and silt and is 90% undetectable.

If the characters hail the nereid, she answers their questions. As she swims up to them, the water snake coils around her affectionately, and the PCs might catch their first glimpse of the serpent. Aquiel knows that a "terrible monster" lives in the Whimsy Caves, but she also knows that she can put it to sleep with her song. She has occasionally heard it snoring from behind the waterfall (area 9). So far as she knows, nothing else lives in the caves.

The gleaming object at the bottom of the nereid's pool is a golden *shield* +3 lying atop the skeletal remains of a human who died from Aquiel's kiss (the fighter visited the pool years ago and, enamored by her beauty, begged her to kiss him, which she did). The skeleton wears a suit of rusted scale mail; a *helm of telepathy* cradles the skull. A *longsword* +1, +3 vs. fire-based creatures lies buried in the silt nearby and is visible to a *detect magic* spell. Aquiel will give these items to the characters if they request them, provided they have treated her kindly. If Vhawn is with the group, this is likely, as she views the nereid as "a dangerous temptress," a foe to be destroyed without quarter.

Aquiel (nereid): AC 10; MV 12, swim 12; HD 4; hp 18; THAC0 17; #AT 0; Dmg nil; SA spit venom (20', blinds target for 2d6 rounds), create pseudo-water weird (4 HD, 1d4 damage per strike), *kiss of death* (save vs. breath weapon at -2 or drown; those who save are lost in ecstasy); SD *control water* within 30' (slows movement to 1/4 normal, deafens characters for 3d4 rounds, increases chance of drowning by 10%), males who see her cannot do her harm, flow like water (escapes damage or capture on successful save vs. poison); SW shawl (contains her life essence—she dissolves into water if it is destroyed); MR 50%; SZ M (4'); ML steady (11); Int very (12); AL CG; XP 975.

Aquiel's serpent (giant poisonous snake): AC 5; MV 15, swim 15; HD 4+2; hp 25; THAC0 17; #AT 1; Dmg 1d3+poison (bite); SA poison (save or die in 2d4 rounds; successful save indicates an additional 10 points of damage); SD camouflage (90% undetectable); SZ M (12' long); ML average (9); Int animal (1); AL N; XP 420.

3. Crystal Cave

Both of the entrance tunnels lead to an oval cave with a 20-foot ceiling. The walls and ceiling are roughly hewn and adorned with sharp outcroppings of transparent crystal. Crystal fragments lie strewn upon the floor, but otherwise the cave is empty. Two tunnels lead to deeper chambers—one to the left, the other directly ahead.

This cave is empty. Characters may rest here without incurring the wrath of the jabberwock or the denizen in area 4. The crystals are worthless quartz.

4. Death From Above

A short, round tunnel leads to this roughly spherical cave some 15 feet wide. The walls, floor, and ceiling are smooth—not at all like the crystal entrance cave.

A lurker above clings to the ceiling. The lurker waits until someone enters the room before dropping down to engulf the hapless prey. Impose a -4 penalty on surprise rolls unless the PCs are carefully watching the ceiling.

Lurker: AC 6; MV 1, fly 9 (B); HD 10; hp 48; THAC0 11; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6 per round (constriction); SA suffocation in 1d4+1 rounds; SD 90% undetectable; SZ H (20' diameter); ML steady (11); Int non (0); AL N; XP 2,000.

5. Remnants of the Burbled

The tunnel slopes upward, ending before another crystal cavern. The 30-foot ceiling of this cave is covered with a thick crystal canopy. Shattered bones and shredded animal remains litter the floor. The cave is otherwise empty. Two passages slope down toward the right. To the left, 6 feet above the floor, a tunnel continues away into darkness, toward the roar of the waterfall.

The bones are the remains of small game and other larger beasts that wandered into the caves, were magically confused by the jabberwock's burbling, and summarily slain. Any loud noises here have a 50% chance of awakening the sleeping jabberwock in area 9.

Any PC rogue who makes a successful Detect Noise roll hears the heavy breathing of the jabberwock emanating from the raised tunnel to the left (that leads to area 8). No noise rises from the tunnels to the right (leading down to area 6).

6. The Fetid Portal

The tunnel descends into a dark and dismal cavern with a 15-foot ceiling. The floor sinks to form a pool filled with brackish, foul-smelling water. Periodically, a bubble rises to the surface of the murk and pops with a dull "blurp."

The pool in this cavern has been tainted since becoming the receptacle for a portal leading from the Abyss. The portal is one-way only, and PCs who enter the water suffer no ill effects. The water is about 10 feet deep.

For every three rounds the PCs spend in this cave, there is a cumulative 15% chance that a wandering chasme on the other side of the portal senses their presence, goes through the portal, and emerges from the murky pool, attacking anyone it sees. The chasme are normally charged with the task of tracking down tanar'ri that evade participation in the Blood War. When it sees Whawn, it concludes that it has found such a tanar'ri and attacks the armanite.

Chasme (tanar'ri): AC -5; MV 6, fly 24 (D), can walk on walls; HD 8+2; hp 37; THAC0 13; #AT 3; Dmg 2d4/2d4/1d4 (claw/claw/proboscis); SA bite damage is permanent on a failed save vs. poison, shriek (save vs. spell or be paralyzed by terror), kiss (transforms paralyzed victim into a vargouille within 4d6 hours); SD infravision (120'); SW blinded by daylight or continual light; SZ S (3' wingspan); ML average (10); Int low (5); AL NE; XP 650 each.

Chasme (tanar'ri): AC -5; MV 6, fly 24 (D), can walk on walls; HD 8+2; hp 37; THAC0 13; #AT 3; Dmg 2d4/2d4/1d4 (claw/claw/proboscis); SA wounds from claw attacks bleed for 2 points of damage per round until magically healed, terror (anyone seeing a chasme must save vs. spell for flee in terror for 1d4 hours), drone (save vs. spell or fall asleep for 2d4 hours); SD immune to poison, electricity, and nonmagical fire, half-damage from cold, magical fire, and silver weapons; SW acid, cold-forged iron, magic missiles; MR 50%; SZ M (7' wingspan); ML champion (16); Int average (9); AL CE; XP 14,000. Special abilities (at will, as 8th-level spellcaster): darkness 15' radius, detect good (always active), detect invisibility (always active), gate (one chasme; 40% chance of success, thrice per day), infravision, insect plague, ray of enfeeblement, telekinesis, teleport without error.

7. Flying Heads & Forgotten Hoards

Roughly hewn steps lead to a dark cave with a tiered floor. Lying atop the raised section to your left are heaps of gold and gems, as well as two large chests sealed with golden bands and hefty iron locks. Fluttering around the treasure hoard are three decrepit heads with bat-like wings and writhing tentacles for hair.

The creatures are vargouilles from the Lower Planes, brought to this plane via the portal in area 6. The creatures attack anyone who enters the cave.

The treasure hoard belongs to a dwarven planewalker who found solace from his many enemies in the pastoral comfort of Bytopia. He hid his treasures here, fearing that they'd be stolen elsewhere. He has not visited the caves in some time and is unaware of their present inhabitants. The two chests are locked, and the locks are magically reinforced (treat each lock as AC 0 with 50 hit points). Rogues suffer a -20% penalty to their Open Locks rolls, but a knock spell opens them normally.

Chest #1 (3'x2'x2') holds a finely wrought suit of dwarven plate mail. The armor is nonmagical but well crafted and can be sold for 1,000 gp. Chest #2 (2'x2'x1') has iron handles for easy transport and contains 825 pp of dwarven mint. Buried under the platinum trove is a *potion of storm giant strength* in a stoppered brass bottle.

In addition to the chests, the raised dais has the following treasures heaped upon it: 2,309 sp, 1,117 ep, 756 gp, 53 gems (10x1,000 gp, 18x500 gp, and 25x100 gp respectively), ten gold rings (mixed with the coins; worth 50 gp each), three jade elf statuettes (150 gp each), a 4-inch silver orb (non-magical; worth 10 gp), an empty but finely crafted scrolltube made of bronze (worth 25 gp), and a *vorpall battleaxe* +3 engraved with a rune—a *symbol of stunning* that affects all who gaze upon it (a successful saving throw vs. spell negates this effect).

Vargouilles (3): AC 8; fly 12 (B); HD 1+1; hp 9, 8, 6; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4 (bite); SA bite damage is permanent on a failed save vs. poison, shriek (save vs. spell or be paralyzed by terror), kiss (transforms paralyzed victim into a vargouille within 4d6 hours); SD infravision (120'); SW blinded by daylight or continual light; SZ S (3' wingspan); ML average (10); Int low (5); AL NE; XP 650 each.

8. The Wending Way

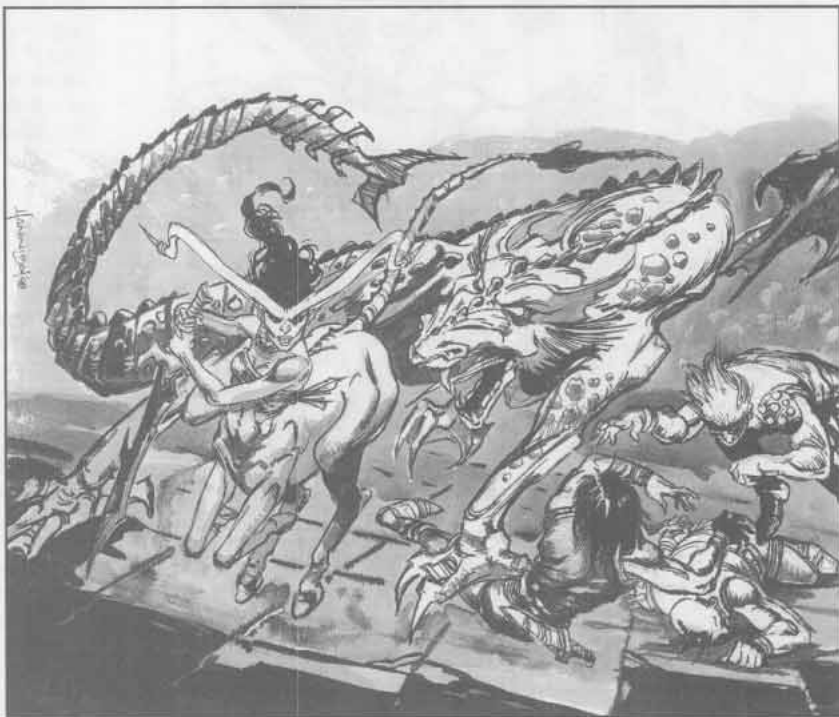
The tunnel, its walls covered with crystalline lattice, twists and widens. The roar of the waterfall grows louder as you continue upward. The water's roar is mixed with an inhuman snorting sound and the harsh scrape of claw against stone.

If the jabberwock has not been awakened by the jubjub bird, the cessation of the nereid's song, or noisy party members, it is sleeping away the day in area 9, twitching and snorting in its slumber. If the jabberwock has been awakened, it awaits intruders in area 9, its glowing eyes reflecting off the faceted walls of this passageway.

9. The Jabberwock

If the jabberwock is still sleeping when the party arrives, read the first paragraph below. If the jabberwock is awake, read the second paragraph to the players.

Coiled in the middle of this cave, behind the roaring waterfall, is a monstrous serpentine beast twitching in the depths of some deep, disturbing dream. Its eyes are closed, but its nostrils flare wildly as its lip pulls back with a tooth-filled sneer. Batlike wings



"Beware the jabberwock, my son!"

—anonymous good advice

are folded across its scaly back, and whipping back and forth is a tail studded with metal barbs.

The baleful gleam of two glowing eyes fills your hearts with dread. A monstrous, serpentine creature uncoils its great bulk, revealing four clawed feet and a huge head filled with yellow fangs. Batlike wings rise from its hunched shoulders. A barbed tail whips the floor as the creature coils back and prepares to lash forth.

Characters who approach the sleeping jabberwock have normal chances to surprise the beast (a roll of 1–3 on 1d10 indicates that the jabberwock is surprised). However, even while sleeping the jabberwock emits a low, rumbling burble that fills the cave (the waterfall drowns out most of it; normally the range of the jabberwock's burble is 200 feet).

Anyone who hears the jabberwock's burbling must make a saving throw vs. spell at –4 or become *confused*. The confusion lasts as long as the victim is within range to hear the burbling (a *silence* spell is especially useful in negating this effect). The confusion has the added effect of imposing a –3 penalty to the victim's attack rolls. Moreover, the victim is struck by the equivalent of a *babble* spell (a reversed *tongues*) and cannot pronounce words properly; this effectively ruins spellcasting. The eye-beams of the jabberwock act as *rays of paralysis*, freezing in place any single target who fails a saving throw vs. paralysis.

Normally, the jabberwock bites with its jaws, inflicting 3d10 points of damage. However, it can also grab prey in its hooked talons, immobilizing one human-sized opponent with either forepaw. The following round, it receives a +2 bonus to hit immobilized prey (+4 if both forepaws are clutching a single victim). The jabberwock prefers to concentrate all its attacks on a single foe until he or she is dead, then transfers its attentions to another opponent. If attacked by a large group of assailants, the creature unleashes a flurry of attacks, striking in all directions with swipes of its forepaw claws (1d10/1d10), wing buffets (2d10/2d10), hind leg stomps (2d6/2d6), bite (3d10), and tail lash (2d8). Each of these attacks is made at a –2 penalty to hit, but each has a 50% chance of knocking down or driving back its recipient, enabling

the jabberwock to focus on a new target. Only vorpal weapons harm the jabberwock, although non-vorpal weapons may be used to subdue the creature. To make this final encounter truly epic, the DM may rule that the creature cannot be killed unless its head is severed, which can only be done once it has been reduced to zero hit points.

Once it finds something to attack, the jabberwock pursues its quarry relentlessly. If the PCs flee, it follows them all the way back to Brillig if necessary, chasing after living prey and leaving the corpses of slain victims behind. *Teleport*, *dimension door*, and similar spells enable PCs to shake the jabberwock's pursuit. If there is no one left to hunt, the jabberwock whiffles back to its lair, curls up in its cave, and goes back to sleep. There is no treasure in the jabberwock's lair, as the creature has no hoarding instinct.

Jabberwock: AC –10; MV 15, fly 15 (C); HD 15; hp 99; THAC0 5; #AT 1 or 8; Dmg 3d10 (bite) or see above; SA *burble*, eye beams, *fear* aura, attack frenzy, *grasp*; SD immune to non-vorpal weapons, keen senses (automatically detects invisible or hidden opponents); MR 80%; SZ G (30' body, 25' tail); ML fearless (20); Int semi (4); AL N; XP 25,000.

Frabjous Day?

If Vhawn and the heroes successfully slay the jabberwock, Toves lets the party complete their exploration of the Whimsy Caves before appearing in a flash of warm light.

"Hast thou slain the jabberwock? Well done, my beamish friends! 'Twas no mean feat—riding the Tulgey Wood of such a vicious threat. You may keep the treasures of these caves as your reward. I have something else for each of you—a gift for a job well done."

Toves gives each character a golden ring (worth 100 gp) enchanted with one *limited wish* spell (the DM should re-read the spell description carefully before allowing the PCs to use the spells). Whether or not Vhawn is destroyed, Toves takes the vorpal sword as his own. He certainly does not allow PCs to keep the sword, claiming he has more important need of it (which is true).

If Vhawn has not been slain, the magical collar that binds her is removed by the deva's touch. Read the following description:

The deva stands before the hulking armanite. "You fought bravely, noble wretch. I now offer you the opportunity to cast off your evil ways, forsake the Blood War, and stand evermore on the side of Good by regaining that which you've lost. Once more, you can travel the planes as a bariaur dedicated to eradicating Evil in all its forms and take vengeance against all who stand against us. Make your choice, tanar'ri."

At this point, any of a number of things can happen, depending on how Toves has interacted with the player characters and whatever the DM thinks dramatically appropriate. The exhausted (and probably wounded) armanite may temporize, demanding proof of the deva's sincerity in the form of some healing. Healing spells do not work on the tanar'ri, so the deva might comply by either transforming her back into a bariaur or by using a *wish* to heal the armanite of all wounds. In either form, once healed Vhawn responds with a wicked smile and then tries to trample Toves under her hooves.

Whether or not he is injured at the hands of the armanite, the disgusted deva admits defeat and flies off, leaving Vhawn to fend for herself. If the characters intercede and try to mediate the conflict, she might attack them as well. She will certainly do so if still in armanite form: tanar'ri see no value in friendships, and there's not enough of the paladin left in Vhawn to care. If restored to bariaur form she might conceivably join the group, so long as they don't remind her of the sanctimonious Toves in any way.

Once the jabberwock is slain, the heroes are free to return to Brillig and leave Dothion via the Infinite Staircase. They might also consider exploring the plane of Bytopia more thoroughly, perhaps encountering the very dwarf whose treasures lie hidden in the Whimsy Caves—which could be awkward if they are openly carrying his treasures at the time....

The End



"Pity me, will you? Take that!"

—Vhawn, "hoofing" the deva

The Heart's Final Beat

An ADVENTURE'S GUILD adventure
set in the RAVENLOFT campaign world
for four to six heroes of 6th to 8th level

by John W. Mangrum

"The Heart's Final Beat" is a RAVENLOFT adventure set in Necropolis, although it can be adapted for use in almost any domain in the Demiplane of Dread. For the sake of the story, one or more characters should either be members of the Order of the Guardians or have close ties to that brotherhood. Though all the information needed to play this adventure is included here, Dungeon Masters may find *Domains of Dread* (TSR #2174) and *Van Richten's Guide to Fiends* (TSR #9477) useful sources of further information. This adventure highlights *Champions of the Mists* (TSR #9559), using kits and secret societies from that book.

Before beginning the adventure, give the heroes the following information:

The Order of the Guardians is an extremely secretive society of men and women dedicated to protecting the Land of the Mists from the insidious threat of powerful artifacts created to serve wicked ends. Those accursed tools of evil which the Guardians cannot destroy they seal away, hiding them from the world that might abuse their powers.

Although the order is divided into numerous isolated factions, most sects do keep records of the accursed artifacts held by the other groups. A certain Sister Eleya of the Guardians in Mordent was studying the historical records of the malignant artifact known as "the Key to the Abyss" when, in a moment of inspiration, she conceived of a way to destroy the supposedly indestructible item! The Key is held by an order calling itself the Watchers at the Gate, so with all due haste Sister Eleya sent off a fellow monk to the Watchers' stronghold in Necropolis. This Guardian, Brother Gregory by name, bore a sealed letter detailing the means of the Key's destruction.

When the messenger's return was a week overdue, Sister Eleya grew concerned. The letter contained important information which could prove disastrous to the Order if it fell into the wrong hands. Thus, Sister Eleya has decided to send another Guardian [one of the PCs] to follow Gregory's trail to the Watchers' stronghold, learn his fate, and recover the letter. Since the messenger would almost certainly be facing unknown dangers, the Guardians have arranged for him [or her] to be joined by several of their allies.

Beginning the Adventure

After a week's travel to Necropolis, and a hard day's trek into the Mountains of Misery, your hastily assembled group of heroes now stands before the Watchers' stronghold. Located on an ancient and abandoned trade route, their home is quite literally a fortress—a blocky structure of massive, weathered stones jutting from the foot of a cliff. Doubtless this ancient fortification extends deep into the mountain's heart.

Disturbingly, as you near the stronghold, the air grows clammy and humid, despite the rising elevation. No birds fly overhead, and no mountain breezes ease your crawling skin.

This scenario assumes that most of the heroes are strangers to each other, united only by their alliance to the Guardians. If they try to share information, they quickly learn (to their regret) that most of them know nothing about the Watchers other than that

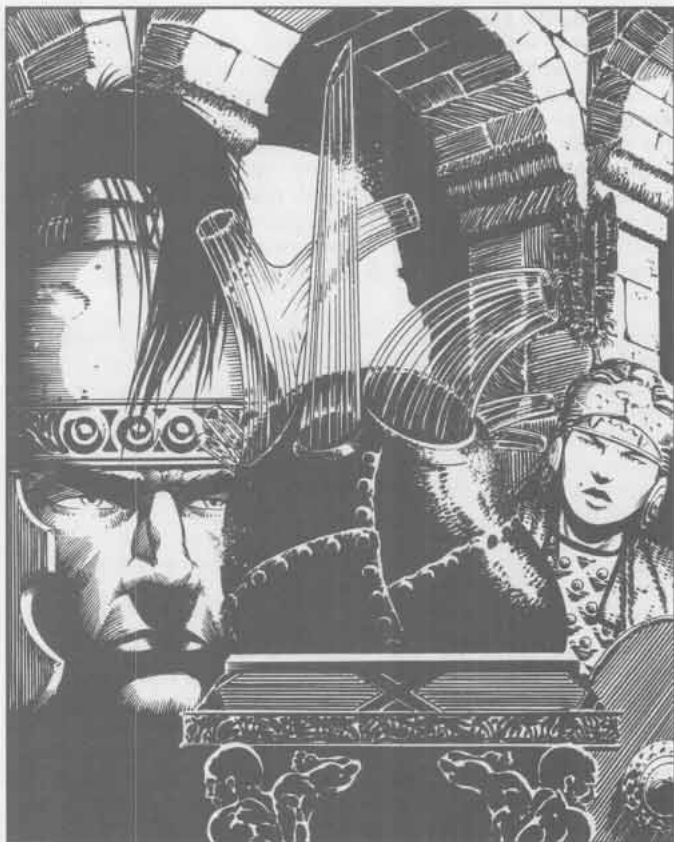
they are another branch of the same organization as the Guardians. The PC who is a member of the Guardians knows that the Watchers guard some object known as the Key to the Abyss; it is up to the player whether or not the character shares this information with his or her fellow heroes.

The Fortress

If the heroes search around the fortress, they discover that the massive double doors at the front of the building seem the only way in; what few windows they can find are tiny and protected by thick iron bars. Despite the walls' crumbling appearance, they are quite solid.

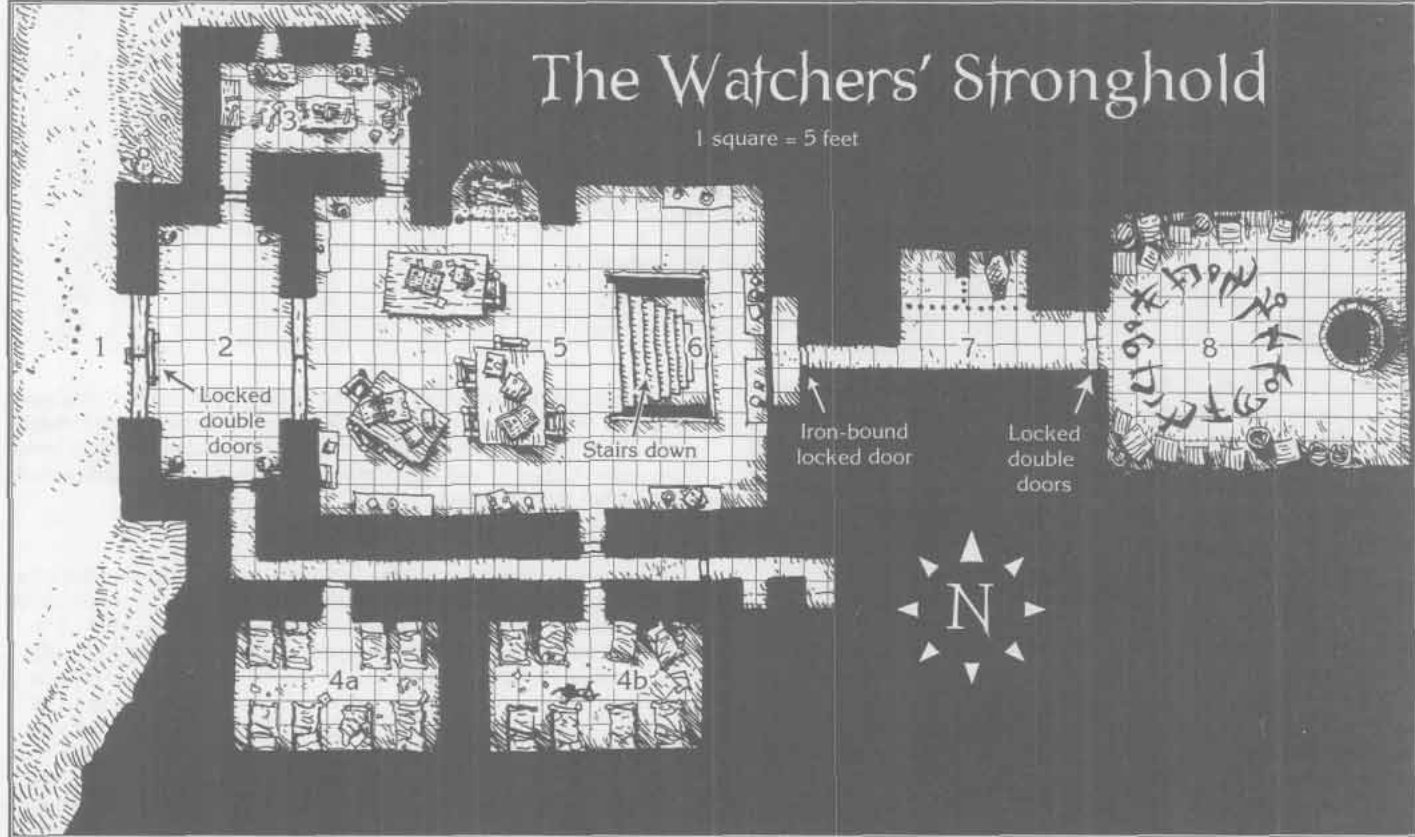
Anyone who examines the walls closely finds a line of fist-sized runes carved into the massive stones at roughly chest height, extending around the entire exposed structure. These runes are magical, and a successful Priestcraft proficiency check reveals their purpose: together, they act as a ward against teleportation. Nothing can teleport into or out of this barrier. The Watchers also maintained many other magical protections on their fortress, but most of these protections have since been shattered by the intruders.

The oppressive humidity the heroes sense is just a hint of the Abyssal energies already seeping through the weakening Key. In addition to the obvious effects, the entire area around the fortress acts as a sinkhole of evil (imposing a -1 penalty on all turning



The Watchers' Stronghold

1 square = 5 feet



attempts). When a character attempts to turn one of the undead within this area, his or her holy symbol glows slightly. Any Psychic among the PCs can vaguely sense this spiritual malaise hanging over the fort.

When the heroes decide to enter the fortress, go to encounter 1.

1. Entering the Fortress

The massive double doors facing the road are the only entrance into the Watchers' stronghold, and they are not easily breached. Constructed of thick, iron-clad oak timbers, they resist any attempts to simply bash through. The doors are also barred from the inside, making lockpicks essentially useless. The aforementioned runes prevent magical entry. The heroes thus have the choice of battering their way through the doors or simply pulling the bell chain. Either way, the heroes alert the current inhabitants of their presence. When the heroes ring the bell or otherwise announce their arrival, read or paraphrase the following:

After a few moments, you finally hear the grinding sound of a heavy bar slowly sliding away from the massive portals. A moment later, one of the doors shudders into motion, swinging open a few feet so that a single figure can slip outside. The woman is dressed in a simple gray robe, identical to that worn by the Guardians. Her hands are completely hidden by the voluminous folds, and she keeps her face in the shadows of her cowl, shielded from the afternoon sun.

The doorkeeper stops just outside the door and takes a moment to silently peer at you, then offers a curt greeting. "What do you want?" she asks in a dry voice.

This "Watcher" is actually a juju zombie, sent to get rid of the heroes as quickly as possible. It answers all of the heroes' questions in the same concise, no-nonsense manner, hoping to quickly satisfy these visitors and send them on their way. Its answers are a mixture of half-truths, bluffs, and outright lies. Yes, the messenger from Mordent arrived without complaint (True). Yes, the letter was delivered safely (In fact, the zombie did not know of the letter until this very instant). Yes, the messenger left the stronghold quite some

time ago. If he ran into trouble, it was after he left (False; in fact, the messenger is still being tormented within the stronghold). The undead impostor entertains the heroes' questions only as long as absolutely necessary. As soon as it realizes the heroes are looking for the missing messenger, it dismisses the matter as "none of my concern" and insists that they take their search elsewhere.

If this lack of interest is not enough to convince the heroes that all is not right with this Watcher, two further clues may give the ruse away. If a Ghostwatcher is present, he or she sees a desperate apparition appear behind the evasive Watcher. After the monk has replied to a few of the heroes' questions, give that character's player **Handout #1**. Similarly, the undead doorwarden could inadvertently give itself away to a Psychic; give **Handout #2** to any player of a Psychic character. Note that the vision this describes is certainly worthy of a horror check. All of these undead were Kargat in life, killed by the terrible wave of negative energy which destroyed Il Aluk; thus the psychic will see similar deaths for any of the other supposed "Watchers" he or she touches as well.

If a Ghostwatcher or Psychic give any obvious sign that he or she knows something is horribly wrong here, the doorwarden notices their alarm and decides to stop playing games:

Noticing your distress, the doorwarden shakes her robed head sadly and says, "It appears the charade is up." Suddenly, she rips back her hood to reveal a hideous face of dried, leathery flesh, and eyes which glow like dying embers. The undead creature hisses at you, immediately turning on its heel to bolt for the open door!

The juju zombie wants nothing more than to run inside, seal the doors, and warn its comrades that the visitors have seen through the ruse. If the heroes block its path inside, it will make a desperate grab for the bell chain to raise the alarm, then attempt to fight the heroes alone. The heroes should have no trouble dispatching this single creature. However, during the melee the ghostly monk described in **Handout #1** will slip back inside the fortress (assuming it was seen at all). Once the undead monk has been defeated, the heroes have an easy, if obvious, means of entrance into the fortress.

Should the heroes examine the doorwarden's corpse, they find two items of interest. First, the woman carries a holy symbol, caked in blood and thoroughly defiled (a small kite shield pierced by a slender sword; any hero with Priestcraft can identify it as a holy symbol of Ezra). Second, she bears an hourglass tattoo over her heart. Characters who make successful Intelligence checks with a -6 penalty know that these signify the creature's membership in the Unholy Order of the Grave, a society of undead who serve Death (the ruler of Il Aluk). Any hero with ties to the Necropolis should attempt another Intelligence check, with success reminding him or her of rumors about the life-draining abilities of Death and his agents.

Most of the undead currently in the Fortress are members of that society and thus have been granted the ability to drain levels from their foes (or have that ability augmented if they already possessed it). Oddly, most choose not to use this ability here or use it only as a last resort. The Abyssal energies seeping through the Key have corrupted this region, tainting the life force of every living thing within it to the extent that even these foul undead find them distasteful.

Juju Zombie: AC 6; MV 9; HD 3+12; hp 30; THAC0 15; #AT 1; Dmg 3d4+energy drain (fist); SA successful attack drains one level (Unholy Order of the Grave augmentation, no save); SD immune to nonmagical weapon and to illusions, psionics, electricity, *magic missile*, and mind-affecting spells; half-damage from fire and from blunt or piercing weapons; SW may be turned (as spectre), holy water (2d4 points of damage per vial); SZ M (5'6"); ML fearless (20); Int very (12); AL NE; XP 1,400.

If the heroes think to investigate the stronghold rather than simply storm in, any Cold One among them would, dressed in the monk's robe, make an appropriate spy. Other undead inside the fortress do not react to his or her presence so long as the character keeps face and hands covered and keeps to himself or herself. Such a spy can wander freely throughout the stronghold's upper level as he or she sees fit. If he or she enters the library (area 5), one of the undead present will simply ask (in a notably bored tone) if the "interlopers have been sent packing." So long as he or she grunts out some satisfying answer, they do not bother the disguised hero. However, should he or she attempt to go downstairs, one of them barks out an angry warning:

"Where are you going? Master Bralkain does not want to be disturbed!" The creature then turns to its neighbor and adds a sneering comment: "—whatever it is he's doing down there."

2. Foyer

Just as the mountain pass is drenched in sunlight, the foyer is drenched in shadow. If the undead creature which answered the door had any need of light, this chamber does not show it. The square room is constructed of the same massive stones used for the outside walls; all in all, it seems more befitting a tomb than a foyer. Heavy candelabras stand in each corner, but the candles have all melted down to shapeless lumps and winding tendrils of cold wax.

Before you, a second set of double doors, closed but not nearly as sturdy-looking as the doors leading outside, lead deeper into the fortress. To either side, a single door offers entrance into unknown chambers beyond. Although no light can be seen seeping under the cracks of any of these closed doors, the stronghold is not abandoned; through the door to your left you can hear muffled voices. Though you can't make out their words, you can detect a certain . . . amusement to their banter.

If a Ghostwatcher PC is present, the spectral monk reappears to him or her. Give the player **Handout #3**. In addition to this disturbing visitation, the heroes will start to detect a strange, coppery taste in their mouths. This is yet another manifestation of the



Abyssal energies trickling through the Key to the Abyss. On top of any other effects, the entire upper level of the stronghold acts as a -2 sinkhole of evil (imposing a -2 penalty on all turning attempts). If a character attempts to turn one of the undead within this area, his or her holy symbol grows warm and glows brightly.

3. Kitchen

The left-hand door in the foyer leads into a mid-sized kitchen. Should the heroes investigate this room, drawn by the muffled voices, read or paraphrase the following:

As you cautiously push the door open a crack, the two voices you heard before become much clearer.

" . . . I don't know, what bit do you think looks tastiest?" says the first voice.

"Slab of ribs?" replies the second.

"Hmm—flank steak?" counters the first.

"Nah—sweetmeats?" queries the second.

As the hissing, leering voices call each apparent delicacy in turn, you hear a dull thud and a weak, agonizing cry!

As soon as the heroes enter the room, they can see the cruel deeds that accompany this light banter:

In the darkness, your eyes make out three figures in gray robes. One seems to be a badly beaten man, dangling limply by his wrists from chains that hang from the ceiling. Circling him like a pair of cackling vultures are two figures carrying crude metal pokers, apparently taken from the nearby hearth. Although the two tormentors wear the same robes as the man they torment, their faces betray them as unnatural creatures. Long, bloated tongues play over their cracked fangs and drooling lips as they savor their prisoner's terror.

"No," one of the two creatures gleefully howls to its companion, "I know what I want! I'll take the brisket!" It accentuates this choice by slapping the bruised prisoner's chest with the

poker, raising another weak cry from the victim. The dozens of scattered, bloody bones on the floor make it clear that this poor monk will not be the first butchered in this kitchen.

At this point, the ghouls will prepare to carve the prisoner into pieces. If the heroes do not interfere, the monk will be killed horribly in a few torturous rounds. So long as the heroes' battle against the ghouls lasts only a few rounds, the undead in the nearby library do not bother to investigate. They are quite used to sounds of struggle and cries of pain coming from this room and grow curious only if the sounds of combat last too long for their liking.

Ghouls (2): AC 6; MV 9; HD 2; hp 13, 15; THAC0 19; #AT 3; Dmg 1d3/1d3/1d6 (claw/claw/bite); SA successful attack causes paralysis (1d6+2 rounds, save vs. paralyzation to resist); SD immune to *sleep* and *charm* spells; SW may be turned, kept at bay by *protection from evil* (unless attacked); SZ M (5'10", 5'9"); ML steady (12); Int average (9, 8); AL CE; XP 175 each.

If the heroes defeat the ghouls, they can free the monk from his bindings (on a successful Pick Locks roll with a +25% bonus or by prying open the shackles using a poker with a successful Strength check). This monk is in fact Brother Gregory, the Guardian's original messenger, so the Guardian PC should recognize him despite his rather battered condition. The ghouls' torture has left him badly shaken and wounded, but if the heroes take a few minutes to calm the poor man, he tries to explain what has occurred here:

In a quavering voice, Gregory describes his experiences. "I arrived here late in the day . . . and they attacked that very night! Curse my soul, those monsters must have followed me! I must have led them right to the Watchers' doorstep! I'm not sure why they attacked, but it has something to do with the Key. I'd swear upon it!"

If Gregory is asked about the fate of the Watchers, he shudders at the memory, then tells what little he knows:

"Most were slain right away. The few survivors were thrown into the prison downstairs—but not left to rot! No, they kept us for food—blood for the master and . . ." Gregory pauses to take a long look at the gnawed bones scattered around the room and shudders ". . . and meat for his servants!"

If the heroes ask about the letter, Gregory simply tells them that he handed it to Brother Ruden, head of the Watchers. He does not know what Ruden did with the letter, but he assumes the undead invaders now possess it. Like the heroes, Gregory knows next to nothing about the Key itself.

In his current state, Gregory is too weak and dizzy (from the life-draining effects of the attackers, lack of water, and the wounds he took) to accompany the heroes. If magically healed for at least 7 hit points, he can draw them a crude map showing the basic layout of the upper level. However, his nerve has broken from the horrors he has witnessed and he dare not accompany them deeper into the fortress (if forced to do so, he automatically fails all fear and horror checks).

The kitchen's hearth holds a number of crudely-made metal tools used to stoke the fire (the ghouls were using two of these pokers). These tools date back to the stronghold's ancient days as a border fortress and are actually made of cold iron—which may make them useful weapons. Due to their inferior craftsmanship, these cold iron pokers act as crude clubs in combat (damage 1d6-1). Any Monster Hunter PC who knows about the Key to the Abyss at this point should quickly realize that these tools could come in handy if they actually encounter a fiend.

4. Barracks

The side door on the right side of the foyer leads down a hallway

to two barracks filled with bunks. Numerous lanterns hang on the walls of the barracks and hall, but the undead do not bother to keep them lit (prudent heroes may wish to take a few lanterns to light their way in the lower level).

The barracks have obviously been looted. In addition to the numerous signs of violence, the heroes find the corpse of a true Watcher, decapitated by overzealous undead during the raid. Master Bralkain found the corpse useless in this ruined state either as a source of blood and as zombie material, so the body was left alone. If the heroes examine the corpse, they find the woman's arms are covered in healed scars, the legacy of a lifetime spent voluntarily offering blood to the insatiable Key.

5. Library

When the fortress was first built, this large chamber served as the stronghold's great hall, used for dining and entertainment. When the Watchers moved in, they converted this room to a library, which they filled with their modest accumulation of Guardian lore. Although the collection is not extremely large, in the wrong hands it could be devastating. Were a darklord to acquire these tomes, he or she would learn the locations of half a dozen Guardian monasteries throughout the Core as well as the secrets of the evil artifacts they guard (it's best not to think about what he or she would then do with that knowledge).

When the heroes first enter this chamber, they find the bulk of the undead intruders passing the time here until their master finally allows them to leave.

As you peer into the vast hall, the faint illumination from a small, barred skylight overhead offers no more than ghostly hints of the room's details. Dusty bookcases stand against the walls here and there, and books lie scattered on several tables about the room. Although the hall's huge hearth has been allowed to grow cold, the room is oppressively hot; just standing in the doorway causes beads of sweat to wind their way down your face. Toward the rear of the room, a wide staircase leads down into utter darkness.

Of more immediate interest, you see six—no, eight—robed figures engaged in various activities about the room. Three of the decayed creatures sit at tables, silently reading, while the other five pull tomes from the bookshelves and toss them in large burlap sacks, going about their work in a decidedly lackluster manner.

The oppressive heat is another sign of the ever-strengthening Abyssal energies leaking through the Key.

Death gave this group a simple command: seek out sources of magical power and bring them back to Il Aluk. All fine and good as far as these undead were concerned, but their leader, Master Bralkain, has been ignoring Death's commands. Instead of gathering up the Watchers' magical lore and returning to their lord immediately, Bralkain has left his underlings loitering here for well over a week. Bralkain is up to something these undead have not figured out, and they do not like it one bit. Some of the more suspicious undead have decided to learn just what Bralkain does during all those hours he spends locked in the stronghold's well room, but they quickly put their research aside when faced with intruders!

In the original tournament upon which this adventure is based, one of the heroes was a Redeemed former agent of Azalin's Kargat. Should any player character share a similar history, a particularly gruesome shock awaits him or her; read or paraphrase the following when the heroes enter the room. If no such character accompanies the party, simply assume that the wight mistakes one of the heroes for a look-alike with a more sinister past.

As you enter the room, the undead scramble from their chores to deal with you. However, one of the undead creatures suddenly stops short. For a moment, its moldering lips curl in confusion, finally splitting into a wide grin. The creature's eyes burn with recognition.

"You!" it hisses. "How wonderful to see you! We all missed you in Il Aluk."

The other undead also now pause to stare at you, and they

too betray a sudden recognition.

Their leader squints and continues, "Azalin ordered us all to the Requiem, and we obeyed. But look at us now. Rotting shells! And look at you—you defied his order! You abandoned us! And look at the reward for your treachery! Why should your heart still beat while ours rot? Why were you spared?" A well of hatred boils up with the creature's words, growing more intense with each question. "It's time you rejoined the fold!"

With that, the undead fling themselves at the heroes. Just as many of the undead recognized their old comrade, the Redeemed character may recognize them too, once he or she looks past the decay. Seeing this unliving example of the fate he or she narrowly avoided is certainly worth a horror check. A character who simply resembles their former comrade will not suffer this shock, of course, but he or she is left with the knowledge that someone who strongly resembles the hero was doing unsavory things in Darkon in the not-too-distant past.

Having been created in the Requiem, these undead are more intelligent than most of their unnatural kind, and if the battle turns against them, the last undead left standing may offer a deal, bargaining for its existence. If the heroes will allow it to leave the stronghold with just one sack of the Watchers' books, it will happily tell the heroes all it knows: that they were sent to find magic, that they learned about the existence of the Watchers and followed the messenger to the Watchers' stronghold, and that Master Bralkain is defying their lord's commands, obsessed with some strange artifact he calls the Key to the Abyss.

If turned, these undead flee to the barracks, not down the stairs.

Wight: AC 5; MV 12; HD 4+3; hp 27; THAC0 15; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4+level drain (touch); SA touch drains two levels (Unholy Order of the Grave augmentation, no save); SD immune to nonmagical weapons, immune to poison, paralysis, sleep, charm, hold, and cold-based spells; SW silver weapons do full damage, holy water (2d4 points of damage per vial), may be turned, instantly slain by *raise dead*; SZ M (5'5"); ML champion (16); Int high (13); AL LE; XP 2,000.

Ghouls (5): AC 6; MV 9; HD 2; hp 13, 15, 12, 16, 14; THAC0 19; #AT 3; Dmg 1d3/1d3/1d6 (claw/claw/bite); SA successful attack causes paralysis (1d6+2 rounds, save vs. paralysis to resist); SD immune to *sleep* and *charm* spells; SW may be turned, kept at bay by *protection from evil* (unless attacked); SZ M (average 6'); ML elite (14); Int average (8-10); AL CE; XP 175 each.

Juju Zombies (2): AC 6; MV 9; HD 3+12; hp 35, 24; THAC0 15; #AT 1; Dmg 3d4+energy drain (fist); SA successful attack drains one level (Unholy Order of the Grave augmentation, no save); SD immune to nonmagical weapon and to illusions, psionics, electricity, *magic missile*, and mind-affecting spells, half-damage from fire and from blunt or piercing weapons; SW may be turned (as spectre), holy water (2d4 points of damage per vial); SZ M (6', 6'2"); ML fearless (20); Int very (12); AL NE; XP 1,400 each.

However the heroes handle the undead, once the creatures have all been dealt with, the heroes can look through the three books the undead were reading (still lying open on the tables). Any Psychic PC can detect an increasing spiritual malaise as he or she nears the stairs, sensing the growing evil streaming through the Key.

Book 1: Historical Records

This text (shown in **Handout #4**) is a compilation of historical records surrounding the destruction of the village of Creeana by an infernal creature which came to be known as "the Whistling Fiend." As well as the personal accounts of those who survived the creature's senseless rampage (excerpts of which appear in *Van Richten's Guide to Fiends*), the text contains the recently underlined transcript of an unsubstantiated rumor, recorded years after the fact, detailing the origins of the creature.

Book 2: The Key to the Abyss

This tome was written soon after the Watchers first claimed the Key and hid it in their stronghold. The two excerpts shown in **Handout #5** are of particular interest.

Book 3: Personal Journal of Brother Jarvik

Brother Jarvik was a prominent Watcher around the turn of the century. The undead had been reading an intriguing section detailing the results of Jarvik's divinations (**Handout #6**).

6. Lower Hall

The wide staircase leads down from the library deep into the darkness. At its base a short, wide hallway leads forward to yet another closed, iron-bound door. Although several lanterns hang in this hall, none are currently lit.

The Abyssal energies permeate this level; the entire lower level reeks of sulfur (character must make Constitution checks to avoid nausea; failure imposes a -2 penalty to all rolls and checks for as long as that character stays on this level). To make matters worse, the lower hall and the prison (area 7) act as a -3 sinkhole of evil (imposing a -3 penalty on all turning attempts). When a hero attempts to turn one of the undead within this area, his or her holy symbol grows extremely hot and glows brightly.

7. Prison

If the heroes open the iron-bound door, they see only a narrow hall leading into the shadows. However, from those shadows the heroes hear something speak:

"Is he dead?" asks a gurgling voice, suspicion apparent in its tone. "He smells dead to me." In reply, you hear only a brief, faint murmur.

If the heroes investigate, they quickly find a small prison consisting of two cells. The gurgling voice belongs to the lone wight that acting as jailer for two monks slumped in one of the cells. The low murmur must have come from one of the monks, but from the heroes' vantage point either or both of the Watchers could be the corpse the wight was asking about.

The heroes may be able to take the wight by surprise and in any case should be able to defeat it quickly. Once the creature has been eliminated, the heroes can take its key ring, allowing them to unlock both cells.

The Jailer (wight): AC 5; MV 12; HD 4+3; hp 30; THAC0 15; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4+level drain (touch); SA touch drains two levels (Unholy Order of the Grave augmentation, no save); SD immune to nonmagical weapons, immune to poison, paralysis, *sleep*, *charm*, *hold*, and cold-based spells; SW silver weapons do full damage, holy water (2d4 points of damage per vial), may be turned, instantly slain by *raise dead*; SZ M (6'); ML champion (16); Int very (12); AL LE; XP 2,000.

Only one of the two remaining Watchers in the cell is still alive, and he is near death (having been used repeatedly to slake Master Bralkain's thirst for blood). This Watcher, Brother Pelov by name, is so physically and spiritually exhausted it takes him several minutes to realize that he has been rescued. Until that time, he believes the heroes to be new prisoners and begs them not to let the jailer know that his companion has died. If they find out, the ghouls will cart the dead monk off to the kitchen, or their hideous master will animate him as a mindless slave.

Brother Pelov can offer the heroes the same basic information about the attack as Brother Gregory (see area 3). In addition, he can offer complete details of the stronghold's layout (including what little the heroes will not have explored by now). On top of this, Pelov can tell the heroes that the invader's leader, Master Bralkain, is a vampire (in fact, Bralkain keeps his coffin in the vacant cell).

Brother Pelov expresses his worry over the untended Key before he passes out, muttering that several days have passed since the

Key last received any blood, and by now it is surely draining away the very last drops of its supply. Pelov also comments on the unnatural taint spreading throughout the stronghold. The stench, the heat, the humidity, the strange coppery taste—these are all signs that the Key is dangerously weak. The Abyss is already starting to slip through the portal! All of these fragmentary remarks are likely to alarm heroes who have not yet learned the nature of the Key.

In life, the second monk was Brother Ruden, head of the Watchers of the Gate. Sadly, he has been dead for over a day, having finally succumbed to the wounds he suffered during the initial attack. If a Ghostwatcher PC looks at this Watcher's aged features, he or she may be in for a bit of a surprise: Brother Ruden is quite plainly the spirit who appeared at the stronghold's entrance (see **Handouts #1 & #3**)! If the heroes search Ruden's body, they find Sister Eleya's letter, still tucked safely away in an inner pocket over the man's heart; give the players **Handout #7**.

8. Well Room

When the heroes approach the double doors at the end of the hall, they can hear a single voice chanting within. Any Psychic hero can also sense that the room beyond the door is flooded with evil. In fact, within this final room the Abyssal energies pulsing through the Key create a -4 sinkhole of evil (imposing a -3 penalty on all turning attempts)! When a character attempts to turn one of the undead within this area, his or her holy symbol grows painfully hot (causing one point of damage per round) and glows as if a *light* spell were cast on it. Corruption this intense will require a madness check on the part of any Psychic heroes, but since the build-up has been gradual, the character can be considered to have prepared himself or herself for the shock, thus receiving a +4 bonus to the roll.

Master Bralkain has locked the doors from the inside to prevent his underlings from interfering with his rituals, but the doors can be opened with a successful Pick Locks or Bend Bars/Lift Gates roll. The well room is a large chamber, made somewhat cramped by numerous ancient supplies stacked around the perimeter of the room in dusty crates and moldy barrels. The open well at the rear of the room is ringed by a low wall.

When the heroes finally enter the room, read or paraphrase the following:

A crimson ring of strange symbols has been painted onto the flagstones of the floor in this room, the unidentified pigments still glistening and wet. This ring is surrounded by some two dozen motionless figures, each one silently holding a thick, flickering candle in its hands. Most of these figures wear the gray robes of the Watchers, and all are quite clearly dead.

A hideous creature stands in the center of the circle, chanting a ceaseless string of oily syllables, holding what looks for all the world like the steel heart of a madman's automaton over its head. A latticework of black veins, bleached bones, and yellowed eyes are all clearly visible through the creature's colorless, jelly-like flesh! As you watch, it cries out, "The hour is at hand! The conduit opens—" The creature's incantation stops as it turns its head to peer in your direction and lowers the steely heart. In the creature's horrid features you detect a note of both confusion and irritation.

"And what do you children want?" it rasps.

The motionless figures are the animated corpses of the Watchers, supplemented by the few undead Kargat who were also killed during the raid. Unlike the other undead which lurk in these halls, these are simple, mindless zombies, the product of Bralkain's spells. The hideous undead figure is Master Bralkain, the vampiric leader of this unit of the Unholy Order of the Grave. For 170 years, Bralkain served Azalin as a leader in the Kargat. Like almost all the rest of the Kargat, he was present in Il Aluk during the Requiem. That event, which caused untold death and misery for thousands of others, had very little effect on the long-dead Bralkain, simply prompting him to change allegiance to his new master, Death.

Even more important than who Bralkain is in death is who he was in life. In the year 580, Bralkain led the wizards from Karg who accidentally created this living conduit and unleashed the

Whistling Fiend upon the Land of Mists. Immediately after finding a way to shut the planar conduit, the wizards were invited to Avernus to receive the thanks of their king. Once they arrived, Azalin made good use of them, transforming them into undead servants utterly under his control. Bralkain's monstrous appearance is the result of the unspeakable sorcery Azalin used to transform him into undead, and the Abyssal energies even now flowing through him have done nothing to improve his looks.

After the Requiem, Death assigned Bralkain's unit the task of seeking out magical items for their master. Bralkain immediately took this opportunity to track down the missing Key to the Abyss, which had been stolen from Avernus after a century of experiments to improve its "utility" by carving away all the unnecessary components of the still-suffering living conduit. Now, Bralkain has tracked down the Watchers at the Gate and intends to finish what he and his comrades started nearly two centuries ago: to use the Key to the Abyss to bind a fiend to his will, then reap the benefits of its power! He believes that possession of the Key, combined with his spells and natural vampiric powers, will allow him to control the Whistling Fiend.

For the moment, Bralkain is content to simply speak to the heroes, trying to convince them not to interfere. Of course, time is of the essence, and Bralkain cannot afford a distraction; the Key has drained the very last drops of its blood supply, and even as the heroes enter the chamber, the planar conduit is opening. If Bralkain cannot immediately convince the heroes to leave, or should the heroes attack him, Bralkain immediately launches an attack, hoping to destroy the interlopers before they can disrupt his careful preparations. He orders his shambling zombies to attack the party, using them to slow the party down while he fires off a barrage of spells. Note that if one of the heroes is a Cold One, none of the zombies will attack that character unless he or she attacks them first.

The heroes must battle their way through the horde of zombies to wrest control of the Key away from Bralkain. Time is working against them, though—as they battle the vampire, the planar conduit is opening, and someone far closer than the Abyss has taken notice.



Zombies (25): AC 8; MV 6; HD 2; hp 13 each; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1d8 (fist); SD immune to *sleep*, *charm*, *hold*, death magic, poison, and cold-based spells; SW holy water (2d4 points of damage per vial), may be turned; SZ M (5' to 6'); ML fearless (20); Int non (0); AL N; XP 65 each.

Master Bralkain, 9th-level Wizard and Vampire: AC 1; MV 12, fly 18 (C); HD 8+3; hp 60; THAC0 11; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6+4+energy drain (blow, Strength bonus) or by spell; SA touch drains three levels (Unholy Order of the Grave augmentation, no save), spells, *charm* gaze (-2 penalty to saving throw); SD *gaseous form*, spider climb (at will), regeneration (3 hp per round), immune to nonmagical weapons, immune to poison, paralysis, and *sleep*, *charm*, and *hold* spells, half-damage from cold and electricity, *shape change* (giant bat); SW garlic, mirror, holy symbol, sunlight, running water, holy water (1d6+1 points of damage per vial); SZ M (6'6"); ML champion (17); Int genius (18); AL CE; XP 9,000. Spells: *magic missile* (x3), *taunt*; *bind*, *levitate*, *Melf's acid arrow*; *fireball*, *hold person*, *lightning bolt*; *fire shield*, *shadow monsters*; *domination*.

DM Note

Starting in the round the heroes enter the well room, the final barriers between Necropolis and the Abyss are torn away. With each round, describe the following cumulative effects of the Abyssal energies pouring through the conduit. Although none of these manifestations have any direct game effects, they may well be worthy of a fear and horror checks!

Round 1: The earth shudders, opening cracks in the stone walls, ceiling, and floor. The shape of the room itself begins to slowly distort.

Round 2: A warm, greasy black slime boils up from the cracks in the floor, oozes down the walls, and drips from the ceiling.

Round 3: Sickly green light bursts from the depths of the well itself, bathing the dripping ceiling in a gangrenous glow.

Round 4: Distorted, inhuman shadows start playing against the infernal light, and a hideous, high-pitched wailing warns that something, or perhaps a great many somethings, are on their way!

Round 5: The first of the Abyssal entities arrives—but not from the conduit; proceed to the next section.

The Whistling Fiend

Bralkain seeks only to bind a single fiend to his power and has no more intention of letting fiendish forces overrun the world than do the heroes. However, Bralkain is not the only party with an interest in the Key to the Abyss. The Whistling Fiend first entered the Demiplane of Dread through the living conduit that is the Key, and it still has an intimate connection to the Key. Wherever it may be lurking within the Mists, it senses when the conduit opens, and immediately comes to investigate.

Due to an event far removed from Ravenloft, most fiends have lost their ability to *teleport without error*; the Whistling Fiend, however, has connected itself so strongly to the Mists that it retains that powerful ability so long as it is within the demiplane. Rather than teleporting, the Fiend simply mistwalks to the location of the Key (though until now the wards carved into the outer wall have prevented it from simply materializing in the stronghold itself). At the end of round 4 of the battle against Bralkain, the Whistling Fiend enters the stronghold via area 1. During round 5 everyone in the stronghold can hear the Fiend's eerie whistling tune grow louder as it saunters through the halls of the fortress, headed directly for the Key. Even if the heroes think nothing of the disjointed tune, Bralkain recognizes it immediately:

As the strange whistling grows louder, the undead wizard stops short and you see true fear creep into his eyes. "You fools!" he cries. "Your meddling has doomed us all! If you value your lives—or your eternal souls—stand back and do not interfere!"

No matter what actions the heroes take, Bralkain tries in vain to prepare himself for the Fiend's imminent arrival. In round 6, the Whistling Fiend finally makes its appearance:

The whistling tune comes closer, and closer still! As it nears, you hear the eerie tune now joined by a softer sound: a sizzling hiss. A moment later, you are given the source of this strange noise. At the end of the hall, you see a foot step into view, black as night, shriveled to the bones, and glistening with slime. As the foot touches the step, the very stones begin to smoke and boil!

Casually, yet with a certain gleeful spring in its step, the creature saunters down the stairs. Standing at least seven feet tall, it looks at first like a mummified corpse: dry, ebon skin stretched tight over a skeletal frame. But in the details this beast loses all claim to humanity. Its fingers sport blood-red talons, and every tooth in its jaw is a jagged fang. Its entire body is coated in obscenely glistening slime that looks like red jelly. A long, curving horn sprouts from the back of its skull, occasionally throwing sparks as it scrapes along the hall's low ceiling. Its eyes are pits of darkness illuminated by balls of bright green flame—the same diseased color as that thrown up from the screaming portal.

As the repulsive creature approaches, still merrily whistling its dreadful tune, you cannot decide which looks more wicked: the hooks and barbs on the metal pike it carries or the monster's shriveled grin.

The appearance of the Whistling Fiend is certainly worth a horror check; if Bralkain is still alive when the fiend arrives, then the creature is quick to demonstrate whom the heroes should truly fear:

The Whistling Fiend pauses to take a look at you all, but when its glowing eyes fall upon Bralkain, the horrid whistling takes on a new note. Grinning broadly, the creature slowly shakes a taloned finger in the vampire's direction, as if gently chastising a beloved pet. Bralkain frantically begins to cast a spell and is answered by the fiend's pike. The hideous creature rams the greenish-black metal barbs through Bralkain's chest, impaling the vampire-mage and effortlessly lifting him off his feet. As he dangles, Bralkain looks down at his own wound in mute horror for a moment before flaking away into dry ashes.

The fiend then tilts its head to glance at you. With an amused whistle, it swings its pike to point directly at you.

The Fiend now turns all of its attention to destroying the party. So long as it has defenseless victims to terrorize here, it is in no hurry to rejoin the Blood War, so leaping through the screaming portal is the last item on its agenda.

Until a hero wounds the fiend, it will treat the party as mere prey, using only its preferred weapon (the pike) on them. As soon as a hero wounds the fiend, however, the pitch of its whistling changes as it starts taking the opposition seriously and turns up the ferocity of its attacks. Although it still prefers to impale with its pike, it may instead use some of its spell abilities if these seem more appropriate.

The Whistling Fiend (Tanar'ri, Greater—Babau): AC -3; MV 15; HD 8+14; hp 65; THAC0 13; #AT 1 or 3 (pike or natural weapons); Dmg 1d8+7 (pike, Strength bonus) or 1d4+1/1d4+1/2d4 (claw/claw/gore); SA *gaze* (enfeeblement, 20' range), *corrosion* (contact with the "red jelly" coating the fiend's skin causes 1d6 points of acid damage), *backstab* (+4 attack bonus, quadruple damage), *choking fog* at will (15' diameter, centered on the fiend, all others must save vs. spell or suffer *confusion*), *poison touch* once per day (save vs. poison or die after 24 hours of agony, even on successful save target is wracked with pain and unable to cast spells, only able to enter combat at -4 attack penalty on successful save vs. death magic each round); SD immune to nonmagical weapons, immune to fire, poison, and electricity, half-damage from silver weapons, half-damage from magical fire, cold, and gases, *corrosion* ("red jelly" coating reduces slashing and piercing damage by half and has 20% chance of destroying any metal weapon that strikes it—item saving throw vs. acid to resist), thief skills (see below); SW full damage from acid, *magic missiles*, and cold iron; MR 50%; SZ M (7'); ML champion (15); AL CE; XP 17,000+. Str 19, Int 18.



Thief Abilities: Pick Pockets 30%, Open Locks 30%, Find & Remove Traps 25%, Move Silently 95%, Hide in Shadows 80%, Detect Noise 35%, Climb Walls 90%, Read Languages 30%. **Spells (one per round, at will):** *darkness 15' radius, dispel magic, fear, fly, heat metal, infravision, levitate, polymorph self, teleport without error (mistwalk).*

The Whistling Fiend will take quite obvious pleasure in the torturous destruction of the party, downing them one at a time. If the heroes try to stand up to it in a direct fight they will almost certainly be overwhelmed, especially after having just spent their resources battling the undead Kargat. However, if the heroes are lucky and clever, they may yet be able to snatch victory from the Whistling Fiend's grasp.

The Abyssal conduit can be sealed simply by "feeding" the Key. Anyone who wounds himself or herself with the Key's spike is drained of 1d6 hp each round until he or she breaks off contact with the living artifact. Once the Key is given 6 hp worth of blood, the conduit snaps shut, ending the immediate threat from the Lower Planes. However, closing the conduit does not dissipate the sinkhole of evil, nor does it have any effect on the Whistling Fiend itself. The Fiend will simply seek to kill the heroes so that it can claim the Key for itself and open the conduit again. If the heroes simply try to throw the Key into the portal, they find this impossible. The conduit is one-way, and at the moment leads only from the deepest levels of the Abyss into this very chamber!

In the off-chance that the heroes actually best the fiend in combat, they may be able to drive it off. If the fiend is dropped to dangerously low hit points, it mistwalks to the foyer upstairs, saunters outside, and vanishes into the Mists to lick its wounds. If the heroes have not yet sealed the conduit by this time, they can easily do so now. However, the fiend has a long memory (as Bralkain just learned to his sorrow), and the heroes can rest assured that some day the creature will come looking to even the score.

The heroes' best chance for victory rests in the Key itself. If the heroes read Sister Eleyna's letter (**Handout #7**), they may know a way to destroy the Whistling Fiend and the accursed Key in one fell swoop. If a hero manages to wound the Whistling Fiend with the Key's bloodthirsty spike, the Key immediately begins draining

blood from the fiend to slake its own never-ending thirst. The Key to the Abyss is an unwieldy weapon (nonproficiency penalties apply), but it is somehow magically drawn to the fiend, granting a +1 bonus when attacking the Whistling Fiend. If a hero successfully strikes the fiend with the Key, read the following text aloud:

As you jab the Key's razor-tipped blade deep into the fiend's oozing hide, the creature's merry whistling turns into an ear-shattering blare of pain and alarm. The fiend suddenly twists this way and that, tearing the Key from your grip as the creature desperately tries to claw the metallic object from its side—all to no avail. Even as the hooting fiend tries frantically to pry the Key loose, you can see the foul artifact doing its work, the crystalline tubes filling with black ichor.

An instant later, the room begins to tremble from unknown pressures, and an icy wind flares to life, a whirlwind threatening to drag everything in the room down into the shimmering well. The fiend finally pulls the Key to the Abyss free, but too late. The Key is torn from the fiend's claws, sucked down into the portal, and the fiend itself dragged along to the lip of the well.

The low walls of the well collapse, the stones sucked down into the deepest levels of the Abyss, and the fiend is left hanging over an open maw. There it is caught, torn between the planar forces dragging it back to its wellspring and the unknowable powers which tie it to this land. Finally, the tug-of-war is decided. As the fiend wails horribly, a sound that you know will haunt your dreams for years to come, its shriveled body is torn asunder, dragged back to the Abyss one squirming, oozing piece at a time. As the last remnant of the fiend is sucked down into the pit, the winds double in strength, pulling you forward as if to share the Whistling Fiend's gruesome fate!

Any heroes who does not immediately flee the room must make a successful Strength check to avoid being pulled into the gaping portal. Those who avoid this dire fate survive to see the portal snap shut in the next round:

The winds double and redouble, threatening to drag the entire stronghold down into the pit. Then, with a deafening thunder-clap, they die. The conduit snaps shut, collapsing back down into the evil realm from whence it came. All is quiet and calm. As you gasp for breath, you realize a change has come over the chamber. The ooze, the heat, the sulfurous stench are all gone. Although it came at great cost, two of the land's most vile evils have been stopped this day, and the unwitting world has you to thank for it.

The End

Handout #1

As the Watcher continues to urge you on your way, a second monk steps out from the stronghold's massive doors. The second monk's head is uncoupled, and desperation is etched deeply into the aged lines of his face. A sudden chill slithers down your spine as you realize that you can see the timbers of the door through this spectral monk. No matter how many times you see the dead, it always catches you off guard. The spectral monk notices that he has caught your eye and bursts into a frenzied display of motion! Frantically jabbing a finger at the brusque Watcher, the silent spirit grits his teeth, runs a thumb across his own throat, and desperately shakes his head and hands at you, as if warning you away!

Handout #2

The monk sighs once in her distressingly dry voice, then offers your group some advice: "It is obvious to me that whatever fate befell your messenger happened to him on his return trip. You do him no good by lingering here. I recommend that you continue to trace his steps back to your headquarters." The Watcher chuckles mirthlessly, reaching out to gently touch your shoulder and turn you back in the direction from whence you came.

However, the instant the Watcher touches you, a nightmarish vision floods your senses! You see a woman whom you know to be this doorwarden, but dressed in leather armor and bearing the weapons of a warrior. She stands in a darkened city street, patrolling a hulking citadel. Suddenly, the citadel is blasted to rubble by a terrible burst of hideous energy! Darker than darkness, yet shimmering with violet light, the wave of energy sweeps across the buildings, across the city streets, across the woman herself, killing all it touches! And yet, death is not the end . . .

The vision ends, and once again you stand before the mountain fortress, the robed doorwarden in front of you.

Handout #3

Sliding from a shadowy corner, the spectral, aged monk once again enters your view. He seems calmer now yet still carries a sense of urgency. Making sure you're watching, he repeatedly jabs two fingers at his chest, directly over his heart. From the spirit's pleading face, you know this is a message, but what message? Even as you ponder this, the spirit slowly fades from view, somehow leaving you with the knowledge that he has truly departed.

Handout #4

Historical Records (580)

A simple farmer near Creeana took on a terrible sickness, his body getting all twisted and bent. The local priest came to look at the poor soul, and he said the man was beset by wicked spirits. The priest tried to rid the man of the evil spirits, but they were too powerful. So the priest sent for help, and in reply came a group of wizards from Karg, led by a man named Bralkain. They learned that the man's body was slowly being replaced, bit by bit, by some kind of infernal entity.

Those wizards were not powerful enough to reverse what was happening to the poor man. In the end, they trapped the man's spirit in some kind of limbo, caught between our world and whatever horrid place those "infernal entities" came from. A fiendish creature rose up from the poor man's ruined body, using the man's soul as the anchor between our worlds. The thing just started whistling, merry as you please, and slaughtered two of the wizards from Karg right there and then. Then it sauntered off and destroyed Creeana. Folks never had a chance.

The Whistling Fiend was busy, but so were the wizards, at least those that were still alive. Somehow, they found a way to seal up that pathway between our world and the nether realms; they found some key to lock the gate. Just as soon as they closed that pathway, the Whistling Fiend vanished, and nobody saw it for another hundred years. As for the wizards and the man they'd turned into a living gateway, nobody ever saw them again.

Handout #5

The Key to the Abyss

Legend had it that Castle Avernus was built atop a portal to the Abyss, and when we penetrated its deepest dungeons in 675, we found this peasants' tale disturbingly close to the truth. Rather than a simple gate, we found an artifact: the Key to the Abyss. All attempts to destroy the Key have proven futile.

The Key to the Abyss is an oddly shaped object, roughly the size of a human head and made from a dark metal we have not yet been able to identify. Several crystalline tubes are attached at uneven intervals around the Key's sides, all just as impervious to harm as the metal lump which serves as its core. A razor-sharp, retractable, spike-like tube extends from the Key's "top"—if it truly has a discernible top. The Key is both conduit and guardian to some unholy place consumed by foul magic and hideous creatures, a place of madness and death. The Key can keep the portal closed only so long as it is kept strong. The Key takes its strength from the blood of intelligent creatures. The crystalline tubes hold an ever-diminishing supply of blood, which must be regularly replenished via the spike. Should the Key ever consume its entire supply of blood, its power will crumble, and the conduit to the Abyss will be thrown open wide . . .

Handout #6

Personal Journal of Brother Jarvik

Entry 206: The strange metal which protects the Key continues to resist all attempts to pierce its shell. But, where brute force will not do, perhaps subtle magics will suffice . . .

Entry 209: The experiments can tell us no more. I have seen into the very core of the Key to the Abyss, and what I have seen leaves me puzzled. Anyone who holds the Key can feel it pulse in their hands; who knew the reason for this would be so obvious? Forever sealed within the Key is a still-beating heart, half human and half . . . something else.

Entry 374: I have recently uncovered tales of a "living conduit" surrounding the legends of the Whistling Fiend. Could the Key be part of those tales or, perhaps, their final evolution? Could it be that the Key, this ever-beating inhuman heart, could be all that remains of the hapless "living conduit?" I shudder to think of the poor man's soul, locked in endless struggle with fiendish forces all these decades!

Handout #7

To Brother Ruden of the Watchers:

Greetings, and I hope this message finds your Order well. I have been studying the past of the Key to the Abyss, and I came to a sudden realization which I hope you may find of some use. We know that the Key is caught in a limbo between this world and the nether realms. We also know that supplying the Key with mortal blood gives it the strength to keep the gateway sealed, but we have never understood exactly why the Key thirsted for this blood. This is my revelation: The Key houses a living heart, itself caught between the human and the fiendish. Giving the Key human blood strengthens its ties to its own humanity, keeping it bound to our world. It is only when the Key lacks this source of strength that it is once again pulled halfway between the worlds, thus allowing the conduit to open. But what would occur were the Key to be supplied with fiendish blood? Might the power of the fiendish blood snap the Key into the nether realms, breaking the connection to this plane and collapsing the conduit upon itself? Do please send a reply back with Brother Gregory; I'm most curious to read your thoughts on the matter.

Humbly,
Sister Eleyna

Leviathan's Deep

An ADVENTURER'S GUILD adventure
using the SAGA® Game Rules
set in the DRAGONLANCE: FIFTH AGE campaign world

by Steven "Stan!" Brown

Since this is an adventure set in the DRAGONLANCE setting, the *Book of the Fifth Age* from the DRAGONLANCE: FIFTH AGE boxed set (TSR # 1148) will be very helpful for the Narrator.

Prologue

This Prologue contains information that all the heroes know at the beginning of play.

Port Balifor

Even before the Second Cataclysm, Port Balifor was a unique town. With the number of pirates, smugglers, and fugitives that called it home, Port Balifor richly deserved its reputation as the roughest, most dangerous city on the Bay of Balifor. In the Age of Mortals, it maintains that image, but for a completely different reason.

When Malystrix the Red Dragon chose Balifor and Kendermore as her base of power, the Bay of Balifor was filled with a tide of refugee boats. The denizens of Port Balifor laughed at them, if they noticed them at all, right up until the day that Malys burned the city to the ground. Perhaps through bravery, perhaps through stupidity, but probably just through bull-headedness, the locals rebuilt the town. This began a cycle of construction and destruction that lasts to this day. Every time the Port Baliforans rebuild their town, Malys reduces it to ashes.

What Malys doesn't know, though, is that while they keep rebuilding their city, the citizens have also built a new city hidden in the sea caves below the smoldering ruins of Port Balifor. This city contains sheltered piers and ports, so the business of Port Balifor can continue right under the dragon's nose. In ten years, the underground town has grown from a ramshackle safety shelter to a stone-hewn city nearly ready to accept all of Port Balifor's residents. One day, the people will simply disappear off the face of the earth and, hopefully, Malys will be none the wiser.

The High Stakes

The heroes work on the *High Stakes*, a local fishing vessel. The ship's captain, Bharn Presman, holds a legendary reputation in ports (and port-side taverns) all along Ansalon's eastern coast as perhaps the finest seaman ever to sail the Blood Sea of Istar. He spent the first part of his career running a merchant ship that would occasionally carry smuggled goods, particularly if the cargo was likely to cause grief or consternation among the Knights of Takhisis. However, a Dark Knight flotilla captured Captain Presman during the Summer of Chaos. His crew (including his wife and four sons) followed the ship and harassed the Dark Knights' fleet for six days, despite the fact that their ship sustained critical damage to its hull from the larger military vessels. On the seventh day, though, their luck ran out. The ship sank, and all hands went to watery graves refusing all aid the Knights of Takhisis offered.

Presman spent two years in a Dark Knight stockade and, when he was released, seemed a broken man. Rather than accept captaincy over another merchant vessel or embark on a voyage of revenge against the Dark Knights, he used his not inconsiderable savings to purchase a small cargo ship and took on a crew of commercial fishermen. Presman named his ship the *High Stakes* to remind himself that the price of a captain's mistakes is often paid by his crew.

Despite the fact that the *High Stakes* carries nothing more valuable than summer golden bass, many a youngster with dreams of a lifetime on the sea signs on for a ten-year apprenticeship with Captain Presman. He teaches them things about being a mariner that a life on the waves might never reveal, but very few appren-

tices stay aboard the *High Stakes* for more than two years. The romantic dreams that brought them there rarely remain unsoiled by the stink of a hold full of bream.

A Strange Voyage

When the *High Stakes* left port last week, you thought it was just for a final run on the Courrain salmon before they left for warmer waters. But when the ship came within sight of a tremendous school, fish leaping so high into the air that you could have leaned out over the prow and caught them by hand, Captain Presman gruffly ordered the ship onward. Likewise, he led you past schools of tuna, abalone, and even a pod of whales, any of which would have brought catches rich enough to keep your crew well-paid through the long, lean winter.

As far as you know, and as far as Captain Presman has ever taught you, nothing is worth fishing for in this part of the ocean. The *High Stakes* seems to be heading for a stretch of sea known as "Leviathan's Deep." This area is rumored to be where one of the leviathans (a whale-like creature the size of one of the Great Dragons) hibernates. Legend says that the leviathans sleep until they are called upon to protect their children, the whales of Ansalon. Recently, dozens of merchant ships with experienced crews have sailed into these waters and simply vanished without a trace.

With no explanation for this destination, the crew is becoming more and more agitated. They work on a fishing vessel, and generally a short-haul one at that. This voyage has them spooked and jittery, and the captain's silence only makes matters worse.

Furthermore, the captain has been showing signs of stress. Whereas most voyages he spends the majority of his time on deck, teaching and encouraging the crew, this trip he spends most of his time locked in his cabin. Several men curious enough to lay an ear against his door say that he is talking to himself.

What does all this strange behavior mean? Has Captain Presman been stricken with some form of madness? Why is he taking the ship to Leviathan's Deep? And what will the crew find in those accursed waters?

Scene One: Ill Winds

The adventure begins with the heroes ten days out of port. Their captain has been acting strangely, and they are not sure where the ship is sailing or what their goal is.

Overview

The fishing vessel *High Stakes* is making full speed toward Leviathan's Deep. The nervous crew sees omens of death and destruction everywhere. As tensions mount and mutiny threatens, the crew must put personal differences aside when a sudden storm threatens to swamp the ship. A map on page 55 shows the course of the *High Stakes*.

Getting Started

The Narrator should make sure that the players all understand their heroes' abilities and are acquainted with the information in the "Prologue" section. He or she should work out with each player a reason why his or her hero is on board the *High Stakes*. When everyone is clear about what his or her hero knows, the Narrator can begin play.

First Impressions

The sea is rough and boiling in spots, the sky steel-gray, and the wind, though directly at your back, blows a stinging rain across the deck. This would be a normal day on the Bay of Balifor, were it not for the fact that your situation is so unusual. Now the weather simply seems a bad omen on a trip that most of the sailors feel they should never have taken.

It is ten days since the *High Stakes* left Port Balifor. She has sailed past all the plentiful game fish and seems bound for Leviathan's Deep, a stretch of ocean that most seamen hope never to have to cross.

The Story Begins

The heroes and the rest of the sailors perform their daily tasks: some scrubbing the deck, others sewing fishing nets, still others working the rigging. On the surface this seems to be a tightly knit crew acting out their dreams of making a living from the sea. The truth, however, is that these sailors' nerves are strained nearly to the breaking point.

Mutiny!

Tension runs high among the crew of the *High Stakes*. Everyone has been pulling his or her share of the workload, but more and more crewmen are grumbling aloud. Were it not for the fact that Captain Presman commands such respect, a confrontation would have erupted days ago. Even now, men talk of storming into the captain's quarters and demanding answers.

"It's our lives at stake, lads!" says Old Fraff, a scarred and tattooed giant of a man. He's the oldest member of the crew, and almost as highly respected as the captain, especially since he holds the position of first mate. "I sailed with Cap'n Presman before the Chaos War and joined this crew so I could finish my days on a friend's ship. But I ain't never seen the Cap'n act this way . . . not even when his family were all kilt."

"If there's a good reason behind it, let 'im come forward and share it. I'd follow that man into the Abyss if the cause were right. But if he's leadin' us into Leviathan's Deep on a kender's whim, we've got to turn this ship around before it's too late."

The heroes must decide on which side of this issue they stand. Do they join with Old Fraff in inciting the crew to possible mutiny, or do they support Captain Presman and try to calm the agitated crew? The Narrator should allow them each the opportunity to try to sway their shipmates one way or the other.

Unless the heroes have extraordinary success, the fifteen seamen will be split almost evenly. About half the crew fears for their lives and supports Fraff while the other half staunchly defends Captain Presman. Angry words are exchanged between the two sides, and violence threatens to erupt.

The Battle

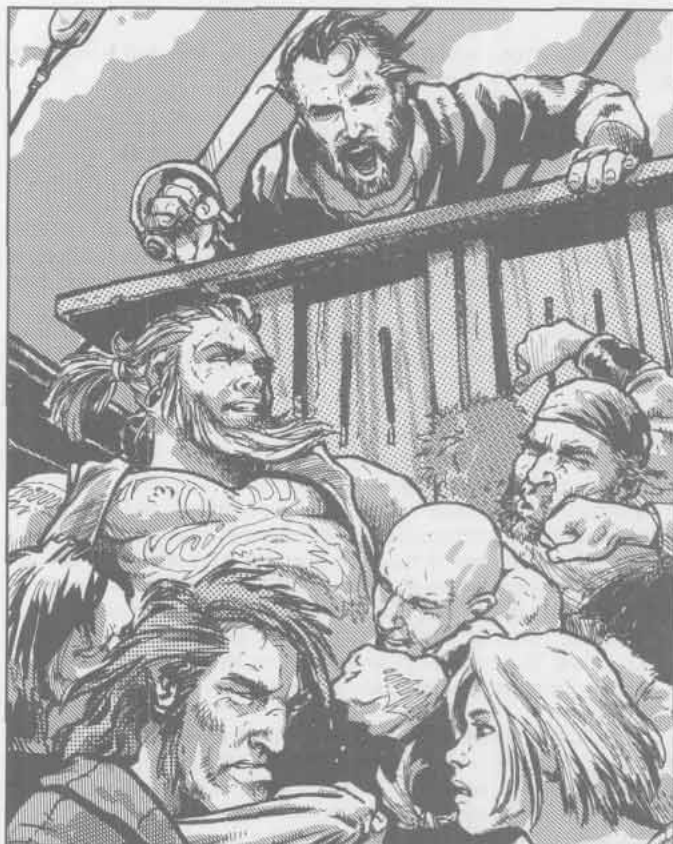
Again, the heroes may wish to attempt to inflame or placate the situation. If even the heroes hold split opinions, matters can quickly get out of hand (see the "Actions" section in this scene below).

If a fight does break out, it should be nonlethal. The crew are not armed, so the most dangerous weapons available are fish-cleaning knives and belaying pins, and only a few of the participants have even these weapons at their disposal. In any case, the Narrator should not let the fight last longer than a few minutes.

The Storm

Captain Presman appears on the poop deck (brandishing a wicked-looking cutlass if there is a fight going on), and a strained silence falls over the crew.

"Stop this nonsense immediately!" bellows the captain. "Brawl all you like in port, but I won't permit such lapses of discipline on my ship! Now get back to work—can't you see that a storm is brewing? And it looks like a bad one."



If the heroes look to the horizon, they see that the captain is indeed correct. A wall of angry, black clouds is bearing down on the *High Stakes*, and the wind has strengthened and begun to swirl. Within minutes, the skies open, and rain comes down nearly horizontally, pelting painfully off any exposed skin. The crew struggles to batten the ship down, and the heroes should help out in any manner they can.

The sky is so dark that it is difficult to believe it is midday. The air crackles with power as lightning leaps from cloud to cloud, even striking the sea dangerously close to your ship. If a bolt should hit the mast, you know, the *High Stakes* will almost certainly catch fire and be lost. The sea that was so calm mere minutes ago now rises in twenty-foot high waves that crash across the deck, threatening to sweep unwary seamen into the roiling water.

Atmosphere

The Narrator should strive to create a nautical atmosphere. Tapes of surf or seagulls would be appropriate, as would penny-whistle hornpipe music. This is the calm before the storm (both figuratively and literally).

For the argument, the mood should be tense. Old Fraff is a frightened man, and so are many other members of the crew. They are not evil nor power-hungry, and the proposed mutiny is in the name of survival rather than avarice.

When the storm hits, the players should feel the unbridled chaos of an angry sea. Sudden loud noises would be appropriate, as would insisting that heroes whose players do not speak loudly cannot be heard. One thing follows quickly after another as the heroes try to keep their wits and their balance.

Actions

Most of the critical actions are detailed in the text, but two others are likely to pop up during this scene.

Work the Rigging

Difficulty: Average (8) or Challenging (12)
Action ability: Strength
Opposition ability: None

Comments: This action may be used for any shipboard activity, from raising the sails to battering the hatches. For these sailors, it is usually of *average* difficulty, but during the storm it becomes *challenging*.

Mishap: The hero falls from or is hit by the rigging and suffers damage points equal to the face value of the top card of the Fate Deck.

Calm/Incite the Crew

Difficulty: Average (8)
Action ability: Presence
Opposition ability: Varies

Comments: The crew will be highly emotional, and convincing them that what a particular hero wants is the "best thing for everyone" will not be easy. If the hero is arguing on behalf of Captain Presman, the opposition ability is Old Fraff's Presence score (9). If he is inciting mutiny, it is half of Presman's Presence score (5).

Mishap: The crew reacts strongly to the hero, but not the way he or she likes. The hero must succeed at an *average Agility* action or be struck by a thrown bottle for 3 damage points.

Should the heroes not know what to do about the fight that is brewing, or if they are split about the issue themselves, the Narrator should flip the top card of the Fate Deck. If the card has a white aura (the color around the card's suit and number designation), a shouting match breaks out between the two factions; however, cooler heads prevent actual violence. If the card has a red or black aura, someone throws the first punch (quickly followed by a second, third, and fourth as the crew dissolves into a brawling mob). The Narrator may decide that heroes caught up in the fight will not notice the storm until it is upon them.

When the storm hits, the Narrator should have each hero attempt a *challenging Agility* action. Anyone who fails has been caught unaware by a wave, knocked off his or her feet, and swept to the railings. The hero must make a successful *daunting Strength* action (or be aided by another crew member) in order to get back to his or her feet. A mishap in this attempt indicates that the hero has lost his or her grip and fallen overboard. The hero is lost from sight; his or fate will be revealed at the beginning of Scene Two.

The Narrator should next have all remaining heroes attempt *average Perception* actions. Those who succeed notice that Captain Presman has been washed off the poop deck by a great wave and knocked unconscious. He lies on the main deck, perilously close to the broken rail. As the ship rises on another swell, it is apparent that the captain is about to fall overboard. The closest hero may attempt to rescue Presman, which is a *challenging Agility* action. Success means that the captain is still unconscious but safe. Failure means the hero is too late and Captain Presman has been washed overboard and out of sight. A mishap means that the hero has overextended himself or herself and falls into the sea as well.

Characters

This scene involves the following characters:

- ♣ **Captain Bharn Presman:** *Human male adult, commanding demeanor, Master.* Ag 6C, Dx 5C, En 8B, St 7C, Re 9C, Pe 8A, Sp 7C, Pr 10A, Dmg +4 (cutlass), Def -2 (leather).
- ♣ **Old Fraff:** *Human male adult, authoritative demeanor, Master.* Ag 4D, Dx 7B, En 7C, St 5C, Re 8C, Pe 7A, Sp 4D, Pr 9A, Dmg +2 (dagger), Def 0 (none).
- ♣ **Fifteen crewmembers:** *Human adults, various demeanors, Adventurers.* Co 5, Ph 7, In 4, Es 4, Dmg 0 or +1 (none or stiletto), Def 0 (none).

Outcome

The storm, though strong, is not terribly large. It blows over in less than an hour. The Narrator should flip the top card of the Fate Deck to determine how many crewmen were lost in the squall. If the card is from the Suit of Dragons, then a number of crew members equal to the card's value fell overboard. If the card is from any other suit, then only one or two seamen have been lost. Their fate will be learned at the start of Scene Two.

Scene Two: Into the Deep

The storm has passed, but the *High Stakes* has arrived at Leviathan's Deep. The captain's strange behavior is explained, and the heroes receive a secret mission.

Overview

The crew cleans up after the storm and are amazed to recover all crew members lost during the gale. Captain Presman is conscious, but hurt. He invites the heroes into his cabin and introduces them to Kellishion, an elf who is the key to the secret mission the captain has undertaken in the name of all Port Balifor. The heroes go to the sea floor and see many wondrous things. They find ancient sunken ships and search for a peculiar type of kelp.

Getting Started

The Narrator should be ready to refer to the magic section of the *Book of the Fifth Age*, since some of the heroes might want to help heal the wounded crew members. Playing background soundtracks such as whale songs or light electronic ambient music would be appropriate. Finally, any *Dexterity* or *Agility* actions are not trump while underwater. Also, when the heroes speak to one another underwater, the Narrator should consider having them make *easy Perception* actions to see if they can understand each other.

First Impressions

The sea is calm once again. Looking around the *High Stakes*, you can see that she has taken very little damage. Old Fraff is organizing repair crews, but everyone's mind is on the poor souls who were washed away during the squall.

Just then, the lookout yells, "Man overboard!"

Rushing to the rail, you are greeted by a miraculous sight: sailors clinging to pieces of driftwood. All the lost men have somehow managed to weather the storm, although some of them seem to be in a bad way.

Any heroes or characters washed overboard turn up before the action begins. They are clinging to driftwood, drenched to the bone, but alive. The Narrator should flip the top card of the Fate Deck to determine the state of the rescued characters. If the card's aura is white, they are relatively unharmed. If it is red, half of them sustained injuries and require medical attention. If it is black, all the rescued crewmembers have wounds so bad that they can no longer perform their duties. To determine how well any rescued heroes fared, the Narrator should go to the "Action" section of this scene.

Captain Presman is now conscious but has a severe head wound (suffered when the wave knocked him from the poop deck). He finds it difficult to concentrate and complains of headache and double vision.

The Story Continues

All thoughts of mutiny have vanished with the foul weather. The crew is too busy making sure the *High Stakes* remains seaworthy to bicker over more trivial matters. Besides, the point is moot—according to the navigator, the ship has arrived at Leviathan's Deep.

The ship's doctor (the cook) approaches the heroes. He has just come from tending to Captain Presman. The captain will survive, but his injuries prevent him from performing his duties. He requests that the heroes join him in his cabin.

Your Mission

The captain's cabin is large and decorated with all sorts of mementos from Presman's life on the sea. Stuffed and mounted fish of all description adorn the room, including an octopus the size of a pony that serves as the headboard for the captain's bed. One wall, however, is bare save for a poorly rendered portrait of the captain's late wife.

"We never got around to having it painted while she was alive," Presman says from a table in a dark corner of the room. "All the artist had to work with was a tiny cameo and my failing memory. But enough about my painful past. Our present holds enough danger." He motions to some empty seats set loosely around the table. "Please . . . join us."

For the first time you notice the other figure seated next to the captain. He is not a member of the crew; you would recognize any of them even on a moonless night. In the dim light, the only thing you can tell is that he is an elf, and that he is studying you as intently as you are studying him.

Captain Presman first swears the heroes to secrecy. He is about to reveal information that only a half-dozen souls are privy to, and he must have the heroes' word of honor that they will repeat none of it to anyone, not even other members of the crew. Assuming that the heroes give an oath of silence, he continues:

"You all know about the plan to relocate our city of Port Balifor to the sea caves. What you don't know is that after ten years of construction, the Prefect has discovered that the plan cannot work. We will be no safer below ground than we are above!"

The captain goes on to tell the heroes that New Port Balifor is nearly completed. Enough light filters through the porous rock to give the cave a twilight air, and the heated water of the Bay of Balifor keeps the cave at a livable, if somewhat sultry, temperature. Unfortunately, when the first hundred families moved down last month, a flaw was revealed. Enough ambient light was present to make it safe to walk the rock-hewn streets, but torches and fires were still necessary to light the interiors of buildings. Even with only thirty buildings occupied, the smoke from the hearths poured from the fissures in the sea cliff and rose hundreds of feet into the sky. When the above-ground city suddenly becomes abandoned, the captain explains, Malys will know exactly where all the people have gone.

Renshar Morgenes, the Prefect of Port Balifor, was beside himself when he learned this information. There had to be some way to light the homes of the new city without giving away its presence. At first he looked into hiring sorcerers to cast spectramantic spells, but the limitations of modern sorcery made it such that a hundred sorcerers working day and night would be unable to maintain the necessary lighting. The prefect and his advisors thought of the panic that would sweep the port when the citizenry discovered that their carefully laid, nearly completed escape plan was terminally flawed. A solution had to be found—and quickly!

As luck would have it, about that same time an elf arrived in Port Balifor. He was looking for a ship to carry him not to another port but simply to a particular stretch of ocean. He inquired about the possibility of chartering the *High Stakes*. Captain Presman surmised that the elf must have some connection to the Dimernesti, the sea elves who, until the coming of the sea dragon Brine, were favorite trading partners of local merchants.

It is only now that the captain introduces Kellishion, a Qualinesti elf who has spent the last few years of his life living with the Dimernesti sea elves. Kellishion can give the heroes direct answers to their questions, but he does not offer any information of his own accord. Although he sympathizes with the Port Baliforans' plight and supports their efforts, he joined the sea elves because of a basic distrust of surface dwellers. As far as he is concerned, they are all barbaric, warlike, and not to be trusted.

He recounts how Presman brought him before Prefect Morgenes who questioned him at length on how the Dimernesti lit their undersea cities. It couldn't possibly be with torches, so how did they do it? Kellishion explained that a certain species of kelp, one that grows only

in the deepest, most isolated parts of the ocean floor, has the natural property of bioluminescence—it gives off light. As it happened, a bed of this kelp grew nearby his destination: Leviathan's Deep. Morgenes swore Captain Presman to secrecy (just as Presman just has the heroes) and gave him the mission of escorting Kellishion to these cursed waters and returning with kelp to transplant in the cave waters.

"I had planned to lead the undersea expedition myself, but as you can see I'm no longer fit for such a job. You're all strong, able seamen, and the closest thing to a family I have left. I could order you to do it, but I'd be much prouder if, for the sake of Port Balifor and everyone who lives there, you'd volunteer to go."

If the heroes agree, proceed with "Under the Sea," below. If not, go to the "Brine Attacks" section of Scene Three.

Under the Sea

Captain Presman pulls out a chart of the ocean floor and shows the heroes where the kelp bed can be found. The spot is amid a garden of sunken ships, some of which plied the seas before the first Cataclysm. Kellishion then explains exactly how to remove the kelp without damaging the delicate roots.

When the heroes understand all this, Kellishion produces a watertight pouch containing a deep green wad of putty with an awful stench like the docks at low tide. This, he explains, is *trannia*, an ancient Silvanesti concoction made from a very rare herb; the Silvanesti chew it to allow them to breathe underwater while visiting their Dimernesti cousins. The heroes can use this to swim below to the kelp bed and gather what they need. The pouch contains enough putty for twelve doses.

But, he warns, non-elves may use *trannia* for no more than twenty-four hours in a row. After that the putty will get into their bloodstream and poison them. Victims of this poison find that no matter how much air or water they breathe, they cannot get enough. Their bodies will not accept the oxygen they need to survive, and they slowly suffocate to death. Elves have a natural resistance to this effect and can use the putty repeatedly without serious harm.



After this lecture, Captain Presman thanks Kellishion and wishes him well in finding the elves that will escort him. The elf repeats his instructions to the heroes one last time, then opens the great bay window over the captain's bed and dives into the sea, presumably to return to the undersea city of Dimernost.

Before departing, the heroes may supply themselves with whatever gear they think will be useful. The ship's stores contain shovels, picks, spears, harpoons, and anything else the Narrator deems appropriate. After this is done, they should be ready for their dive.

The putty tastes terrible, like pickled stinkweed, but it is the only thing that will allow you to undertake this vitally important mission. Captain Presman salutes you as you leap off the deck into the chilly waves.

Stress the difficulty the heroes have adapting to the underwater environment. The sensation of breathing water is terribly disconcerting; the heroes must consciously force themselves to take each breath, as all their instinct are against letting cool water into their lungs. If the heroes thought to weigh themselves down with heavy objects, they sink to the ocean floor in only a few minutes. If not, they will each need to try to swim down (see "Actions").

You find yourselves in a bizarre world of shadowy shapes and dull, echoing noises. You can speak normally but the sound, though dull and muffled, seems to travel farther than usual. Odd multicolored fish swim by and look at you curiously. Some have beautiful gossamer-thin fins, while others look like distant relations to dragons. However, they all swim quickly away if you reach out to touch them.

The heroes find that their relatively lower weight prevents them from moving normally; they must actually swim down if they wish to reach the bottom (see "Actions"). Looking around for the kelp beds, they see sunken ships lying about. Closer investigation allows them to catch a glimpse of the faint glow of the kelp beds just a little beyond the ships. Heroes who wish to explore the sunken ships may find only desolation or ancient works of art, rusting steel coins, or other treasures long forgotten by the surface world. At the Narrator's discretion, the heroes can find one or two magical items, but nothing particularly powerful or of immediate use (perhaps an enchanted sextant, definitely not a weapon or other item useful in combat). Once the heroes find the kelp beds, they must harvest the kelp in the way recommended by the elf if they are to get live plants that will survive being transplanted.

Atmosphere

The first half of this scene should be filled with various levels of relief and shock. The heroes' friends are all safe and the captain has survived, but the ship is in dangerous waters. Captain Presman's mission should have an immediate and urgent impact on the heroes. After all, Port Balifor is their home too.

When the heroes move underwater, the Narrator should strive to create a wholly alien atmosphere; disorient the players as much as possible. Everything not only looks and sounds different but *is* different; even the heroes' own bodies feel different because of their relative weightlessness.

Actions

Heroes picked up from the water at the beginning of the scene should attempt a *challenging Endurance* action to determine how much damaged they suffered in the ordeal. Success means that they take one card worth of damage; failure means they suffer damage equal to half the cards in their hands (round down); a mishap means that their hands are depleted and their shipmates find them floating unconscious on the water.

While the heroes remain underwater, they cannot gain trump bonuses for Agility and Dexterity actions. The most important action the heroes will make during this scene, however, is the initial action to determine how well they adjust to breathing under

water. Failure means that all subsequent physical actions are one degree more difficult than normal. Once their ability to breathe underwater has been determined, the heroes must succeed at a *challenging Strength* action in order to swim down. Otherwise, they tend to hover in a certain position until one of their companions can help them descend. The exception to this is any dwarf with the party; being denser than other races, dwarves begin to sink at once. This should help them get to the bottom quickly, but the Narrator should keep in mind that dwarven heroes will need help from their friends to get back up to the surface.

While they are looking around, the heroes should attempt *average Perception* actions. Any who succeed notice the silhouette of a sunken galleon, and several other ships beyond that. Kellishion told them that the kelp beds lie near "a garden of sunken ships," so they should head in the direction of the galleon. Finding the kelp bed can be as difficult or easy as the Narrator chooses to make it. The heroes might automatically see the ghostly glow of the plants, or they might have to succeed at several *Perception* actions in order to locate the right patch. Once there, the heroes must perform five successful *challenging Dexterity* actions before they have enough kelp to satisfy Port Balifor's needs.

The final action of the scene takes place just as the heroes succeed in harvesting the last bit of kelp. The heroes must perform an *average Perception* action. Those who fail are considered surprised at the start of Scene Three.

Characters

Besides the heroes, the characters listed below may play a part in the scene:

- ♣ **Captain Bharn Presman:** *Human male adult, commanding demeanor, Master.* Ag 6C, Dx 5C, En 8B, St 7C, Re 9C, Pe 8A, Sp 7C, Pr 10A, Dmg +4 (cutlass), Def -2 (leather).
- ♣ **Old Fraff:** *Human male adult, authoritative demeanor, Master.* Ag 4D, Dx 7B, En 7C, St 5C, Re 8C, Pe 7A, Sp 4D, Pr 9A, Dmg +2 (dagger), Def 0 (none).
- ♣ **Fifteen crewmembers:** *Human adults, various demeanors, Adventurers.* Co 5, Ph 7, In 4, Es 4, Dmg 0 or +1 (none or stiletto), Def 0 (none).
- ♣ **Kellishion:** *Qualinesti elf male adult, fierce demeanor, Hero.* Ag 6D, Dx 7B, En 5C, St 8A, Re 7C, Pe 8B, Sp 7C, Pr 7B, Dmg 0 (none), Def -2 (sharkskin).

Outcome

This scene is slightly odd in that it ends in the middle of the heroes' actions. Scene Three begins just as they have finished digging up the glowing kelp. The Narrator should note which heroes were not surprised so that they can take actions at the beginning of the next scene.

Scene Three: In Deep, Deep Trouble

The sea dragon, Brynseldimer, attacks and causes terrible trouble for the crew of the *High Stakes*.

Overview

Brine suddenly menaces the heroes and chases them into hiding. Then the sea dragon moves off to attack the *High Stakes*. He sinks the ship and swims off into the depths, leaving the heroes marooned on the ocean floor.

If the heroes refused to go on Captain Presman's mission, they are onboard the *High Stakes* when Brine attacks. Pick up the action in the middle of the "Brine Attacks" section below.

Getting Started

Narrators should remember that any *Dexterity* or *Agility* actions are not trump while underwater. Again, when the heroes speak to one another, the Narrator should consider having them make *easy Perception* actions to see if they can understand each other without needing to repeat what they have said.

Any kind of sweeping, powerful soundtrack will add to the overall effect of Brine's attack on the ship. Particularly good are scores from nautical war movies or television programs.

First Impressions

This scene begins abruptly and in such a way that the players and their heroes do not sense that one scene has ended and another begun. Heroes who are not surprised at the end of Scene Two will have the first opportunity to act. They notice a dark ominous shadow pass over them. If they look up, they see a terrifying sight. Those whose alertness seems impaired, however, will come under attack before they even realize they are in danger.

Speeding through the water above you is a two-hundred-foot monster. Tail swishing almost lazily, the dragon lord Brynseidimer is patrolling his territory in which you and the *High Stakes* are clearly trespassers.

One of the great, deep-set eyes fixes on your group digging in the kelp. With incredible speed the sea dragon spins and accelerates toward you, maw gaping, ready to swallow your entire group whole.

The Story Continues

Brine is vicious and cruel. Most of all, though, he is a bully. He will not simply kill the heroes, though he could. Rather, he wants to play with them first, showing them how powerful he is and how helpless they are before him. This is the only thing that will save the lives of those heroes who failed to notice Brine's approach.

Brine Attacks

Unlike other types of dragons, sea dragons do not have a dragonawe attack. Therefore, any hero who notices Brine's approach can perform any action he or she likes. However, since Brine is bearing down on the group with his mouth agape, swimming for safety seems to be the most likely reaction.

Instead of finishing his dive and scooping you into his giant maw, Brine suddenly pulls up and grins at you malevolently. He opens his mouth again, unleashing a stream of scalding water. The boiling blast streaks toward you, and the water in your ears begins to pop and hiss.

Heroes who were not surprised may attempt to avoid this attack (see "Actions" below). Luckily, this attack was intended to frighten, rather than kill, the heroes.

The heroes may stand and fight the sea dragon, but sensible heroes are more likely to look for somewhere to hide. There are plenty of likely spots under thick kelp beds, inside one or another of the sunken ships, or even behind a convenient coral reef. Even if the heroes are unsuccessful on their initial attempts to hide, Brine is having too much fun torturing them to end the game so quickly. Subsequent attacks from the dragon will still be at reduced damage levels.

When all the heroes are hidden, unconscious, or dead, Brine turns his attention to their ship. Depending on the state of the heroes, read the following aloud, adjusting as necessary:

At first it seems as though the great sea dragon is about to make a pass at the spot where you lie, but instead he curls gracefully around himself and swims toward the surface. Far overhead you can see a tiny speck bobbing on the silvery waves that he is clearly aiming directly for—the unsuspecting *High Stakes*!

Below is a description of the action as seen by the crew of the *High Stakes*. Heroes at the bottom of the ocean could not witness the attack in such clarity, but the dramatic impact of the description adds to the emotion of the scenario. Narrators who are sticklers for realism may choose to shorten or paraphrase the sections below. Heroes who are on the ship will, of course, see this scene firsthand, no doubt much to their regret.



Two hundred yards off the stern, something enormous breaches the waves and lets out a mighty roar. It's the sea dragon, Brine! Even with only a portion of his body out of the water, his head towers over the ship's main mast.

Captain Presman barks out orders. "Hard astern! Man the harpoons!" The experienced crew members do their best to follow them, but the younger tars are too awestruck by the sheer size of the sea dragon to do more than gape and mumble broken prayers.

If some or all of the heroes remained on the ship, they may react as they see fit. After each hero has attempted one action, continue with the following:

"Grab hold o' somethin', lads" cries Old Fraff, "The beastie means t'ram us!"

Indeed, Brine swims at the ship at speeds unmatched by even the fastest ship in Port Balifor. Just before hitting, though, he dives below the ship and disappears into Leviathan's Deep.

Silence falls over the scene. The sea is unnaturally calm, and the crew hold their breath for long minutes. Just when it seems that all is well, twin eruptions spout from the water on either side of the hull. Two monstrous rows of teeth rise into the air and clamp firmly onto the ship, locking it in place. Brine has swum under the *High Stakes* and now holds it in his mighty maw! He could easily snap the small vessel into a thousand pieces, but instead the sea dragon slowly begins to dive, pulling the ship down with him.

"He's going to scuttle us!" shouts Captain Presman. "Abandon ship! All hands, abandon ship!"

If the heroes are onboard, they must quickly decide what to do. The dragon's jaws are unprotected and may be easily attacked, but at any moment he may dive deeper, sucking the ship below the waves. If this happens, the heroes will find themselves instantly swept hundreds of feet below the surface, unable to swim to safety or even take a full breath of air.

Waves crash over the railing, swamping the deck. The crew of the *High Stakes* swim with all their might to put as much ocean as possible between themselves and their doomed ship. All the crew, that is, but two.

Old Fraff clings to one of the giant jaws, stabbing at it futilely with his fishing knife. "I signed on to finish my career with this crew, and that I'll do! No damned sea serpent is gonna make a land lubber outta me!"

Even as he uttered these words, the first mate loses his grip on the dragon's jaws and falls down its throat. Atop the poop deck, Captain Presman stands gripping the wheel as if his soul depends on it, a look of grim determination etched on his face. He was a prisoner the last time a ship under his command was sunk. Many loyal crewmen lost their lives—his family lost their lives—and he was not even allowed the honor of going down with his ship. He will not let the same thing happen again.

Inexorably, the ship sinks lower and lower, and hardened sailors find droplets too hot and bitter to be seawater rolling down their cheeks. Several snap final salutes to their captain as the *High Stakes* vanishes below the waves. The sound of the sea swirling in her wake fills the air like deep, vicious laugh.

If the heroes are on the ocean floor, they see Brine drag the *High Stakes* to the bottom and tuck it next to the rotted hull of an ancient cog. Like a dog burying a bone for later consumption, he secures the treasure and swims away.

The heroes have survived the attack, as have the crew members floating on the surface, but that is cold comfort. They have no provisions, no ship, and hundreds of leagues separate them from the nearest dry land. Brine may not have killed them outright, but they certainly seem to be doomed. Before continuing with the section below, allow the players to ponder the situation for a few minutes. Help them come to terms with the immensity of their predicament. If they immediately attempt to help the captain, then allow them to begin their efforts before running the "Friends in Need" section.

Friends in Need

The situation may seem utterly hopeless, or the heroes may already have a plan. Indeed, they may be bobbing on the surface of the waves, walking on the ocean floor, or attempting to find Captain Presman before he dies. In any case, once they have had time to consider what to do, Kellishion returns with three Dimernesti warriors. They saw the attack but could do nothing to prevent it. Now they come offering any aid they can (which, truthfully, is not much).

If the heroes did not go to the ocean floor, Kellishion again offers them doses of the elven putty to allow them to do so. As for rescuing Captain Presman, if the heroes push or persuade the elves into helping, the Narrator needs to go to the section "The Story Continues" in Scene Four.

This section is designed mainly for roleplaying. Kellishion and his comrades will answer any questions the heroes have and offer advice to the best of their knowledge as to what their best course of action may be. Facts the Narrator should know include the following:

- ❧ No ships sail in the general area. Thus, no one will be along to rescue the castaways.
- ❧ The Dimernesti have a small village about five miles away (as the fish swims). They have food to spare, can offer medical attention to any injured crew members (including the heroes), and one of them is skilled enough at hydromancy to transform a wineskin filled from the sea into fresh, drinkable water. However, their town is on the ocean floor, and there is not enough of the putty to allow the entire crew to breathe underwater. Besides, one day of water breathing will not solve their troubles.
- ❧ Brine is likely to return eventually and eat anyone who is still in the area.
- ❧ Wood, ropes, and sails can be scavenged from the *High Stakes* and other wrecks if the heroes want to fashion life-rafts. This will solve their most immediate problem but leave them at the mercy of further dragon attacks.
- ❧ The *High Stakes* does not seem to be structurally damaged (it hasn't). If the heroes can somehow manage to get her to the surface and drain the water from the hull, she should still be seaworthy.

This last point is important. If the players cannot figure out how to rescue themselves, Kellishion will suggest that course of action. Raising the *High Stakes* is the best solution to their predicament, and the Narrator should make sure the heroes are aware of this option. It is important, though, that the players not be railroaded into doing exactly what the Narrator (or this text) says. Part of the fun of role-playing games lies in the unexpected turns a story can take. Several other plans of escape that might work include the following:

- ❧ Constructing a raft with a sail and sailing away on it.
- ❧ Using cryomancy to create an ice floe and floating away on it.
- ❧ Using pyromancy to fill the elves' air bags (see Scene Four, "The Story Continues") with hot air and balloon away.

The Narrator should carefully evaluate any plan the players come up with and decide if it is feasible. If so, the heroes can proceed along that route, with the elves able to offer them any aid that is reasonable. Ignore whatever portion of the following scene is no longer applicable and improvise new material to take its place.

Atmosphere

Much of this scene depends greatly on the Narrator's storytelling abilities. The Narrator must strive to capture the grandeur and drama of events that the heroes may be viewing from relative safety. The players should not be allowed to passively watch these events; they should be able to feel the emotion of the *High Stakes*' final moments.

The loss of their ship should be traumatic for the heroes. It is all right if the players seem severely shaken by these events. The return of Kellishion is meant as a way to snap them out of this funk and get them back on track to solve this problem and get themselves and any surviving crewmates to safety.

Actions

Heroes who attempt to avoid Brine's attack should perform an *average Agility (Dexterity)* action (remember, no trump bonuses are allowed). Anyone who is surprised by Brine's approach (or who failed the Agility action) receives only 12 damage points rather than the 58 damage points that a direct hit would have caused.

Finding a sanctuary to hide from Brine requires a successful *average Perception* action. Actually getting there without Brine spotting the hero, however, requires a successful *average Agility (Perception)* action.

Save Putty

Difficulty: Average (8)
Action ability: Perception
Opposition ability: None

Comments: During their flight from Brine, the heroes may fall or be struck. Whenever this happens, the Narrator may decide that a hero must succeed at this action or the putty will fly from his or her mouth. If this happens, the hero must take his or her next available action to pick the putty up and put it back in his or her mouth. If he or she does not do so within three minutes, the putty's effect fades and he or she will drown.

Mishap: The hero does not see where the putty fell; he or she must succeed at a *challenging Perception* action to find it.

Scavenge Shipwrecks

Difficulty: Average (8)
Action ability: Perception
Opposition ability: None

Comments: There may be tons of wood, rope, and sail on the ocean floor, but most of it has decayed to the point that it is useless. Succeeding at this action allows a hero to pick only material that will be useful in whatever plan he or she is hatching.

Mishap: The hero grabs rotten or damaged material. When the plan gets underway, the Narrator should flip the top card of the Fate Deck. If its aura is black, the material disintegrates, shatters, tears, or simply fails to work properly (with disastrous results).

Characters

The following characters and monsters may play a part in this scene:

- ☞ **Captain Bharn Presman:** *Human male adult, commanding demeanor, Master.* Ag 6C, Dx 5C, En 8B, St 7C, Re 9C, Pe 8A, Sp 7C, Pr 10A, Dmg +4 (cutlass), Def -2 (leather).
- ☞ **Old Fraff:** *Human male adult, authoritative demeanor, Master.* Ag 4D, Dx 7B, En 7C, St 5C, Re 8C, Pe 7A, Sp 4D, Pr 9A, Dmg +2 (dagger), Def 0 (none).
- ☞ **Fifteen crewmembers:** *Human adults, various demeanors, Adventurers.* Co 5, Ph 7, In 4, Es 4, Dmg 0 or +1 (none or stiletto), Def 0 (none).
- ☞ **Brynseldimer (Brine):** *Sea dragon male wyrm, tyrannical demeanor.* Co 13, Ph 58, In 17, Es 17, Dmg +40, Def -30, also dragon breath and swallow whole.
- ☞ **Kellishion:** *Qualinesti elf male adult, fierce demeanor, Hero.* Ag 6D, Dx 7B, En 5C, St 8A, Re 7C, Pe 8B, Sp 7C, Pr 7B, Dmg +5 (trident), Def -2 (sharkskin).
- ☞ **Three sea elf warriors:** *Dimernesti elf males, brave demeanors, Adventurers.* Co 7, Ph 8, In 5, Es 6, Dmg +5 (tridents), Def -2 (sharkskin).

Outcome

At the end of this scene, the heroes should have some plan of action for Scene Four. If it is not to somehow raise the *High Stakes*, the Narrator needs to improvise much of the coming action. If the heroes wanted to rescue the captain right as the elves enter this scene, then the action should carry on in the section "The Story Continues."

Scene Four: Raising the Stakes

The heroes set out to extricate themselves from their predicament. As the plan comes together, Brine returns.

Overview

The first half of this scene deals specifically with ways in which the heroes might raise their sunken vessel. If they are pursuing a different escape plan, the Narrator will have to improvise. Assuming

that their plan, whatever it is, works, the heroes must overcome one more obstacle—Brine's return. They will have to find a way to either outrun him or chase him off—both easier said than done.

Getting Started

Since the heroes might need to motivate the crew, the Narrator should be prepared to use the *Incite the Crew* action from Scene One. Also, dramatic background music similar to that used in Scene Three would be appropriate when the heroes and the crew raise the ship.

First Impressions

The action may begin with the heroes bobbing on the surface of Leviathan's Deep or in a small Dimernesti village about five miles from where the *High Stakes* sank. They should bear in mind that at least some of their comrades are still floating on the waves, easy prey for sharks (or Brine, should he return). If the scene opens on the floor or surface of the sea, the heroes are fully aware of their surroundings. If they have gone with the Dimernesti warriors to their village, however, the scene must be described for them.

The Dimernesti village was practically invisible as you swam toward it. The half dozen or so houses grow directly out of a coral bed and have such a natural shape that you would need to know what you were looking for in order to see them at all.

Inside, the walls are lined with shelves and jutting table-like outcroppings at all levels. Since Dimernesti are just as buoyant as humans, there is no need for their home lives to remain floor-bound. Most of the furniture is grown from the same coral as the structure itself, but often it is covered with a softer, mossy algae, making it quite comfortable to sit on. Strips of the same kelp you were digging earlier grow on the ceiling and walls, brightly illuminating the buildings. This, you see, will be an elegant and practical solution to Port Balifor's problems—assuming you and your crew make it back alive to make it all possible.

The Story Continues

Wherever the heroes are, they should want to check on the *High Stakes*. Make their first approach to the sunken vessel as dramatic as possible.

The *High Stakes* rests on the ocean floor, dwarfed by the surrounding wrecks. For the first time you see what a tiny ship it was, and how fragile. The enormity of your loss swirls around you more strongly than the underwater currents that ruffle your hair.

On the deck, a gruesome sight awaits. Standing on the poop deck, still gripping the wheel with lifeless fingers, is Captain Presman. He has a look that can most closely be called undefeated pride. His ship may have gone down, but this time he had the opportunity and the courage to go down with it. After all that happened in his life, this seems to have been enough to give the old sailor a final measure of peace.

The heroes will have to decide exactly what to do with the corpse. If they intend to raise the ship, they will probably want to set the captain's body free (leaving it to rest here undisturbed) or bring it up with the ship for a more traditional burial at sea once they are underway. There are too many possible ways to raise the ship to mention them all here. Some of the most likely plans include the following:

- ☞ **Ice buoys:** Someone in the group might realize that ice floats. A carefully cast spell by a hero skilled in the sorcerous school of cryomancy could create buoys that would lift the ship gently to the surface. Of course, if this is done recklessly, the ship may flip over and surface upside down. There will of course still be the problem of the flooded hull to contend with.
- ☞ **Animal aid:** A hero skilled in the mystic sphere of animism might hit upon the idea of using a spell to get a giant sea creature (such as a leviathan) to help raise the ship. However, care must be used, as such a large animal could easily do severe damage to the hull in the process, and this method still does not address the issue of the flooded hull.



☞ **Air bags:** Not all Dimernesti buildings are filled with water. Since the sea elves can breathe air as well as water, they sometimes build waterproof shelters and fill them with air. In order to keep the air fresh, the elves must occasionally bring fresh air down from the surface. This is done using large air-tight bladders. One of the local houses is built for air breathing, so the elves have four of these bladders available. If the heroes can think of a way to use them to fill the ship's hull with air, it will float to the surface. However, if this is not done carefully, the ship may flip over in the process and surface upside down—but at least the hold will not be flooded.

The Narrator should let the heroes roleplay out the activities involved in their plans, calling for relevant card play from time to time. In the end, though, the success or failure of their actions should depend more on the heroes' thoroughness, ingenuity, and effort than the luck of the draw. Once the heroes have successfully executed whichever plan they chose, the Narrator should continue on with the section below.

Anchor's Aweigh

Now that the heroes and the crew have a way to get themselves back to land, they will want to gather up the kelp and set sail as quickly as possible. Kellishion warns them that Brine tends to remain in the same waters for a few days in a row and may come back at any time. If the heroes did not finish their harvesting (or lost their kelp in the chaos) and are tempted to simply leave without the kelp, the rest of the crew refuses. As much as they are frightened of Brine, they do not willingly harbor the idea that Captain Presman died in vain. If the heroes are sadly battered, the Narrator may wish to move directly to the Epilogue. However, he or she is urged to include the return engagement of Brine to make for a truly explosive conclusion.

The sails raise and billow as they grab the wind, beginning to propel the *High Stakes* through the waves. In your wake, Kellishion and the Dimernesti warriors wave farewell. "May the gods watch over you!" he shouts. The elf's manner, however, suddenly changes, his smile abruptly replaced with a look of disbelief and fear.

"He's back!" screams a terrified lookout. "The sea dragon is back!"

The crew are seized with panic. Grown men cower like children afraid of a thunderstorm. It was only a short time ago that this very same beast grasped the *High Stakes* in its jaws and dragged it to the bottom of the sea! What is to prevent it from doing the very same thing again?

As their last encounter proved, fighting the beast is next to impossible. However, Brine does not want to wander too far from his territory. He survived the Dragon Purge by keeping a low profile and prefers to remain a power that is known through rumor and supposition only. He has no wish to hunt close enough to Malystryx's territory to be perceived as a threat by the Red. Therefore, if the heroes can manage to get the *High Stakes* up to full speed and hold off the sea dragon for a time, they have a chance of escaping. The heroes can organize the crew to attack using harpoons, conventional missile weapons, and magical spells.

Despite the overwhelming odds, despite the awesome size of their foe, despite the events of earlier in the day, the surviving sailors work in unison. Some raise the rigging while others aim wholly inadequate weapons at the charging beast. They may not win this battle, but they will surely go down fighting. Captain Presman would have wanted it that way.

Brine surfaces along the starboard bow and a hail of arrows and harpoons fly, most bouncing harmlessly off the sea dragon's hide. But it doesn't matter. The crew has a purpose—survival!

Every time the heroes succeed at using the Incite the Crew action, their shipmates remain focused and motivated for five minutes. When the ship has been underway for fifteen minutes, Brine follows it no farther, giving up the chase rather than follow them into the Red's realm. When he dives for the final time, however, make them sweat: it should not be clear that he has given up the chase, and the

heroes (and sailors) may conclude he is about to come up beneath them again. Stretch out the suspense for as long as possible; their relief will be all the greater once they realize they are finally safe.

Atmosphere

The Narrator should describe the raising of the *High Stakes* with all the grandeur it deserves. When the ship breaks the surface, every eye should be wide, every mouth agape. The relief and joy the crew feels at once again having a ship below their feet may be mixed with some sorrow over the death of their captain and the mate. But the prospect of actually returning home (and having successfully completed their mission at that) has them in high spirits.

This should make the shock of Brine's return even greater. The Narrator should make sure the players feel the pressure the heroes are under to move—and move quickly. Their only hope of survival is to outrun Brine, and this should seem like a nearly impossible task. Do not disillusion them from the expectation of a heroic death.

Actions

For the most part, the Narrator is left to decide the specifics of actions performed in this scene. He or she should remember, though, to emphasize well-thought-out plans, clever execution, and good roleplaying over card play.

If the Narrator prefers to make it difficult to get the terrified crew moving at any point during the scene (including during the second attack by Brine), he or she can require the heroes to first succeed at the Incite the Crew action from Scene One. In this case, though, a failure or mishap indicates that the crew is too terrified to respond. Also, if the players don't think of it themselves, the Narrator can choose to have one of the heroes perform a successful *average Reason* action to remember that ice floats (for the "ice buoys" idea) or that sea animals can help them (for the "animal aid" idea).

Characters

The following characters have roles in this part of the adventure:

- ☞ **Brynseldimer (Brine):** *Sea dragon male wyrm, tyrannical demeanor.* Co 13, Ph 58, In 17, Es 17, Dmg +40, Def -30, also dragon breath and swallow whole.
- ☞ **Kellishion:** *Qualinesti elf male adult, fierce demeanor, Hero.* Ag 6D, Dx 7B, En 5C, St 8A, Re 7C, Pe 8B, Sp 7C, Pr 7B, Dmg +5 (trident), Def -2 (sharkskin).
- ☞ **Three sea elf warriors:** *Dimernesti elf males, brave demeanor, Adventurers.* Co 7, Ph 8, In 5, Es 6, Dmg +5 (tridents), Def -2 (sharkskin).
- ☞ **Surviving crewmembers:** *Human adults, various demeanor, Adventurers.* Co 5, Ph 7, In 4, Es 4, Dmg 0 or +1 (none or stiletto), Def 0 (none).

Outcome

In the end, the heroes will either escape or get the *High Stakes* sunk for a second time that day. If they get away, conclude with the "... And a Star to Sail By" section of the Epilogue. If they lose the ship, conclude with the "Watery Grave" section of the Epilogue.

Epilogue

With any luck the heroes and the crew of the *High Stakes* head for calmer waters, with a job well done.

Overview

There are two possible resolutions to this tale. If the heroes were successful, they will have a happy end. Otherwise, this will be their eulogy.

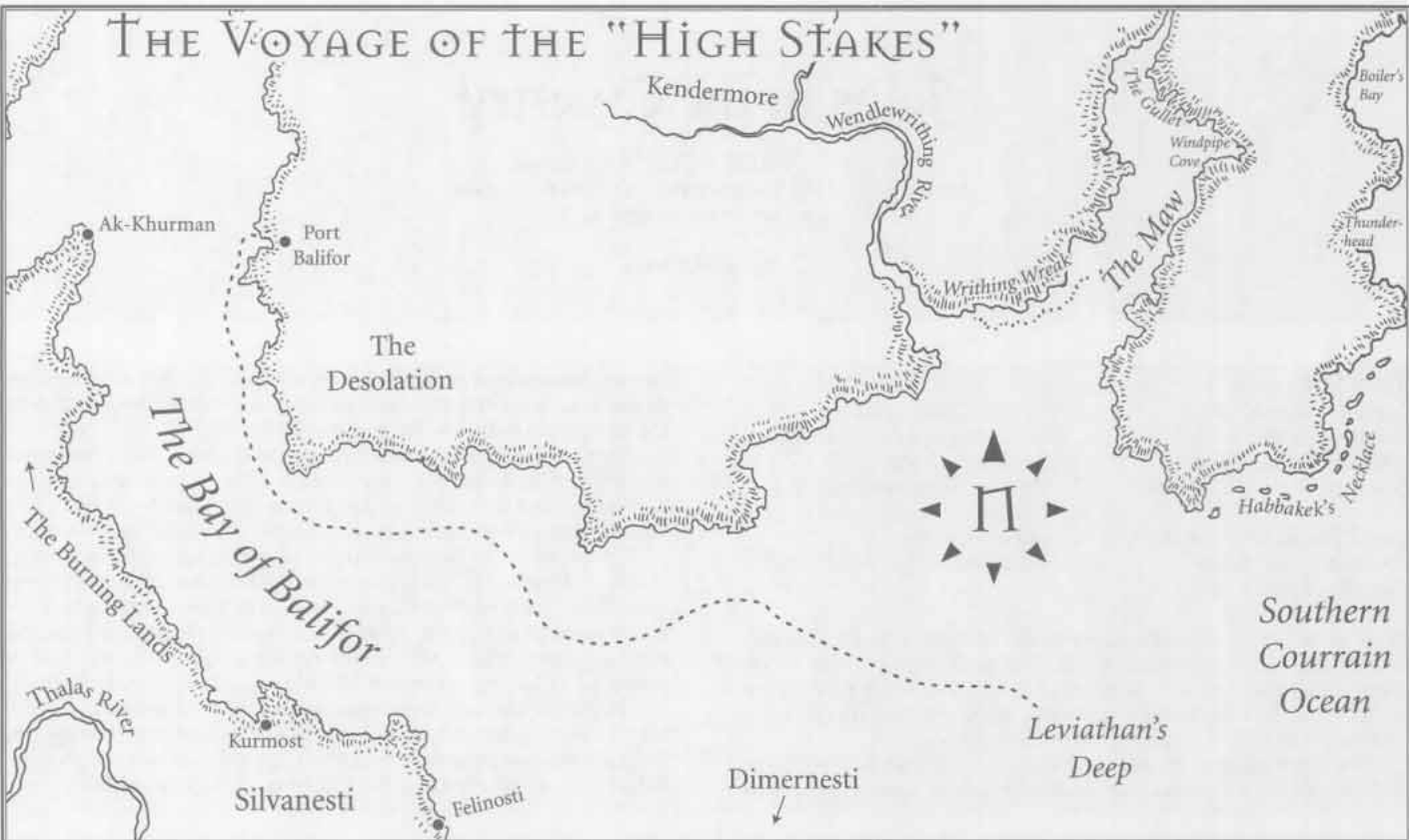
Getting Started

The Narrator might wish to go back over the spellcasting system in case one of the players wants his hero to use mystic healing on any injured characters.

First Impressions

If the *High Stakes* got away at the end of Scene Four, use the "... And a Star to Sail By" section below. If Brine was victorious, use the

THE VOYAGE OF THE "HIGH STAKES"



"Watery Grave" section. The Narrator should use the appropriate section to give his or her players a sense of closure. Whether they were successful or not, the goal of this game was for everyone to have a good time. Even if the ending is less than perfect, having tried their best should be satisfying for all involved.

... And a Star to Sail By

As the sun sets, you can see the lights of Port Balifor glowing softly on the horizon. By morning the *High Stakes* should be sailing into port, and you and your crew can get a well-deserved bit of shore leave.

Another glow catches your eye—the glow of the carefully tended kelp lying in the ship's hold. Lives may have been lost along the way, but as long as that cargo is delivered safely, they will not have been lost in vain. The rare plant you carry will give every man, woman, and child in Port Balifor the greatest gift of all—hope. Hope that one day they can escape the tyrannous rule of Malys. The hope of freedom.

Watery Grave

The constant rise and fall of the waves is the closest thing you will ever have to a gravestone. If there is a lesson to be learned from this, it is that on the sea, no one controls his or her own fate.

When the *High Stakes* fails to return to dock, another ship will be sent. And if that one fails to return, another. It will be too late to help you, but one day one will succeed on its mission. The names of you and your crew will be spoken with pride and reverence in every home in Port Balifor, for you made the ultimate sacrifice. You gave your lives in the name of freedom—and that effort is the mark of true heroes.

The Story Concludes

There may be one or two things the heroes wish to accomplish before concluding play. They may want to post guards around the kelp or provide first aid for injured crewmembers.

Most likely, they may want to hold proper funerals or memorial services for Captain Presman and Old Fraff. This should be a highly emotional scene, so the Narrator must insist on dramatic roleplaying. Encourage one of the heroes to deliver the eulogies.

Atmosphere

It is up to the Narrator to assess the players and their moods and provide a satisfactory ending. Some groups may require a somber, reverent tone, while other may better appreciate a rousing, breast-beating conclusion. Remember, the mood the players have as they stand up from the table will greatly color their memory of the adventure.

Actions

Although there are no set actions for this scene, the Narrator might be called upon to help players figure out healing spells, and so on.

Characters

The following characters could play a part in the Epilogue:

- ♣ **Surviving crewmembers:** *Human adults, various demeanors, Adventurers. Co 5, Ph 7, In 4, Es 4, Dmg 0 or +1 (none or stiletto), Def 0 (none).*

Outcome

This adventure should end cleanly; there should be no question as to the heroes' fate and the success or otherwise of their mission. Narrators and players who particularly enjoyed adventuring on the waters around the Bay of Balifor may wish to incorporate the *High Stakes* and her crew into their ongoing home campaign. In this case it is likely that one of the heroes will end up captaining the *High Stakes* and one of the others will be his or her first mate. Port Balifor is a wonderful site for an ongoing DRAGONLANCE: FIFTH AGE game: it is located on one of Ansalon's most historic coastlines, under the shadow of the Peak of Malys, in close proximity to the Silvanesti Shield and the undersea city of Dimernost. And, of course, it is the best place from which to someday launch a retributive strike against Brine. These sites and personalities are discussed in depth in the *Heroes of Hope* Dramatic Supplement (TSR #9546). In addition, the adventure contained within *Heroes of Hope* takes the heroes on a search for the Crown of Tides, where they can get some additional exposure to Brine and the Dimernesti elves.

The End

Folds in the Tapestry

An ADVENTURE'S GUILD Adventure
for the ALTERNITY science fiction roleplaying game
for four to six characters

by Jeff Quick

New Mojave

Parent: Melinor, G3	Surface Gravity: 1.1 g
Orbital Radius: .8 AU	Atmosphere: Earth Standard
Orbital Period: 426 days	Pressure: 1.1 atm
Rotation Period: 33.8 hours	Median Temperature: 22.8 C (71.68 F)
Axial Tilt: Extreme (59.4[DG])	Satellites: none
Diameter: 11,756 km	GRAPH: G2/R1/A2/P3/H2
Density (Earth = 1): 1.2	

New Mojave is the fourth planet in the Melinor system, approximately 250 light-years from Earth. It rotates a yellow star much like Earth's sun, but at a distance of .8 AU. The inner planets are mostly scarred balls of rock, but they contain enough metals to be of interest to miners and other fortune seekers.

The outer planets are mostly gas giants or ice worlds that have little to offer. An asteroid belt, referred to as the Sandstorm due to

its vast quantity of small rocks, resides around 100 AU from its parent star. Most spacefarers avoid entering the Sandstorm due to the navigational difficulties and probable collisions.

The planet itself lacks any sign of native sentients, but a variety of unclassified life forms roam the surface. Most of these appear to be herbivores, but a number of carnivores have also been reported. Weapons are recommended for all excursions on the planet's surface.

Travel toward either of the poles results in climactic extremes. North of the equator, the planet's surface becomes more and more desertlike, while southern travel yields a more arctic climate. This is due to the axial tilt of the planet, which serves to always bake the northern hemisphere while leaving the southern land masses shrouded in half-light (broken by long periods of total darkness).

The habitation zone at the equator has very mild seasons, ranging from brisk rains and mild frost in the winter to torrential downpours in the spring. Summers are much dryer but still provide enough rainfall so as to allow crops to grow and avoid drought conditions.

Gamemaster Summary

This adventure requires use of the ALTERNITY *Player's Handbook* (TSR #2800). It takes place in any Gravity Age (PL 7) campaign setting, on a small planet in the Melinor system. The system represents the edge of explored space, and a new colony has been established to provide a safe haven for travelers, provide food and other resources, and eventually serve as a base camp for further exploration of the stars. The planet, New Mojave, is the only earthlike world in the system. A human farming colony was established six months previously in a fertile oasis near the planet's equator. Everything was going fine until the colonists found themselves under attack by aliens, whom the locals have dubbed "Rugs."

The adventure begins when the heroes arrive on the planet. Their mission is to evaluate colonists' requests for military support due to the hostile incursion of native life. If the threat is verified, the heroes are also charged with determining the extent of the threat. The heroes get to meet the colonists, learn about the alien threat firsthand in an ambush, and then have time to gather more information on the first day. On the second day, the heroes should survey the situation and may stumble onto a Rug outpost. There, they can attack, talk to the aliens, or sneak in and find a map that leads them to the "enemy" command center. Once at the command center, they get a chance to negotiate directly with the head Rug and participate personally in a contest to determine the final fate of New Mojave's ownership. The heroes must then report back to the colonists and their off-world superiors of their success or failure in the mission.

Should the hero team lack diplomatic skills, the Gamemaster can adjust the scenario accordingly. Perhaps the heroes are traders who are mistaken for the expected envoys, mercenaries hired to help out in the crisis, or simply people who are in the wrong place at the wrong time and get drafted into the colonists' war.

Alien Information

The aliens are squarish, flat creatures roughly resembling manta rays or skates. They weigh around 200 kilograms but can move quickly using small feet at each corner of their bodies. In addition, they possess two fold-up arms on their underside with loose, mitten-like hands. Several "finger" bones rest beneath the skin attached to a ball joint; any or all of these fingers can act as thumbs. The skin is loose enough around the hands so that they can approx-

imate human appendages if necessary or mold their hands around various protrusions. This makes them excellent climbers despite their unwieldy body shape.

Their race is known as the Jannigar, though the aliens would quickly remind listeners that mere verbal communication does not convey the subtleties of racial heritage inherent in the name. The jannigar have an advanced artistic culture. Their art involves numerous senses to convey an image or emotion; one piece of art can involve all five normal human senses as well as psychic emanations and radio frequencies imperceptible to the unaided, non-psionic human.

Jannigar take great joy in competition. They are almost never bad losers or winners; for them, the joy is in the game itself. This love of games most often manifests itself in war games with various restrictions, such as "no nuclear technology" or "naval combat only." They take delight in innovative games and new twists on old games. They often travel far away from their home world to take advantage of unusual terrain or dangerous indigenous life.

Jannigar are strictly hierarchical. This social construct is reinforced by physiological differences in the various levels of the hierarchy. Lower caste jannigar have more limited forms of communication and expression. Culturally, rungs on the caste determine which primary form of locomotion each rung uses, as detailed below in "The Rug Hierarchy." Of course, none of these names are what the Jannigar would call themselves. Note that while this hierarchy might appear unjust to a human, the jannigar don't treat lower-caste members badly. Skulkers are not unhappy with their station, rightly perceiving themselves as a vital part of the system. Lopers do not lord it over lower-caste jannigar or take particular pride in their station; they are simply "above" their inferiors.

The Rug Hierarchy

- **Skulkers** are the basic troops. Though slightly below average human intelligence, they possess a natural cunning that makes them formidable opponents. They can only communicate through gestures and emitted olfactory chemicals, which smell like citrus to humans. They move flat on the ground in a surprisingly fast crawl. Skulkers are the lowest members of jannigar society, used mainly as ground troops in war games.
- **Walkers** are essentially the "sergeant" caste, overseeing field deployment of Skulkers and leading units into combat. They

generally stand upright and move with a sort of toddling motion. Walkers can imitate verbal noises, speak Standard poorly, and emit a wide variety of scents while communicating. They can hear but don't understand most verbal languages.

- **Cartwheelers** command the Walkers and carry out the will of the Lopers (detailed below). They are called "cartwheelers" by the human colonists for their tendency to move by flipping end over end. They communicate via verbal and olfactory means and can speak and understand Standard and a few other stellar languages.

- **Lopers** are the highest ranked jannigar that the heroes encounter. They are artists, administrators, and generals, often in charge of an entire war party. They move by loping about, with a "fold" in the middle. They communicate almost fluently in different languages and mediums, including an expressive version of Standard. They also possess rudimentary telepathy and the ability to transmit and receive low-wave radio transmissions.

Prologue

Your team has been sent to check on an escalating threat to a fledgling colony on the planet New Mojave. When New Mojave was last surveyed nearly 18 months ago, no indications of intelligent life were found. The planet was largely rocks and rubble, but a few oases were found which proved exceedingly fertile. Human colonization began a year ago after sustainability tests were finished. The first colony wave settled at the Underwood Oasis and promises to be almost entirely self-sustaining in five years.

Then the attacks started. Creatures which did not appear in the threat survey began attacking the colony. At first, colonists thought that the aliens (called "Rugs" because of their flat bodies and tendency to crawl) were native, unintelligent predators. Soon, though, attacks became coordinated. The colonists began suffering serious losses both in property and life, and they have requested large-scale energy weapons and a troop garrison for defense. Before committing such resources, the Interplanetary Governmental Department of Colonization thought it best to send in a team of consultants to investigate the effects and source of the threat. They sent you.

The Gamemaster should make all the information in the box on page 56 available to the players, should any of their characters express a desire to learn more about New Mojave; these are all well-known facts that the heroes could discover on their way to the Melinor system.

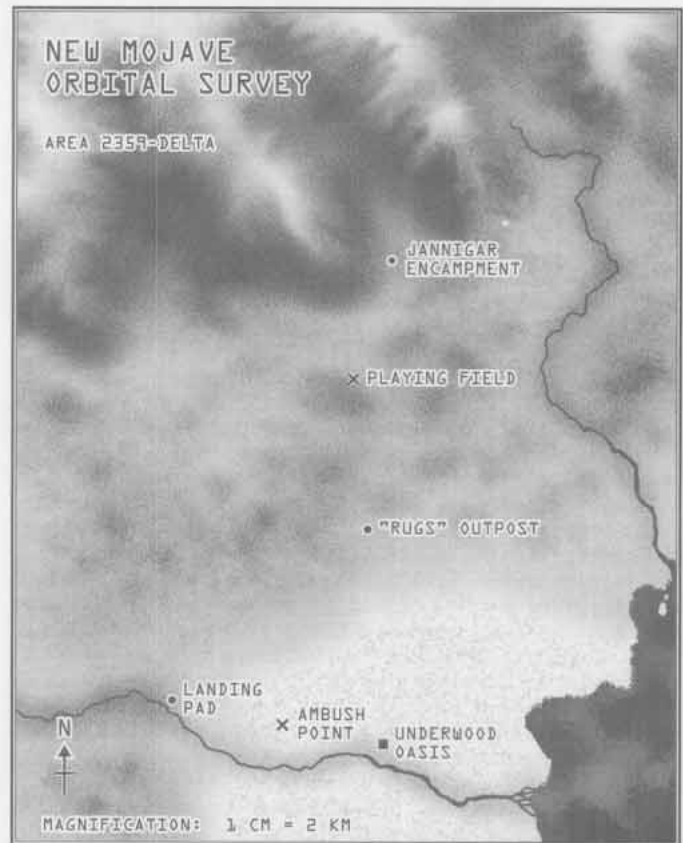
Arrival

It is near sunset on New Mojave when your shuttle lands. The landing pad where you touch down is little more than a flat area cleared of large rocks. From the looks of things, clearing the area must have been quite a task. Boulders the size of your shuttle ring the landing pad.

As you exit the shuttle, two hover trucks pull up. Five armed colonists emerge and walk toward your shuttle in a circle, wearing their guns and makeshift armor uncomfortably. They look wary, but troubled. They're clearly civilians, unused to the guarded paranoia of war. When the circle of men and women gets close to you, they open to reveal Sasha-Ka Underwood, the leader of the Underwood Oasis colony.

Sasha-Ka is a muscular man in his mid-40s. His skin and sandy blond hair have the weathered look of someone who spends much time outdoors. His voice, while cordial, carries authority: "Welcome, diplomats. Forgive our lackluster greeting, but we are at war."

Give the heroes an opportunity to introduce themselves and ask questions, but don't let things get too involved. If heroes try to start complicated discussions, Sasha-Ka points out that a landing pad is hardly the place to linger—given the hostilities, they make too tempting a target standing out in the open like this. In any case, after initial pleasantries Sasha-Ka directs the party toward the hover trucks.



"Please also forgive our poor transportation. We must ask that some of you ride in the back of the trucks on the return to the compound. We can make full formal introductions tonight at the welcoming banquet. For now, let us load up and depart. It is a 15-minute trip back to the compound, and night falls quickly here on New Mojave." Sasha-Ka waves to the shuttle pilot, and the craft's engines whine as it takes off again to meet your transport ship in orbit.

The trucks carry three in the cab tightly, and four in back loosely. Anyone who rides in the truck with Sasha-Ka can talk and ask questions (there's a sliding window between the cab and the back, but the wind blowing past makes it difficult to carry on a conversation through it). The heroes can discover that the landing pad is set kilometers away from the colonist compound so that it doesn't take up arable land. Even roads don't take up space; everyone uses hover cars and trucks to skim over crop tops, obviating the need.

The Oasis itself is perhaps 60 square kilometers. This is quite small for a farming community, but they are 60 very fertile square kilometers. Thanks to a favorable environment, a long revolution around its star, smart crop rotation, and well-adapted plant bio-engineering, the colonists can get two harvests out of each solar year (Sasha-Ka is very proud of this fact, and makes a point to mention it).

Six-meter tall towers with blinking red lights mark the way toward the colony through the high stalks of grain. The towers are essentially ladders with lights and serve the dual purpose of navigation pointers and pick-up points for field workers looking to return to the base. The towers are obvious enough that anyone who glances out of the truck can see them.

Ambush

The trucks skim along, a meter above the top of the grain. Sunset on New Mojave is lovely for those inclined to notice. The large lemon-colored sun sinks heavily behind the mountains to the west, casting a red hue over everything.

On the way to the oasis, the heroes are attacked. Have any character riding in the back of a truck make an Awareness—*perception*

or Awareness—*intuition* skill check. Any heroes that make the check spot an unnatural bending of the crops to the left of the trucks and catch a whiff of an odd smell of citrus.

If the heroes tell anyone in the cab what they see or smell, the drivers begin a wild bob-and-weave pattern to prevent Rug snipers from drawing a bead on them. Everyone in the back of a truck (heroes and supporting cast) must make a successful Dexterity feat to keep from being thrown out. One round later, energy blasts erupt from the field, wild shots trying to hit the swerving trucks. They continue to fire for three more rounds until the trucks are out of range. Anyone who falls out may take damage from impact with the ground: allow a hero with Acrobatic—*fall* specialty feat to make a skill check; all others must make Dexterity feat checks. Consult Table P15: Impact Damage in the *ALTERNITY Player's Handbook* for the results of this short (S) fall; an Ordinary check result causes d4w. The drivers notice fallen characters, and both trucks begin wide circles in opposite directions to draw fire away from them. Fallen characters can get to a navigation tower in 1d4 rounds and must spend a round climbing to get picked up.

If the party didn't notice or didn't warn anyone of what they saw, a single red beam lances out of the field, striking the driver of the truck not carrying Sasha-Ka Underwood. The driver is knocked unconscious, and the truck swerves. The truck can't actually crash since it's in the middle of a field, but with no one to put pressure on the accelerator it slows to a halt in five rounds. As the truck slows, Rugs concentrate their fire on it, trying to hit the hover fans and bring it down. Any hero in the cab can move the unconscious driver away in one round and take her place to get the truck moving again. If it comes to it, a hero in the back can climb into the cab and move the driver in two rounds.

Once a hero is driving, have him or her make Vehicle Operation—*air* skill checks every round to dodge fire. In the unfortunate event that the truck takes five hits, it loses a fan and dips in altitude. After that, the truck runs frighteningly close to the ground for the rest of the trip, plowing through the crops mere centimeters off the ground. The driver has no forward or side vision due to the plants; someone standing in the back of the truck will have to help navigate!

Fighting Rugs in this encounter is difficult. They stay low to the

ground, shift positions regularly, and move more quickly through the tall crops than a human on foot. Anyone trying to fight them on the ground must make a successful Awareness—*perception* skill check to locate them; he or she still fires at a +3 step penalty because of the heavy foliage cover. Rugs can be tracked from above, however, with relative ease. If a hero tries to draw a bead on one by the trail of swishing crops and fires down on it, give a +1 step penalty to the action.

With the onset of nightfall, and the Rug terrain advantage, Sasha-Ka yells for the drivers to pick up any dropped heroes. The hover trucks then makes an attempt to outrun the snipers, heading for the safety of the compound. In three rounds, the snipers are left behind. Sasha-Ka apologizes profusely for the danger he has placed them in but uses the incident as an example of the plight of the colonists.

Skulkers

STR	8	0	INT	7	0
DEX	12	+2	WIL	7	0
CON	12	+2	PER	7	0
Durability: 12/12/6/6			Action Check: 11+/10/5/2		
Move: sprint 20, run 12, walk 4, swim 4			#Actions: 2		

Attacks

Beamdisk	13/6/3	d6+1s/d6+1w/d4+1m	En/O
Knife	9/4/2	d4+1w/d4+2w/d4+3w	LI/O
Brawl*	10/5/2	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s	LI/O

* Smother. see below

Defenses

Dodge—Successful skill feat increases DEX or STR resistance modifier vs. next attack by +1/+2/+3.

Skills

Athletics [8]; Melee Weapons [8]—*blade* [9]; Unarmed Attack [8]—*brawl* [10]; Acrobatics [12]—*dodge* [13]; Modern Ranged Weapons [12]—*beamdisk* [13]; Survival [12]; Tactics [7]; Awareness [7]

Skulkers are amber-colored with black patterned spots on their backs. None of this is apparent to heroes in this encounter unless they kill one and pick up the body. In unarmed combat, Skulkers have the unusual option of smothering on an Amazing Brawl success. Basically, the "Rug" wraps itself around an opponent, doing an automatic d4s every action until the target is unconscious. Unconscious targets begin to take wounds and then mortals at the same rate until dead.

The Compound

Your hover trucks fly over the compound walls to land in the motor pool. The walls consist of four-meter-tall metal plates scavenged from the colony landing ship, reinforced by native tree trunks. Buildings and homes inside the walls have a frontier shabbiness about them: serviceable, but not pretty.

"We have nearly 400 people here at the Underwood Oasis," Sasha-Ka says proudly as he leads you to your quarters. "I'm terribly sorry we couldn't give you more spacious accommodations, but since the attacks we've had to become much more centralized and, I'm sorry to say, cramped. I'll let you rest up for an hour before your welcoming banquet. If you need anything, please do not hesitate to ask your steward, Hyong-kim DiCarlo. He will be at your disposal while you are our guests."

Hyong-kim is a red-haired teenager who looks to be about 14 years old. He stands attentively by the door to the building and leads you down long hallways past several doors to your quarters. "This used to be our school," he says unenthusiastically, "but now families live in our old classrooms." Hyong-kim shows you to your rooms. "These used to be the offices of our administrators. They're more quiet and private than anywhere else we could put you."

Three rooms each contain two beds and a beat-up wardrobe. Despite their crudeness, they are a good deal more private than the classrooms that house entire families down the hall.

After the heroes are settled in, Hyong-kim hangs around, dawdling, finding excuses not to leave. If players don't pick up on



hints, have anyone with the Awareness—*perception* specialty skill make a check. Tell those who succeed that Hyong-kim acts like he has something he wants to say. Assuming anyone asks him about it, he looks around and says guiltily, “If I tell you something, will you not tell anybody else?” Assuming the heroes agree, he goes on:

“I shot the first Rug.” He pauses and looks at the floor. “I was out in the field with my shotgun, and I saw one sneaking around, so I shot it. The next day the Rugs started using slug-throwers. This is all my fault, isn’t it?”

In truth, Hyong-kim is not at fault for the Rug attacks or the arms escalation the colonists have experienced. If the heroes are kind and understanding, they’ve earned a loyal friend for their entire stay who will do almost anything to help them. Hyong-kim can procure supplies from around the compound that Sasha-Ka may deny due to shortages, or he may provide inside information that the characters want to know.

Dinner

The Welcoming Banquet is held in a long, low room—obviously used as a meeting hall for the populace. Virtually every one of the 400 or so residents of Underwood Oasis has come here tonight to shake your hand and thank you again for your efforts on their behalf. Before everyone begins eating, Sasha-Ka stands and taps his cup with his knife loudly to get everyone’s attention.

“We hold this poor banquet tonight for our guests, who come as diplomats and observers to alleviate our desperate circumstances. I am only sorry that this meal and entertainment must be of such low quality for visitors of their status. I believe our guests will surely see the necessity of our plight and recommend emergency supplies and weapons be sent to us from the greater interplanetary governments. Now, without further apology, let’s eat!” The crowd responds with an enthusiastic cheer, and everyone digs in.

This is the time for players to gather information about life in the colony and what the colonists know about their enemy. The colonists are of average intelligence, although the seemingly random attacks have scared them into a hunker-down mentality. They are very happy to see the heroes, believing that once the team assesses the situation they will certainly go back and recommend that troops and improved arms be sent to New Mojave. Through dinner conversation with Sasha-Ka Underwood and various colonists, heroes can get the following information:

- They sure are happy to see the party here. The heroes can go tell the government that they’re in desperate need and get them more supplies and weapons.
- The Rugs started showing up about four months ago.
- Rugs are squarish, flat creatures with spotted, camouflage patterns on their backs.
- No one has ever tried to capture one, they just kill them on sight. Rugs are silent, even in death.
- Rugs seem to prefer stealth and ambush to straight fighting. Colonists can usually overpower them in straight fights.
- Rugs usually attack around dark.
- They generally seem to come from over the mountain ridge to the north.
- No one knows why they attack or what they want. They only attack to kill or sabotage.
- At first, Rugs snuck up on farmers and pummeled them to death with their weird mitten hands, sometimes suffocating people with their heavy, flat bodies.
- After the colonists started carrying knives regularly, Rugs did too.
- Soon after, the Rugs began using slug-thrower weaponry from sniper positions to pick off field workers. That’s when the colonists put up the wall and sent guards out into the field.
- When the colonists began using their meager supply of laser guns, the Rugs started using energy weapons too.
- Rug energy weapons are strange. They look like flattened bowling balls with a bunch of holes in one side and a slit on the edge where they think the beam fires. Nobody can make the guns

work though. If the heroes want to take a look, someone will gladly show a captured beamdisk to them.

- If the heroes’ team could just convince the interplanetary government to issue a garrison of troops and weapons, they’re sure they could take the Rugs.

After the party gathers information, they will (hopefully) want to get a look for themselves. Sasha-Ka strongly discourages anyone from traveling by night, since this seems to be when the Rugs are most active, encouraging the heroes to sleep first and then search in the morning. If the heroes simply must go tonight, he lets them, but they see nothing in the dark aside from the ambush described below (assuming they are close enough to the Oasis at the time).

Encounter

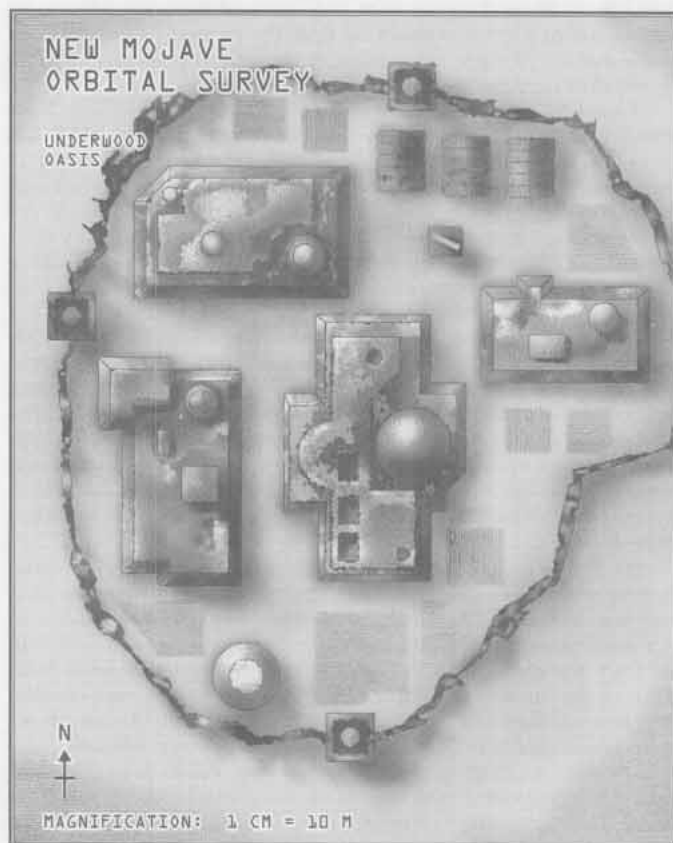
At around 02:00 in the morning, when most of the camp has retired for the evening, the peaceful night is broken by the sound of klaxons.

AA-OOGA! AA-OOGA! You awaken to the familiar blare of a warning horn. Moments later, Hyong-kim beats on the outer door to your makeshift bedrooms, “Perimeter Alarm! It’s a Perimeter Alarm! The Rugs are trying a sneak attack! Come quick!”

Let players tell you what they do before you continue. Once they get outside, read the following:

You see half a dozen colonists on a scaffolding behind a section of the wall, shooting down on the ground outside. Lights flood the area, as the colonists have turned every available light in the compound on the battle. Red energy beams, like those firing at the trucks yesterday, shoot upward toward the colonists on the wall. “I’m gonna kill me every Rug I can find!” screams an angry colonist from the top of the wall.

This battle is a jannigar diversionary tactic so that one Skulker can sneak in through a tunnel it dug under the wall. The stealthy





Rug is acting as a scout, poking around while looking for weaknesses in the colonists' defenses. It is covered with the alien equivalent of black greasepaint to hide its natural amber color, making it very difficult to see. Have every player make an Awareness—*perception* skill check at a +2 step penalty to spot movement farther into the compound, away from the action at the wall. Successful heroes notice a curious shuffling near the ground. It's difficult to make out the Skulker, since most of the lights are turned toward the combat on the wall.

If anyone shines a light in the direction of the shuffling, they discover a blackened Rug in the compound. If they alert the colonists, the civilians are simultaneously frightened and angry at the sight of it. Most of the guns remain in use on the wall, but one woman with a gun commences firing on the lone Rug. Characters wanting to get a closer look at it must now fend off a mob. By contrast, if they investigate on their own, the fight at the walls draws away the colonists' attention and the heroes should be able to easily defeat or capture the intruder.

The stealth Rug is identical to the Rugs from the Ambush encounter (use stats on page 58). However, if three or more people show up to oppose it, it throws down its knife and beamdisk and holds out its arms perpendicular to its body, swaying slightly. Orders to "Freeze!" or "Don't move!" won't stop this movement; Skulker Rugs are deaf and can't understand Standard language anyway. A Culture—*first encounter* skill check indicates that this is a surrender, although players may not even need a roll to determine this.

The Rug is covered with a greasy black soot that comes off on the fingers of anyone touching it. The creature seems semi-intelligent. It responds to various physical stimuli (heat, touch) but does not talk nor understand human language. It continues to sway or undulate its body the entire time in captivity unless physically restrained. Though the heroes can torture or kill the Rug (this is the colonists' suggestion), they cannot get any information out of it; it is physically and mentally incapable of communicating with humans.

The heroes can try to incarcerate the Rug, kill it, or let it go and follow it. Xenophobia is so high at the compound that any attempts to jail the Rug result in its eventual death at the hands of an angry mob (heroes choosing to play guardian to the creature must roleplay

their way through this confrontation). If they decide to release it and follow it back to the Rugs' base, proceed to the next section; if they kill it or turn it over to the colonists, the heroes' search for the Rug outpost will be much harder.

Tech Op characters can figure out how to make the beamdisk work with a Technical—*juryrig* skill check. Activation involves sticking several fingers into the holes at proper angles, then removing certain fingers to fire. Humans can fire these guns awkwardly at best, and even that takes two hands (use the Modern Ranged Weapon broad skill with a +1 step penalty). The knife also seems to have various holes in the handle. Again, humans can hold it, but in a Rug's "hands" the knife fits so naturally as to almost be an artificial appendage.

Outpost

Characters who simply wait in the outpost experience variations of the first day and night's activities: snipers, ambushes, and the occasional surprise attack, all of which slowly drain the colony's resources and resilience. If the heroes have still not acted by the third day, a group of hot-heads storm out of the compound, intending to find and destroy the Rug base, only to fall into an ambush from which only a few stagger back more dead than alive. Any upgrade of weaponry from the player characters' ship is quickly matched by a corresponding upgrade on the Rugs' side. And throughout it all, the colonists' numbers continue to decline through attrition.

Eventually, the heroes should realize that the situation will escalate out of control unless they gather some information about the aliens. The best way to do this is to scout out their base. If they didn't find out at the welcoming banquet that the Rugs seem to come from the north or if they've forgotten the fact, have someone tell them or remind them. Once they set out, it will take several hours of travel and search to locate the outpost, even if they think to ask the colonists for an area map. Have them make Navigation—*surface* or Investigate—*search* skill checks to represent the search effort. Each check represents four hours of search time. If one of the heroes makes a successful Tactics—*infantry* check in conjunction with a terrain map of the surrounding area, he or she can find likely places for a strategic base camp, thereby reducing the search time by 75%.

Give heroes a Survival—*wasteland* skill check before starting out to remember that days are long and hot in the mountainous regions of New Mojave. Plenty of water is essential for a long hike in the sun. Sasha-Ka offers little in the way of supplies, citing dwindled resources in light of the siege. However, if they made friends with Hyong-kim earlier, he can scrounge up water, rations, and short-range comm units for them.

The easiest way for them to find the Rug's base is to let the Rug they captured go and follow it. It heads straight back to its outpost to report on the failure of its mission. Once the Rug arrives at the outpost, or the heroes eventually find it on their own, they're in for an interesting show:

You see a large tent-like structure next to what must be a tall radio antenna. A two-meter watchtower with a steep stepladder stands a short jog away from the lean-to, with a gun emplacement on top. Some sort of solid-walled animal pen is set up several meters away from the tent, though you don't see any action in or near it.

One Rug stands upright on top of the tower, its rust-colored back toward the gun and your position. Occasionally its body sways and its arms wave up and down. Two other Rugs stand below near the stepladder, swaying and waving similarly.

If the heroes followed the Skulker back into camp, read the players the following:

The Rug you've been following crawls back into camp and approaches the standing Rugs near the tower. It thrashes on the ground, moving its arms violently. The other Rugs do not seem to change their behavior.

Allow heroes with the Culture—*first encounter* skill to make a check to understand that the Rugs appear to be in conversation.

This thrashing and rolling around on the ground goes on for a few minutes. Then, you hear one of the standing Rugs speak in Standard, "I'm gonna kill me every Rug I can find!" It's spoken in nearly the same tone of voice that the angry colonist used during the attack. Then the Rug lapses back into silence, though their gestures and movements continue. Eventually, the Rug you've been trailing goes to the pen, opens the gate, crawls inside, and shuts the gate behind itself.

Unless the party does something obvious, the Rugs here are bored and lax and do not detect them. They take shifts on the watchtower but rarely seem alert while on guard. Occasionally, one opens the pen, and various numbers of Skulkers emerge and leave. Sometimes they travel northeast from the camp, sometimes to the west, and sometimes south. If the heroes follow any of these groups, the northeast and west ones are headed out on day-long maneuvers—marching, mountain climbing, and performing other military functions. The southbound ones are off on a stakeout of the Oasis and will be very surprised to see the heroes if they suddenly show up. Generally though, as long as the heroes try to hide, they remain undiscovered.

If the heroes snipe from their hidden position, the Rugs become quite alert and open the pen, allowing dozens of Skulkers out. They radiate from the camp, moving quickly to eliminate the threat. Heroes who try this tactic are in for a long, dangerous fight—the Skulkers will quickly find them, and they outnumber the party at least five to one. Retreat quickly becomes the smartest option.

If the heroes charge the camp, guns blazing, they may well cut down all three Walker Rugs before they have a chance to react. Since these Rugs are bored and lazy, they flail uselessly for two rounds, "screaming" to each other about what to do. After that, the one atop the watchtower comes to its senses and begins firing its gun. The other two Rugs move to the pen and fumble with the latch for another round before releasing the Skulkers. If the Skulkers get out, then the heroes must fight them as above, besides having to face any surviving Walkers.

Remember, however, that the characters are supposed to be diplomats. As such, they should realize that combat is hardly the only option. If any or all of the heroes simply walk up to the camp and try to talk to the jannigar, the one who spoke Standard before says, "Have you come to parley?" Regardless of their verbal answer (it doesn't actually understand Standard but has memorized a few key phrases), it says, "Follow me. I will take you to our leader."

Walkers

STR	10	0	INT	9	0
DEX	12	+2	WIL	9	0
CON	12	+2	PER	7	0
Durability: 12/12/6			Action Check: 12+/11/5/2		
Move: sprint 16, run 10, walk 4			#Actions: 2		

Attacks

Beamdisk	13/6/3	d6+1s/d6+1w/d4+1m	En/O
Knife	11/5/2	d4+1w/d4+2w/d4+3w	LI/O
Brawl*	11/5/2	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s	LI/O

* Smother. Refer to the Skulker's entry for details on this ability.

Beamdisk Tower Gun

12/6/3	d6+1w/d6+3w/d6+1m	En/O
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Defenses

Dodge—Successful skill feat increases DEX or STR resistance modifier vs. next attack by +1/+2/+3.

Skills

Athletics [10]; Melee Weapons [10]—*blade* [11]; Unarmed Attack [10]—*brawl* [11]; Acrobatics [12]—*dodge* [13]; Modern Ranged Weapons [12]—*beamdisk* [13]; Survival [12]; Knowledge [9]; Tactics [9]—*infantry* [10]; Awareness [9]—*perception* [10]; Leadership [7].

Walkers are rust colored with black patterned spots on their backs. Most are quite competent, but these particular ones are lazy and inattentive.

If heroes kill all the Walkers before they free the Skulkers, then aside from restless movement in the pen, nothing untoward happens. They can search the camp freely. Inside the tent they find a radio transmitter and receiver with a similar recessed-holes motif to the beamdisk, three puffy mats (probably beds), and a low table with what appears to be maps spread out on it. A successful Awareness—*intuition* skill check helps with reading the maps, which show the location of the jannigar base.

Revelation

Whether they follow the Walker Rugs or navigate their own way with the maps, it takes the party several more hours to get to the jannigar base camp. They travel over rocky terrain and at several points must make steep climbs to get there. If they try to take hover trucks, the rugged terrain forces them to abandon them after only a few kilometers. Read the following aloud when they finally reach the base:

After several hours' march over rocky terrain, you arrive at the Rug base camp. The place is abuzz with activity. Here and there, groups of Skulker Rugs shuffle in formation, led by one or two Walker Rugs. Other Rugs of a light-green hue seem to cartwheel around doing errands and chores. More tents like the one you saw before cluster around a permanent structure in the center. The building is a low dome, with smoke rising from what you would guess to be a chimney.

If heroes are with the Walker Rugs, then there is a small delay as the Cartwheelers and Walkers "converse." The Cartwheelers then approach the party.

In quite passable but oddly accented Standard, one of the light green Rugs speaks to you, "Come inSide the Dome to Meet the seLected of naHasapur please Leave your weaPons with Us as negoTiators you are Free from Harm in the seLected's Home."

Although vocabulary and grammar may be correct, jannigar have almost no sense of the proper rhythm and emphasis to give human words. This particular jannigar speaks without pause (read the speech in one long breath if possible) in an undulating tone that emphasizes the syllables capitalized in the boxed text.

Once they've puzzled out what it said, heroes who agree to leave their weapons behind are escorted inside the dome to meet the leader of the "Rugs." If the characters arrived without the Walker Rugs, or are trying to fight their way through this adventure, things get tricky. Unless they take great pains to remain hidden, the heroes are soon spotted and see Cartwheelers come rolling out to meet them. Smart characters who surrender or try to parley are greeted by the speech given above. Gung-ho idiots who attack when faced with overwhelming odds will be slaughtered here; use the Cartwheelers statistics below for combat until everyone either dies or surrenders. If they surrender, they are disarmed and put in cages as prisoners of war (as their captors politely inform them). The jannigar treat them well, questioning them carefully to find out what to feed them, but keep them locked up and under guard. Heroes who come up with a good plan should be allowed to escape in a daring breakout and make their way through many hazards back to the Oasis, where they can report back to their superiors. In this case, the adventure ends with an escalating war with the Rugs.

Characters willing to negotiate rather than fight (which is after all their original mission) get inside the dome and meet the jannigar leader:

You have to get down on your belly and crawl inside the dome through a recessed hollow in the ground. You emerge in a plushy adorned room with crystal glasses of water set on a low table in the center near a bowl full of grape-like fruits. A fireplace is set



in one wall, and the room smells strongly of creosote. A dark blue Rug stands near the fire apparently blowing glass. When it sees you, it sets the apparatus down and lopes over to you with a fold in the middle of its body.

"I am Jondree, Selected of Nahasapur, of course I offer you hospitality, please have fresh water and purdles, which are delicious, and favorites of mine." One of its hands gestures to the bowl of grapelike fruit. "I understand you have come to negotiate?"

Higher caste jannigar have better inflection than their inferiors but still have a tendency to speak in run-on sentences. Read Jondree's speeches in one long breath, with an "upper-class" accent. When you do have to breathe, exaggerate it, then resume the flow of words as if uninterrupted. Note, however, that Jondree is very sophisticated and will begin to break his speech in more human patterns after he has been exposed to firsthand contact for a while.

Jondree assumes the first person to speak is the dominant member of the entourage, and the Loper is surprised when someone else speaks. It wonders why the lead alien allows its troops to be so impertinent. If the heroes try to explain that they are equals, Jondree is confused by the concept. If no one tries to explain, it eventually concludes that they are all on the same caste level, however unusual this sort of large-scale fraternization among equals would be among the jannigar. Regardless of what anyone says, when talking to the group Jondree tends to mainly address the first hero who spoke. It dislikes trying to communicate with more than one person at a time, but speaks to others in the group if they directly ask it a question.

As it turns out, jannigar are not native to the planet and are actually here to colonize as well, as Jondree will freely admit. However, jannigar society enjoys war games and uses lower caste members as units in war sports. Read or paraphrase the following information as necessary:

"Our Walkers were out hunting with Skulkers for sport. We had not realized, of course, that your infantry was not native, that you too were hunters, and that you too enjoyed a good skirmish.

Naturally, I was delighted that your infantry had innovation, of course, it is only polite for initiators to allow defenders to choose technological level, but we were pleased to participate in stepped technological advance: from grip-to-grip, to sharpened blades, to projectile weaponry, and finally to beam weaponry. It certainly does force one to think differently when one must advance through tactical stages!

"I was most pleased to finally enjoy the advanced tactics of beamdisks. The use of vehicular-mounted weaponry caught us by surprise, I must say. I will be unable to receive tripod mounts for our repulsorlifts for several days! I am, of course, planning ahead this time and ordering armored vehicles for that escalation. Would you consider giving me notice before that occurs?"

The heroes may try to explain to Jondree that they are not at all there to fight or discuss negotiations for fighting, but rather to cease fighting. If anyone tries the elegantly simple negotiation of "we give up," Jondree will be offended. Jannigar societal rules do not allow a conflict to end through surrender or for one side to be declared "Winner." The conflict must be played out, as all civilized beings adhere to rules.

This is the point at which players can get creative. Jondree is looking for sporting conflict and won't allow anything but conflict to settle the matter. After more conversation with the party, it says:

"Well, if a war is not what you humans want, although why not is completely beyond me, then some other conflict will suffice. What does your bizarre society do for customary contests of resolution?"

"Of course I must contest for my victory or loss, it cannot simply be given! After all, conflict is the very house of improvement. Do you humans have any preferred method of sporting conflict resolution?"

Conflict

Give the party a few minutes to confer among themselves. Jondree is (obviously) ignorant of human customs and accepts almost anything the heroes offer, so long as it involves conflict (although the less warlike the activity, the stranger the jannigar finds the custom). Note that though uninformed, Jondree is not stupid. As a strategist and game player, it has an eye for fairness and turns down any "games" which appear patently unfair or biased. Anything from rock-paper-scissors to footraces to a shooting contest will appease Jondree. If players come up with something completely off-the-wall but still fair, assign skill checks as you see fit, and run with it.

Jannigar is at a serious strategy disadvantage if the players choose something like Backgammon. However, if players choose any sort of physical contest, Jondree finds one or more of its soldiers to rival the heroes in skill and ability. No matter what they choose, try to make it a close, exciting contest; modify the Cartwheeler statistics below as necessary to create a worthwhile challenge. If players are indecisive or simply can't think of anything, after a few minutes Jondree wonders aloud:

"I know how difficult it is to choose a proper game after one disallows war, I wonder if you humans have ever played goal-oriented small-team skirmishes, though it is a spawnling's game, it has been used to determine settlement rights before in the Nahasapur dialect—or do I mean district?—a fascinating language, though difficult to master."

If the heroes ask for more information, Jondree essentially suggests a game of full-contact Capture the Flag. The difference is that in Jondree's version the "flags" are small, native lizards found on New Mojave. These lizards are kept in cages in the other side's territory. Each team must free their lizard from their opponents' cage and carry it to their own end of the field. Contestants cannot touch the lizard they hold prisoner until after an opponent has taken it out of their cage.

To make things harder, the lizards bite anyone trying to carry them. Damage is negligible, but heroes must make a Resolve—physical or

Stamina—*resist pain* skill check to keep from dropping a lizard when it bites. If a hero fails, the lizard falls to the ground and runs toward the nearest rock structure to hide. If one side's lizard leaves the playing field, that side loses. Thus, a perfectly viable strategy is to let the opposing team get their own lizard, then make them drop it near the edge of the field, or push them out, forcing a loss. Killing your lizard to keep it from running away is also acceptable, though much less fun.

Jondree assumes that the hero who spoke first (see above) is the team captain; the jannigar leader suggests that he or she pit the party against six of Jondree's Cartwheeler soldiers. Jondree has a spot in mind for such a contest to be carried out and shows the party the area with glee (show the players the Player's Map on page 64; this can be used with tokens or markers to show placement of both side's contestants and lizards during the skirmish).

If the heroes agree to this proposal, Jondree seems giddy. "We have not contested like this in generations! How quaint!"

Cartwheelers (6)

STR	11	0	INT	10	0
DEX	11	+2	WIL	9	0
CON	12	+2	PER	7	0
Durability: 12/12/6			Action Check: 12+/11/5/2		
Move: sprint 16, run 10, walk 4			#Actions: 2		

Attacks

Brawl* 11/5/2 d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s LI/O

* Smother. Refer to the Skulker's entry for details on this ability.

Defenses

Dodge—Successful skill feat increases DEX or STR resistance modifier vs. next attack by +1/+2/+3.

Skills

Athletics [11]; Melee Weapons [11]—*blade* [14]; Unarmed Attack [11]—*brawl* [13]; Acrobatics [11]—*dodge* [13]; Modern Ranged Weapons [11]—*beamdisk* [13]; Survival [12]; Knowledge [10]—*first aid*; Tactics [10]—*infantry* [12]; Awareness [9]—*perception* [12]; Leadership [7]—*command* [10].

Unlike lower castes, Cartwheelers never smother in polite melee combat, although they may pin an opponent and hold him or her immobile.

Lizards

Combat statistics are hardly necessary for the lizards, except to note that they move about half as fast as a human. If dropped, they head for the nearest shelter under rocks and are not slowed by field obstructions which the larger combatants must go around or over. Contestants can try to reach in and grab sheltered lizards with a Dexterity feat at +1 step penalty. Failure sends the little beast off to the next closest rock structure.

Resolution

Try to make this contest fun for the players, but also hard work for their characters. The outcome of the contest, whether it be Capture the Flag or some other game, determines whether the jannigar stay or go. Either way, Jondree is pleasant and civil, being a very good winner or loser.

If the Heroes Won

"What great fun! You played marvelously, why, I almost wanted to go out and join you, though of course that would be scandalously improper, wouldn't it? Although I must admit a full-scale war game would have been more enjoyable, you have defeated my underlings in fair combat, as victors you receive rights to the planet as agreed. I will remove my station and troops by the end of four days, although I do enjoy the mountains here which would have made excellent conflict training. I will see that the appropriate treaty papers are drawn up, until then, be my guest and enjoy more of these delicious purdles."

Over the next day the heroes rest up and sign treaties granting humans full rights to the use of New Mojave. Jondree calls for



transport ships to come pick up the entire jannigar contingent and, true to its word, is off-planet in four days.

The heroes can report the negotiated outcome to the colonists. The colonists will be deliriously happy that the "Rug Menace" is gone; they clamor to hear the story of their victory over and over. Sasha-Ka in particular heartily congratulates them and tells the heroes that they always have a friend and a place to stay if they ever need it. He calls for their shuttle to pick them up whenever they are ready. They are heroes to the colonists. Even if the heroes try to tell the colonists the truth—that Jondree and the aliens are not a threat; that the entire event was a cultural misunderstanding—the colonists are sure that this is merely modesty on the heroes' part.

The interplanetary government will also be congratulatory and offer heroes posts as diplomats to the jannigar (especially the character Jondree assumed was their spokesman). Eventually, the humans open up permanent relations with the jannigar, who become useful allies for military training sessions with human forces. Everybody wins.

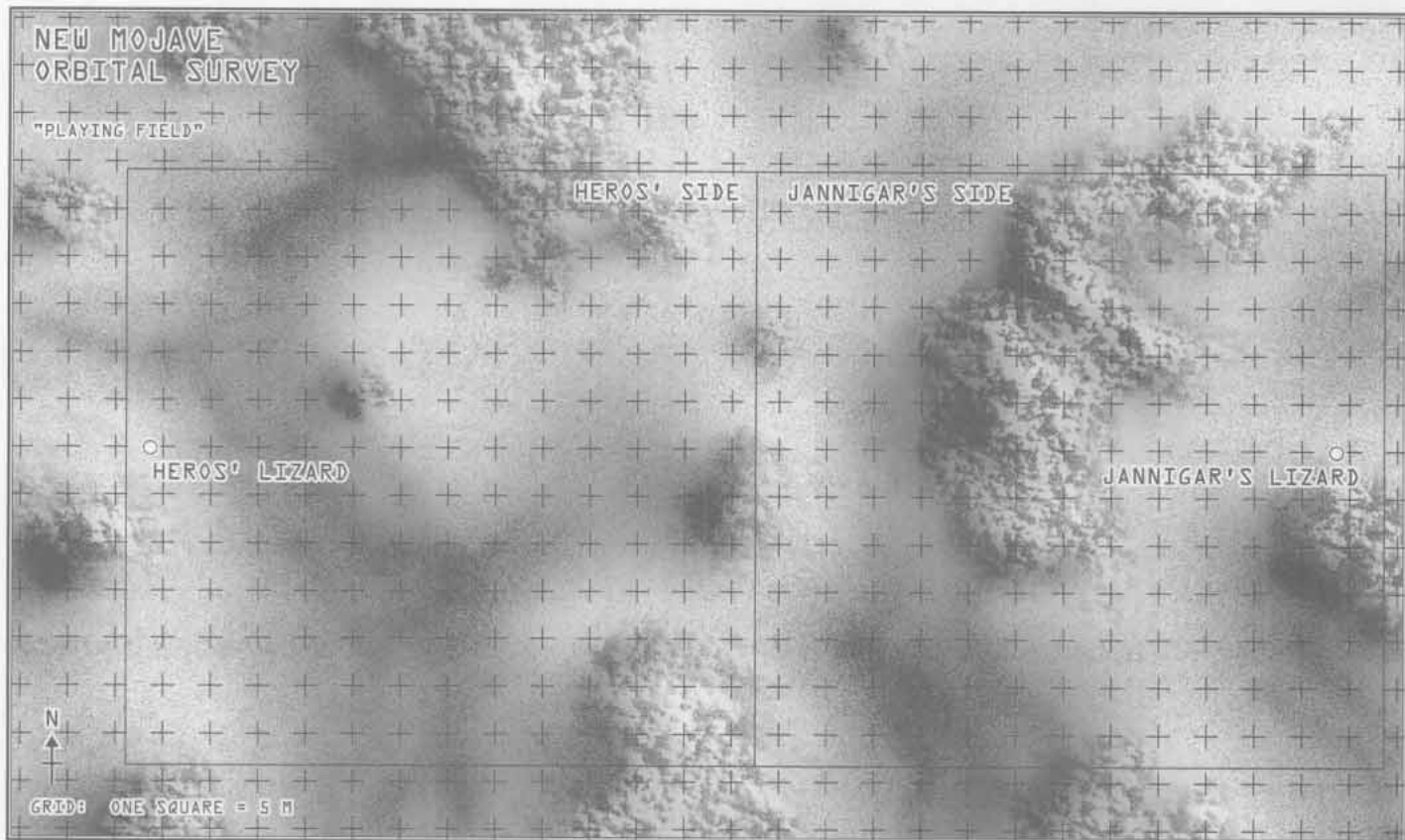
If the Heroes Lost

The heroes, as civilized sentients and verbal communicators, are expected to take their loss with good sportsmanship. Jondree claims all rights to New Mojave as spoils of victory and has each hero sign forfeiture of claim pacts on behalf of their government. Refusal to sign is a terrible breach of etiquette, and such an insult could lead to actual war between humans and jannigar.

Whatever the heroes decide to do, they must go back and report the negotiated outcome to the colonists. If they signed away the world and admit to it, the colonists are outright hostile, calling them "traitors!" and "Rug-lovers!" Sasha-Ka will be gravely serious. He tells them he will call for their shuttle to pick them up tomorrow morning at first light. They will be safe at the Oasis, but they have earned the lifelong scorn of every colonist for their failure.

The interplanetary government is much less concerned, having sacrificed only one largely uninhabitable planet in exchange for diplomatic relations with a new race. The heroes may even be congratulated for "letting the Rugs win" if they handled themselves smoothly. In any case, they are commended for their adaptation to unusual circumstances in the face of uncertainty.

The End



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