



FORBIDDEN KNOWLEDGE

A One-Round DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® Adventure
for 1st- to 3rd-Level Characters
CRIMSON CODEX™ Faction Adventure 2 for the XEN'DRIK
EXPEDITIONS™ Campaign

Design: Shawn Merwin
Crimson Codex Factionmaster: Shawn Merwin

Based on the original DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® 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.

This WIZARD OF THE COAST® game product contains no Open Game Content. This work may be reproduced for personal use or in its entirety for use at RPGA-sanctioned events. To learn more about the Open Gaming License and the d20 SYSTEM® License, please visit www.wizards.com/d20.

This product use material from the v.3.5 revision. This is an official RPGA® play document. To find out more about the RPGA and to learn more on how you can sanction and run DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game events of all sizes, visit our website at www.wizards.com/rpga.

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS, D&D, D&D REWARDS, D&D CAMPAIGNS, DUNGEON MASTER, EBERRON, XEN'DRIK EXPEDITIONS, CRIMSON CODEX, HERALD-LEVEL, RPGA, d20, d20 SYSTEM, WIZARDS OF THE COAST, *Player's Handbook*, *Dungeon Master's Guide*, and *Monster Manual* and their respective logos are trademarks owned by Wizards of the Coast, Inc., in the US and other countries. This material is protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America. Any reproduction or unauthorized use of the material or artwork contained herein is prohibited without the express written permission of Wizards of the Coast, Inc. This product is a work of fiction. Any similarity to actual people, organizations, places, or events is purely coincidental. © 2006 Wizards of the Coast, Inc.

Visit the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS CAMPAIGNS website at www.rpga.com

INTRODUCTION

Forbidden Knowledge is the second faction adventure for the Crimson Codex faction of the XEN'DRIK EXPEDITIONS campaign. It is optimized for 2nd-level characters. This means that it's designed and balanced for a group of four to five 2nd-level characters (PCs).

If your group deviates from this size and strength, each encounter features a section titled "Scaling the Encounter" so that you, the Dungeon Master (DM), can create a more enjoyable and better balanced adventure.

If there are only four of five PCs of the same level in your group, it's easy to use this section: just use the level entry that corresponds with the PCs' level (the optimized entry is given in the main adventure text). For groups of mixed levels and groups with six PCs, determine the average level of the PCs, and increase that average by one for groups of six PCs. Treat that level as the groups level. That said, as DM you have discretion when it comes to fitting the challenges of the adventure to your group. If your group finds the challenges too easy or too difficult, feel free to increase or decrease the level of challenge appropriately. The goal is to challenge the PCs and entertain the players, not to overwhelm or even overwhelm them. The most enjoyable D&D games are ones where failure and character death are possible, but success and reward are attainable through daring and smart play.

Forbidden Knowledge has been designed to be part of the RPGA DUNGEON & DRAGONS CAMPAIGNS: XEN'DRIK EXPEDITIONS program. Like all DUNGEONS & DRAGONS CAMPAIGNS adventures, it's recommended that PCs undertaking its challenges have at least one arcane spellcaster, a divine spellcaster (preferably a cleric), a strong warrior, and a rogue. Parties missing these valuable adventuring components may find *Prophecy's Unwitting Servant* very challenging, and the chances of character death higher. Please warn the players of this before play starts. DUNGEONS & DRAGONS CAMPAIGNS allow players to "take one for the team"; that is to play a fastplay wizard, fighter, rogue, or cleric in place of one of their characters, and gain experience point for their character. If the group lacks one of these vital four classes, suggest to your players to take advantage of this option.

RPGA-SANCTIONED PLAY

Most likely you ordered this adventure as part of an RPGA even from the RPGA website, or as part of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS CAMPAIGNS retail program. To play *Forbidden Knowledge* as part of the XEN'DRIK EXPEDITIONS campaign—a worldwide, ongoing D&D campaign set in EBERON—you must sanction it as part of an RPGA event. This event could be as elaborate as a big convention, or as simple as a group of friends

meeting at the DM's house.

To sanction an RPGA event, you must be at least a HERALD-LEVEL gamemaster. The person who sanctions the event is called the senior gamemaster, and is in charge of making sure the event is sanctioned before play, runs smoothly on the date sanctioned, and then reported back to the RPGA in a timely manner. The person who runs the game is called the table DM (or usually just DM). Sometimes (and almost all the time in the cases of home events) the senior gamemaster is also the table DM. You don't have to be a Herald-Level GM to run this adventure if you are not the senior GM.

By sanctioning and reporting this adventure you accomplish a few things. First, it allows the PCs participating in play to accumulate experience points (XP) and gold pieces (gp) to advance their XEN'DRIK EXPEDITIONS characters. Second, it allows the RPGA to track and record what character did during the adventure, and future adventures a written with what the majority of player did in mind—in this way characters' action shape the future of the campaign. Lastly, player and DMs gain rewards for sanctioned RPGA play if they are members of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS REWARDS program. Playing this adventure is worth four (4) points.

This adventure retires from RPGA sanctioned play on December 31, 2006.

To learn more about the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS CAMPAIGNS: XEN'DRIK EXPEDITIONS character creation and development, RPGA event sanctioning, and DUNGEONS & DRAGONS REWARDS, visit the RPGA website at www.rpga.com.

THIS IS A FACTION ADVENTURE

This is a faction adventure for the Crimson Codex. This means that the story is suited for that group, and can only be played by Crimson Codex characters. As the DM you should make sure that only member of this faction play in this adventure, as play of another faction's character could invalidate the entire session.



Crimson Codex Faction Symbol

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

On his myriad expeditions throughout Khorvaire and Xen'drik in search of the portents and signs that became his interpretation of the draconic Prophecy, Ohnal Caldyn traversed the highest peaks of Eberron and plumbed the lowest depths of Khyber. One of those expeditions beneath the surface of Xen'drik brought him into the sphere of influence of one of the imprisoned daelkyr, a creature of brilliant insanity known only as Virulence.

While Caldyn didn't make contact with Virulence directly, he and his associates defeated some of the daelkyr's abominations and one of his closest links to the outside world, and as a result the insane daelkyr instantly formed an obsession with the travels and victories of Caldyn. With the scholar's eventual re-establishment of the Crimson Codex, Virulence now has a new obsession. As the daelkyr are inscrutable and their actions are beyond the understanding of mortals, this obsession manifests itself in many, and often contradictory, ways: one moment it seems Virulence's goal is the absolute and final destruction of any Crimson Codex member it can find, and the next minute Virulence is offering them assistance in their search for, and manipulation of, the draconic Prophecy. It is just as likely to study and reward its foes like rats in a maze as it is to see them exterminated.

Virulence's latest gambit takes place at a Crimson Codex safehouse a week's journey south of Stormreach. The safehouse acts as a way station for Crimson Codex members and a repository for new and interesting relics found on Xen'drik. Any objects or secrets that might be too valuable or too dangerous for immediate transport to Stormreach are catalogued and examined at the safehouse. A team of Crimson Codex specialists, led by a legendary Crimson Codex adventurer Rasp Gilboa, maintains and guards the place.

Virulence sent some of its most powerful followers to destroy the safehouse and test the Crimson Codex's ability to handle the most bizarre and deadly tricks, traps, and puzzles the daelkyr could imagine. This is where the PCs enter the story. They are the unfortunate souls who wander into the safehouse as the daelkyr presents its twisted test to the Crimson Codex. Failing the test means death and destruction, while rewards are offered by Virulence if the PCs manage to succeed. Success, however, may come at the steepest of prices.

ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

The PCs are assigned the task of delivering a cartload and wagonload of supplies to a Crimson Codex safehouse 60 miles south of Stormreach. The PCs meet one of the higher-ups in their organization after getting secret offers by others in the organization.

On the way to the safehouse, the PCs pass a Crimson Codex contingent delivering some recently uncovered artifacts from the safehouse to Crimson Codex handlers in Stormreach. These members of the Crimson Codex tell the PCs that a new shipment of rare objects and scrolls had just arrived from the mysterious depths of Xen'drik, and as they were leaving the safehouse, the remaining members were excited to begin investigating and cataloguing. This information

should let the PCs know the conditions they find at the safehouse are relatively recent.

When the PCs arrive at the entrance to the safehouse, which is held in a subterranean complex, they find a scene of great carnage. Several Crimson Codex members are dead. As they search the area, magically altered monstrous spiders attack the PCs.

Entering the safehouse, the PCs learn it has been infiltrated and ransacked. All but two of the Crimson Codex members have been killed, and all manner of bizarre traps and puzzles have been placed in the safehouse. The PCs find a note instructing them that they must successfully deconstruct the various puzzles and traps in order to rescue the Crimson Codex members and save the valuable treasures held at the safehouse from destruction. Many of the traps and puzzles rely on the skills and feats of the PCs to solve, although the players themselves need to be paying attention as well. The devious and illogical tricks that Virulence has concocted are meant to force the PCs into causing the very death and destruction they are attempting to stop. If handled properly, through intelligence, patience and ingenuity rather than brute force, the PCs can save the day and earn the "rewards" of Virulence and his minions.

TROUBLESHOOTING

The situation at the Crimson Codex safehouse is an ingeniously tangled and multi-layered puzzle trap made up of several smaller tricks, traps, and puzzles, as something that would befit a maker like the daelkyr: insane, deadly, totally corrupt and filled with vermin. PCs can use their imaginations in solving the puzzles and traps set before them in the safehouse, and DMs need to be flexible in allowing PCs to use different methods to overcome these obstacles, while at the same time not diminishing the extreme challenges presented.

The secret to properly adjudicating the puzzles and traps is to keep in mind some solutions are considered the most obvious way to handle the challenges, while also allowing non-traditional solutions to succeed as well. While criteria and consequences are established for success, partial success and failure along the way, the DM should keep in mind that PCs and players can be ingenious in their solutions, and PCs should be rewarded for ingenuity rather than being forced to answer the challenges in the exact same way or by the way the writer assumed they would solve them.

Resist the urge to give PCs extra clues or hints. The puzzle at the safehouse is one that they may well not solve, and that is how it should be if it happens. However, if any of the PCs have the Investigate feat, let them make Search checks of the various areas of the safehouse, and checks over DC 20 should provide that PC with clues. Do not give it away outright, but feel free to provide basic clues to move them in the right direction, such as pointing out that each area highlights a color, an element, a precious metal, and poisonous vermin, and a carved gemstone of a differing value.

ADVENTURE START

The PCs are instructed to prepare themselves for a journey and meet their superiors. PCs that fit certain descriptions may be approached by a member of their faction with a special request.

Read or paraphrase the following. The PCs are assumed to be either waiting in their quarters for their

next mission, or they are performing the duties that cover their true purpose here on Xen'drik.

Early one bright Sul morning you receive a summons. An older female dwarf wearing leather and a bright red ribbon tying up her braided beard calls out to you by name. When you look at her, she holds her right hand in the shape of the letter C, and she strokes her beard with that hand. "Our masters wish ta'spake with ye'. As soon as ye' can make ready, find yer' way to the wainwright's business just south o' the city proper. Expect to be gone fer' at least twenty days, so pack yerself for overland travel. Don't tarry overmuch."

The dwarf is a new member of the Crimson Codex named Farridge Stonelock. She doesn't know any more than what she just told the PCs. She is an evoker newly arrived in Xen'drik from the Mror Holds. Presently she is performing menial tasks for the Crimson Codex, but she hopes one day soon to be given an important and dangerous mission. The leader of the Crimson Codex in Stormreach, Zekeriff Brithlestone, instructed her to find some available operatives and give them these precise instructions.

The PCs can then prepare for the trip individually. However, two individuals may approach certain PCs before the mission truly starts, based on the race, class or philosophical outlook of the individual. Each PC is approached individually, so that no other PC knows the details.

The following directions explain which PC is approached by each individual, and what is said to them. First of all, if a PC is a spellscale, a skarn, a dragon shaman, a sorcerer, an incarnate, a totemist or a PC who has any other strong connection to dragons, they are approached by a halfling calling himself Pfilo the Filch. He tells the PCs the following after giving the proper signs to identify himself as a member of the Crimson Codex:

"Certain elements within our organization realize that the reunification of Galifar is a wonderful goal. However, with the dangers and intrigues of our situation increasing continuously, time and energy that could be spent studying the secrets and relics tied to the Prophecy are being wasted on more mundane and worldly political considerations. I represent a small but growing segment of the Crimson Codex that seeks to focus more on the Prophecy, as well as on the dragons that are key to the Prophecy. We ask you to help our cause. This doesn't mean we want you to do anything to jeopardize the goals of the Codex, of course. From time to time, we may simply ask you to do something to further our own cause specifically. In this case, I will even offer you payment ahead of time. I strongly believe this small tome may assist you in your upcoming mission. In return, I ask that if you come across a small, completely spherical Siberys dragonshard, you secure it outside the sight of others in your party and bring it directly to me. I assure you again, this is a minor element, but we believe it is key to a part of the Prophecy that would be relevant to only dragons, dragon-kind, or those who wield the power of the dragons."

Pfilo offers the PC or PCs a small text titled *A Field Guide to the Vermin of Xen'drik*. Pfilo does not detect as any alignment (as he is neutral), and the words he speaks are true. He can't answer any further questions because he doesn't know much more than this. Make sure at least one PC is approached by Pfilo, even if that PC doesn't exactly fit the profile. Select the most appropriate candidate if this is the case.

If a PC does not meet any of the criteria to be approached by Pfilo, the next criterion for being approached is being non-good. A short, thin human with prematurely graying hair wearing grey clothing and a red bandana around his neck approaches any non-good PCs who weren't already approached by Pfilo. Again, PCs should be approached individually. (No PC should be approached by both Pfilo and the graying human.) He gives the PC or PCs the Crimson Codex sign, and speaks quietly so that no one else can overhear:

"Greetings, my brother/sister in foresight. I understand that you are traveling on a mission for the good of the organization, and before you leave I wanted to make you aware of something. There are those of us in the group who believe that we are on the right track, but we are not doing enough to bring the Prophecy to fruition. Ohnal is a great and wise man, of course, but he looks only to the old ways and the nations of Khorvaire, seeking the laudable but limited goal of national unity. We believe that there is a future elsewhere for us, and the Prophecy shall lead us there. I ask nothing of you now save this one thing: remember we are here, and if you find a small round Siberys shard in your journeys, hide it away and bring it to me. You will gain the notice and favor of those of us who seek something greater in the Prophecy than just political stability. Make no decision now, but take these as a token of our good faith and trust. Prophecy speaks of the mission you are about to take, and these may play a small part in your success. I cannot tell you my name yet, but I will know where to find you at the completion of your mission if you have found the Siberys shard I spoke of."

The mysterious man offers the PC 4 vials of antitoxin. The man detects as faintly chaotic (he is chaotic neutral) if detected, and the words he speaks are true. He can't answer any further questions. Make sure at least one PC is approached by this man, even if that PC doesn't exactly fit the profile. Select the most appropriate candidate.

If a PC is able to get the small Siberys shard and give it to one of these two mysterious contacts, they receive the special story award at the end of the adventure.

When these dealings have concluded, continue with Part 1.

PART 1: DUTIES AND GIFTS

At the wainwright's place of business, a superior in the Crimson Codex meets the PCs. They are instructed to deliver some supplies to a Crimson Codex safehouse located about a week's travel to the south. The PCs have a chance to interact with their superior, ask questions, and learn more about the safehouse. They are also approached by the pregnant wife of one of the Crimson Codex members currently stationed at the safehouse. On their travels, they cross paths with a Crimson Codex caravan bringing some artifacts and tomes to Stormreach from the safehouse. The caravan members can relate the current situation to the PCs.

The Send-Off

Read or paraphrase the following as the PCs arrive at the wainwright's business. It is on the southern fringe of Stormreach:

A wainwright hunches over an upturned cart as you approach his business, wrestling with a wheel. Fifty yards beyond him, a group of people gathers around a wagon hitched to a pair of horses. The wagon is fully loaded with boxes, sacks, and other containers—all of them tightly strapped into the cart with numerous lengths of hempen rope. Seeing you, one of the group comes forward. He is an older human with white hair and a neatly trimmed white beard, which stands out in stark contrast to his ruddy red face and the bright scarlet cap he wears. With a hand cupped into a C shape he waves to you, and then he adjusts his cap with that hand.

Assuming the PCs approach the old man and the group gathered around the wagon, continue:

The old human speaks as you approach. "I see Farridge found some able-bodied folk to help out." He looks up at the sky, where some darker clouds threaten rain to the south. "You might be getting a wee bit wet." Although you have not met him before this point in your careers in the Crimson Codex, you know that you are speaking to the ranking member of the Crimson Codex on the continent: Zekeiriff Brithlestone. Known as 'Zeke' to all who work for the Codex in Xen'drik, he is in charge of all operations on this untamed continent. Rumors of his exploits over the years have become legends of nearly mythical proportions among the younger and more inexperienced Crimson Codex operatives.

"See that wagon there and that cart there?" Zeke points to the loaded wagon and then to the cart being repaired. "You are going to be taking them, full of provisions and equipment, to Red Rover Base." He chuckles. "Picked that name myself. That's a place a few days south of here, where those of us who explore the main continent can come for safety. It's also where explorers take the relics they find to be studied and catalogued before being brought back to Stormreach for their final destinations. So you all get to take the supplies there, help out at Red Rover Base doing anything that your told to do for a couple of days, and then bring back anything they deem ready for transport. Think you can handle that? I know it isn't glorious, but it is necessary and it increases your knowledge and experience in how things work around here. Use this map to find your way."

After he provides the PCs with a map, Zeke orders the PCs and the rest of the group standing around the wagon to help carry goods from a nearby warehouse and load them onto the cart that the wainwright has just finished fixing. While that happens, the PCs can ask questions of Zeke (see bulleted points below).

The only other noteworthy NPC here is a half-elven woman, her bulging belly revealing that she is in the last stages of pregnancy. She approaches the PCs as they work and makes a request of them. She first approaches half-elves, then elves, then halflings or gnomes, then anyone except humans.

A pregnant half-elf woman, who has been hanging back as you go about your business in preparing the wagon, cart, and horses for the journey, approaches tentatively. "Pardon," she says, practically finching as you turn in her direction. "My husband is at the base where these supplies are going. He is a half-elf named Pinesky. Could you give him this, and also tell him that it will not be long before I give birth? I would very much appreciate it."

The half-elf, named Vistola Pinesky, hands the PC a necklace woven from what appears to be thin silver and gold threads. A DC 10 Appraise check reveals that the necklace is probably worth about 10 gp. A DC 15

Knowledge (religion) check reveals that it is a charm of good luck associated with elven worshippers of Olladra, the goddess of feast, healing, and good fortune.

The PCs can speak to Zeke, Vistola, or any of the other laborers. If they ask the appropriate questions, they learn the following information:

- The trip to Red Rover Base takes more than five days. Most of the trip can be made over the main path heading south toward the heart of the continent, but the final day of the journey must be made over a little-used path where travel is slow and dangerous.
- Red Rover Base is under the command of a human named Rasp Gilboa. He is an incredibly knowledgeable scholar and fearless adventurer, but he doesn't have the most personable attitude. His trademark mutton-chop sideburns are still black despite his advanced age.
- There are usually twelve people stationed at Red Rover Base: scholars, guards, and a cook. Adventurers traveling to or from the center of the continent can also often be found there resting.
- The base is held within a subterranean complex of caves that has been partially worked to offer the best possible living and working quarters. Although it is not perfect, it has served the Codex well over the years.

After the PCs have asked their questions and the wagon and cart are loaded, the PCs are sent on their way with good wishes from Zeke and Vistola. Zeke has one more thing to tell the PCs before they leave:

"It has come to my attention that some members of our organization have different ideas than Obnal Caldyn and the rest of us. Some are just misguided, while others actively pursue goals directly opposed to us. Be wary of any of these rascals approaching you, and let me know if this occurs. They are escalating their attempts to sabotage our mission. Fare thee well, my fellows in foresight!"

If any of the PCs detail their meetings with Pfilo the Filch or the graying human, Zeke thanks them for their honesty and asks them to play along with the wishes of the others unless it seems particularly dangerous or detrimental to do so.

The Returning Caravan

The journey south is fairly uneventful. The PCs travel for 4 days along the main path. Finally they come to the area marked on their map where they need to follow a less-used path to the west. The travel becomes much more difficult then, but still manageable. Along this route, on the fifth day of travel, just a few hours before they expect to come to Red Rover Base, a heavy rain begins to fall. Just after this, the PCs encounter a Crimson Codex caravan returning to Stormreach from Red Rover Base with some artifacts from the continent.

The path the PCs travel is overgrown, and the field of vision is limited. Give the PCs a Listen check (DC 25) to hear the approaching caravan at 200 feet, and then another Listen check (DC 15) at 100 feet. The approaching caravan members do not hear the PCs unless the PCs try to be heard (calling out or making a lot of noise). If the PCs do not hear them at 100 feet, they come upon each other at 50 feet when they come

within visual range. Modify the following read-aloud text as appropriate based on the PCs' actions:

Through the dense foliage and driving rain appears a pair of horses pulling a wagon. Atop the wagon ride two figures, both halfling sized but concealed by thick riding cloaks, hoods drawn. Flanking the wagon, two human-sized figures trudge through the mud. The wagon must be loaded full of heavy goods, judging from the deep ruts the wagon wheels are making in the sludge.

If the PCs make a reasonable attempt to hide (DC 18 Hide check to conceal the wagon and cart), the other wagon passes without seeing them. If the PCs do not hear them approaching, or do not make an attempt to hail the wagon, they can interact with the Crimson Codex teamsters and guards.

The two drivers are a halfling and a gnome named Everquinn and Snooxle. Each wears a red scarf around their necks. The two men walking are human guards, Darlus and Constantine, armed with longswords and crossbows, wearing red vests. If the PCs give them the sign of the Crimson Codex (making a "C" shape with a hand and then touching either their face, head or a red item on their persons), the caravan members relax and share information with the PCs. If the PCs do not give the sign, the caravan members act polite but wary, and DC 15 Spot checks reveal that they keep their hands on their weapons and do not stop for anything more than the most cursory pleasantries.

If the PCs reveal themselves as Crimson Codex members, they can learn the following information by talking to the four Crimson Codex travelers:

- The four are experienced Xen'drik explorers. They are not experts on the Prophecy and history like many in the faction, but they are capable adventurers who are trusted to transport valuable goods when needed.
- When they left Red Rover Base just a few hours ago, a shipment of new artifacts and treasure from deeper in the continent had just arrived. They didn't get a chance to see what was brought, since they were preparing to leave with their own cargo, but the scholarly types who work at the base were extremely excited and looking forward to beginning their investigation.
- There are currently 16 people at the base: 4 guards, 5 scholars, 5 adventurers who had retrieved the latest shipment, a cook, and Rasp Gilboa. (A half-elf with obvious drow heritage named Pinesky is one of the scholars at the base.)
- Most of the cargo they carry is relatively worthless by purely monetary standards. It is stuff that has little material value and no detectable magic. Some of it contains odd writings in stone that will be sent to Ohnal Caldyn back on Khorvaire for closer examination. They have no dragonshards or anything noteworthy.

PART 2: SPIDER ATTACK

When the PCs arrive at the site of the entrance to Red Rover Base, they come upon a scene of great carnage.

Many of the Crimson Codex members are dead, and a group of mutant spiders attack the PCs.

Read or paraphrase the following, making alterations based on the way the PCs approach the entrance to Red Rover Base. See the "Entrance to Red Rover Base" map for further details on the layout of the area.

Around a final bend in the trail, the small hill that holds the entrance to the Red Rover Base sits before you. Your approach causes a few carrion crows to shriek and fly away. The feast you interrupted is a gruesome sight: several bloodied humanoid bodies lay strewn about the flooded hillside, some missing limbs. There is no stench, so the carnage must have occurred relatively recently. The torrential rains have subsided, but the ground is still drenched.

The PCs must approach the bodies to learn more about what happened here:

- There are 11 bodies spread about at the bottom of the hill and on the hillside. The hillside is slick with the rain and blood. Most of the bodies are armed with light armor and weapons, although some are unarmored and unarmed. No one matching the descriptions of Rasp Gilboa or Pinesky can be found. All of the bodies wear some piece of clothing or equipment that is red, as is expected from a Crimson Codex member.
- A DC 15 Search check of the bodies reveals that some of them are plastered with sticky strands of some fibrous material. A further DC 10 Knowledge (nature) check of anyone viewing the strands reveals they are the webs of monstrous spiders.
- A DC 15 Heal check reveals that the wounds are from large spider bites, and that the wounds still contain remnants of toxins.
- A DC 12 Survival check (with the Track feat) reveals that giant spider tracks are all over the wet ground. A DC 18 Survival check (with the Track feat) also reveals that some spider tracks lead up the hill toward the entrance to the Red Rover Base entrance. Odd large-sized footprints and handprints are scattered about the area among the spider tracks, and their presence doesn't make any sense based on the patterns they make.

As the PCs search and decide what steps to take, the spiders appear at the top of the hill, coming for another round of battle. PCs succeeding at a DC 17 Spot check or a DC 22 Listen check can act in the surprise round. If a PC states that he is keeping an eye on the top of the hill, give him a +10 bonus on his Spot check.

Read or paraphrase the following when the PCs see the spiders crest the hill above them:

At the top of the hill, up where you have been instructed the entrance to the base is located, a blur catches your attention. Cresting the hilltop are creatures that even the most insane person's nightmare would not accommodate: spiders as big as your horses scuttle toward you. Most of their thin legs arch and fall like others of their kind, but some of their appendages seem at once haunting familiar and grotesquely out of place. Humanoid arms and legs rise and fall amid the tangle of arachnid legs. You can see their gruesome mouths clearly above you, and each looks as dangerous as a pair of longswords.

Foes: The spiders that have attacked Red Rover Base are creations brought into existence through the dark imagination of the daelkyr called Virulence. The minions of the daelkyr who set up the diabolical test for the Crimson Codex on behalf of their master brought the spiders with them, and then they decided to leave them to prey on any other people who came by. The spiders look like normal monstrous spiders, except two of their legs look like human legs ending in feet, and two of their legs look like human arms ending in hands. This mutation does not give them any advantages or disadvantages in combat.

Virulence-Mutated Monstrous Hunting Spiders (2): hp 24, 14; Combat Statistics.

Tactics: Virulence-mutated monstrous spiders know no fear, and they attack without any sort of reason or instinct other than doing as much damage as possible to the most convenient target. PCs might be able to use the mindless destruction of the spiders to their advantage, summoning creatures to act as a buffer or using some other tactic to keep the spiders busy. The spiders each have only two of their daily web uses available for the day, and they use them on targets before attacking that target.

The whole area, apart from the clearing (brown on the map) slopes steeply uphill. Moving up the hill costs double movement. Moving down the hill costs normal movement, as does moving sideways across the hillside.

The areas marked in blue on the map are areas of water and mud on the hillside. Moving through or occupying these areas requires a DC 15 Balance check or the PC falls prone in the square. The spiders can move through and in these squares normally. However, the entire hillside is wet and muddy, offering the PCs a +6 circumstance modifier to Escape Artist checks, which might come in handy if entangled by the webs.

The spiders have been injured slightly by the previous combat, and they have noticeable wounds on their legs and bodies.

Developments: After the PCs have defeated the spiders, they can better survey the situation. The corpses of their Crimson Codex comrades have been mostly picked over by the minions of Virulence, although some usable weapons can be salvaged (see Treasure below).

The entrance to Red Rover Base has been blocked with boulders, rubble, and body parts. It takes 6 PCs a total of 2 hours to clear the area enough to gain access to the entrance. Once the area has been cleared, they can enter the opening. PCs may also decide to rest outside the entrance before entering. They can do this with no problem, and it does not affect anything happening within Red Rover Base.

Treasure: Among the bodies the PCs can gather some usable equipment: 4 sets of leather armor, 2 longswords, 4 daggers, 1 masterwork heavy crossbow, 1 longbow, 15 bolts, 10 masterwork cold iron arrows, 2 vials of acidic fire, and a divine *scroll of cure light wounds* (CL3). PCs taking gear from the bodies notice that the bodies have already been picked over by someone or something, as other gear is obviously missing.

VIRULENCE-MUTATED MONSTROUS HUNTING SPIDER CR 3

CE Large Vermin

Init +3; **Senses** Listen +0, Spot +8

Languages –

AC 14, touch 12, flat-footed 11

hp 34 (4 HD)

Immune vermin immunities

Fort +8, **Ref** +4, **Will** +1

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares), climb 20 ft.

Melee bite +7 (1d8+7 plus poison)

Ranged web +5 touch (entangle)

Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft.

Base Atk +3; **Gp** +12

Atk Options poison (DC 16, 1d6 Str/1d6 Str)

Abilities Str 21, Dex 17, Con 18, Int –, Wis 10, Cha 2

Feats –

Skills Climb +13, Hide+7, Jump +15, Listen +0, Move Silently +7, Spot +8

Web (Ex) A Virulence-mutated monstrous spider can throw a web eight times per day. This is similar to an attack with a net but has a maximum range of 100 feet, with a range increment of 20 feet, and is effective against targets up to one size category larger than the spider. The web anchors the target in place, allowing no movement. An entangled creature can escape the web with a successful DC 21 Escape Artist check or burst it with a DC 21 Strength check. The check DCs are Strength-based and include a +4 racial bonus. The web has 12 hit points and hardness 0, and takes double damage from fire.

SCALING THE ENCOUNTER

1st-Level Characters: subtract one Virulence-mutated monstrous spider.

3rd-Level Characters: add one injured Virulence-mutated monstrous spider (hp 20).

4th-Level Characters: add two injured Virulence-mutated monstrous spiders (hp 27, 20).

PART 3: THE SAFEHOUSE OF HORRORS

After the PCs clear away the debris blocking the entrance to Red Rover Base, they can enter. The layout of the base is shown in Red Rover Base map. The whole base has been turned into a living nightmare puzzle: a test for the Crimson Codex dreamed up by the insane daelkyr called Virulence and carried out by his minions. The PCs must untangle the threads of the puzzle (literally and figuratively) and avoid the traps in order to save Pinesky and Rasp Gilboa and retrieve some of the artifacts deemed so valuable to the Crimson Codex. The PCs may rest at any point in the safehouse. However, if they rest for more than 24 hours, Rasp succumbs to his transformation and turns into a dolghast even if the PCs get him out of the cocoon in the proper manner.

1. ENTRANCE

With the debris that blocked the entrance to the base now removed, you can see the steep tunnel passage descending into the earth. Rudimentary steps have been carved into the sloping passage, allowing safe, if uncomfortable, egress. The passage descends several hundred feet into the darkness, but finally it opens into a wide, flat area, lit by a pair of everburning torches. The room has been worked inexpertly out of the rock. A makeshift stone door on rusty hinges sits ajar in front of you.

It takes a DC 5 Strength check to pull open the door, revealing the main area of Red Rover Base. A DC 25 Survival check (with the Track feat) reveals that several booted humanoid footprints have been in and out of this area within the last few hours, as have some prints from obviously non-humanoid creatures: slithering creatures, vermin, and other aberrations of various shapes and sizes.

2. MAIN AREA

This chamber and all the other chambers in the Red Rover Base have 15-foot-high ceilings.

The chaos that has descended on this large chamber is enough to make even the most battle-hardened adventurer shake his head or wipe her eyes to make sure things are as they actually appear. Broken furniture, smashed stone artifacts, and destroyed tomes litter the floor of the chamber. Occasionally a piece of debris moves, seemingly of its own accord, but no wind or earthquake is the cause. A scream like the death wail of a tortured woman erupts inside your head, only to die away. Bolted to the walls, lanterns radiate sickly orange, ghastly purple, and bloody red lights. The shadows themselves move without actually moving. Sticky strings and threads hang from the ceiling of the chamber: some holding body parts, some holding vermin, and others holding smashed pieces of old artifacts. Covering the walls are words written in chalk in strange script and different alphabets.

And this is before you see the really weird things. Such as the bright red scorpion floating in mid-air right in front of you, with a piece of parchment attached to the stinger on its tail.

The red scorpion is hanging from the ceiling by a thin strand of sticky web, leaving it tangled and spinning there. The note attached to the scorpion's tail is written in Daelkyr, and is supplied as Handout 1 when translated. If a PC does not read Daelkyr, a DC 15 Decipher Script check is needed to understand the gist of the message, although magic can also be used to read the note. Some scrolls and a wand of *comprehend languages* are available in the broken chest (see Area A below), so the PCs should not have any difficulty in learning what it says.

The words written on the walls all say the same thing: "value," "toxicity," "density." These words are written in no particular order, instead scrawled everywhere completely randomly and haphazardly. The words are written in four different languages: auran (draconic alphabet), ignan (draconic alphabet), aquan (elven alphabet), and terran (dwarven alphabet). Anyone speaking any of those languages can at least tell what the three words are and that they are written dozens of times in each language. A DC 15 Decipher Script check allows a PC to read each language, therefore learning all the words written in that language.

A DC 10 Heal check allows a character to surmise that the body parts hanging about the area probably account for about three people.

Area A – Magical Aid

A broken chest sitting immediately to the right of the entryway has words carved into the lid in Common: "Translation Aids." The chest, when the lid is pulled off, contains four scrolls of *comprehend languages* and a wand of *comprehend languages* with 7 charges remaining. Anyone who picks up the wand and has *comprehend languages* on his spell list knows the activation method.

Area B – The Spider Web Trap

Read the following when the PCs view this part of the room more closely:

This section of the room contains a mass of thick, fibrous cords that appear to be spider webs. The webs, however, are actually being used as strings or ropes. In the center of the mass, a human-shaped figure is apparently bound to a chair, but the ropes are entwining the figure so thickly that it is impossible to make out who or even what the figure is. The only distinguishing feature is a thick black beard peeking out of the strands where the face of the figure would be. Four heavy crossbows are somehow connected to the strands, and they are aimed directly at the figure's head on each side. It would be impossible to get to either the figure or the crossbows without disturbing the thick strands. The strands are four different colors: black, white, red and gold. Tiny spiders crawl within this horrific mass, but appear to be leaving the figure alone.

A PC with trapfinding who makes a DC 23 Search check learns that the strands are indeed connected to the figure in the chair, to the crossbows, and to each other. A DC 10 Disable Device check reveals that this is a series of interconnected traps, and to disable it successfully the strands have to be cut in a particular order, or else all of the crossbows fire simultaneously into the head of the figure in the chair. A DC 38 Disable Device check made without cutting each strand in the proper order must be made to disable ONE of the strand traps, so it would take 4 consecutive Disable Device checks at DC 38 to succeed. Additionally, anyone with trapfinding knows that even the slightest disturbance of the strands, the crossbows, or the figure would set off the entire trap, trigger all four crossbows to shoot into the head of the figure in the chair.

The correct order to cut the strands is white, black, gold, and red. Cutting in a different order, touching the strands, moving the strands, making contact with the crossbows, or making contact with the figure results in the crossbows firing and "killing" the figure in the chair. It is impossible to even reach the figure or the crossbows without making contact with the strands, although PCs might try to use *mage hand* or other magic to manipulate things. This still sets off the trap as well.

The key to figuring out the correct order to cut the strands is contained in the strange writing on the walls and the various other tricks and traps throughout the rest of Red Rover Base. Each string is a certain color, and that color corresponds with a precious metal, a type of vermin, and an element, as detailed below:

White: copper, ants, air
Black: silver, centipede, fire
Gold: gold, wasp, water
Red: platinum, scorpion, earth

The secret to the puzzle is cutting the strings in order from the least to the most of each category: the least to the most valuable metal, the least to the most poisonous vermin, and the least dense to the densest element. The

PCs can use *A Field Guide to the Vermin of Xen'Drik* at least one of them was given at the beginning of the adventure to ascertain the toxicity of the various vermin in the safehouse: ants are the least dangerous, then centipedes, then wasps, and scorpion poison is the most deadly. A DC 12 Knowledge (nature) check can reveal this as well.

If the PCs set off the trap, the crossbow bolts fire into the head of the figure, but the blood splatter one would expect doesn't occur. The saltor worms his way out of the strands, and says the following before attacking:

The creature in the chair was not human-sized at all, but as small as a halfling. It has a baboon-like head with a beard of small tentacles hanging off its chin. In a barking voice it says in Common, "You have failed. The Master was right in thinking you were not worthy. Master thought you were smart, but Master was wrong. You are not worthy, as Master thought."

If the PCs succeed in cutting the strings in the proper order, the trap is disarmed and the threads fall away from the crossbows and the figure. Read or paraphrase the following when that happens:

With the trap disarmed, the strands fall away. The figure in the chair wiggles, loosening the bindings. As they fall away, the head also falls away and rolls across the floor. The creature in the chair was not human-sized at all, but as small as a halfling. It has a baboon-like head with a beard of small tentacles hanging off its chin. In a barking voice it says in Common, "I must tell Master you succeed. Master will not be pleased, but Master will be pleased. Now I tell you how to save your trapped friend."

Creature: The creature is a saltor named Pkogp (p'gog-puh), one of the minor and least significant servants of Virulence. Pkogp calls all of the creatures who serve Virulence, as well as Virulence himself, "Master." If questioned, he doesn't know much except how to release Rasp from the cocoon (using the four elements) and that he is supposed to report back to his masters whether the PCs succeeded or not in releasing him without setting off the trap. Pkogp takes no hostile actions against the PCs with they freed him without setting off the trap, and he tries to be as helpful as possible in that case. If the PCs attack him, Pkogp defends himself to the best of his ability.

SALTOR CR 3

NE Small aberration

Init +3; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +5, Spot +5

Languages Common, Undercommon

AC 16, touch 14, flat-footed 13

hp 17 (5 HD)

Fort +3, **Ref** +6, **Will** +5

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares), climb 30 ft.

Melee bite +7 (1d6+1)

Base Atk +3; **Grp** +0

Special Actions screech

Spell-Like Abilities (ML 3):

3/day – concealing amorpha, energy ray (3d4 sonic)

1/day - hustle

Abilities Str 12, Dex 17, Con 12, Int 9, Wis 12, Cha 11

Feats Alertness, Weapon Finesse

Skills Climb +11, Jump +7, Listen +5, Spot +5, Tumble +5

Screech (Ex) As a standard action, a saltor can emit a high-pitched, piercing shriek in a 20-foot cone. The shriek deal 2d8 points of sonic damage to all nonsaltors and stuns creatures for 1 round. A DC 14 Fortitude save negates the stun and halves the damage. Once it screeches, a saltor cannot screech again for 1 hour.

Psi-Like Abilities:

Concealing Amorpha This psi-like ability grants the saltor concealment (20% miss chance) for 3 minutes.

Energy Ray This psi-like ability deal 3d4 points of sonic damage to a target with 30 ft. The saltor must succeed on a ranged touch attack for the ray to succeed.

Hustle This psi-like ability costs a swift action.

When manifested, this power gives the saltor one extra move action in a round.

SCALING THE ENCOUNTER

1st-Level Characters: Pkogp cannot use his screech or psi-like abilities.

3rd-Level Characters: no change.

4th-Level Characters: no change.

Area C – The Wasps

Read the following when the PCs view this part of the room more closely:

In this corner of the chamber rests a six-foot tall stall made of a clear glassy substance. The stall is about four-feet long and wide, and it is filled with buzzing, unnaturally gold-colored wasps. At the bottom of the stall, resting in a few inches of clear water and covered in hundreds of the strange golden wasps, is a leather satchel with a gold buckle. A thick yellowish-gold cloth covers the opening at the top of the stall.

The waterproof satchel in the stall contains a gold coin, vial of holy water, 2 skins of fresh drinking water, a scroll of *water breathing* and a gemstone cut to look like a wasp. An Appraise check (DC 15) reveals that the gem is worth about 50 gp. The PCs can use whatever means necessary to get the satchel out. Breaking the glass or leaving the cloth top off the stall for more than three consecutive rounds releases the wasp swarm. A PC can climb into the stall, grab the satchel and climb out, but she takes damage each round she is in the stall. PCs may drop fire, acid, or other damage-dealing substances into the stall, but there is a danger of destroying the contents of the satchel.

For example, if the PCs attempt to snag the satchel with a grappling hook, that requires a DC 15 Dexterity check. Failure means that the top remains open for a round, potentially releasing the wasp swarm if the cloth is left off the top for too long. A *mage hand* spell does not work, as the satchel is too heavy. Allow other methods of retrieving the satchel to work as

appropriate, based on your best judgment of that the PCs attempt.

Foes: The wasps are normal wasps, but they are a special breed created by Virulence to attack any living creatures they can sense. A DC 15 Knowledge (nature) check reveals that these wasps number more than enough to swarm over a person and kill them quickly. The wasp swarm uses identical stats to a centipede swarm, except it can fly at a speed of 20 ft. instead of climb.

Wasp Swarm: hp 31; *Monster Manual* 238 (see Centipede Swarm).

SCALING THE ENCOUNTER

1st-Level Characters: the swarm has only 11 hp and only does 1d6 points of damage per round.

3rd-Level Characters: no change.

4th-Level Characters: add a second wasp swarm.

Area D - The Cocoon

Read the following when the PCs view this part of the room more closely:

In the corner of this area, where the ceiling meets the wall, a cocoon consisting of a mass of fibrous strands hangs. Every so often a twitching becomes evident from beneath the cocoon, but the movements are so miniscule as to be almost unnoticeable.

The cocoon contains the body of Rasp Gilboa. He is in the process of being turned into something horrible: a dolghast. The thick and vile strands of the cocoon make anything in the cocoon immune to magic, physical damage, and any energy damage. Attacking the cocoon with a slashing weapon releases Rasp the dolghast.

If the PCs are patient and free the saltor from the Spider Web Trap first, that creature tells the PCs how to release Rasp from the cocoon without having him come out as a dolghast. In this case Rasp is unconscious (-1 hit points) but unaltered. The method of releasing Rasp from the evil and corrupting magic of the cocoon is to hit the cocoon with all four elements simultaneously: air, water, earth, and fire. Even the most basic elemental contact, such as fanned air stirring a breeze, a lit tindertwig, a handful of earth or rock, and a splash of water, is enough to do the trick. The secret is that this must be done simultaneously, so it will take 4 PCs working in concert to achieve the task. If successful, the cocoon melts away and reveals Rasp, who falls to the floor of the chamber.

Foe: Assuming the PCs release Rasp in dolghast form by slashing the cocoon with a weapon, the PCs must fight him. Rasp in dolghast form has lost all memory of his former life, and his mind has been warped to one of pure hatred and loathing for living creatures.

On the round that he is freed, the dolghast falls prone on the floor. The stench and the horrible boiling skin are sure signs that something is wrong, although the living side of the dolghast matches the description of Rasp exactly. On the first round of combat, the dolghast must stand from prone, giving the PCs a slight advantage.

DOLGHAST CR 4

LE Medium aberration

Init +2; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +2, Spot +2

Languages Common, Undercommon

AC 17, touch 12, flat-footed 15

hp 33 (6 HD); fast healing 5

Immune fatigue, exhaustion, poison, sleep effects, paralysis, stunning, disease, death effects

Fort +3, **Ref** +6, **Will** +5

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares)

Melee 2 claws +8 (1d6+4)

and

Melee bite +3 (1d6+2)

Base Atk +4; **Grp** +8

Special Actions dissolution

Abilities Str 19, Dex 14, Con 13, Int 6, Wis 11, Cha 14

SQ half-dead, scent, stench

Feats Alertness, Lightning Reflexes, Track

Skills Listen +2, Spot +2, Survival +9

Dissolution (Ex) If a dolghast hits with both claw attacks, a living opponent must succeed at a DC 15 Fortitude save or its flesh begins to boil away. The target takes 1d4 points of Constitution damage and is stunned for 1 round. On a successful save, the target takes only 1 point of Constitution damage and is not stunned.

Stench (Ex) Living creatures with 10 feet must make a DC 15 Fortitude save or be sickened for 1d6 + 4 minutes. A creature that saves cannot be effected by the same dolghast's stench for 24 hours. A delay poison or neutralize poison removes the sickened effect. Creatures immune to poison are unaffected, and creatures with a bonus to saving throws versus poison receive that bonus.

Half-Dead (Ex) 50% chance to ignore extra damage dealt by a critical hit or sneak attack. Healed by both negative and positive energy, but only if it successfully saves against the spell. A failed save means the spell does damage as if the creature were living (for *inflict* spells) or undead (for *cure* spells).

Developments: If the PCs defeat Rasp the dolghast, they find (with a DC 7 Search check) clasped in his hand a single small round Siberys dragonshard. The person or people doing the searching of the body (rolling the Search checks) are the ones who find it.

If the PCs free Rasp without having him turn into a dolghast, he is unconscious but alive. The small Siberys dragonshard is clutched in his hand. If brought back to consciousness, he is relatively lucid and can answer a few questions. (See "Ending the Adventure" with the points that Rasp and/or Pinesky can share with the PCs.)

SCALING THE ENCOUNTER

1st-Level Characters: The dolghast is not formed well enough to have the stench ability, and he can only take one standard action each round (which means he

cannot use his dissolution attack since he gets one claw attack each round).

3rd-Level Characters: Use the normal stats.

4th-Level Characters: Another body has been placed in the cocoon with Rasp, so there are two dolghasts.

3. THE CHAMBER OF MIST

Read or paraphrase the following when the PCs approach the mist-covered passage leading to Area 3 and before they step onto the white-covered floor outside that corridor:

In front of a fog-choked passageway, the floor was been covered with a whitish substance that looks a bit liked hardened flour. In the substance covering the floor is written in Common, "Only three may enter."

When the first PC steps into the area of the white substance, three spirits appear from out of the mist:

Insubstantial human forms float out of the fog in the corridor, and you hear a whispering voice echo throughout the chamber. "We were killed by the spiders while defending this place, and our souls are trapped here. Only you can release us, but we can help you too. Three of you must pass through the fog, and the three of us must. However, no more than two can pass at a time, and we must grasp this book in order to cross the fog. And if at any time we spirits outnumber you mortals one side or the other, we will perish and you will fail. How can we all pass safely?"

This is a standard logic riddle. As the spirits say, three PCs and the three spirits must get through the fog into the chamber beyond. Only three PCs may take part in the riddle. If the spirits ever outnumber the PCs on either side of the fog-filled chamber, anyone standing on the white substance takes 3d6 points of negative energy damage (Will save DC 12 for half) and the spirits are destroyed forever. If a PC tries to enter the fog without holding the book, that PC takes the damage as well as finds he cannot pass. The answer to the riddle is as follows:

Round 1 – Either two spirits (or a spirit and a PC) cross over holding the book.

Round 2 – One spirit remains on the far side, leaving 2 spirits and 3 PCs in the main chamber.

Round 3 – Two spirits cross over holding the book.

Round 4 – One spirit returns with the book, leaving 1 spirit and 3 PCs in the main chamber.

Round 5 – Two PCs cross over.

Round 6 – One PC and one spirit return, leaving 2 PCs and 2 spirits in the main chamber.

Round 7 – Two PCs cross over, and then send the spirit back to fetch the two still in the main chamber.

When the PCs make it across the foggy passage (whether or not they succeed in solving the riddle correctly), read or paraphrase the following:

Ants, pure white against the dark stone, crawl about this chamber. At one point this chamber was probably used as a sleeping area and mess hall. Bunks and tables lay smashed about the room, and the ants hungrily crawl over the footstuff spread about the room. On the north wall is a pictograph representing the blowing wind, on the west wall is a similar pictograph representing an ant, and on the south wall is a pictograph representing a bar of copper.

When all three PCs and three spirits are in the chamber, the PCs hear a whispered voice say: "You must find the copper to release us." They speak no more, but fly around the room faster when the PCs get closer to the pictographs described below.

A Search check of the room reveals nothing, although when a PC gets within 10 feet of one of the pictogram, it glows faintly. The closer they get, the brighter it goes, until finally it glows with light equal to a light spell if touched. When each of the 3 PCs touches a different pictograph simultaneously, all three pictographs light. Read the following:

When the last pictograph is touched and lights, the debris about the room begins to move, finally culminating in a veritable whirlwind of sharp shards of wood. In the middle of the whirlwind appears a copper box. To get to it, however, you would have to pass through the dangerous mass of flying wood.

The PCs, however, do not have to pass through the dangerous area, as the spirits of their fallen brethren are now free, and as a last thank you, the spirits assist. They fly into the area, become corporeal long enough to push the copper box out of the danger zone, and then dissipate with a wave and a whispered "Wisdom is Foresight. The danger is ever increasing, but that is the answer to the strand trap as well. Ever increasing. Ever increasing. Ever increasing." Then the spirits fade and the whirlwind subsides.

The copper box can be opened easily. The lid of the box is etched with strange designs over various vermin, mutated into strange new and deadly shapes. In the language of Daelkyr is written a single word: "Virulence." Inside the box are 1 copper coin, a *Quaal's feather token (fan)*, and a gemstone carved in the shape of an ant. An Appraise check (DC 15) reveals the gem is only worth about 5 gp.

SCALING THE ENCOUNTER

1st-Level Characters: The damage done by the fog or the dissipating spirits is 3d4.

3rd-Level Characters: The damage done by the fog or the dissipating spirits is 3d8.

4th-Level Characters: The damage done by the fog or the dissipating spirits is 3d12.

4. THE ARTIFACT ROOM

Read or paraphrase the following when the PCs approach passage leading to Area 4:

This chamber contains stacks and stacks of delicate scrolls, parchments, and tomes. By the looks of some, they have to be hundreds, if not thousands, of years old. All of these flammable treasures sit on tables made of wood. Beneath each of these tables, small fires flicker. The fires are small enough to not use up all the oxygen in the chamber, but large enough to possibly light the tables, which would in turn destroy the artifacts on them. Other nonflammable artifacts have been pushed to the corners of the room. Pitch black centipedes scurry around the room, trying to avoid the fires. Hanging from silver threads stuck to the ceiling above the books are small vials. Centipedes crawl upon these as well. Resting on a central table, among the endangered tomes, is a black backpack tied closed with a silver string.

The vials hanging above the fires and tables are filled with lantern oil. The room is trapped to drop the oil on the artifacts, tables, and fires if the trap is not disarmed or avoided. Unfortunately for the PCs, the trap dropping the oil onto the fires is the obvious one.

Another trap, more subtle and well hidden, threatens the chamber as well (see Traps below).

Inside the black backpack is a single silver coin, 10 tindertwigs, a vial of alchemist's fire, and a gemstone cut to look like a centipede. A DC 15 Appraise check shows the gemstone to be worth 25 gp.

Traps: The first trap is a relatively simple mechanical trap. The strands holding the vials of oil are attached to strands on the floor, so walking through the chamber releases the oil into the fires, essentially destroying the tomes. This trap does no damage to the PCs, and it can be found and disabled with DC 15 Search and Disable Device checks, respectively.

The second trap, however, threatens both the artifacts and the PCs. If the PCs touch or move any of the books on the tables in any way, a fire spell shoots upward from the floor, affecting the PC touching the book, any PCs adjacent to the touching PC, and the artifacts on the tables. Note that using magic to move the books (*mage hand*, *unseen servant*, etc.) still activates the trap. Anyone casting a *detect magic* into the room and concentrating can see that a dormant spell effect is resting on the fires. A DC 20 Knowledge (nature) or DC 16 Spellcraft or Knowledge (arcana) check also reveals that the fires beneath the table are not behaving as normal fires. Anyone making this check can provide a +8 bonus to a PC's Search and Disable Device checks to find and disable the *burning hands* trap.

Attempts to put out the fire with either normal or magically conjured water fail, but this failure should clue in the PCs that something about this fire is not normal, thus providing a +2 bonus to the above Knowledge or Spellcraft checks.

Burning Hands Trap: CR 2; magic device; touch trigger; automatic reset, spell effect (*burning hands*, 1st-level wizard, 3d4 fire, DC 12 Reflex save half damage); Search DC 26; Disable Device DC 26.

SCALING THE ENCOUNTER

1st-Level Characters: Use the following trap instead:

Burning Hands Trap: CR 2; magic device; touch trigger; automatic reset, spell effect (*burning hands*, 1st-level wizard, 1d4 fire, DC 11 Reflex save half damage); Search DC 26; Disable Device DC 26.

3rd-Level Characters: Use the following trap instead:

Burning Hands Trap: CR 3; magic device; touch trigger; automatic reset, spell effect (*burning hands*, 5th-level wizard, 5d4 fire, DC 11 Reflex save half damage); Search DC 26; Disable Device DC 26.

4th-Level Characters: Use the following trap instead:

Empowered Burning Hands Trap: CR 4; magic device; touch trigger; automatic reset, spell effect (*empowered burning hands*, 5th-level wizard, 5d4 plus (5d4) fire, DC 13 Reflex save half damage); Search DC 26; Disable Device DC 26.

5. RED SCORPIONS AND PINESKY

Read or paraphrase the following when the PCs approach the blood-covered passage leading to Area 5:

The hallway leading into this chamber is thick with drying blood. Scorpions, bright red in hue, scuttle through the blood and away from you as you approach. They round a barrier just inside the chamber. The barrier wall appears to be made of earth and stone, with some platinum filaments holding it together.

When the PCs get to the barrier, read or paraphrase the following:

A female voice from beyond the wall calls out, "If you are here to take the test and rescue your friend, enter now. I grow tired of waiting."

The scorpions have alerted Gris'Eld to the approach of the PCs. She stands against the south wall, behind a 5-foot-deep hole in the floor. Several other similar holes dot the room. In the hole in the southeast corner of the room lies the half-drow Pinesky. He is currently unconscious (0 hit points) and is mostly insane due to the treatment he received at the hands of Virulence's minions.

Medium-sized PCs can stand in a hole and fight, but take a -2 on attack melee attack rolls and a -2 on Dexterity due to the awkward footing. Opponents fighting someone in a hole have higher ground. However, PCs in a hole gain a +2 cover bonus to AC if being attacked by ranged attacks from someone more than 5 feet away. Small creatures have full cover in the holes and cannot attack out.

Foes: Gris'Eld is a daelkyr half-blood drawn to the evil and chaotic nature within her. She happily joined forces with the minions of Virulence, and she was tasked to guard the prisoner and kill anyone who came to rescue him. She was told that if she kills those sent to rescue the prisoner, she would be rewarded with power directly from the daelkyr itself. She is forbidden to attack the prisoner herself, however.

Gris'Eld: female daelkyr half-blood hexblade 4: hp 32; Combat Statistics.

GRIS'ELD CR 4

Daelkyr half-blood hexblade 4

CE Medium aberration

Init +0; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; **Listen** +0, **Spot** +0

Languages Common, Daelkyr

AC 14, **touch** 10, **flat-footed** 14

hp 32 (4 HD)

Fort +2, **Ref** +1, **Will** +4 (mettle; arcane resistance: +2 versus spells or spell-like abilities)

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares)

Melee mw greatsword +8 (2d6+3/19-20)

Ranged throwing scarab +4 (1d6+2/19-20 plus 1d6 acid)

Base Atk +4; **Grp** +6

Atk Options Power Attack

Special Actions hexblade's curse

Combat Gear *potion of barkskin* +2, 2 *potions of cure light wounds*

Hexblade Spells Known (CL 2nd):

1st (1/day)—Protection from Good, Tasha's

Hideous Laughter (DC 13)

Abilities Str 14, Dex 10, Con 13, Int 13, Wis 10, Cha

14

Feats Power Attack, Symbiont Mastery^B, Weapon Focus (greatsword)
Skills Bluff +9, Diplomacy+11, Intimidate+11
Possessions Combat gear, masterwork chain shirt, masterwork greatsword, throwing scarab symbiont

Personal Symbiont (Ex) Gris'Eld has a throwing scarab symbiont. If a symbiont is lost, she can grow a replacement from her flesh in 2d4 days. Symbionts gained in other manners, and personal symbionts yet living, cannot be replaced in this manner.

Symbiont Dependency (Ex) If Gris'Eld has no contact with at least one of her symbionts for 24 hours, she takes 1 point of Constitution damage. She takes this damage every 24 hours, until contact is restored, and damage sustained in this fashion cannot be restored by any means as long as she remains separated from her symbiont.

Unbalanced Mind (Ex) Any creature that attempts to read the thoughts of Gris'Eld or otherwise study her mind must make a Will save (DC 14) or be dazed for 1 round.

Hexblade's Curse (Su) Once per day, as a free action, Gris'Eld can unleash a curse on a visible foe within 60 feet. The target takes a -2 penalty on attacks, saves, ability checks, skill checks, and weapon damage rolls for 1 hour thereafter. A successful Will save (DC 14) negates the effect.

Mettle (Ex) If Gris'Eld makes a successful Will or Fortitude save against an attack that would have a lesser effect on a successful save, she instead completely ignores the effect.

THROWING SCARAB

CR 1

LE Fine aberration (Symbiont)
Init +1; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +5, Spot +5
Languages understands Undercommon, telepathy with host

AC 19, touch 19, flat-footed 18

hp 5 (1 HD)

Fort +0, **Ref** +1, **Will** +2

Speed 5 ft. (1 square), fly 60 ft. (perfect)

Melee bite +9 (1)

Space ½ ft.; **Reach** 0 ft.

Base Atk +0; **Grp** -20

Abilities Str 3, Dex 12, Con 10, Int 5, Wis 12, Cha 6, Ego 2

SQ symbiont traits

Feats Alertness, Weapon Finesse

Skills Hide +17, Listen +5, Spot +5

Host Benefit (Ex) A throwing scarab generates small shards of hard crystalline carapace. As a free action, a host can grasp a shard and throw it as a normal ranged attack. The shard has a range increment of 20 feet, and the host is always

proficient with it. The shard is treated as a magical weapon when thrown for the purpose of overcoming damage reduction. On a successful hit, the shard deals 1d6 points of slashing damage (critical 19-20/x2) and then dissolves in its target, dealing an additional 1d6 points of acid damage.

At the beginning of the host's next action, the throwing scarab secretes another shard, allowing the host to throw one shard each round. Shards do not last for more than 1 round once detached from the symbiont. If the shard is not used as a weapon within 1 round after being pulled from a symbiont, it dissolves harmlessly. While attached to the host, a throwing scarab does not make any attacks of its own.

Developments: In Pinesky's pockets are the following items, placed there by the minions of Virulence: a single platinum coin, a vial full of red dirt, and a gemstone cut in the shape of a scorpion. A DC 15 Appraise check shows the gem is worth 100 gp. Pinesky's hair has been dyed an unnatural red.

If the PCs attempt to speak to Pinesky, who becomes conscious if they remove him from the hole, he starts screaming and attempting to knock himself unconscious by beating his head against a wall or the floor. The PCs can stop him, and a DC 10 Heal check reveals that his mind has snapped from obvious abuse. The only thing that brings him even partially to his senses is being presented with the gold and silver necklace from his wife. Brought back to his sense, Pinesky still isn't much help with the current problems, although he can answer questions later. (See "Ending the Adventure" for points that Pinesky and/or Rasp can offer the PCs.)

Note which PC struck the killing blow or was the final cause of Gris'Eld's demise. That PC is later asked by Pinesky to be the godparent of his newborn daughter. That PC gets a special story award. If the PC refuses, another PC (at your discretion) is asked.

SCALING THE ENCOUNTER

1st-Level Characters: Use the 3rd level Gris'Eld.

3rd-Level Characters: Use the 5th level Gris'Eld.

4th-Level Characters: Use the 6th level Gris'Eld.

GRIS'ELD

CR 3

Daelkyr half-blood hexblade 3

CE Medium aberration

Init +0; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +0, Spot +0

Languages Common, Daelkyr

AC 14, touch 10, flat-footed 14

hp 25 (3 HD)

Fort +2, **Ref** +1, **Will** +3 (mettle; arcane resistance: +2 versus spells or spell-like abilities)

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares)

Melee mw greatsword +7 (2d6+3/19-20)

Ranged throwing scarab +3 (1d6+2/19-20 plus 1d6 acid)

Base Atk +3; **Grp** +5

Atk Options Power Attack

Special Actions hexblade's curse

Combat Gear *potion of barkskin +2, 2 potions of cure light wounds*

Abilities Str 14, Dex 10, Con 12, Int 13, Wis 10, Cha 14

Feats Power Attack, Symbiont Mastery^B, Weapon Focus (greatsword)

Skills Bluff +8, Diplomacy +10, Intimidate +10

Possessions Combat gear, chain shirt, masterwork greatsword, throwing scarab symbiont

Personal Symbiont (Ex) Gris'Eld has a throwing scarab symbiont. If a symbiont is lost, she can grow a replacement from her flesh in 2d4 days. Symbionts gained in other manners, and personal symbionts yet living, cannot be replaced in this manner.

Symbiont Dependency (Ex) If Gris'Eld has no contact with at least one of her symbionts for 24 hours, she takes 1 point of Constitution damage. She takes this damage every 24 hours, until contact is restored, and damage sustained in this fashion cannot be restored by any means as long as she remains separated from her symbiont.

Unbalanced Mind (Ex) Any creature that attempts to read the thoughts of Gris'Eld or otherwise study her mind must make a Will save (DC 13) or be dazed for 1 round.

Hexblade's Curse (Su) Once per day, as a free action, Gris'Eld can unleash a curse on a visible foe within 60 feet. The target takes a –2 penalty on attacks, saves, ability checks, skill checks, and weapon damage rolls for 1 hour thereafter. A successful Will save (DC 13) negates the effect.

Mettle (Ex) If Gris'Eld makes a successful Will or Fortitude save against an attack that would have a lesser effect on a successful save, she instead completely ignores the effect.

GRIS'ELD CR 5

Daelkyr half-blood hexblade 5

CE Medium aberration

Init +0; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +0, Spot +0

Languages Common, Daelkyr

AC 15, touch 10, flat-footed 15

hp 45 (5 HD) + 5 hp from breed leech included

Fort +3 (including +1 bonus from breed leech), **Ref** +1, **Will** +4 (mettle; arcane resistance: +2 versus spells or spell-like abilities)

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares)

Melee mw greatsword +9 (2d6+4/19-20)

Ranged throwing scarab +5 (1d6+2/19-20 plus 1d6 acid)

Base Atk +5; **Grp** +7

Atk Options Power Attack

Special Actions hexblade's curse

Combat Gear *potion of barkskin +2, 2 potions of cure moderate wounds*

Hexblade Spells Known (CL 2nd):

1st (1/day)—Protection from Good, Tasha's Hideous Laughter (DC 14)

Abilities Str 14, Dex 10, Con 13, Int 13, Wis 10, Cha 14

Feats Power Attack, Spell Focus (enchantment), Symbiont Mastery^B, Weapon Focus (greatsword)

Skills Bluff +10, Diplomacy +12, Intimidate +12

Possessions Combat gear, +1 chain shirt, +1 greatsword, throwing scarab symbiont, breed leech symbiont

Personal Symbiont (Ex) Gris'Eld has a throwing scarab symbiont. If a symbiont is lost, she can grow a replacement from her flesh in 2d4 days. Symbionts gained in other manners, and personal symbionts yet living, cannot be replaced in this manner.

Symbiont Dependency (Ex) If Gris'Eld has no contact with at least one of her symbionts for 24 hours, she takes 1 point of Constitution damage. She takes this damage every 24 hours, until contact is restored, and damage sustained in this fashion cannot be restored by any means as long as she remains separated from her symbiont.

Unbalanced Mind (Ex) Any creature that attempts to read the thoughts of Gris'Eld or otherwise study her mind must make a Will save (DC 14) or be dazed for 1 round.

Hexblade's Curse (Su) Twice per day, as a free action, Gris'Eld can unleash a curse on a visible foe within 60 feet. The target takes a –2 penalty on attacks, saves, ability checks, skill checks, and weapon damage rolls for 1 hour thereafter. A successful Will save (DC 14) negates the effect.

Mettle (Ex) If Gris'Eld makes a successful Will or Fortitude save against an attack that would have a lesser effect on a successful save, she instead completely ignores the effect.

GRIS'ELD CR 6

Daelkyr half-blood hexblade 6

CE Medium aberration

Init +0; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +0, Spot +0

Languages Common, Daelkyr

AC 15, touch 10, flat-footed 15

hp 53 (6 HD) + 5 hp from breed leech included

Fort +5 (including +1 bonus from breed leech), **Ref** +3, **Will** +6 (mettle; arcane resistance: +2 versus spells or spell-like abilities)

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares)

Melee mw greatsword +10/+5 (2d6+4/19-20)

Ranged throwing scarab +6 (1d6+2/19-20 plus 1d6 acid)

Base Atk +6; **Grp** +8

Atk Options Power Attack

Special Actions hexblade's curse

Combat Gear *potion of barkskin* +3, 2 *potions of cure moderate wounds*, *potion of bear's endurance*, *potion of fox's cunning*

Hexblade Spells Known (CL 3rd):

1st (2/day)—Charm Person (DC 14), Protection from Good, Tasha's Hideous Laughter (DC 14)

Abilities Str 14, Dex 10, Con 13, Int 13, Wis 10, Cha 14

Feats Cleave, Power Attack, Spell Focus (enchantment), Symbiont Mastery^B, Weapon Focus (greatsword)

Skills Bluff +11, Diplomacy+13, Intimidate+13

Possessions Combat gear, +1 *chain shirt*, +1 *greatsword*, throwing scarab symbiont, breed leech symbiont, *cloak of resistance* +1

Personal Symbiont (Ex) Gris'Eld has a throwing scarab symbiont. If a symbiont is lost, she can grow a replacement from her flesh in 2d4 days. Symbionts gained in other manners, and personal symbionts yet living, cannot be replaced in this manner.

Symbiont Dependency (Ex) If Gris'Eld has no contact with at least one of her symbionts for 24 hours, she takes 1 point of Constitution damage. She takes this damage every 24 hours, until contact is restored, and damage sustained in this fashion cannot be restored by any means as long as she remains separated from her symbiont.

Unbalanced Mind (Ex) Any creature that attempts to read the thoughts of Gris'Eld or otherwise study her mind must make a Will save (DC 15) or be dazed for 1 round.

Hexblade's Curse (Su) Twice per day, as a free action, Gris'Eld can unleash a curse on a visible foe within 60 feet. The target takes a -2 penalty on attacks, saves, ability checks, skill checks, and weapon damage rolls for 1 hour thereafter. A successful Will save (DC 15) negates the effect.

Mettle (Ex) If Gris'Eld makes a successful Will or Fortitude save against an attack that would have a lesser effect on a successful save, she instead completely ignores the effect.

BREED LEECH CR 1

LE Tiny aberration (Symbiont)

Init +2; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen -1, Spot -1

Languages understands Undercommon, telepathy with host

AC 15, touch 14, flat-footed 13

hp 5 (1 HD)

Fort +0, **Ref** +4, **Will** +1

Speed 20 ft. (4 squares)

Melee bite +4 (1d3-2)

Space 2½ ft.; **Reach** 0 ft.

Base Atk +0; **Grp** -10

Abilities Str 6, Dex 15, Con 11, Int 5, Wis 8, Cha 10, Ego 2

SQ symbiont traits

Feats Lightning Reflexes, Weapon Finesse

Skills Hide +12, Move Silently +4

Bolster Body (Su) While a breed leech is attached to a host, the host gains 5 bonus hit points per day and gains a +1 bonus on Fortitude saves.

ENDING THE ADVENTURE

After the PCs have concluded their nightmare test in the safehouse, they can pack up any survivors, any artifacts that they rescued, and travel toward Stormreach. On the way, Rasp and Pinesky, if alive and with the PCs, slowly heal the mental wounds they received. However, they still occasionally babble, even in their sleep or when unconscious. This babbling conveys certain knowledge and is Virulence's gift to the PCs: a dark blessing of forbidden knowledge on them (see Story Object).

In their more lucid moments, Pinesky and/or Rasp can reveal the following:

- Dozens of aberrations and swarms of vermin attacked the safehouse, and they took most of the artifacts being housed and studied there.
- The aberrations included many kinds neither had ever seen or read about before. However, two of them who seemed to be commanding the others were very recognizable: and illithid and a beholder.
- The beholder grumbled a bit about not being able to just slay them all, and something about wasting time with a test.

When the PCs arrive back, they can contact the Crimson Codex and turn over all objects they retrieved, as well as Rasp and Pinesky. If a PC secreted away or was given the Siberys shard, that PC can easily find their secret contact and turn it over. That PC receives a special Story Award.

Also, Pinesky's wife gives birth a few days later to a healthy, half-drow female. The PC who struck the killing blow against Gris'Eld is asked to be the godparent. If that PC refuses, the PC who was next most responsible for the rescue is asked, until someone accepts. That PC receives a special Story Award.

ADVENTURE QUESTIONS

1. Did the PCs defeat the Virulence-mutated spiders?
 - A. Yes.
 - B. No.
2. How did the PCs handle the cocoon and Rasp?
 - A. They cut him down and had to kill him.

- B. They cut him down and he killed them.
 - C. They released him properly and he survived.
 - D. They never got the chance to interact with the cocoon.
3. Did the PCs gain access to the objects in the white ant room?
 - A. Yes.
 - B. No.
 4. Did the PCs gain access to the backpack in the wasp stall?
 - A. No.
 - B. Yes, they got it out without taking any damage.
 - C. Yes, they got it out but had to fight the swarm.
 5. Did the PCs gain access to the objects in the centipede fire room?
 - A. Yes.
 - B. No.
 6. Did the PCs defeat the daelkyr half-blood hexblade?
 - A. Yes.
 - B. No.
 7. Did the PCs release the saltor?
 - A. They messed up the Spider Web Trap, and the saltor died.
 - B. They never got a chance to mess with the Spider Web Trap.
 - C. They released him from the trap, got his information, then killed him.
 - D. They released him from the trap, got his information, then let him go.
 8. Who ended up with the small round Siberys shard?
 - A. They never found it.

- B. A PC gave it to one of the secret groups.
- C. It was returned to the Crimson Codex officials.

STORY OBJECTS

A Deal with Unknown Forces – You have done a task for someone within the Crimson Codex. You have their thanks and their favorable disposition, although you do not yet know their true motivations. This will certainly be important as your career in the Crimson Codex progresses.

Dark, Forbidden Knowledge – You have come into contact with someone whose mind has been touched by the forbidden knowledge that accompanies insanity. If you are a cleric, you now have access to the Madness domain (*Lords of Madness*, 207). You can denounce the madness and ignore this, or you can give in and take the domain as a third domain immediately.

If you are not a cleric, the madness manifests itself in a different way. Whenever you deal with an aberration, as a free action you can attempt either a Knowledge (nature), Knowledge (dungeoneering), or Knowledge (arcane) check. The DC of the check is 10 + the aberration's hit dice. A successful check lets you choose one of the following for your interaction with that aberration: +1 to weapon damage, +1 on Cha-based skill checks, or +1 on DCs to resist your spells. This bonus cannot be changed for that aberration once you select it.

Godparent to a Half-Drow Child – For striking the killing blow against the creature that held Pinesky the half-drow scholar prisoner, you have been asked to be the godparent of his daughter. The child was named after you, and you are tasked to help in her upbringing if necessary. Given the strange interaction of all things within the draconic Prophecy, this may carry more weight, for weal or woe, than you can even imagine.

HANDOUT 1

My master Virulence has recently taken notice of your master Ohnal Caldyn and his work with the Caldyn Fragments. Chaos looking at order and marveling, you might call it. My master's curiosity is ever-increasing, and Virulence wishes to know more about your attempts, and the attempts of your master, to take the beautiful chaos of this and the other universes and give them shape and form in the guise of a Prophecy — a Prophecy which then itself becomes a tool to further impose order upon chaos.

So my master presents to you this gift you see before you: chaos in its most raw form. You value life and the treasures of this continent. Virulence wishes to learn how you can take this chaos, this inevitable whirlwind of destruction, and bring order to it — and in doing so save those beings and objects that you hold dear. I hope the increasing magnitude of danger in our gift does not dissuade you from showing my master the full value of your skills.

I would just as soon kill all of you and sprinkle the depths of Khyber with your putrefying flesh, but my master's genius is fed by your hopeless shenanigans, and Virulence will one day rule us all. Even the elements themselves will bow before him. And you will help that happen, if you survive that long.

May your deaths be slow and torturous,

Abrinxenphyric

Base Entrance

Top of Hill

Slick Spots

Bottom of Hill

Clearing



