



# DUNGEONS & DRAGONS<sup>®</sup> Campaigns<sup>™</sup>

## XEN'DRIK EXPEDITIONS

### Marked Man

## Blackwheel Company Faction Scenario #3

### An Adventure for 3<sup>rd</sup> Level Characters (Scaled for 2<sup>nd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> Levels of Play)

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Based on the original DUNGEONS & DRAGONS<sup>®</sup> rules created by E. Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson and the new DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game designed by Jonathan Tweet, Monte Cook, Skip Williams, Rich Baker, and Peter Adkison.

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Sources: *Player's Guide to Eberron*, *Secrets of Xen'drik*, *Libris Mortis*, *Miniatures Handbook*, *Magic of Eberron*, *Monster Manual II*, *Monster Manual III*

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# Adventure Background

Velrith d'Tharashk and his expert team of dragonshard hunters in the employ of the Blackwheel Company are five days past their rendezvous time. This is making the Blackwheel Company brass, particularly those with close ties to House Tharashk, extremely nervous. Velrith was sent to use his Mark of Finding to help recover a shard of particular import to the Blackwheel Company. This *psionic shard* is reported to contain some of the essence of the draconic Prophecy.

Unfortunately, Velrith's entire expedition is dead—or undead. Velrith's platoon was sent to recover this *psionic shard* from a twisted maze of underground catacombs known to be a haven to a tribe of Umbragen drow. Velrith stumbled onto something far worse than a drow camp, however. The catacombs were the final rally point for the Umbragen drow defenders holding off the surging aberrations welling up from Khyber. The drow had no fear of experimenting with terrible and evil magicks, and they drew deep into the Shadow Flame to cast down a terrible curse upon the catacombs, one sure to keep the upwelling of aberrations to a minimum. Within the catacombs they placed a horrible device that manipulates the Shadow Flame, slowly drawing the life out of creatures and eventually causing them to rise as undead. Many members of the drow tribe sacrificed themselves to become the first undying guardians of this waypoint between Khyber and Eberron.

As Velrith's team realized what had happened within the catacombs, one of his own team betrayed him. Syreck, a human sorcerer, was actually a member of the Cabal of Shadows that had infiltrated the Blackwheel Company. Syreck, a member of the dreaded Children of Xoriat Obscura, chose that time to reveal himself, and he slew Velrith. Syreck believes that if he gains some control over the undead, he can bend them into a force that serves, rather than hinders, the Umbragen below. Syreck is currently examining the *psionic shard* to determine if its power can be used to shape the magic of undeath that currently terrorizes the catacombs.

In a place where the magic of Eberron and Khyber meet, the power of a dragonmark, an ancient curse, loyalty, betrayal, and the draconic Prophecy have wrought a most unusual servant. Velrith d'Tharashk walks the line between human and ghoul, with a full memory of the events of his past and the use of his dragonmark. He is currently struggling for control over his sanity, as the taint of undeath, the rage at his friend's betrayal, and the loyalties to his house and mission all clash within him. As he wages a battle for his soul, he awaits a sign from the gods, above or below, to provide the catalyst that determines the course of his future.

# Adventure Synopsis

As the adventure opens, the PCs find themselves—once again—in the office of Sergeant Skyne Tragar. As she explains the mission to the party, she reveals that they will be using a very interesting method of transport to their destination. This adventure formally introduces the concept of “Magic-Assisted Airship Drops” or “MAAD's” to Blackwheel Company members. The jungles around the catacombs are simply too choked with undead, aberrations, and extremely hostile drow tribes. MAAD's are the preferred method of insertion for highly dangerous, secretive, or hasty missions. Only a select few recruits are chosen to undergo the training necessary to execute (and survive) a jump. The Blackwheel Company has an extreme interest in quickly recovering the *psionic shard* within those catacombs, and House Tharashk has an extreme interest in finding out what has happened to beloved house member Velrith d'Tharashk. As such, this mission is of the highest priority, and the PCs report to the airship immediately as all MAAD-trained BWC operatives are currently on other missions. This is “on the job” training.

The airship departs immediately, and the PCs are given rudimentary training on how to survive a drop. Once the PCs have successfully inserted themselves atop the catacombs, they are instructed to find the entrance and enter immediately. Their mission is to locate Velrith d'Tharashk's platoon (or their remains) and recover the *psionic shard* he was seeking. The PCs are then given a “call shard” that they are to use two hours prior to the time at which they require extraction. After the PCs activate the shard, they are to make their way back to the surface and await airship pickup.

The catacombs provide an opportunity for nearly continuous combat as the party explores. The narrow, twisting passageways are literally crawling with undead, hungry for a variety of things the PCs possess. As the PCs explore the catacombs in search of the shard, they may stumble across dead or undead members of the former Blackwheel Company expedition. The PCs can explore as they please, with no time limit other than the duration of the adventure itself. Syreck, the member of Velrith's party who betrayed and murdered him, holds the shard. The encounter with Syreck and finding Velrith are the two main mission parameters, but the party may leave at any time. Two hours after the PCs activate the call shard, an airship arrives to carry them to safety.

# Troubleshooting

**Very long read-aloud text:** The Magic-Assisted Airship Drop training section of this module has a very long section of read-aloud text. This section provides specific instructions for breaking up this text, encouraging players to actively participate in instruction. It is strongly recommended that you have players help demonstrate the specific techniques, prepare this section several times, and read with a good deal of voice inflection. At the very least, inform the players beforehand that the section contains a large read-aloud section and that their attention and level of study is necessary to ensure their survival in the very dangerous Magic-Assisted Airship Drop.

**A very dead NPC in the party:** Should Velrith d'Tharashk be convinced to join the party, one of the most important things to keep in mind is that he exists to add color and flavor to the adventure. Velrith provides support, advice, witty quips, but he should not upstage the party in combat or in any other manner. If there is already a rogue in the party, Velrith takes him under his wing and points out ways to subtly identify traps and disarm them (assisting on checks but not doing them himself). Until the final combat Velrith only fights if his doing so is the difference between PC success and failure. Have him provide advice and make jokes, but don't let Velrith monopolize the action.

**Undead with a Dragonmark:** Velrith is not fully undead yet. The ancient curse that plagues the catacombs, combined with the strange will of the Draconic Prophecy, has created a creature that lies halfway between life and undeath. If the PCs help Velrith d'Tharashk cling to the shred of humanity within him, he maintains the use of his Dragonmark for a short time. If the PCs allow him to slip down the path of undeath, becoming the monster he is beginning to resemble on the exterior, he immediately loses the use of his Dragonmark.

**The catacombs map:** The map of the catacombs has been constructed using exactly two full sets of the D&D Dungeon Tiles. While these are not necessary, they are extremely useful in laying out the exact map as it appears in this module. Additional sets of Dungeon Tiles may be useful in illustrating other terrain features such as chasms, columns, statues, and rubble.

**Timing the Escape:** Pay close attention to the time that elapses in the adventure once the PCs activate the call shard. The goal of the escape encounter is to give the PCs a sense of urgency, not to overwhelm them with hopeless combat. They should feel they need to flee against insurmountable odds, but the idea is that rescue comes just in time. Even if the PCs activate the call shard after they defeat Syreck, they should have only about 15-30 minutes to wait between when they exit the catacombs and the airship's arrival. This means that if the PCs activate the call shard immediately after defeating Syreck, the skeletons will be hot on their heels, but they should lift off in the airship just as the skeleton horde bursts out from below. If the PCs take an exceptionally long time below, they may need to hold off the skeleton horde while they wait for the airship to arrive.

## Adventure Start

The adventure begins aboard The Glory Road, the Blackwheel Company's massive airship and temporary staging ground until a more permanent stronghold can be established. The party is enjoying a little rest and relaxation in the shipboard cantina late one evening. Sergeant Tragar arrives to spoil the mood and present the PCs with a mission of critical importance.

## Part One: So Much for Rest

*A fellow dragoon, a shifter from the White Hand Battalion, the Company's elite intelligence unit, is sawing out a ferociously lively tune on his well-worn viol. As his bow flies across the strings of the upright instrument, the sound reverberates with cheer throughout the tiny cantina. The Blackened Wheel, usually called "the Wheel," is one of two tiny watering holes used by the enlisted ranks aboard the massive airship: the Glory Road. While the officers have their own more exclusive drinking facilities, the Wheel is a more common stop for hires from the White Hand and Six Paths battalions. Hires from the research and the transport battalions tend to keep to the other bar closer to their quarters.*

*The grating sound of the shifter's bow screeching across the strings brings the music to an abrupt halt. Standing at the Wheel's entrance is a female gnoll covered in short-cropped black fur. Suddenly, the mood in the cantina seems a perfect match with the color of Sergeant Skyne Tragar's fur. Almost as suddenly as the music stops, the gnoll officer's orders begin:*

*"[Character names 1, 2, 3, 4, etc.], don't move... don't even so much as twitch! The rest of you miserable grunts have three seconds to vacate my sight. GO!"*

*As a handful of hires fly from the room, she growls out behind them, "And shut the bloody door!" Sgt. Tragar whips past you and stomps around to the other side of the bar. Snatching a bottle of whiskey from the cabinet behind her, you can hear an audible sigh as she pours herself a drink. The highball glass etched with the 13-spoked wheel emblem of the Company looks tiny in the Sgt.'s large hands. She drains the glass in a single draught. As she pours herself another, she looks up and begins to speak.*

Sgt. Tragar has just learned that she must send the PCs on their first "Drop Op" without having gone through Magic-Assisted Airship Drop training. Though a brutal and demanding taskmaster, she is also fiercely proud of her platoon. Her continued contact with them has caused her to grow fond of them, a trait she shows by being even more defensive and terse. She's been known to grow attached to her hires, and the thought of them having to do their first MAAD without training or experience, on an already dangerous assignment, does not thrill her. She also knows that something has gone terribly wrong with the first mission to this location, which only adds to her foul mood. She also knows from whom the order came, and her relationship with the much-maligned General Ogdin is strained, to say the least. Despite her reservations, she's determined to motivate her platoon to do their best work, and to get this mission done with as few additional casualties as possible.

*"Listen up, and save your whining and questions until I'm done. Hopefully I'll be drunk by the time that happens." She continues, downing another full glass of whiskey. "Time for some on-the-job training. The order has just come in from General Ogdin—it's time for you ground crawlers to finally get a shot at earning your Griffon Wings. We've got a platoon missing from a mission on the eastern edge of the Valley of Shadows. Platoon Corporal and House Tharashk golden boy Velrith d'Tharashk is five days late for his appointed rendezvous time, and this is making The Company and his house extremely nervous. The Mark of Finding whelp was sent in to recover a psionic shard that is supposed to hold a bit of a draconic Prophecy. General Ogdin has ordered a recovery team to get in there and find his platoon, or what's left of them, and recover that shard."*

*She sets down the glass; audible pops can be heard as she flexes her fingers before balling them into a fist. "Unfortunately, the area surrounding the catacombs that Platoon Corporal Velrith's team was exploring is crawling with undead and aberrations. Worse still, the drow tribes in that area are extremely unfriendly to visitors—they've even taken shots at our airship reconnaissance patrols. Hundreds of miles of Traveler-bet-damned jungle, twice as thick as anywhere else in Xen'drik, surrounds the location. That's why we'll be using airborne insertion... There's simply no way to get there fast enough from the ground. That's right hires, you get to make your first Magic Assisted Airship Drop, or MAAD. The drop zone is a rubble pile that was once a temple of some sort. It's nearly a hundred feet in width and contains the entrance to the catacombs. Hit the ground as fast as you can, and get your rear-ends into those catacombs and under cover as quickly as possible."*

*"Because this is your first jump, because we have no time, and because the general ordered it, you'll be making this jump during the day. In fact, you were to be on the Cloud Ray five minutes ago. Captain Wrynth d'Lyandar will be your C.O. this mission. The Drop Officer on the ship will go over the basics with you. Now, grab your gear and get your sorry tails aboard that ship."*

*"Oh, and if any of you nancies have the nerve to die while you're there, I'll find your corpse and have you raised so I can kill you again personally—after you spend a week cleaning the latrine bilges with your tongues. Now get out of my sight, and go find Captain Wrynt. He should be pulling the Cloud Ray along side us any minute now."*

Sgt. Tragar is in no mood for conversation and answers questions only in the most brief, terse manner possible. She has deep concerns about General Ogdin's orders regarding her platoon, but she's too professional and well trained to let those show through any more than they already have. If the PCs press her for information or supplies, she'll simply offer them her blessing and tell them they can have the 2 greatest gifts of all: 1) the pleasure of dying under her command, and 2) her vote of confidence that they can succeed at this mission.

Sense Motive checks (DC 18) reveal that Sgt. Tragar is obviously annoyed and concerned about something. She does not appear to be withholding any information (other than her dislike of General Ogdin) and if the PCs continue to press her she uses her rank and temper to send them scurrying on their way.

## Part Two: Learning To Fly

### The Cloud Ray

*Captain Wrynth and the Cloud Ray don't prove difficult to find. A sorcerer standing near the railing of the Glory Road has extended a bridge of shimmering magical force across the open sky and off some 50 feet onto the railing of another smaller airship. When compared to the leviathan-like Glory Road, the Cloud Ray is but a tiny dart. The agile-looking ship has a single elemental ring burning around it and looks to be no more than perhaps forty feet from stem to stern.*

*Captain Wrynth is a hawkish-looking half-elf with braids of wispy gray hair. As he sees you, he waves and points toward his ship. "She's built for speed, hires—the fastest The Company has... and the only thing slowing her down at this particular moment is **you!** The force bridge won't last forever, so let's get moving. I'll give you a full briefing when we're on board." With that he hops up onto the railing and darts across the force bridge.*

The force bridge is a full 12 feet wide and provides no trouble for PCs attempting to cross it. If PCs are too reluctant, the concentrating sorcerer, who outranks them significantly, harangues them. If they still delay, he threatens to conjure up creatures to carry them over. As soon as the PCs are across, read the following:

*The instant the last boot steps from the shimmering bridge and onto the ship, the force bridge vanishes and the ship lurches upward. As the fire elemental roars to life from the exertion, the ship climbs in altitude rapidly. After nearly 20 minutes of climbing, Captain Wrynth hands off the controls to a well-dressed female half-elf. The captain hustles over to speak with you. "Welcome aboard the Cloud Ray. We've got quite a journey ahead of us; it's likely to take the better part of a day to get there, even pushing her at top speed. That will give you plenty of time to speak with our Drop Officer. We've logged over 200 drops from the Cloud Ray, and Sgt. Crash is one of the best instructors in the company. Now, before you put your foot in your collective mouths and insult him, let me answer a few of your questions in advance: Yes, he is blind. No, that does not affect his MAAD status. Yes, he is a minotaur. Yes, his nickname is Crash. We call him that because he had an interesting technique of plunging downward, horns first, and activating his feather fall talisman at the exact moment his horns bit into the flesh of the enemy beneath him. Of course, perfecting that technique did cost him his sight, but he's since improved his accuracy and timing considerably. I'm sure you'll find him below deck gathering your talismans for the drop."*

The captain excuses himself and returns to his duties at the controls. If the PCs push him for questions, he simply urges them to speak with Sgt. Crash and informs them that it's going to take the full power of his mark, along with all his concentration, to make the drop zone on time. If any PC is asking about captaining the airship or is curious about the workings, the captain appreciates the interest, but informs them that, at the moment, their drop training is far more important than such things. Perhaps on the return journey the captain could spare some time to answer questions about that, or show them the workings of the controls.

## **Arms Out, Horns Back**

*The cabin below deck is small, cramped and filled almost entirely by the massive frame of Sgt. Crash. The minotaur is dressed in the stately "blacks" of the company, the fabric straining under his heavy musculature. The row of medals gleaming across his broad chest is nothing short of impressive. Among the more notable medals are a pair of golden crossed swords, a pair of blue dragon wings, and something you've not seen before, a pair of gleaming midnight-black opal griffon wings. The drop officer looks up as you enter, and speaks in a surprisingly articulate, deep, melodic tone. His sightless eyes stare forward into space and he welcomes you:*

*"Salutations class of... well, class of today. The hires here usually call me Sgt. Crash, and you may do the same. My job is to keep you alive. You'll be making your first Magic Assisted Airship Drop, with no experience, from somewhere around 12,000 feet. If our House Cannith artificers are worth the money we've paid them, they estimate that you'll be falling at 185 feet per second, which will give you almost 80 seconds of freefall time. In that time you'll have to overcome your fear, position your body, locate your position relative to your platoon, survey the drop zone, and activate your feather fall talisman at the exact right moment. Given your level of experience, I'd say we don't have a moment to lose."*

Sgt. Crash smiles at the hires and asks them to gather around for formal instruction. He quickly picks out one of the platoon to demonstrate for the others. As a DM, you can have some fun with this section and have the players actually demonstrate with you, or you can simply talk through the process. A **very** long section of read-aloud text follows, sometimes pausing to have the players demonstrate a technique or act something out to break up the monotony of the text. Sgt. Crash is a patient and careful teacher with a good sense of humor. Still, he's apt to remind his students about the speed they're going to be moving at and the possible consequences of failure if they're not learning fast enough or if they are taking things less seriously than he'd like.

*"The drop zone we've targeted is extremely hot. Last time we made a low pass, the natives below launched spells and summoned flying monstrosities to waylay us. For that reason, we're going to have to make a high-altitude drop—12,000 feet is about as high as we can get before we start to run into the thin air. It'll give you plenty of time to build up speed and to survey the ground below. A high altitude drop will do two things for you: First, it will allow you to build up speed—this should make you a pretty tough target to hit with spells or missile weapons, and second it will give you time to survey the situation below and use your hand signals to coordinate your platoon's strategy so you can act the moment your feet touch the ground. "*

*"Now, let's talk about how we survive a drop hurtling toward the ground at speed that's likely to turn even the stoutest recruit's liver to paste. The first, and perhaps most crucial skill you'll need to master is conquering your fear. We've had 27 casualties during drops—three, and **only** three, of those were not related to taking hostile fire—none of them were students of mine. You can bet that those three who didn't make it couldn't summon the calm and force of will necessary to act with a clear head. You can make this drop. Work as a team, and take confidence from each other. You'll need every ounce of willpower and concentration to do it, but I assure you, you already possess all the tools you need... the rest is just a matter of application."*

*"First rule of MAAD training: When you hear the jump command, **jump!** Don't hesitate; don't think. The timing of your drop and landing is calculated precisely. Don't force yourself to overcorrect in the air because you hesitated on the deck. We've never had a feather fall talisman fail, never. And allow me to assure you that you're far safer in the sky than you will be on this ship with me if you don't jump when I give you your mark."*

*"When you begin your drop, leap out and away from the ship, lead with your head. Do not jump feet first, I don't give a dolgaunt's tentacle how much armor you're wearing. At the exact moment of your jump, the captain will be pulling the ship into a steep climb to get you and your team clear of the hull and the elemental. Your head better not be the closest thing to it."*

*"As you leap away from the ship, your fear-bloated bellies should be parallel with the ground. Now you [--feel free to select a PC to participate—and you can demonstrate along with them], get down here and demonstrate for the platoon. You need to arch your back up and away, like you're trying to land belly first. Let the force of the air send your arms and legs up over the center point of your body. You're going to spread your legs, and you'll want them a good hand's length or two outside of the width of your shoulders, nice and wide. Make sure you get a good bend in your knee as well, you want them slightly flatter, right about 45 degrees."*

*"Now, you're going to want your arms spread wide as well, but bend them about 90 degrees, but never closer than a 90 degree angle in your elbow. Your hands should end up out near your head, and slightly above it in height. Now keep that back arched and then get your chin up and pull your head back. If you need to look down, angle your body down, don't crane your neck down and look. Arms out, horns back!"*

*"This position is called the 'box' because your arms and legs are at perfect angles, arms 90 degrees, elbows a 90 degrees, legs spread 45 degrees apart and knees bent 45 degrees—one big box. This is your default drop position."*

*"Now if you start to come under enemy missile or magical attack, keep your eyes open, and pull your arms tight to your side. Angle your head downward and keep your legs spread a little. This allows you to pick up speed and make you a much more elusive target. You should return immediately to the box as soon as the danger has passed."*

*"In jumps where you're not involved in airborne combat, the preferred landing position is the 'gull.' Here you're going to get your feet beneath you by closing the gap in your legs, straightening your knees, and rotating your hips back a bit. Keep your arms up and arched and they'll catch the wind, forcing your feet beneath you."*

*"In hostile drops where you're actively taking fire, or where you suspect unfriendly contact, you're going to want to hold off on activating your talisman or 'sliding,' as we call it, until the last possible safe moment. That means being able to get into gull position and activating your talisman within three to four seconds."*

*"The Company Drop Manual indicates that a safe 'slide' altitude for most drops is between 15 and 30 seconds from impact. Talismans only have about 36 seconds of magic in them—activate them too soon and you will return to terminal velocity the moment that magic expires. Activate them too late... and well, we'll be getting the shovel battalion out to scrape up what's left of you. That or we'll leave you to join the fertilizer corps."*

*"Your talismans are specially crafted to activate in one of two ways. They will activate by thought so long as they are in skin contact with you. Most hires practice screaming the activation word 'Pok!' in their minds, but since you don't have that luxury you'd better remember it now. It's Draconic for the word 'stop,' and it will activate the first time you forcefully think it. The other activation method is to wrap the leather strap around your wrist and grasp the pressure switch on the side of the talisman. Once you relax your grip on the switch, the talisman will activate. This is a 'dead man's switch' and is there in case you are mortally wounded, are put to sleep, or fall unconscious by some means. It's up to you which you choose to use."*

*“Now, when you activate your talisman and begin your ‘slide,’ you’re going to feel a little queasy. It passes after a few drops. But, the talisman’s magic slows you from 180 feet per second down to a cushy 5 or 6 feet per second. Still, it takes time to slow you down, even with magic. Company Artificers have spec’ed out the minimum activation time of two seconds. That means you’re going from 180 to 5 feet per second in 2 seconds. If you activate that talisman with less than three seconds until impact, you’re going to be swimming in an ocean of pain... if you survive at all.”*

*“You’ve got some time to practice and rehearse before we hit the drop zone, I suggest you make use of it. I’ll be available for questions if you need anything. Right now I have a couple of details to attend to.”*

Once the PCs have had a chance to ask questions, Sgt. Crash departs for work above deck. Encourage the PCs to practice their technique. They have roughly 6 hours until they reach the drop zone. At this point they may converse, explore the ship, or do anything else they need to before they reach the drop zone.

## **Mission Briefing**

*Suddenly the booming yet melodious voice of your Drop Officer rings out again. You’re summoned back to the small cabin. “Now...” says the hulking minotaur, staring into space, “let us review a few details of your mission. You’re being sent to recover Platoon Corporal Velrith d’Tharashk and the psionic shard he was searching for. These goals are of equal importance: recover the platoon corporal or what’s left of him and the shard or what’s left of it.”*

*“Our last intelligence reports indicate that the drop zone was crawling with drow natives and mindless undead. We’re hoping that dropping in the full sun of midday will discourage any unwanted guests in the landing area. Dropping from this altitude should allow us to avoid attracting attention, and we’re going to make a very wide circle that could take us as far as 90 minutes away from the drop zone to keep suspicions down and prying eyes away from the target area.”*

*The minotaur then produces a small crystal shard, roughly the size of a human thumb. “This is a call shard. Activate it when you estimate you’re within 2 hours of needing retrieval. One drop of blood and three taps against any bit of metal will cause it to activate. Once we receive your signal, we’ll haul the Cloud Ray about on her keel and make for your signal as fast as possible. Keep your heads low when you surface. Our artillery officer will provide suppressive fire, but he can’t risk your lives in doing so. That means being ready to grab the ropes as soon as you see them. Secure yourself on a rope and we’ll haul you out of there in a matter of seconds. If we don’t see you, we’ll circle for 15 minutes, then we’ll return every hour. If we have no call shard signal from you within 72 hours of the drop, we will abort the rescue attempt and return to the Glory Road with news of your deaths.”*

*“Now, when you’re approaching the ground...” The well-spoken minotaur is suddenly interrupted as the cabin door opens behind you and one of the crew shouts, “Drop Zone, 15 minutes!”*

*“Well that’s all the time we have for teaching, it seems. Take the shard. Get your gear together. If you have a god, pray to him, her, or it. Then get yourself on deck with all the courage you can muster—the Company is depending on you.”*

With that, Sgt. Crash departs for above, claiming that he has to make the deck ready for the drop. He makes sure the PCs have *feather fall* talismans and the call shard. Hurry the PCs through any final preparations and get them up on deck as quickly as possible.

## **Magic-Assisted Airship Drop**

*From the rough vibration of the deck beneath your feet to the wind screaming by deafeningly, it’s obvious that the captain is giving the Cloud Ray all she can handle. Sgt. Crash is gesturing to you from the rear of the airship, where he stands next to a small platform, raised perhaps a foot off the deck. As you approach you note that the platform is roughly 12 feet wide and extends a foot or two past the rear deck of the ship.*

*“Step up, form a line along the edge, get a good foot or two between you.” The minotaur bellows into the howling wind. The Company brought you in because they thought you were the best. Here’s your chance to prove it to them and to yourselves. You’ve all the training needed to stay the Traveler’s hand for the next 80 seconds. Good luck!”*

*The next few minutes seem to crawl by as the ship slashes through the sky. The air has grown bitter cold and drier than before. You stand perhaps 3 feet from the area where ship meets sky. You can see far, far below a blur of shapeless green passing by: the jungle. Sgt. Crash seems to be counting silently to himself, his hoof tapping in rhythm to some unknown cadence. Suddenly his hoof stops tapping.*

*“It’s time! When you get your mark, jump as one. Get into your box position and keep those eyes open. Go on my call, not a second before or a second after. Get ready hires, here it comes. One aim—United! On my mark!”*

*“3”*

*“2”*

“1”  
“Jump!”

Assuming the PCs jump, continue:

*And suddenly you find the world rushing up to meet you. The ground below is no longer a blur, but a beautiful panorama that is rapidly growing larger with each passing second. After approximately 30 seconds of freefall, the pile of rubble that breaks up the monotonous green of the thick jungle canopy comes into focus. As you continue to count down in your mind, you're not approaching the time to activate your talisman.*

A DC 20 Spot check reveals a clear landing zone below. PCs failing this spot check are unable to determine if enemies lurk in the landing zone below. If the PCs succeed at the Spot check they find that there's no sign, yet, of either undead or the native drow tribes. Use the following information to determine how the PCs land.

### Magic-Assisted Airship Drops

Successfully activating a *feather fall talisman* at the appropriate time during a MAAD means succeeding at a DC 10 Will save. On this jump, Sgt. Crash's careful teaching grants the PCs a +2 circumstance bonus on this save. Use the chart below to determine the result of the Will save.

Final Will Save Total	Result
1 or less	Death—Talisman not activated before impact, or talisman activated too soon ( <i>feather fall</i> spell expires before impact)
2-3	3d6 falling damage, land prone—Talisman activated late
4-5	2d6 falling damage, land prone—Talisman activated late
6-7	1d6 falling damage, land prone—Talisman activated late
8-9	Land prone—Hard landing
10-19	Acceptable landing
20 or more	Flawless landing—PC lands with a flourish, +2 bonus on Spot, Move Silent, Hide, and Listen checks as well as Initiative and attack rolls within 20 seconds of landing.

Few situations are as difficult as a Magic-Assisted Airship Drop. While risk must exist, it's unrealistic to penalize 5% of players for rolling natural 1's on the Will save. Natural 1 rolls are not instantly fatal. Treat them as you would any other roll of the d20 in this unique situation. Players may always add an action point roll to this save. NPCs may (and perhaps should) encourage PCs with negative Will save modifiers to use magic or other means to help augment or offset that weakness during the drop.

A DC 15 Tumble check successfully reduces any damage taken by 1d6 points. Casting a spell during freefall requires a Concentration check (DC 20 + spell level) due to the extreme conditions.

### Landing

*The field of rubble around you extends for perhaps 100 feet in every direction. The chunks of light gray rock are quite large but weathered with age. Some of the largest chunks are overgrown with vegetation. In the center of the rubble field stands the closest thing to an intact building. Sgt. Crash instructed you to make for cover as soon as possible, and the single remaining structure resembles his description of the entrance to the catacombs below.*

The rubble field is largely unremarkable. A recent battle between drow skirmishers and a massive group of undead just a day ago has quieted things down. In a few more days, the area around the rubble field is likely to be crawling again with some combination of hostile drow, undead, and/or aberrations. A DC 20 Survival or Search check (DC 15 with Investigate feat) reveals the signs of a recent battle around the western perimeter of the field. A DC 25 Survival or Search (DC 20 with Investigate feat) reveals the telltale signs of continual combat waged in this field for hundreds of years.

### Catacomb Entrance

*The ruins are a hollow collection of columns connected by a crumbling ring of walls. What remains of a two-foot-thick solid stone slab forms a room giving shade to a small alcove. The vegetation forming a thick carpet around much of the ruin field has been completely obliterated here. Whether by foot traffic or some other force, the firmament is covered by crushed vegetation. Barely visible in the deep shade of the alcove is the rough outline of a staircase that leads downward.*

The alcove is no more than a 15' x 15' room with a staircase at its center. The staircase winds down into a thick mist. The crushed rubble and vegetation underfoot is in such a state of disarray that tracking or identifying specific clues proves impossible. The dense mist allows no more than 15-foot visibility down into the staircase.

## Part Three: The Catacombs

### Into the Catacombs

#### 1. Entrance

*The trek down the staircase is long, but otherwise unremarkable. The nearly 200-foot descent on the well-worn stairwell ends at a large stone double door that is slightly ajar. The stone of the door appears to be worked marble. Carved into the door is the time-scarred scene of humanoid figures engaging in various rituals of burial. Beyond the door a hallway stretches off to the left and to the right. A badly scorched stone door sits directly across the hallway from the entrance.*

There is no light in the catacombs so the PCs must provide their own. The double doors mark the formal entrance to the catacombs. A Search check (DC 22) by a character with trapfinding reveals that there was previously some sort of magical trap on this door. The trap has either been triggered or disarmed permanently.

#### 2. Burial Niche

*Funerary biers are carved into the recessed walls of this small alcove. Each wall contains three niches, one above the next. The skeletal remains of ancient humanoids are crammed into each niche. The bones are packed so tightly that little space remains between them. You estimate that anywhere between 5 and 10 different bodies may fill each niche.*

A Heal check (DC 20) or Knowledge Religion check (DC 22) indicates that these humanoids resemble elves. There is nothing of value within the niches. Disturbing the niches results in the tightly packed bones falling and scattering all over the floor in a cloud of debris and bone dust.

#### 3. A Murder's Path

*The door is made of a thick white stone, now covered in black scorch marks. The door itself is nearly six-inches thick, and the handle on the left side is badly damaged. .*

This door leads down the path toward the current lair of Syreck. A Search check (DC 21) uncovers the remains of a now-disabled Whirling Poison Blades trap (DMG 73). As the PCs proceed in the catacombs, they may notice that the disabled and tripped traps lead on one path, while the active traps show areas that were not explored by the previous Blackwheel Company party. Of course, some of the disabled traps may have reset themselves. If the PCs open the door, read the following:

*As the door opens inward, bits of the scorched organic material on the surface flake off, fluttering down onto the floor. Beyond lays a hallway that snakes off to the right.*

At this point, read the text from **Area 14: The Corridor of Judgment**.

#### 4. Storage

*This room is covered in a thick, musty dust. Various masonry tools hang from the walls. The decayed remains of several wooden tools—shovels and picks perhaps—lie in piles upon the floor. Sealed jars and several barrels and crates line the edges of the room. A pile of intact stone blocks is stacked neatly in the far corner.*

This room was a storage space for the masons and priests working in the catacombs. The tools are in horrible shape, and there is little of value in the room. Most of the jars contained water or other fluids, and all have long since evaporated save one small jar (enough for 5 flasks) of lamp oil. A careful Search check (DC 22) reveals treasure for the PCs.

**Treasure:** Some *unguent of timelessness* (DMG 268) and *dust of tracelessness* (DMG 255) is lying hidden amongst the empty jar and barrels.

## 5. Font of Eternal Rest

*Welling up from ground, a natural spring feeds a 10-foot-square fountain in this room. Small patches of greenish-brown algae have formed around the lip of the fountain where the water meets the stone. The water is slightly gray in color.*

The water, while dirty, is perfectly drinkable. Save for the fountain, the room is otherwise unremarkable.

## 6. The Dead Greet the Living (EL 1)

*Four solemn burial niches line the wall of this long hallway. Upon the floor, scrawled in an erratic script, words of a dark purple substance spell out the phrase "The dead greet the living."*

A Heal check (DC 20) reveals that the substance is blood. A Search (DC 18) check (DC 12 with Investigate feat) uncovers a half-dozen small, extremely thick and sharp yellow fingernails. The nails appear to have been ripped out at the roots.

**Foes:** A quartet of skeletons rises and greets the PCs as soon as one of them passes the center point of the burial niches.

**Human Warrior Skeletons (4):** hp 9, 7, 7, 5 (*Monster Manual* 226)

**Tactics:** The skeletons are mindless undead that attack until destroyed. Split the skeletons up among the burial niches and have them attack the nearest PCs.

### Scaling the Encounter:

2<sup>nd</sup>-level: Subtract one skeleton.

4<sup>th</sup>-level: Add two skeletons.

5<sup>th</sup>-level: Add five skeletons.

## 7. Mausoleum (EL 4)

*The ceiling in this room is particularly low, perhaps only 10 feet from the floor. The walled-up faces of 4 distinct crypts line the right and left walls of this room. Various crests and heraldic symbols are carved into the face of each crypt.*

**Trap:** The door contains a delay trigger for a Stone Blocks from Ceiling trap. If the PCs fail to disable or bypass the trap, it activates a second mechanism. When any PC enters the chamber further than 15 feet, the mechanism activates and the crypt walls collapse (as trap). Each square adjacent to a crypt takes damage accordingly. After the shower of bone and wall cascade down upon the room, the hallway of the room is then treated as difficult terrain.

**Stone Blocks from Ceiling:** CR 3; mechanical; location trigger; repair reset; Atk +10 melee (4d6, stone blocks); Search DC 25, Disable Device DC 20.

**Foes:** Four zombies surge out from behind the fallen crypt walls and attack if the trap is triggered.

**Human Commoner Zombie (4):** hp 20, 17, 16, 12 (*Monster Manual* 266)

**Tactics:** The zombies are mindless undead that attack until destroyed. Split the zombies up among the crypts and have them attack the nearest PCs.

### Scaling the Encounter:

2<sup>nd</sup>-level: Subtract two zombies.

4<sup>th</sup>-level: Add one zombie.

5<sup>th</sup>-level: Add two zombies.

## 8. Statuary

*The remains of long-decayed tapestries cling to the walls. Pieces of rotted fabric, ripped where the tapestry could no longer support its own weight, line the walls along the gray stone floor. A large chamber bisects the hallways. Within the chamber, images of the ancestors and idols of the tomb builders are carved from onyx and stone.*

The statues depict elves of various stations in life. All look to be noble or heroic in some ways. A Search (DC 16) or Investigate (DC 12) check reveals sloughed off bits of human flesh on the floor. A Heal check (DC 20)

can confirm that they are, indeed, human and that they appear to be no older than a few days. More interestingly, the flesh appears to have fallen off naturally, rather than having been torn or ripped off.

## 9. Unfinished Tomb

*A small colony of rats screeches in protest at your approach. The walls of this room are considerably rougher than the walls in the rest of the catacombs. Masonry tools, in various stages of decay, lie scattered about the floor. In the center of the room, a partially finished outline of a tomb, only a few bricks high, juts up from the floor. The partial, scattered remains of a skeleton lie near the unfinished tomb.*

This room was unfinished at the time the Umbragen unleashed their horrible curse. The skeleton is all that remains of a worker caught in the horrible curse. The rats have gnawed the bones and scattered them throughout the room.

## 10. Cenotaph of Remembrance (EL 4)

*This large chamber has walls covered entirely in a thin plating of tarnished bronze. In the center is some sort of memorial. A scene of combat, with elven figures battling horrible tentacles monsters, is cast entirely in bronze. The life-sized sculptures are locked in various stages of mortal combat. Stone benches line the walls surrounding the memorial, perhaps providing a place to contemplate the event that this scene represents. As the door opens, the decaying corpse of a gnoll, clad in black, standing as a silent sentry—as if guarding the door behind him—turns its head in your direction. An equally dead and decaying wolf at its side turns and charges forward in your direction.*

The cenotaph at the center of the room depicts the Umbragen in fierce combat against the swarm of aberrations welling up from below. A Knowledge (dungeoneering) (DC 15) check identifies the strange creatures as aberrations, and a DC 20 check correctly identifies the creatures as some advanced form of dolgaunt. A Search (DC 16) check reveals a large swath of dried blood leading into the Burial Preparation Chamber.

**Foes:** The zombie pair guards the door to the Burial Preparation Chamber along the eastern wall. Behind this door lies Velrith d'Tharashk. A DC 10 Wisdom check reveals that the uniform worn by the gnoll zombie matches that of the Blackwheel Company. The zombies, still carrying some impossible sense of duty, stand in guard of their fallen commander. They attack as soon as they are aware of the PCs.

**Unkillable Wolf Zombie:** hp 48; Combat Statistic

**Fast, Diseased Gnoll Zombie:** hp 33; Combat Statistic

**Tactics:** The zombies are mindless undead that attack until destroyed. The zombies charge in an attempt to inflict as much damage as possible.

### Scaling the Encounter:

2<sup>nd</sup>-level: Grant the party a surprise round.

4<sup>th</sup>-level: Add a pair of human commoner zombies (*Monster Manual* 266)

5<sup>th</sup>-level: Add a bugbear zombie (*Monster Manual* 267)

FAST, DISEASED GNOLL ZOMBIE

CR 2

*Black, pustulent sores erupt from beneath the matted, rotting black fur of this zombie. The zombie wields a massive greatsword and seems to move with preternatural speed.*

NE Medium undead

Init +1; Senses Listen +0, Spot +0

---

AC 16, touch 13, flat-footed 12

hp 33 (4 HD); DR 5/slashing

Fort +1, Ref +1, Will +4

---

Speed 60 ft. (12 squares)

Melee masterwork greatsword +8 (2d6+7) or slam (1d6+5)

Base Atk +2; Grp +7

Atk Options disease

---

Abilities Str 20, Dex 12, Con -, Int -, Wis 10, Cha 1

SQ Darkvision 60 ft., undead traits

Feats Toughness

Skills -

Possessions: masterwork greatsword

---

Disease (Ex): Any successful melee attack by a diseased zombie exposes the target to Filth Fever. Any creature making a successful unarmed or natural attack against the zombie is similarly exposed (a PC that grapples with a diseased zombie gets a -4 penalty on the save to resist the infection).

Fast Zombie: The fast zombie (in addition to gaining additional base speed and a dodge bonus to AC) is not restricted to taking single actions only. However, it still cannot attack more than once per round.

UNKILLABLE WOLF ZOMBIE

CR 2

*Thick knots of muscle ripple beneath the rotting skin as this wolf zombie levels the gaze from its cold, lifeless eyes upon you.*

NE Medium undead

Init +1; Senses Listen +0, Spot +0

---

AC 16, touch 12, flat-footed 14

hp 48 (4 HD); DR 5/slashing

Fort +1, Ref +3, Will +4

---

Speed 50 ft. (10 squares)

Melee bite +4 (1d6+2) or slam +4 (1d6+2)

Base Atk +2; Grp +4

Atk Options disease

---

Abilities Str 15, Dex 14, Con -, Int -, Wis 10, Cha 1

SQ Darkvision 60 ft., fast healing 5, undead traits

Feats Toughness, Improved Toughness

Skills -

---

Fast Healing 5 (Ex): An unkillable wolf zombie regains 5 HP each round.

## 11. Burial Preparation Chamber (EL 5)

*This room is in absolute disarray, and the smell of death hangs heavy in the air. The shattered remains of coffins lie strewn about the chamber. Jagged script covers the gray stone walls of this room. The script looks as if someone has taken a sharp object and scraped it into the stone itself. The script is in Common, and the thousands and thousands of lines of it that cover every inch of the walls vary in their meaning. Many state something like: "My pain is my sin, my redemption is my pain. My duty is my pain, my life is my duty. My sin is death, my duty is life. My sin is duty, my death is life."*

*A creature covered in mottled, decaying flesh drawn tightly against its gaunt frame sits in the corner. It has a fragment of bone in its hand, which it is using to etch writing onto the wall. It wears tattered black garments and has an exquisite-looking shortsword buckled to its side. Although an undead creature of this nature typically has wickedly sharp claws, this creature has only stubby fingers tipped in dried blood. A large piercing hole is plainly evident in the back of his black garments.*

A Search (DC 16) or Investigate (DC 12) check reveals dozens of sharp thick, bloody fingernails scattered about the floor of the room—they appear to have been ripped out from the root. The ghoul is Velrith d'Tharashk. At this moment he teeters precariously on the razor-thin edge of insanity. The temptation for him to give in to the powerful pull of death and the seductive call of the horrid curse that haunts the catacombs is significant. Yet, the draconic Prophecy is mysterious, and it has some role for him still to play. He has not fully transformed into an undead creature, and therefore he retains his memory as well as the use of his Dragonmark, though he does not yet know this. Each moment that passes draws him nearer to giving in to the horror within. Velrith's sense of duty, and his loyalty and dedication, are the only thin chords still connecting him to the mortal world—they are sufficiently strong that he has been able to resist succumbing to undeath. The chords are growing thinner.

**Creature:** Velrith d'Tharashk has been transformed into some terrible hybrid creature. He retains his training as a rogue, but is for all intents and purposes a ghoul (because of the low level nature of this adventure, Velrith has not been converted into a ghastr as level conversion stipulates). In this encounter, the PCs may assist Velrith in understanding his duality, and draw on his history, duty, and loyalty to help bolster

his ties to the material world. The PCs may encourage Velrith to embrace the savage curse of undeath and become a powerfully deadly creature. The PCs may attempt also to destroy Velrith either because they do not recognize him for who he is or because they feel that he is too evil or too dangerous to be allowed to exist. A DC 19 Knowledge (religion) check reveals the creature is partially undead but still retains a semblance of its humanity.

**Velrith d'Tharashk, Ghoul Rogue:** male undead rogue 4; hp 32; Combat Statistic

**Tactics:** Velrith ignores nearly all attempts at verbal communication from the PCs. Instead, he remains in the corner, rocking and scratching his strange missives into the wall. If the PCs attack, he finally gives in to his horrible nature and attacks in return. If the PCs are extremely verbally persistent, making frequent mention of the Blackwheel Company, his name, or his mission, he may eventually engage them in conversation. If the PCs poke, prod, nudge, or otherwise make harmless physical contact with him, he snaps out of his daze and scuttles backward, placing his back to the corner. He then engages the PCs in conversation.

Velrith's voice is a harsh, grating whisper. He is still quite capable of rational, moral reasoning; however, he does strongly feel the pull of both the horrible curse of the catacombs and his own undead lust for flesh. He has had almost a week to be introspective and reflect on the nature of his being. He makes very insightful, but somewhat negative, comments about his own situation. Velrith is currently in a protracted state of existential despair and is searching for some meaning. He feels trapped between life and death and can only see the black and white of it. He has been searching for some sign from the gods or the universe as to his fate. The party can be that sign.

If the PCs push him to attend to the fact that he retains all of the qualities of humanity and focus on his duty, mission, and loyalty, he embraces that identity. Velrith wants to believe he can be saved, and he wants to believe that his loyalty to the Company and the mission can save him. Still, he hates what he has become and is both afraid and disgusted with himself. He has refused to feast to this point, ripped out his ghoulish nails, and filed his teeth flat.

Velrith is also very much aware of how he was slain and—with strong emotion—relates the tale of how Syreck, one of his Blackwheel brothers, stabbed him in the back with a poisoned blade. They had lost most of their platoon (all but he and Syreck) and things were desperate. Just when he needed his old friend the most, Syreck—out of nowhere—stabbed him. As Velrith lay dying, Syreck sneered and claimed that something named the “Cabal of Shadows” sends their regard. Syreck took the *psionic shard* that their platoon had given their lives for and left him in a pool of his own blood. A day later, Velrith rose as this horrible creature.

Velrith's motive for revenge can also be played upon. If the PCs encourage this too heavily or focus on betrayal and revenge, Velrith gives in to the temptation to become a monster. He embraces the nature of his undeath and slowly becomes little more than a true ghoul. His lust for revenge quickly slides into a lust for flesh.

Velrith, at the start of the conversation, has no desire to kill or harm anything at all. In fact, he fears greatly that it might push him over the edge. Therefore, unless attacked directly, he is unlikely to be provoked into attacking the PCs. If the PCs are verbally hostile or antagonistic, he instead returns to his writing, rocking like a child in the corner.

**Development:** If the PCs convince Velrith to embrace his humanity and his duty to the mission, he accompanies them in the hopes of saving himself or returning with the PCs to be restored. More importantly, he accompanies them to complete the mission. He remains out of combat, but can be convinced to use his dragonmark to locate the *psionic shard*. He also steps out in front and detects and disarms traps for the party—something he happily volunteers to do—if the party has befriended him and does not have a rogue or other trapfinder. If the PCs encourage him to embrace his undead nature, he accompanies them but cannot use his dragonmark, calling it “a trapping of his past life.” He does not detect or disarm traps either; he simply fights savagely alongside them, attacking things violently with little concern for himself until he is destroyed. Again, if Velrith fights alongside the PCs for whatever reason, his role should be minimal—there is no reason to upstage PCs in combat with his presence.

If the PCs encourage Velrith to use his dragonmark, he locates the *psionic shard* to the east, in the general direction of Areas 17 and 18 on the map.

VELRITH D'THARASHK, GHOUL ROGUE

CR 6

*This creature is covered in mottled, decaying flesh that is drawn tightly against its gaunt frame. It wears tattered black garments and has an exquisite looking shortsword buckled to its side.*

Male ghoul (human) rogue 4

CE Medium undead

Init +4; Senses Listen +1, Spot +5

---

AC 18(+4 Dex, +2 armor, +2 natural), touch 14, flat-footed 18

hp 32 (6 HD)

Fort +1, Ref +8, Will +4

---

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares)

Melee bite +7 (1d6+3 + paralysis), and 2 claws +5 (1d4+2 + paralysis),  
or shortsword +8(1d6+3)

Base Atk +4; Grp +7

Atk Options sneak attack (+2d6), ghoul fever, paralysis

---

Abilities Str 16, Dex 18, Con 0, Int 14, Wis 10, Cha 6

SQ Darkvision 60 ft., undead traits, +2 turn resistance, evasion, trap  
sense, trap finding, uncanny dodge

Feats Multiattack, Least Dragonmark (Finding), Improved Paralysis,  
Dodge

Skills Balance +10, Climb +7, Decipher Script +3, Disable Device +13,  
Escape Artist +8, Hide +8, Jump +11, Listen +1, Move Silently +9,  
Open Lock +15, Search +10, Spot +5, Tumble +12, Use Magic Device -1

Possessions: bracers of armor +2, shortsword +1, potion of cure moderate  
wounds, masterwork thieves tools

---

Ghoul Fever (Su): Disease—bite, Fortitude DC 12, incubation period 1  
day, damage 1d3 Con and 1d3 Dex. An afflicted humanoid who dies of  
ghoul fever rises as a ghoul at the next midnight.

Paralysis (Ex): Those hit by a ghouls bite or claw attack must succeed  
on a DC 16 Fortitude save of be paralyzed for 1d4+1 rounds.

Mark of Finding (Sp): Least Dragonmark—as spell *locate object*, once per  
day, CL 1.

## 10. A Winding Hallway (EL 5)

*This long hallway winds around a corner in the distance. A burial niche can be seen on the far side, crammed with skeletal remains. Suddenly an ear-piercing wail shatters the silence. The wail is shrill yet short lived, but it is followed by the sound of thousands of tiny feet scabbling across stone.*

This hallway connects the Cenotaph of Remembrance to the central hallway of the catacombs. The doorway leading from the Cenotaph of Remembrance to the Winding Hallway is trapped.

**Wall Blade Trap:** CR 1; mechanical; touch trigger; automatic reset; hidden switch bypass (Search DC 25); Atk +10 melee(2d4/x4, scythe); Search DC 22, Disable Device DC 22.

**Foes:** The wail of the cursed spirit in this hallway has alerted the bone rat swarm to the presence of a possible meal. The cursed spirit is a victim of the horrific tragedy that occurred here and seeks only to inflict pain and suffering.

**Cursed Spirit:** hp 24; Combat Statistics

**Bone Rat Swarm:** hp 27; Combat Statistics

**Tactics:** Bone rat swarm quickly moves from the burial niche toward the party. The cursed spirit does not manifest until the bone rat swarm is already adjacent to a PC. They fight close together, unknowingly maximizing the impact of the cursed spirit's curse aura.

### Scaling the Encounter:

2<sup>nd</sup>-level: Remove the cursed spirit and substitute a ghoul (*Monster Manual* 119)

4<sup>th</sup>-level: No change

5<sup>th</sup>-level: Add an additional 3 human warrior skeletons (*Monster Manual* 226)

CURSED SPIRIT

CR 3

*This creature's tormented, immaterial form hints at the horrific tragedy that must have befallen it. It's upper body is distinct with*

*a manic humanoid form, but its lower body blurs into a ghostly cloud. Its hollow eyes convey a malevolent intelligence.*

CE Medium undead (incorporeal)

Init +2; Senses Listen +5, Spot +5

---

AC 14, touch 13, flat-footed 11

hp 24 (3 HD)

Fort +1, Ref +3, Will +2

---

Speed Fly 30 ft. (6 squares) (perfect)

Melee Incorporeal touch +4 (1d8+2)

Base Atk +1; Grp -

Atk Options accursed touch

---

Abilities Str -, Dex 14, Con -, Int 9, Wis 8, Cha 14

SQ Darkvision 60 ft., incorporeal traits, undead traits, curse aura

Feats Toughness, Weapon Finesse

Skills Intimidate +8, Listen +5, Spot +5

---

Accursed Touch (Su): A cursed spirit adds its Charisma modifier to damage dealt by its incorporeal touch attack

Curse Aura (Su): The taint of loss surrounds a cursed spirit. Adjacent enemy creatures take a -2 penalty on all saving throws.

BONE RAT SWARM

CR 3

*With the scrabble of hundreds of bony claws, a mass of tiny skeletal creatures surges across the floor. Hundreds of tiny pinpoints of red light gleam from their empty eye sockets.*

NE Tiny undead (Swarm)

Init +3; Senses Listen +0, Spot +0

---

AC 15, touch 15, flat-footed 12

hp 27 (4 HD)

Immune cold

Resist DR 5/bludgeoning, half damage from slashing and piercing

Fort +1, Ref +4, Will +4

---

Speed 15 ft. (3 squares)

Melee Swarm (1d6)

Base Atk +2; Grp -

Space/Reach: 10 ft./0 ft.

Atk Options distraction

---

Abilities Str 2, Dex 17, Con -, Int -, Wis 10, Cha 1

SQ Darkvision 60 ft., swarm traits, undead traits

Feats -

Skills -

---

Distraction (Ex): Any living creature that begins its turn with a bone rat swarm in its space must succeed on a DC 15 Fortitude save or be nauseated for 1 round. The save DC is Constitution based.

### 13. Hall of Cairns (EL 5)

*This long hallway spans a distance of some 70 feet. Two larger openings, perhaps 20 feet across, punctuate the center of the hall. Within each of the larger sections, stone cairns have been painstakingly crafted into the sides of the walls. Eight of the piecework stone tombs bulge out from each of the far walls. In the distance, something shimmers momentarily.*

**Trap:** The door to the Hall of Cairns is rigged with a javelin trap. As soon as the PCs open the door, the trap triggers from a hole in the floor some 20 feet in the distance. The shimmering comes from an umbral displacer serpent that has been trapped within the room.

**Javelin Trap:** CR 2; mechanical; location trigger; manual reset; Atk +16 melee(1d6+4, javelin); Search DC 20, Disable Device DC 18.

**Foes:** The umbral displacer serpent has an inescapable craving for Strength and quickly moves to attack the PCs.

**Umbral Displacer Serpent:** hp 32; Combat Statistics

**Tactics:** The displacer serpent attempts to use the darkness and its displacement ability to surprise the PCs. It attacks the strongest-looking PC first, hoping to slake its hunger. Note the umbral displacer serpent is both incorporeal and displaced, and PCs must roll against both to score a successful hit.

**Scaling the Encounter:**

2<sup>nd</sup>-level: The umbral displacer serpent cannot surprise the party.

4<sup>th</sup>-level: No change.

5<sup>th</sup>-level: A trio of human warrior skeletons (MM 226) bursts forth from the Cairns to join the attack.

UMBRAL DISPLACER SERPENT

CR 4

*The shadowy outline of a serpent looms before you. As its purple-hued scales shimmer in and out of reality it slowly begins to float forward.*

CE Medium undead (Incorporeal, Augmented Magical Beast)

Init +3; Senses Listen +7, Spot +2

---

AC 14, touch 14, flat-footed 11

hp 32 (3 HD)

Fort +1, Ref +4, Will +8

---

Speed Fly 40 ft. (8 squares) (perfect)

Melee Incorporeal Touch +5 (1d6 Strength)

Base Atk +2; Grp -

Atk Options Strength damage

---

Abilities Str -, Dex 16, Con -, Int 1, Wis 14, Cha 4

SQ Create spawn, darkvision 60 ft., displacement, incorporeal traits, low-light vision, +2 turn resistance, undead traits

Feats Iron Will

Skills Listen +7, Spot +2, Hide +11

---

Create Spawn (Su): Any humanoid reduced to Strength 0 by an umbral displacer serpent rises as a shadow under the control of its killer in 1d4 rounds.

Displacement (Su): A light-bending glamer continually surrounds a displacer serpent, making it difficult to surmise the creature's true location. Any melee or ranged attack directed at it has a 50% miss chance unless the attacker can locate the serpent by some means other than sight. A *true seeing* allows the user to see the serpent's position, but *see invisibility* has no effect.

Inescapable Craving (Su): An umbral displacer serpent has an inescapable craving for Strength, which is satisfied by using its Strength damage ability.

Strength Damage (Su): The touch of an umbral displacer serpent deals 1d6 points of Strength damage to a living foe. A creature reduced to Strength 0 by an umbral displacer serpent dies.

## 14. Corridor of Judgment

*The solid black granite walls stand in stark contrast to the light-colored dust on the floor as this hallway extends 30 feet before bending off to the right. A massive slab of rock attached to a chain runs up into a recessed hole in the ceiling, occupying the floor 10 feet into the corridor. The remains of a small, skeletal hand jut out from beneath the rock. The floor around it is stained with old blood and the sticky dust has piled up around the edges.*

It doesn't take a rogue to figure out that a trap was triggered a short distance into the hallway. The trap appears to have no reset. The slab weighs approximately 500 pounds. If the PCs lift it, they find the remains of a small creature, perhaps a halfling, clad in what remains of black garments. Any possessions have been completely shattered or badly damaged by the force of the impact.

*As the hallway bends off to the right, a pair of doorways can be seen along the right-hand wall before the hallway once more winds its way off to the left.*

## 15. Sepulcher (EL 2)

*The door to the small chamber beyond is marked in script that has been worn down by time. Scratch marks cover the outside of the door as if something was trying to claw its way inside.*

*The sepulcher beyond contains six upright stone sarcophagi, all carved in the likeness of the former inhabitants of the catacombs. Several flat slabs lie on the floor and as you enter, the dead rise to greet you.*

Except for the disturbed dead, this room is otherwise unremarkable.

**Foes:** A pair of human commoner zombies is joined by a trio of human warrior skeletons as the primary occupants of this tomb.

**Human Commoner Zombie (2):** hp 18, 15; *Monster Manual* 266.

**Human Warrior Skeleton (3):** hp 10, 7, 6; *Monster Manual* 226.

**Tactics:** The mindless undead rush forward and attack until destroyed.

### Scaling the Encounter:

2<sup>nd</sup>-level: No change.

4<sup>th</sup>-level: Add 2 human commoner zombies.

5<sup>th</sup>-level: Add a ghoul (*Monster Manual* 119) and two human commoner zombies.

## 16. Vault of Repose

*The door in front of you is a massively thick concave dome of a dark metal streaked with purple. On the outer surface of the door, defiant of gravity, sits an inch-thick layer of whitish-blue liquid. The liquid has the thickness of oil and runs down from the top of the door, but seems to disappear when it reaches the bottom. There is no handle to the door, only the imprint of a hand, which can barely be seen beneath the thick layer of oil.*

A Craft (alchemy) (DC 15) or Knowledge (geography) (DC 15) check reveals the metal is *byshek* (*Eberron Campaign Sourcebook* 126), a powerful metal known to repel and harm aberrations. A Craft (alchemy) (DC 30) or Knowledge (religion) (DC 30) check reveals the substance on the door is Liquid Mortality, a potent positoxin lethal to only undead (Poison, injury DC 20, 1d4 Str initial; 2d4 Str secondary). It can reduce an undead to 0 Str, at which time that creature is utterly destroyed). The liquid defies any attempt to be bottled or removed from the door. It leaves the hand slightly wet to the touch but quickly evaporates from clothing, skin, and any other surface, even sealed ones.

If Velrith is adventuring with the party, he indicates that this room is called the Vault of Repose and was on their original map before Syreck stole it. He states his men were able to access the vault by placing a hand within the impression. If Velrith places his hand in the impression, he is immediately subject to the effects of the Liquid Mortality. Velrith states that he does not recall much about the room other than the fact that it didn't contain any hostile creatures.

*The room is roughly 20 feet square and is crafted entirely of the strange purple metal. A single catafalque lies at the center of the room empty, a thick, perfectly preserved soft linen cushion atop it. A comfortable-looking chair is also present in the room and is perfectly preserved. The room itself radiates peace and tranquility, and no noise from the outside can be heard from within.*

The Vault of Repose is a place of quiet contemplation where the Umbragen brought their slain heroes to reflect on their lives before being interred. The quiet and comfort is a sign of respect for the dead. A Search check (DC 18) reveals treasure beneath the catafalque.

**Treasure:** Two doses of the positoxin known as *gravedust* (*Libris Mortis* 74) can be found here. It affects only undead as a poison. Contact DC 10, initial damage 1 Dex; Secondary damage 1d4 Dex. Price 100gp (per dose); Craft DC 20.

**Adventure Secret:** If the party has a means of unlocking an adventure secret, such as the Favored in House feat or an appropriate Campaign Card, they may learn the true purpose of this room. The Vault of Repose is warded from both undead and aberrations. The door may be closed from the inside and the party may safely rest the night without fear from random encounters or interruption of any kind.

## 16. Ossuary (EL 4)

*The remnants of a shattered stone door lies smashed at your feet. The chamber beyond is musty, and the smell of damp wood and rust hangs heavy in the air. The remains of several coffins that have obviously been smashed and looted lie scattered about. The most notable feature of this room is that the entire chamber is lined in bone. The ceiling, floor, walls, and even the columns are covered in a layer of bone. A handful of bone catafalques dot the chamber, and the rear of the room is barely visible beyond the columns that support the high ceiling. It would appear, however, that some part of the bone structure of the room is moving toward you.*

A Search check (DC 20) reveals that the door was likely blown apart by whatever trap was on it. Velrith has no memory of setting off this trap. The room itself is an ossuary where the bones of the many average members of a civilization are stored. The honor of lending their bodies to the support of the catacombs as they once supported their tribe in life is significant.

**Foes:** A vicious ogre skeleton, along with a trio of human warrior skeletons attacks the PCs if they enter the room.

**Vicious Ogre Skeleton:** hp 36; Combat Statistics.

**Human Warrior Skeleton (3):** hp 11, 8, 5; *Monster Manual* 226.

**Tactics:** The mindless undead rush forward and attack until destroyed.

### Scaling the Encounter:

2<sup>nd</sup>-level: Remove the three human warrior skeletons.

4<sup>th</sup>-level: Add a wolf skeleton (*Monster Manual* 226)

5<sup>th</sup>-level: Add a ghoul (*Monster Manual* 119) and a wolf skeleton.

VICIOUS OGRE SKELETON

CR 3

*A pair of unusually large, wicked-looking claws ending in steel-hard nails prove to be the main attraction on this skeletal ogre.*

NE Large undead

Init +5; Senses Listen +0, Spot +0

---

AC 12, touch 10, flat-footed 11

hp 36 (4 HD); DR 5/bludgeoning

Immune cold

Fort +1, Ref +1, Will +4

---

Speed 40 ft. (8 squares)

Melee 2 claws +6 (1d8+5/19-20x2)

Base Atk +2; Grp +11

Space/Reach: 10/10

Atk Options rend

---

Abilities Str 21, Dex 12, Con -, Int -, Wis 10, Cha 1

SQ Darkvision 60 ft., undead traits

Feats Improved Initiative, Improved Critical (claw)

Skills -

---

**Rend (Ex):** If a vicious skeleton hits with at least 2 claw attacks it latches onto the opponent's body and tears the flesh apart. This attack automatically deals extra damage equal to twice the normal damage of a claw attack plus 1-1/2 times the vicious skeleton's strength damage.

## 18. Cavern of Corruption (EL 8)

*The massive set of solid stone double doors is covered in the cheerful relief of drow in a celebration of their ancestors. The doors have a pair of handles upon the front.*

A Listen (DC 14) check reveals the sound of the rushing wind beyond.

*As you push open the massive stone doors, the wind assaults you, howling and whipping about the doorway. You stand at the entrance to an extremely large natural cavern. The area of the cavern you stand in has been worked by hand to resemble the catacombs, but the further the cavern stretches, the less worked it becomes. At the rearmost point it is nothing more than a natural cave with two large gaping chasms in the ground. These twin chasms appear to be the source of the unnatural wind. Large columns, some near the rear of the room unfinished, stretch toward the cave ceiling.*

*Beyond the chasm stands a heavily robed humanoid figure hunched over a circular device. He turns as you enter. On the small span of earth between the chasms, a pair of identical gnoll skeletons stands as sentinels.*

The room itself is very large. The curse aura is centered on the Shadow Ecliptic that gives all undead in the vicinity Turn Resistance +4. If Velrith is with the party, the robed figure, Syreck, turns and taunts him.

*"[Maniacal laughing]. Velrith, my old friend, who could have known what was in store for you? I hoped only to kill you, but this fate seems so much more fitting. How ironic, no? You are too late, unfortunately, as I have learned how the psionic shard powers the Shadow Ecliptic! Any moment now I will be able to reverse the energy of the Shadow Flame and lay down these undead guardians, allowing the children of Khyber to once again pour forth from the depths. But before that, I will finish what I started with you! I see that your repulsively loyal Blackwheel lackeys have come to your rescue. It is only fitting that this should become Blackwheel's greatest tomb. Witness the power of the Xoriat Obscura!"*

At this point, Syreck launches his attack against the party. Velrith now participates in combat, but leaves Syreck for the party to handle unless that becomes impossible.

If Velrith is not with the party, read the following instead:

*"What is this now? More Blackwheel fools? I will entomb you here with the rest of your friends! You would have thought that the Company would have learned after I dispatched your last expedition...or perhaps they never learned of my treachery. Nevertheless, your deaths will now herald the power of the Xoriat Obscura!"*

Syreck then attacks.

**Foes:** Syreck is a member of the Cabal of Shadows and the Xoriat Obscura subfaction. He seeks to bring forth, once again, the madness of Xoriat, and he embraces the aberrations and children of Khyber. As a sorcerer, he has embraced the Keeper as his patron deity and has joined an ancient order that has learned to unlock some of the deepest secrets of the Keeper. As a hooded pupil, he wields the power of both the Keeper and the Cabal. At his command are two former Blackwheel hires, the pair of gnoll skeletons, as well as three human warrior skeletons coated in brittlebone and a pair of human commoner zombies.

**Gnoll Skeletons (2):** hp 18, 16; Combat Statistic.

**Human Commoner Zombie (2):** hp 19, 16; *Monster Manual* 266

**Syreck, Hooded Pupil Sorcerer:** Male human sorcerer 5; hp 18; Combat Statistic.

**Brittlebone Human Warrior Skeleton (3):** hp 11, 8, 5; *Monster Manual* 226. Brittlebone is a paste that reduces the skeletons natural armor by 2 (to AC 13). When that skeleton is destroyed, its bones splinter and explode into shards all around it. It deals 1 point of piercing damage to each adjacent foe.

**Tactics:** The human warrior skeletons and human commoner zombies emerge from behind the pillars and engage the PCs to keep them from reaching Syreck. The gnoll skeletons remain on the bridge until the other skeletons and zombies are destroyed or unless they come under ranged attack. Syreck opens the combat by launching a volley of *fell weaken magic missiles* at the two strongest-looking melee combatants (each missile targeting a different PC). He follows that by attempting to *blind* any arcane casters or sufficiently dangerous ranged attackers. *Clutch of the keeper* is his next action against any remaining arcane or divine casters. *Ray of enfeeblement* follows, and then he awaits any combatants that move too close. If PCs approach too closely, he uses his *spider climb* ability to climb to the ceiling approximately 40 feet above and rain spells and crossbow bolts down upon the party.

**Development:** If Syreck falls, what happens is based on Velrith's condition:

**Velrith in touch with humanity**—If Syreck is dropped below 0 hp, he falls to the floor (or from the ceiling to the floor) where he lies bleeding to death. Velrith rips out his short sword and presses it into Syreck's neck, contemplating taking revenge. Syreck is semi-conscious and attempts to goad Velrith into killing him. If the

party is unable to persuade Velrith to stay his hand, he kills Syreck, stabbing him violently several dozen times. Once Velrith realizes what he has done, he knows he has succumbed to the monster within, and leaps down one of the apparently bottomless chasms. If the party is able to persuade Velrith to show Syreck mercy, Syreck simply bleeds to death in a few short moments unless healed, and Velrith is able to rest assured that he has passed a pivotal test of his remaining humanity.

**Velrith the ghoul**—If Velrith has not realized his humanity, he fights with savage ferocity. Once Syreck falls, he begins eating him. After a few moments, he continues his bloodlust and comes after the PCs.

**Velrith not with the party**—Syreck simply falls to the ground, bleeding to death.

Regardless of the above circumstances, read the follow before Syreck is slain, eaten, or bleeds to death. At this point, if the PCs have not yet activated the call shard, you should remind them to do that now, and pay close attention to the amount of time you estimate passing after its activation:

*A burbling laugh escapes. "You're too late." The foul sorcerer points a blood hand toward the Shadow Ecliptic. You see now that it is a small tripod with a circular disk atop it. The disk contains 13 unrecognizable symbols spaced evenly around its perimeter. In the center of the disk is a small hole. Protruding from the hole is an object that resembles the description you were given of the psionic shard. As Syreck's laughter rattles, the shard pulses more rapidly with a dull pink glow. Suddenly, the pulsing stops and a wave of translucent ectoplasm arcs out in all directions from the disk. As the ectoplasm reaches you, it surrounds you, turning a pale green color. As it reaches Syreck, it suddenly turns a violent red and all of it retracts immediately to the disk with a popping sound.*

*As suddenly as it retracted, an arcing beam of black ectoplasm emerges again. The beam splits in mid-air and sends a shaft of coruscating energy down each of the impossibly deep chasms. Then, the beam slowly retracts back to the disk. Syreck sudden screams out, "NO! This cannot be. I interpreted the shard's Prophecy perfectly, I'm sure of it. The Mere of Shattered Souls cannot possibly exist! The children of Khyber must be released!"*

*As Syreck speaks, a clacking noise emanates from the chasms. The ground shakes around you, and toward the entrance to the room a skeleton erupts from the ground slowly, and as it emerges it turns and hurries out the door.*

At this point, if Syreck has not been healed, he takes his final breath and dies. If the party examines the chasms, they find the walls of the chasms covered in a bone lattice, almost like several dozen ladders. The clacking noise grows louder with each moment, and deep within the chasm hundreds of points of red light seem to be growing closer.

In truth, Syreck has misinterpreted the Prophecy and, rather than reversing the power of the device, something about the party's presence has strengthened it. Thousands of skeletal undead, those Umbragen who died fighting deep in the pits of Khyber, are now making their way up the chasm to form a final force to guard the catacombs and ward off any further intrusion.

If the PCs examine the Shadow Ecliptic, they may be able to make a Decipher Script check (DC 30) to identify the symbols as some combination of the Giant, Draconic, and Elven languages. Any character that speaks all those languages may recognize that the symbols are some aggregation of those languages. There is little else to learn from the device. From this point, approximately 20 minutes are estimated to have passed since the end of combat with Syreck. More time may have passed if the PCs took additional actions or engaged in other activities.

#### **Scaling the Encounter:**

2<sup>nd</sup>-level: Remove the three human warrior skeletons.

4<sup>th</sup>-level: Add another pair of human commoner zombies (*Monster Manual* 266)

5<sup>th</sup>-level: Add a ghoul (*Monster Manual* 119) and a pair of human commoner zombies.

GNOLL SKELETON

CR 1

*Tattered bits of black leather cling to this gnoll skeleton. It wields an axe in one hand and carries a large steel shield strapped to its other arm.*

NE Medium undead

Init +5; Senses Listen +0, Spot +0

---

AC 15, touch 11, flat-footed 14

hp 18 (2 HD)

Fort +0, Ref +1, Will +3

---

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares)

Melee Battleaxe +5 (1d8+3) or 2 claws +6 (1d4+3)

Base Atk +1; Grp +4

Atk Options brittlebone

---

Abilities Str 16, Dex 12, Con -, Int -, Wis 10, Cha 1

SQ Damage reduction 5/bludgeoning, darkvision 60 ft., immunity to cold, undead traits

Feats Improved Initiative

Skills -

---

Possessions large steel shield, masterwork battleaxe

SYRECK, HOODED PUPIL SORCERER CR 5

*A smell resembling a freshly dug grave heralds this slight man. Draped in ominous black folds, his features are mostly indistinguishable beneath an inky black hood. A pair of glowing red eyes peer out from the darkness.*

Male human sorcerer 4

CE Medium humanoid (human)

Init +7; Senses Listen +3, Spot +3

---

AC 24(+3 Dex, +4 mage armor, +4 shield, + 1 ring of prot., +2 natural), touch 14, flat-footed 17

hp 18 (4 HD)

Fort +2, Ref +8 (weasel familiar), Will +5

---

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares)

Melee masterwork dagger +5 (1d4) or masterwork lgt crossbow +6(1d6)

Base Atk +2; Grp +2

Atk Options *clutch of the Keeper* (DC 18), drink blood

Sorcerer Spells (6/7/4 CL 4<sup>th</sup>)

2<sup>nd</sup> (4 per day)—fell weaken *magic missile* (2 missiles, 1d4+1 and -4 Str each), *blindness/deafness* (DC 17), *scare* (DC 17)

1<sup>st</sup> (7 per day)—*cause fear* (DC 16), *ray of enfeeblement*, *magic missile*

0 (6 per day)—*acid splash*, *touch of fatigue*, *ray of frost*, *daze*, *flare*

---

Abilities Str 10, Dex 17, Con 12, Int 8, Wis 12, Cha 18

SQ resist cold 5, spider climb

Feats Lightning Reflexes, Sudden Empower, Improved Initiative, Alertness, Fell Weaken, Spell Focus (necromancy)

Skills Concentration +8, Spellcraft +5, Knowledge (arcane) +1

Possessions ring of protection +1, masterwork dagger, potion of shield, scroll of mage armor, masterwork light crossbow

---

*Clutch of the Keeper* (Sp): As *Clutch of Orcus* (*Libris Mortis*, 63), but adapted for Eberron. Once per day a hooded pupil can use the spell *Clutch of Orcus* as a 10<sup>th</sup> level caster. The save DC is Charisma based.

*Drink Blood* (Su): Once per day a hooded pupil can suck blood from a living victim who has damage that is yet unhealed. It does so by succeeding on a grapple check against a pinned or helpless foe. Drinking blood deals 2 points of constitution damage to the victim.

*Spider Climb* (Su): A hooded pupil can climb sheer surfaces as though with a *spider climb* spell.

### **New Spell**

*Clutch of Orcus*, *Libris Mortis*, 63

**Level:** Cleric 3

**Components:** V, S

**Casting Time:** 1 standard action  
**Range:** Medium (100 ft. + 10 ft./ level)  
**Target:** One humanoid  
**Duration:** Concentration  
**Saving Throw:** Fortitude negates  
**Spell Resistance:** Yes

Magical force grips the subject's heart (or similar vital organ) and begins crushing it. The victim reacts as if having a heart attack (and is paralyzed) and takes 1d3 points of damage per round. Concentration is required to maintain the spell each round. A conscious victim gains a new saving throw each round to end the spell. If the victim dies as a result of this spell, its smoking heart appears in the caster's hand.

## Escape

*The room begins shaking more violently and suddenly a skeletal figure clambers up from out of the chasm.*

This skeleton is far ahead of the hundreds of other below. The single human warrior skeleton should be a quick fight for the party, but the purpose of the fight is to warn of the hundreds more to come. If the party fights near the chasms, they see the overwhelming horde climbing up rapidly from below. It is at this point they should make their exit from the catacombs. If Velrith is with the party, he encourages them to flee to the surface as quickly as possible.

As the party exits the catacombs, keep them in initiative order for the escape. Every few rounds have them run into 1 human warrior skeletons until they make their exit. Feel free to push the party along by allowing them to hear the sound of dozens more skeletons clawing their way out through their tombs or seeing the approaching army of undead draw near. Let them know that the undead appear to be coming continuously with no end in sight.

Once the last party member climbs the staircase, the party no longer encounters undead. Instead, the mass of skeletons slowly builds behind them. The undead pursue, but slowly. The party should have a 30-minute head start on the skeletons by the time they reach the top of the staircase. Any locked or barred door in the skeletons' way slows them down by approximately 30 minutes. Allow the party to slowly hear them clawing or breaking through it. Even stone and steel doors cannot stand in the way of this mass. It takes approximately 15 minutes to ascend the stairs.

## The Surface

*As you emerge from the top of the lengthy staircase, the sky waits to greet you. The passage of time in the catacombs seemed to be eerie, as now you have no concept of how much time was spent below.*

Depending on how much time has passed, the *Cloud Ray* may already be waiting for the PCs. If the PCs activated the call shard immediately after the combat with Syreck, approximately 60 minutes will have passed, leaving them about 30 minutes to wait unless they lingered longer below. Again, ascending the stairs should give the PCs a 30-head start on the skeletons. If all has gone smoothly and the PCs emerge from 90 to 180 minutes after they activated the call shard, the *Cloud Ray* waits for them with ropes lowered. The ropes have a small loop at the end to secure a foot, and as soon as all of the PCs are present (and they throw over a rope for Velrith), the ship rapidly departs, pulling the PCs up as they lift off over the jungle. Read the box text at the end of the section.

If the PCs arrive at the surface before 90 minutes has elapsed since they activated the call shard, they must wait for the *Cloud Ray*. If the skeleton horde catches up with the party before the *Cloud Ray* arrives and Velrith is with the party, he meets the skeletons on the stairs. He advises the party to flee to high ground in the ruins and await pickup. He thanks the party for "freeing" him, tosses them his insignia of rank, with instructions to return it to House Tharashk, and runs off to bottleneck the skeletons on the staircase and buy the PCs some time. Velrith assures the PCs that they will meet again, and that their duty is to get the *psionic shard* back to the Company.

If the PCs do not have Velrith with them and the skeletons catch up, they may either flee or fight. They may attempt to hide in the ruins, which should buy them another 20 minutes. If they fight, the staircase produces waves of skeletons thirty deep, but they can be bottlenecked 2 at a time. After each wave of thirty, 2d10 minutes pass before the next wave arrives. If the PCs are fighting the skeletons when the *Cloud Ray* arrives at 90 minutes, it signals its arrival by hailing fireballs and arrows down at any skeletons. The *Cloud Ray* tries to drop ropes in an area they've cleared with *fireballs*, but the PCs may have to fight their way there. Each round the *Cloud Ray* eliminates 2d8 skeletons.

No matter how the PCs escape, read the following:

*As the last member of your platoon secures their foot into the safety loop, the Cloud Ray lifts off into the sky. As the nimble airship picks up speed, you lift off the ground, dangling from your rope. As the jungle grows smaller and smaller, you see a wave of white figures burst out over ruins. You estimate there may be as many as a thousand skeletons, and they spread out through the jungle like a wave breaking upon a promontory. As the sea of green beneath you grows more and more distant, you realize that your rope has nearly been pulled to the top of the ship.*

## Ending the Adventure

If Velrith is with the party, the PCs must explain his “condition” to the crew of the *Cloud Ray*. The crew is very understanding, but they keep their distance nonetheless. As the *Cloud Ray* docks with the *Glory Road*, the party is instructed to meet with Sgt. Tragar immediately. The deck officer instructs Velrith to come with him immediately to meet with the medical team in hopes of reversing his condition as quickly as possible. Velrith once again thanks the party, assuring them that they will meet again.

Sgt. Tragar looks very relieved to see the PCs and takes their report, praising them for their successes. If appropriate Story Objects are to be awarded, award them here.

PCs that survived the Magic-Assisted Airship Drop are highly surprised as Sgt. Crash is brought out with a sly wink from Sgt. Tragar to pin the Bronze Griffon Wings on the PCs.

No medal is appropriate for the Touch of Undeath Story Object, but if the PCs successfully returned Velrith d'Tharashk to the *Glory Road* they are awarded this Story Object.

## Adventure Questions

- Describe how the PCs paid attention to Drop Officer Crash's MAAD lesson.
  - They listened with rapt attention and participated as much as asked. [250xp, 0 GP]
  - They participated but sometimes had difficulty listening. [170xp, 0 GP]
  - They neither listened nor participated. [90xp, 0 GP]
  - They were actively disruptive or distracting. [0xp, 0 GP]
- Not counting Velrith or the skeletons during the escape, how many encounters did the PCs face?
  - 7-8 [150xp, 150 GP]
  - 4-6 [100xp, 120 GP]
  - 2-4 [80xp, 100 GP]
  - 0-1 [50xp, 50g GP]
- Describe the PCs relationship and interaction with Velrith.
  - They convinced Velrith to see the humanity in himself. [300xp, 300 GP]
  - They allowed or helped Velrith to find the monster within himself. [150xp, 200 GP]
  - They slew Velrith. [100xp, 100 GP]
  - None. They never found Velrith. [0xp, 0 GP]
- How much of the catacombs do you estimate the PCs explored?
  - 100% [150xp, 100GP]
  - 80-99% [120xp, 80GP]
  - 60-79% [80xp, 60GP]
  - Less than 60% [50xp, 30GP]
- Describe the PCs interaction between Velrith and Syreck?
  - The PCs convinced Velrith to spare Syreck [200 xp, 200 GP]
  - The PCs allowed Velrith to slay Syreck [150xp, 150 GP]
  - The PCs actively encouraged Velrith to slay Syreck [80xp, 50 GP]
  - Velrith was not with the PCs when they met Syreck [0xp, 0 GP]
- Describe the adventure's conclusion.
  - Velrith and the PCs escaped aboard the Cloud Ray [250xp, 150gp]
  - Velrith sacrificed himself so the PCs could escape [190xp, 80gp]
  - The PCs escaped without Velrith [120xp, 50gp]
  - The PCs failed to escape [40xp, 0gp]
- Rate the group's roleplaying.

- a. Fantastic! Everyone had interesting and engaging characters that interacted and challenged the adventure in very fun ways. [200xp, 100 GP]
- b. Good. Most players had interesting and engaging characters. [60xp, 90 GP]
- c. Okay. There was some roleplaying. [40xp, 50 GP]
- d. None. There was no roleplaying. They treated the adventure as nothing more than a set of objectives to be accomplished. [0xp, 0 GP]

**Story Object Request:**

Bronze Griffon Wings: This medal identifies the PCs as members of an elite group within the Blackwheel Company. This medal is awarded to Company members that survive their first Magic-Assisted Airship Drop. Bearers of the medal gain a +1 bonus to Will saves made to determine the outcome of a MAAD. Company Members that bear this medal have faced their fear and may freely attack, cast spells, or engage in other actions during a MAAD with no additional checks required as a result of the especially stressful conditions of the drop.

Touch of Undeath: Thanks to the Company's ability to study the unique "condition" of Velrith d'Tharashk, the PCs receive direct benefit from this research. PCs with this Story Object may freely take any of the general feats from *Libris Mortis* without spending an expansion slot. PCs with this story object may also apply a one-time 25% discount (rounded down) on a single purchase of any of the non-restricted special, magical, or alchemical items in *Libris Mortis* (they need not expend an expansion slot for that item). This discount and item(s) will be recorded on their Adventure Journal.

# Appendix: Catacombs Map

