

COR5-01



STONE MAN'S MISSIVE

A ONE-ROUND D&D[®] LIVING GREYHAWK[™]
CORE ADVENTURE

Version 2

by Ron Lundeen

Circle Reviewers: Creighton Broadhurst and Stephen Radney-MacFarland

Drell, the peaceful and reclusive stone giant, has gone visiting some local miners in the Abbor-Alz Hills. All he finds are empty homes, and signs that his friends disappeared in the middle of their daily tasks. Drell asks the help of trusted adventurers to solve this mystery: who would want to spirit away a clan of miners? A loose sequel to *COR4-02 The Stone Man's Puzzle*. A scenario for APLs 6 to 12.

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, Richard Baker, and Peter Adkison.

This game product contains no Open Game Content. No portion of this work may be reproduced in any form without permission of Wizards of the Coast. To learn more about the Open Gaming License and the d20 SYSTEM license, please visit www.wizards.com/d20

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.rpga.com.

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS, D&D, GREYHAWK, LIVING GREYHAWK, D&D REWARDS, RPGA, *Player's Handbook*, *Dungeon Master's Guide*, and *Monster Manual* are trademarks of 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. © 2005 Wizards of the Coast, Inc.

RPGA SANCTIONED PLAY

Most likely you ordered this adventure as part of an RPGA even from the RPGA website, or you received it from your senior gamemaster. To play this adventure as part of the LIVING GREYHAWK campaign—a worldwide, ongoing D&D campaign set in the GREYHAWK setting—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 couple of things. First it is an official game, and you can use the AR to advance your LIVING GREYHAWK character. Second player and DMs gain rewards for sanctioned RPGA play if they are members of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS REWARDS program. Playing this adventure is worth two (2) points.

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

To learn more about the LIVING GREYHAWK character creation and development, RPGA event sanctioning, and DUNGEONS & DRAGONS REWARDS, visit the RPGA website at www.rpga.com.

PLAYERS READ NO FARTHER

If you are planning on playing this adventure, stop reading now. The rest of the information in this adventure is for the DM only. If you read farther than this section, you'll know too much about its challenges, which kills the fun. Also, if you're playing this adventure as part of an RPGA-sanctioned event, reading beyond this point makes you ineligible to do so.

PREPARING FOR PLAY

To get the most out of this adventure, you need copies of the following D&D books: *Player's Handbook*, *Dungeon Master's Guide*, and the *Monster Manual*.

Throughout this adventure, text in **bold italics** provides player information for you to paraphrase or read aloud when appropriate. Sidebars contain important information for you, including special instruction on running the adventure.

Information on nonplayer characters (NPCs) and monsters appear in abbreviated form in the adventure text. Full information on NPCs and monsters are given in Appendix 1.

Along with this adventure you'll find a RPGA Table Tracking sheet. If you're playing this adventure as part of an RPGA-sanctioned event, complete and turn in this sheet to your senior GM directly after play. You'll also find a LIVING GREYHAWK Adventure Record (AR).

LIVING GREYHAWK LEVELS OF PLAY

Because players bring their own characters to LIVING GREYHAWK games, this adventure's challenges are proportionate to the modified average character level of the PCs participating in the adventure. To determine this modified Average Party Level (APL) follow the steps below:

1. Determine the character level for each of the PCs participating in the adventure.
2. If PCs bring animals that have been trained for combat (most likely dogs trained for war), other than those brought by virtue of a class ability (such as animal companions, familiars paladin's mounts) or the warhorse of a character with the Mounted Combat feat, use the sidebar chart to determine the number of levels you add to the sum of step one. Add each character's animals separately. A single PC may only bring four or fewer animals of this type, and animals with different CRs are added separately.
3. Sum the results of step 1 and 2, and divide by the number of characters playing in the adventure. Round up to the nearest whole number.
4. If you are running a table of six PCs, add one to that average.

Throughout this adventure, APLs categorize the level of challenge the PCs face. APLs are given in even-numbered increments. If the APL of your group falls on an odd number, ask them before the adventure begins whether they would like to play a harder or easier adventure. Based on their choice, use either the higher or the lower adjacent APL.

APL also affects the amount of experience and gold a PC can gain at the end of the adventure. If a player character is three character levels or more either higher or lower than the APL at which this adventure is being played, that character receives only one-half of the experience points and gold for the adventure. This simulates the fact that either the PC was not challenged as much as normal or relied on help by higher-level characters to reach the objectives.

Furthermore, a PC who is four or more levels higher than the highest APL supported by the adventure may not play the adventure.

Mundane Animals Effect on APL		# of Animals			
		1	2	3	4
CR of Animal	1/4 & 1/6	0	0	0	1
	1/3 & 1/2	0	0	1	1
	1	1	1	2	3
	2	2	3	4	5
	3	3	4	5	6
	4	4	6	7	8
	5	5	7	8	9
6	6	8	9	10	
7	7	9	10	11	

LIVING GREYHAWK adventures are designed for APL 2 and higher. Four or five 1st-level characters may find the challenge of an APL 2 adventure difficult. Suggest the following to these groups to help increase their chances of success:

1. Enlist a sixth player.

Advise characters to buy riding

dogs to help protect them, and fight for them.

Time Units and Upkeep

This is a standard one-round Core adventure. All characters pay two Time Units per round. Adventurer's Standard Upkeep costs 12gp per Time Unit. Rich Upkeep costs 50gp per Time Unit. Luxury Upkeep costs 100gp per Time Unit.

Adventurer's Standard Upkeep costs 12gp per Time Unit. Rich Upkeep costs 50gp per Time Unit. Luxury Upkeep costs 100gp per Time Unit. Characters that fail to pay at least Standard Upkeep will retain temporary ability damage until the next adventure, must buy new spell component pouches and healer's kits, and may suffer other in-game penalties (or possibly gain in-game benefits) as may be detailed in this scenario.

A character who does not pay for at least Standard Upkeep may also avoid the above-described penalties by living off the wild. If the character possesses four or more ranks in the Survival skill and succeeds at a Survival check (DC 20), the character will heal temporary ability damage as if he or she paid for Standard Upkeep, may refill spell component pouches and healer's kits, and may restock up to 20 arrows or bolts if the character has at least four ranks in Craft (bowmaking). The player is allowed to Take 10 on this roll.

More information about Lifestyle and Upkeep can be found in the "Lifestyle and Upkeep" section of Chapter 3 of the *LIVING GREYHAWK Campaign Sourcebook*.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Within the last decade or so, a peaceful and reclusive stone giant elder named Drell moved into the Abbor-Alz Hills, and made friends with some of the local

miners. Only a week ago, the miners uncovered an ancient buried chamber containing a plane-shifting device called the *Sending Stone*. This device only permits travel to the Ethereal Plane, Acheron, and Mechanus. To operate, keys spelling out the name of each plane must be properly aligned on the *Sending Stone*. The miners, who are not knowledgeable about other planes, spelled out words and phrases with the keys. Not surprisingly, they weren't able to get the *Sending Stone* to work.

In the outer plane of Mechanus, the hive queen Kik'la commands an army of workers and warriors. Her scouts discovered a large cog containing traces of thinaun, a rare ore. She needed experienced miners to mine this ore, as formians are not skilled miners. Kik'la is wise and learned; she knew the Material Plane held many creatures skilled in mining. Along with a retinue, she *plane shifted* to the Material Plane. The uncovered *Sending Stone* drew the formians to the mining camp (which Kik'la considered quite lucky). With a few well-placed *mass suggestions*, she was able to subdue the entire company. The miners have been relocated to Mechanus to work as slaves for the formians.

At the same time, the *Sending Stone* has been drawing interest from the Ethereal Plane. Niknik, an ethereal filcher, irritated one too many xill tribes with his tricks and thefts, and fled the area with his life. The xill sent one of their number, a huntmaster named Silixz, to retrieve the criminal, along with his "hunting beasts" (ethereal marauders or, at higher APLs, phase spiders). Niknik unconsciously followed the pull of the *Sending Stone* and is hiding out near the mining camp.

Drell arrived at the mining camp three days ago, and immediately knew something was wrong. All the miners were gone, with indication that they'd just decided to leave, but there was no sign of where they'd gone. Drell immediately sent for help from one of the local villages (he summoned an earth mephit to deliver the message from a powerful rod he'd created). Meanwhile, Drell discovered the *Sending Stone*. Drell puzzled over the keys until he got one of them right: Acheron. Unwittingly, Drell was drawn to Acheron. Once there, he was discovered by Jherik, an erinyes leading a band of hobgoblins in unceasing warfare on that plane. Jherik promptly imprisoned Drell until he could decide what to do with him.

Niknik, hiding in the mining camp, saw all this happen. A covetous creature by nature, the ethereal filcher examined the *Sending Stone* and stole a couple of the keys before returning to his hiding spot in the miners' well.

ADVENTURE SUMMARY

This scenario begins when the characters receive a message from Drell, a peaceful and reclusive stone giant in the Abbor-Alz Hills. They are asked to

investigate some missing miners in the Abbor-Alz Hills.

The characters arrive at the mining camp and are almost immediately attacked by a xill named Silixz and his ethereal beasts. The xill is searching for a rogue ethereal filcher named Niknik, but is happy to attack the party instead.

The characters investigate the mining camp and mines. In one of the mines they discover a strange planar shifting device called the *Sending Stone*. Two of the keys from the *Sending Stone* are missing, however, and the characters are limited to traveling to the Ethereal Plane. Once they do, they find Niknik, and Niknik might give them the missing keys.

The characters discover that Drell went to Acheron, and they travel there to find him. In Acheron, the characters are asked by a unit of hobgoblins to clear out a nest of demonic birds. If they do, they can free Drell from the clutches of a melancholic erinyes. Drell thanks the characters, and joins with them to help find his miner friends.

The characters travel to Mechanus to free the miners from the formian work pits. With Drell's help, the characters can take advantage of the formians' rigidly lawful nature to enact a prison break.

Drell communes with an earth creature to find a gateway back to the Material Plane for the miners. Before the characters can get the miners to safety, they must defeat a strike team of inevitables sent by the formian queen. The miners and the characters flee Mechanus, and arrive safely back on Oerth.

BEFORE PLAY

Have the players introduce their characters to each other; they have been traveling together for many days.

They arrived in the town of Megas Landing, near the large seaport of Hardby, following an ancient treasure map. They've been staying at Coster's Inn, the only inn in Megas Landing, while looking for the treasure.

In essence, this character begins right on the heels of a treasure hunt the characters have just completed "off stage."

You'll also want to find out if any of the characters participated in *COR4-02 The Stone Man's Puzzle*.

INTRODUCTION

Pay attention while the characters are introducing their characters. Choose three different characters at the table: a "burly" character willing to do some heavy lifting (like a barbarian or a fighter), the most "bookish" character (like a wizard or a bard) and the most "woody" character (like a ranger or druid). Note those character names for the introductory text.

[Burly character] *hefts the iron treasure chest out of the freshly-dug hole, so that the rest of you can examine it. As expected, it bears the crest of Grevax, long-dead artificer of the early Flan people.*

It was [bookish character] who discovered the ancient map to Grevax's buried treasure, tucked in the binding of a long-forgotten tome. The group of you assembled to seek this treasure, well aware that every adventure can be fraught with unexpected peril.

[Woody character] *was able to guide you to this very spot. This was no small feat, as the map is generations old and the natural landmarks have shifted over time.*

But here you are, and all that stands between you and fabulous treasure is a simple metal latch.

This treasure chest is completely unrelated to the plot of this adventure, but it serves as a way for the characters to work together and to start the adventure with some unusual magical treasures.

The chest is neither locked nor trapped. It does not detect as magical and is in fact just storage for some of Grevax's powerful items. Grevax is long dead, as is his entire line, and no one has any claim to this find except the characters. Once the characters muster the courage to open the chest, the contents are listed below by APL. Tell the characters what the items look like. You can also reveal their magical auras, if the characters detect them. Of course, you should not tell the players what the items are until they have been able to identify them somehow. All these magic items are listed in Appendix 2: New Rules Items.

APL 6

- A set of leather bracers engraved with spiral symbols (faint transmutation). These are *bracers of quick strike*.
- A short red cloak with a jagged hem (faint abjuration). This is a *cloak of elemental protection*.
- Soft red leather gloves with holes cut out for the knuckles (faint divination). These are *gloves of fortunate striking*.
- An iron skullcap studded with small pearls (moderate conjuration). This is a *helm of glorious recovery*.
- A scarlet woolen bedroll (faint conjuration and enchantment). This is a *magic sleeping bag*.

APL 8

- A pair of sturdy leather boots with a metal sole. The boots vibrate slightly, as with stored-up energy (faint transmutation). These are *boots of charging*.
- A set of leather bracers engraved with spiral symbols (faint transmutation). These are *bracers of quick strike*.
- A short red cloak with a jagged hem (faint abjuration). This is a *cloak of elemental protection*.
- Soft red leather gloves with holes cut out for the knuckles (faint divination). These are *gloves of fortunate striking*.

- An iron skullcap studded with small pearls (moderate conjuration). This is a *helm of glorious recovery*.
- A scarlet woolen bedroll (faint conjuration and enchantment). This is a *magic sleeping bag*.

APL 10

- An iron pendant with a large pearl set in the center (moderate divination). This is an *amulet of fortune prevailing*.
- A narrow belt of tough leather, decorated with an ornate iron clasp (faint transmutation). This is a *belt of one mighty blow*.
- A pair of sturdy leather boots with a metal sole. The boots vibrate slightly, as with stored-up energy (faint transmutation). These are *boots of charging*.
- A short red cloak with a jagged hem (faint abjuration). This is a *cloak of elemental protection*.
- A piton made of some reddish metal, warm to the touch (moderate evocation). This is an *exploding spike*.
- A well-crafted wooden box about a foot square, carved with spirals. The box is empty (faint conjuration). This is a *field provisions box*.
- Soft red leather gloves with holes cut out for the knuckles (faint divination). These are *gloves of fortunate striking*.
- An iron skullcap studded with small pearls (moderate conjuration). This is a *helm of glorious recovery*.
- A scarlet woolen bedroll (faint conjuration and enchantment). This is a *magic sleeping bag*.

APL 12

- An iron pendant with a large pearl set in the center (moderate divination). This is an *amulet of fortune prevailing*.
- A narrow belt of tough leather, decorated with an ornate iron clasp (faint transmutation). This is a *belt of one mighty blow*.
- A pair of sturdy leather boots with a metal sole. The boots vibrate slightly, as with stored-up energy (faint transmutation). These are *boots of charging*.
- A pair of supple leather boots trimmed with a coarse crimson fur (moderate conjuration). These are *boots of big stepping*.
- A set of leather bracers engraved with spiral symbols (faint transmutation). These are *bracers of quick strike*.
- A short red cloak with a jagged hem (faint abjuration). This is a *cloak of elemental protection*.

- A piton made of some reddish metal, warm to the touch (moderate evocation). This is an *exploding spike*.
- A well-crafted wooden box about a foot square, carved with spirals. The box is empty (faint conjuration). This is a *field provisions box*.
- Soft red leather gloves with holes cut out for the knuckles (faint divination). These are *gloves of fortunate striking*.
- An iron skullcap studded with small pearls (moderate conjuration). This is a *helm of glorious recovery*.
- A scarlet woolen bedroll (faint conjuration and enchantment). This is a *magic sleeping bag*.

After examining your treasures, you observe that this must be the least dangerous mission you've ever undertaken. All that remains is to return to Coster's Inn for some well-deserved celebration.

At this point, the party has nowhere else to go except to return to Megas Landing. Go on to the first encounter.

ENCOUNTER 1: BACK TO MEGAS LANDING

Megas Landing is a small fishing village. It consists of about thirty wooden buildings, but only two of these will be of interest to the adventurers: Coster's Inn and Felkin's Tower. The rest of the buildings are one- or two-family dwellings for fishermen. The characters return in the late afternoon.

🏰Megas Landing (Small Hamlet): Standard; AL NG; 250 gp limit; Assets 2,300 gp; Population 91; Mixed (human 86%, gnome 6%, halfling 5%, half-elf 3%).

Authority Figures: Coster, innkeeper, merchant and town elder, male human Sor2.

Other Notable Figures: Felkin, resident wizard and town protector, male human Wiz6.

Read the following:

As you crest one last heather-covered hill, the town of Megas Landing comes into view. The ramshackle collection of fisherfolk cottages contains only two buildings of interest. The large and sturdy-looking Coster's Inn has been your home for the past couple of weeks. At one end of town is a tall wooden tower, home of the jolly and wealthy wizard Felkin. The fisher-folk of Megas Landing wave amiably to you as you return.

The characters are welcome to chat to the mundane fisher-folk if they'd like, but there are only two places of interest are in Megas Landing:

Felkin's Tower

The jolly human abjurer named Felkin retired to Megas Landing some years ago after a lucrative adventuring career. Most people in town think well of Felkin. Although not a particularly effective battle mage (evocation and necromancy are his prohibited schools), Felkin helps defend the town when needed, and the villagers look up to him.

With the characters, Felkin is very friendly and quite willing to swap stories from his "adventurer days." If the characters mention the unusual magic items they've found, Felkin will agree to *identify* them for 100 gp per item. He can't identify items until the next morning, when he prepares spells, but he can *identify* as many items as the characters would like (Felkin uses his *pearls of power* to recall his *identify* spells, although he won't volunteer this information to the characters). Be sure to note how much characters pay Felkin, and deduct it from their gp awarded on the AR.

All APLs

☞ **Felkin**, human Wiz6; hp 18; NG, Cha 11.

Coster's Inn

Coster is a strong, stout human who runs the tavern/inn/general store in Megas Landing. He is a vain, talkative man who uses a little sorcerous talent to make his life easier. His rates are fair, and he's happy to have adventurers in town. The characters likely have their bedrolls, spare clothes, and other such gear stored at Coster's Inn.

When the characters return to Coster's Inn, read:

The innkeeper Coster runs up to you, wringing his thick hands nervously. "Strange visitor for you," he says, nodding toward a cloaked dwarf in a dark corner of the common room.

If any characters played *COR4-02 The Stone Man's Puzzle*, add: **"Very strange, asking for [character(s) who played that event] by name."**

The dwarf looks toward you, and you see that his head is hairless and his eyes gleam like gems. His cloak twitches, and you can see that the "cloak" is a pair of wings folded over his shoulders. The rich smell of newly-turned dirt wafts from the creature.

Any character that makes a DC 13 Knowledge (the planes) check knows that this visitor is an earth mephit.

The mephit's name is Loamgrinder. He has a surly, get-down-to-business personality. Loamgrinder was sent to Megas Landing by a stone giant named Drell. Drell heard that trustworthy adventurers were in Megas Landing, and wants them to help him with a mystery. Some characters may have met the peaceful and reclusive Drell in *COR4-02 The Stone Man's Puzzle*. Drell went to visit a camp of miners he knew,

and found the camp completely deserted. There was evidence that the miners disappeared right in the middle of their usual daily tasks. Drell summoned Loamgrinder, told him what had happened, and asked him to fetch the adventurers and show them the way to the mining camp. Loamgrinder left Drell three days ago, and has only just arrived here in Megas Landing. Characters who ask Loamgrinder about Drell and succeed at a DC 15 Sense Motive realize that Loamgrinder respects Drell, but doesn't know him well (Loamgrinder was summoned by Drell's *rod of earthen allies*; see the AR for more information on the operation of this magic item).

Loamgrinder gives the party a letter from Drell, hastily written in charcoal on the back of a ledger page. Give the players Player Handout 1.

Drell hadn't thought to offer any reward or payment for the characters' help, so Loamgrinder doesn't offer any.

All APLs

☞ **Coster**, human Sor2; hp 7; N, Cha 15.

☞ **Loamgrinder**, earth mephit: hp 26, see *Monster Manual* page 182.

The Journey

The trip to the mining camp will take three days on foot through the rugged Abbor-Alz hills, so Loamgrinder doesn't mind if the characters want to wait until morning to leave. Loamgrinder insists on leading them directly to the mining camp in the Abbor-Alz Hills. If the characters absolutely don't want Loamgrinder along, he gives them very specific directions.

ENCOUNTER 2: THE HUNTMASTER

After nearly three days of uneventful travel through the Abbor-Alz Hills, the characters spot the low buildings of the mining camp as they crest a tall hill. The camp is still miles off, but the party should have no problem reaching the camp in an hour or two.

If Loamgrinder is still with the party, he bids them farewell once the camp is in sight:

The travel through this hilly terrain is an endless repetition of up and down. As you crest the top of each hill, your eyes strain for any sight other than an endless parade of rocky hills.

But now, as you crest one high hill, you can see down into several valleys. In a far-off valley, a few stout stone buildings cluster together around a well. The hills around this camp are peppered with dark entrances to what must be mines. One of the buildings looks as though it has sustained a great deal of fire damage, but it's hard to tell from here. Once down this hill, and over a half dozen more, you will be within the camp and able to take a closer look.

“Well, there you have it,” grumbles the mephit. “My deal with Drell was to gather the batch of you in that town, and lead you back to the camp. And there it is. Since I can’t see that I’ll be much more help to you, off I go.” With a spray of fresh dirt and a low rumbling noise, the mephit disappears.

After another 45 minutes of travel up and down through the high hills, the characters should be expecting to see the mining camp around any hill. Suddenly, the party is attacked by ethereal hunters. The xill huntmaster Silixz intends to capture one of the characters, and kill the others.

The Target: Silixz hopes to find a good, rich-looking target to use as bait to lure the ethereal filcher Niknik out of wherever he’s hiding. Silixz marks one of the characters as his target, and instructs his beasts to slay everyone else. To determine which character is Silixz’s target, look over the MILs of all the characters at the table, and choose the one that has the greatest amount of valuable-looking small items (like wands, ioun stones, potions, and the like). Silixz would rather not choose an armor-clad front-line fighter, if that can be avoided. If multiple targets seem likely, Silixz chooses the character that is smallest and weakest (like a halfling).

APL 6 (EL 8)

➤ **Silixz, Xill Huntmaster:** hp 32; see *Monster Manual* pages 259-260. Silixz has Handle Animal +4 instead of Intimidate +8. He fights with his claws, not short swords.

➤ **Fiendish Ethereal Marauders (3):** hp 15 each; see *Monster Manual* page 105. Since they are fiendish, these creatures gain resistance to cold and fire 5, SR 7, and the smite good ability (1/day, +2 damage). They are neutral evil.

APL 8 (EL 9)

➤ **Silixz, Xill Huntmaster:** hp 32; see *Monster Manual* pages 259-260. Silixz has Handle Animal +4 instead of Intimidate +8. He fights with his claws, not short swords.

➤ **Fiendish Ethereal Marauders (6):** hp 15 each; see *Monster Manual* page 105. Since they are fiendish, these creatures gain resistance to cold and fire 5, SR 7, and the smite good ability (1/day, +2 damage). They are neutral evil.

APL 10 (EL 12)

➤ **Silixz, Xill Huntmaster:** xill Rgr1/Mnk4; hp 83; see Appendix 1.

➤ **Fiendish Phase Spiders (2):** hp 45 each; see *Monster Manual* page pages 207-208. Since they are fiendish, these creatures gain resistance to cold and fire

5, DR 5/magic, SR 10, and the smite good ability (1/day, +5 damage). They are neutral evil.

APL 12 (EL 13)

➤ **Silixz, Xill Huntmaster:** xill Rgr1/Mnk4; hp 83; see Appendix 1.

➤ **Fiendish Phase Spiders (6):** hp 45 each; see *Monster Manual* page 207-208. Since they are fiendish, these creatures gain resistance to cold and fire 5, DR 5/magic, SR 10, and the smite good ability (1/day, +5 damage). They are neutral evil.

Tactics: *Surprise Round*—Unless a character has *see invisibility* active (or can otherwise see into the Ethereal Plane), it is likely Silixz and his beasts surprise the characters. The beasts shift out of the Ethereal Plane on the surprise round and attack. They spread out their attacks on as many characters as possible except the target. Silixz does not appear, but maneuvers near the target on the Ethereal Plane.

Subsequent Rounds—On their next action, the ethereal creatures attack and then shift back to the Ethereal Plane. They continue to shift in, make one attack, and shift back out again until defeated. Silixz shifts in adjacent to the target, attacks with one claw, and attempts to grapple it. He also hisses to the target, in Infernal, “You’ll make good bait to catch that slippery thief.” If the grapple fails, it attempts to make a full attack on the target in the following round. Once the target is grappled, Silixz tries to paralyze it until successful. Once the target is paralyzed, Silixz retreats to the Ethereal Plane with it.

Treasure: Neither the Huntmaster Silixz nor his creatures possess any treasure.

Development: In the unlikely event that the characters capture and question Silixz (he only speaks Infernal), he resists interrogation. Eventually, however, he reveals that he’s searching for a thief named Niknik. He believes that Niknik is hiding out somewhere in the area.

ENCOUNTER 3: THE CAMP

The characters reach the mining camp soon after Silixz’s ambush. The mining camp is completely abandoned, and has been abandoned for about a week. The first sketch in Appendix 3 shows the layout of the mining camp. Use the following information to guide the characters’ investigations:

The mining camp consists of a handful of large stone and timber buildings. Three are obviously lodges of some sort, and another has been gutted by fire but is still standing. These buildings cluster around a stone well. There is a smaller building off to one side, but its purpose isn’t immediately apparent. From here, you can see that there are about six different mines; each has an entrance large enough to admit two men side by side. Outside of each is a heap of tailings. Various tools have been discarded on the ground near the

mine entrances, and the doors of the buildings bang in the wind.

Clearly, this camp is deserted, but it feels abandoned, as though the occupants all left in a hurry.

Lodging: The miners in this camp lived in three barracks-like buildings. Two buildings housed sixteen individuals each. One held human and the other housed dwarven men each. The third building housed a dozen dwarven and gnome women. Personal effects and valuables have been left in the lodgings, as though the owners planned to return.

Mess: The mess building of the camp has been gutted by fire. The food stores and wooden benches within the sturdy building were consumed by the blaze, although the outer building is still intact. A DC 15 Search check reveals that the blaze was started by a cooking fire left untended. A DC 20 Survival check indicates that the fire occurred about a week ago.

Storage: This small storage building is claustrophobic, and tightly packed with gear to outfit a mining camp: spare tools, ropes, and barrels of water. No matter how thoroughly the characters search, there is nothing to discover here.

Tracks: Upon a successful Survival check against the listed DCs, a character with the Track feat can learn the following helpful information (information for the DM is in parentheses):

DC 12: Dozens of humanoids have tromped all over this area for months at least, although none of the tracks are just over one week old (these are the miners).

DC 20: Six days ago, a Large humanoid (the stone giant Drell) came into this camp and moved from building to building. He entered one of the mines, but turned and left when the mine narrowed too much for him to follow. He entered the other mine, and did not leave. Drell's tracks lead to the Ancient Chamber (see below).

DC 23: A half-dozen bug-like creatures simply appeared among the buildings of the camp about eight days ago. They didn't move far; the largest creature (the formian queen) did not move at all. The miners' most recent tracks move up to the insectoid tracks, and all of them disappear. (The formians *plane shifted* in, used several *charms* and *suggestions* on the miners, and then *plane shifted* away with them.) A DC 15 Knowledge (nature) check reveals that these tracks are ant-like or beetle-like. A DC 20 Knowledge (the planes) check reveals that these are likely tracks that formians would make.

DC 40: If the character succeeds at this DC while searching for tracks in the Ancient Chamber, he or she notices a few strange hoof-like tracks near the *Sending Stone*. They neither come from nor go to anywhere else. The tracks are unlike any the characters have seen before. (This was Niknik materializing to take the "N" tiles; see Encounter 4). These tracks are about three days old.

The Well: The water table in these hills is particularly low. The well drops 20 feet before reaching cold, clean water. Just above the waterline, well hidden from view (DC 28 Spot check to notice from the top of the well) is a small shaft leading to a burrow about 10 feet square. In this dank hole hides Niknik, an ethereal filcher hiding out from a ruthless xill hunter named Silixz (who the characters faced in Encounter 2). Niknik doesn't climb up and down the well to reach his bolthole. Instead, he goes ethereal and moves right through the ground. Therefore, Niknik leaves no tracks to or from the well. In fact, his only tracks nearby are those around the *Sending Stone*.

If the characters manage to discover Niknik in his bolthole, he most likely flees into the Ethereal Plane as best he can. Only if the characters are calm, friendly and peaceful does Niknik speak to them at this time. If the characters get Niknik to talk, skip to the end of Encounter 5 to roleplay the conversation with him.

The Mines: Most of these mines are quite old, and go back several hundred yards into the surrounding hills, following mined-out veins of ore. All of these start out quite large, but narrow to less than 5 feet wide after a few dozen yards. The mine marked on the map of the camp in Appendix 3 is different. About fifty feet into the mine, the sidewall of the mine has collapsed, revealing a large room carved out of the rock ages ago. This is the Ancient Chamber. If the characters think to ask, the passage into the ancient chamber is large enough for a giant to squeeze through. In fact, this is just what Drell did.

The Ancient Chamber: This large chamber was worked smooth by magic, and is older than the mines. It is fifty feet square and twenty feet high. In the center of the room is a square obelisk made of obsidian. This obelisk is the *Sending Stone*. When the characters examine the *Sending Stone* in detail, proceed to the next encounter.

ENCOUNTER 4: THE SENDING STONE

The *Sending Stone* is an obelisk three feet on each side and 15 feet high. It is made of some indestructible obsidian-like stone, carved with strange symbols. The symbols all resemble a clock face, but with 16 numbers rather than 12. This 16-number clock is repeated all over the *Sending Stone*, from small carvings (mere inches across) to large (several feet across, wrapping around the obelisk). The largest of the 16-number clocks have marks in between the numbers, subdividing each into 16 units. These carvings don't do anything, but are merely decorative.

The *Sending Stone* radiates strong conjuration magic. On the side of the obelisk (opposite from the side facing the hole in the mine wall) is the plaque used to operate the *Sending Stone*. It is five feet from the floor and about two feet square. When the characters look at the plaque on the *Sending Stone*, show them Player Handout 2.

Twenty-three tiles, each a couple of inches high, fit into three rows on the plaque. Each tile has one letter carved into it. The top row holds eight black tiles (although only seven are here now). The second row holds seven gray tiles (although only six are here now), and the bottom row holds eight white tiles, all of which are here.

The tiles are easily detached from the *Sending Stone*, and can be replaced in any order (although only black tiles fit in the top row, only gray tiles fit in the middle row, and only white tiles fit in the bottom row). When the final tile is placed on any given row spelling the name of another plane, the *Sending Stone* gates everyone in the Ancient Chamber to that plane. The travelers remain on the plane for precisely two hundred fifty-six minutes (four hours and sixteen minutes). Every sixteen minutes, all travelers hear an audible “click” seemingly coming from nowhere. In the last 16 minutes of the extraplanar sojourn, travelers hear the “click” every minute. At the expiration of the 256 minutes, the travelers are all *gated* back into the Ancient Chamber. Travelers cannot bring any creatures back with them that were not originally sent by the *Sending Stone*, but they can be carrying up to their maximum loads.

There is no saving throw for either *gate* effect produced by the *Sending Stone*.

The top letters, arranged correctly, spell out “Mechanus,” although the N tile is missing; without it, the gate to Mechanus does not function. The middle letters, arranged correctly, spell out “Acheron,” although its N tile is missing as well. The bottom letters, properly arranged, spell out “Ethereal.”

Since the players must solve this puzzle to proceed with the adventure, they might need clues from you. If the players have trouble figuring out the *Sending Stone* puzzle, give them a Knowledge (the planes) check to recognize that “Achero” almost spells out “Acheron,” the name of one of the Outer Planes. If they still need a further hint, allow a DC 12 Intelligence check to recognize that the other two lines might be the names of other planes.

A Little History: the original crafter of the *Sending Stone* is unknown, although it’s a very useful device for making short trips to three of the planes. The events that led to the *Sending Stone* being buried under the Abbor-Alz Hills are lost to history.

The miners here accidentally breached the Ancient Chamber about ten days ago. They tried rearranging the keys, but couldn’t get them to spell anything useful (as the miners weren’t familiar with the names of any other planes). Within a day or two of finding the strange artifact, the miners were all kidnapped by the formians. Although the *Sending Stone* secretly warped the hive queen’s *plane shift* to arrive nearby, the formians never actually discovered the *Sending Stone* in the few minutes they were in the area kidnapping miners.

Drell showed up a couple of days later, curious that everyone was gone. He looked around until he

found the *Sending Stone*, and was knowledgeable enough to figure out some of the names. The first one he got right was Acheron, and Drell was whisked away to Acheron. He hasn’t returned yet, because while there he was imprisoned by an erinyes and manacled with *dimensional shackles* (see Encounter 6).

Three days ago (about the time the characters met Loamgrinder in Megas Landing), the ethereal filcher Niknik discovered the *Sending Stone*. A curious but stupid creature, Niknik removed the two N tiles (since he knows they “spell” his name), and took them into his bolthole down the well.

Characters Using the Sending Stone: The first time the characters examine the *Sending Stone*, they won’t be able to get anywhere other than the Ethereal, since the two N tiles are missing. Once they are thrown into the Ethereal, go to Encounter 5 (where they gain the two N tiles one way or another).

Once they have the N tiles in hand, the characters can go to Mechanus or Acheron. Astute players will realize that the last person to use the *Sending Stone* must have gone to Acheron, since it’s the only name properly spelled out.

When the characters spell out Acheron, go to Encounter 6.

When the characters spell out Mechanus, go to Encounter 7. Although the players might choose to go to Mechanus before Acheron, they will have to backtrack to Acheron eventually. The characters won’t be able to rescue the miners from the formian work pits without Drell’s help, as they won’t know how to get the miners back to Oerth.

ENCOUNTER 5: THE ETHEREAL

Familiarize yourself with the qualities of the Ethereal Plane, as presented on page 151 of the *Dungeon Master’s Guide*.

When the characters activate the *Sending Stone* to the Ethereal Plane, read:

The last tile snaps into place with an audible “click.” You feel a sudden wrenching, as though your body is being pulled in a direction it was not meant to go.

It seems as though this chamber is suddenly filled with mist and pale light, but the obelisk and the walls seem blurry and indistinct. Items that were solid only moments ago are now pale apparitions, and you know you could pass through them as easily as a ghost.

The only solid objects nearby are your companions.

The characters are now on the Ethereal Plane, as any characters succeeding on a DC 10 Knowledge (the planes) check can confirm. They cannot interact with the *Sending Stone* at all while on the Ethereal Plane, even with magic or force effects.

The characters are free to explore the Ethereal Plane as much as they'd like for the next 256 minutes. Remember, they hear a "click" every 16 minutes, and every minute during the last 16 minutes of their visit.

Nothing interesting happens until the characters return to the mining camp, where they see Niknik the ethereal filcher taking a look around. Once they get within 60 feet or so of the well, read:

The mining camp looks very different in your ghostly state. You cannot see more than sixty or so feet away. The buildings all look hazy and haunted.

Suddenly, a man-sized creature rises up through the ground near the well. It has a solid, substantial look, unlike the rest of the camp. The creature has a lumpy round body and a single hoofed foot. It has four spindly arms, and no head. A row of small black eyes studs the creature's chest, with a mouth underneath them. As soon as it sees you, it gives a startled squeak and dives back into the ground near the well.

The characters may attempt a DC 15 Knowledge (dungeoneering) check to identify this creature as an ethereal filcher. Characters that were "Lost" playing *COR2-08 Echo* succeed without a roll; they have seen ethereal filchers up close many times.

Niknik flees to his dank bolthole and returns to the Material Plane once there.

The characters may follow Niknik to his hole and try to contact him, but Niknik cannot sense them while he is Material and they are Ethereal. Every ten minutes or so, Niknik becomes Ethereal just to take a look around. If he sees that the characters are still around, but haven't attacked him, he becomes curious rather than afraid.

If the characters are still around a third time when Niknik takes a look, he waves amiably at them and tries to start up a conversation.

Roleplaying Notes: A conversation with Niknik is necessarily limited due to three factors: first, he can only be on the Ethereal Plane for about six seconds at a time, before going back to the Material Plane. He can return to the Ethereal Plane immediately, but any interaction with Niknik should have an amusing on-and-off feel.

The second liability is that Niknik is not very smart (Intelligence of 7).

Finally, Niknik can't speak except for the syllable "nik." He understands Common, however, and he is pretty good at charades (since he has four arms).

Notwithstanding these limitations, Niknik is an eager conversationalist, gesturing wildly and shaking hands with the characters as well as he can. He points to himself and says, "Niknik" early on, to let the characters know that this is his name, but he also clucks, "niknikniknikniknik" as a response to just about anything the characters say.

Niknik is also a good-natured kleptomaniac. While talking with the characters, he can't help but try

to steal small items from them and examine them. He'll do this right in front of the characters, and is happy to give any of these stolen items back if asked. He's just curious.

If the characters question Niknik about the goings-on around here, remember that Niknik came by after the formians had kidnapped the miners, but before Drell found the *Sending Stone*. Therefore, he knows that Drell was here, although Niknik never approached him (Niknik was afraid because Drell was so big). Niknik saw Drell go into the mine with the Ancient Chamber, and hasn't seen him come out (but, as Niknik spends all his time twenty feet underground, this shouldn't be too surprising). Niknik doesn't know what the *Sending Stone* is, or how it works, but he has seen it up close (in fact, he stole the two N tiles from it).

Have all characters interacting with Niknik make a DC 18 Spot check. Those that succeed notice that Niknik is carrying two stone tiles like those from the obelisk. If no character notices this, Niknik eventually brings them up himself:

The creature holds up one stone tile engraved with the letter N. "Nik!" it cries happily. Then it holds up another slightly darker than the first. "Nik!" it says again. Then it puts the two tiles together and crows, "Niknik!" while pointing at its chest with a third hand.

The creature seems exceptionally pleased with itself.

A goal of this encounter is for the characters to get the two tiles from Niknik, as they can't utilize the other functions of the *Sending Stone* without them. There are several ways for the characters to get the tiles:

- **Fight Niknik.** If the characters attack Niknik, he drops the tiles and flees in whatever method seems fastest and safest. He does not return.
- **Scare Niknik.** A successful Intimidate check opposed by Niknik's level check (+5) cowers Niknik. He falls to the ground, grovels piteously, and gives up the tiles.
- **Barter with Niknik.** Niknik exchanges the tiles for anything interesting worth at least 20 gp. Niknik makes a big show of carefully examining anything the characters present for trade, then accepts or declines it seemingly on a whim. It's up to you to decide whether Niknik finds an object suitably interesting or not, but the shinier the better.
- **Convince Niknik.** The characters can convince Niknik to just give them the tiles with a successful DC 30 Diplomacy check. This DC drops to 25 if the characters offer anything worth 20 gp or more for the tiles, even if it's something Niknik doesn't find interesting.

All APLs

➔ **Niknik the Ethereal Filcher:** hp 22; see *Monster Manual* pages 104-105.

Development: Once the characters have the tiles, there's little they can do except wait for the duration of their Ethereal trip to expire. Once it does, they are probably anxious to get back to the *Sending Stone* and use the N tiles. Go back to Encounter 4.

Troubleshooting: If Silixz escaped with the Target in Encounter 2, the characters discover him outside the mining camp on the Ethereal Plane, casually torturing the Target. Silixz hasn't gotten around to using the Target as bait for Niknik yet, and is having some evil fun with the Target first. If the characters fight Silixz on the Ethereal, he fights to the death.

If the characters already discovered Niknik down the well in Encounter 3, their sojourn to the Ethereal Plane passes uneventfully, and they return to the *Sending Stone* after their time is up.

Ethereal Return: Although the return trip from Acheron and Mechanus brings the characters back to the Ancient Chamber, the characters don't instantly return to the Ancient Chamber when their visit to the Ethereal Plane expires. This is because the Ethereal Plane, unlike the Outer Planes, is coexistent with the Material Plane. Instead, the characters "fade in" to the Material Plane from whatever coexistent point they are at in the Ethereal Plane. If this would place them into a solid object (like underground), they are shunted to the nearest open area, sustaining 1d6 points of damage for every 5 feet shunted.

ENCOUNTER 6: ACHERON

The characters arrive in Acheron when they spell the name of the plane with the tiles on the *Sending Stone*.

Familiarize yourself with the qualities of Acheron, as presented on page 163 of the *Dungeon Masters Guide*. Remember that Acheron is mildly law-aligned, so chaotic characters suffer a -2 penalty on all Charisma-based checks. The *gate* opens on the upper layer of Acheron, called Avalas (also called the Battleplains, a plane of drifting metal cubes and near-constant warfare between renegade armies). The characters arrive inside a particularly small cube hovering dangerously near a much larger one.

The sound of metal crashing against metal fills your ears, and makes the air around you vibrate. You find yourself in a small hollow, barely fifteen feet across. The walls and floors of this hollow are of ancient, battered metal that flakes rust when touched. There is an opening about fifteen feet from you. Outside of it, you see a twilight sky filled with drifting cubes of metal. There are more cubes than stars in the night sky, and they are constantly colliding with each other and rebounding. This is the source of the crashing noise you hear. A closer look reveals that the crashing cubes are many different sizes. Some small ones

might be only a half-mile away; others the size of continents must be leagues off.

Once the characters exit their arrival hole, read on:

Once you scramble out of the hollow in which you arrived, you see that you are on a cube as well, although yours seems tiny in size. Barely fifty feet across, your cube drifts lazily next to the edge of a far, far larger cube several miles in length. The surface of this larger cube is, like yours, rusted metal with divots and pits large enough to hold a platoon of men.

In fact, from one of these divots, you see about twenty men hunched down for cover, peeping cautiously at you. (or at your cube, if the characters are trying to hide.) One of them waves a crusty yellowish-white handkerchief lazily.

These 'men' are in fact hobgoblins, dressed in thick leather cloaks and carrying an array of weapons. A DC 20 Spot check reveals their race. The edge of the large cube is about 50 feet away from the character's small cube. The hobgoblins are seventy feet away.

This is a squad of hobgoblin troops serving in a far larger organization called Jherik's Company (more about Jherik below). This group happened to be patrolling by when they caught sight of the small cube; they're cautious of what might come out of the hole.

Although these hobgoblins are lawful evil, they aren't immediately hostile. They have learned that it's best to be cautious around strangers and then ambush them when they're weakest. They at least pretend to be friendly until they can measure up the characters. As the hobgoblins start 70 feet away, they are out of range of most detection spells. If the party doesn't immediately respond with hostilities, the squad leader, a grizzled veteran named Sergeant Halgander, stands up and addresses the characters:

The flag-waving creature stands. It is a red-nosed, battle-scarred hobgoblin with a wide grin and a horrible complexion. The hobgoblin crosses his arms across his massive chest. "Well, there! Little chicks comin' out o' a metal nestin' hole! Har har! Can you little chickies fly yet, or is me an' me men gonna hafta throw ya a rope?"

It's possible that the characters have their own way across the void. If they fall or jump more than 5 feet from their own cube, they drift toward the edge of the large cube for about 15 feet, and then fall the rest of the way (30 feet, for 3d6 falling damage). If the characters want help, Sergeant Halgander orders his men to throw up a rope topped by a rusted old grappling hook to the characters; after a couple of tries, it gets near enough to catch. The characters can easily climb down the rope to the hobgoblin squad on the ground. Sergeant Halgander orders his men to ease, and slaps the characters on the back and shakes their hands, chuckling. Sergeant Halgander makes a big show of

being friendly to the characters, while doing his best to size up their abilities. He introduces himself and some of his men, who casually tend to their weapons and equipment.

All APLs

➤ **Sgt. Halgander:** male hobgoblin Ftr5; hp 47; see *Dungeon Master's Guide*, page 117, except that Halgander is equipped like an ordinary hobgoblin.

➤ **Halgander's Troops, Hobgoblins (20):** hp 7 each; see *Monster Manual* page 153.

Development: The Inevitable Collision: The small cube upon which the characters arrived is creeping slowly toward the edge of the large cube upon which Jherik's Company is fighting. Ten minutes after the characters arrive, if they are still around, the small cube gets within 30 feet of the large cube, and falls suddenly towards it. Sergeant Halgander will encourage everyone to be far away by then; anyone on, in, or under the small cube when it crashes takes 18d6 points of damage. The small cube ends up as twisted metal wreckage on the larger one. If the characters use the *Sending Stone* to come back to Acheron for whatever reason, they return atop the wreckage.

Development: We've Come to See About Some Miners: The characters may believe the miners came to Acheron, which is incorrect. Halgander assumes that he would have heard about a bunch of miners wandering around, unless they got themselves killed off quickly. He hasn't seen or heard about them here.

Development: We've Come to See About a Giant: The characters may assume that Drell came this way, and they're right. If the characters ask Sergeant Halgander or any of the troops about a stone giant, Sergeant Halgander chuckles:

"Yer lookin' fer a stone giant? Yeah, I seen plenty in my time. I seen one of 'em just a few days ago. Came outta one o' the cubes sailing near here; it mightta been just that one you chickies came outta. I understand Jherik collected him, took him prisoner all nice and formal-like."

Once the characters ask about Jherik, read:

The big hobgoblin laughs a deep belly laugh. His gasps of laughter are tainted with dreadfully rotten breath. "Jherik runs the whole show on this big square chunk o' iron. I work for 'im. Jherik's Company has taken over nearly this whole cube, an' two others besides. Me humble crew of men is one bitty part of Jherik's Company. We're advance scouts. Yer gonna git anywhere 'round here, you'd better know who Jherik is. Jherik's got a battle-plan, a real far-sighted one, I s'pose, but I don't know nothin' other than doin' as I'm told. I'm no fighter, I'm a thinker—wait, other way 'round, I mean—you know whut I mean."

The characters probably want to know about Jherik or how they could meet him.

Sergeant Halgander suddenly gets a shifty look in his eye. "Hey, I got me a deal right good fer ya. You could keep me from getting' knocked down a peg or two, and I could take ya back to Jherik as ambassaderries, or whatever. Ya see, Jherik's gonna move the whole comp'ny through here in the next week or two, and he heard a rumor about bird demons nestin' in the area. Them bird demons can be nasty-wicked to a clumped group of men. (Note: At APL 6 and 8, Sergeant Halgander is referring to the achierai's inky cloud; at APL 10 and 12, he's talking about the vrock's dance of ruin; either can be devastating to massed troops.) We're supposed to see if they were here and take 'em out. And we think they know where they are, but I don't wanna lose any of me men t'day, and I sure don't want to lose my hide. You go take care of 'em, and I'll take you to Jherik. Deal?"

Sergeant Halgander is true to his word. He gladly directs the characters to a nearby hollow in the cube's surface. This one is nearly sixty feet across, and the bird demons are at the far end of it.

APL 6 (EL 8)

➤ **Achierai (3):** hp 39 each; see *Monster Manual* page 9.

APL 8 (EL 10)

➤ **Achierai (6):** hp 39 each; see *Monster Manual* page 9.

APL 10 (EL 12)

➤ **Vrock (Demon) (3):** hp 115 each; see *Monster Manual* page 48.

APL 12 (EL 14)

➤ **Vrock (Demon) (6):** hp 115 each; see *Monster Manual* page 48.

Tactics: These foul-tempered creatures are nesting, but wary. The characters have to succeed on Move Silently checks opposed by the demons' Listen checks to get to the edge of the hollow unnoticed (remember to apply the -6 penalty for distance). Once alerted, the achierai leap right into melee using their Spring Attack feat and fight until dead. The vrocks use *mirror image* immediately and again as soon as most of their images are gone. They use their spore attack as often as possible and their stunning screech whenever they can affect more than two characters with it. If any vrock is reduced to 25 hp or less, it *teleports* away, never to return. A mean trick fleeing vrocks will do, if they can manage it without too many attacks of opportunity, is to pick up any weapons dropped on the ground before *teleporting* away (remember that stunned creatures drop what they're holding). At APL 10, all three vrocks leap into melee after activating their *mirror images*. At

APL 12, all six vocks activate *mirror images*, but only three advance on the characters; the rest begin a dance of ruin. If successful, they afterward move into melee to pick off any surviving characters.

Development: Noticeably Weak Characters: If the characters leave the fight with the nesting bird-demons noticeably weakened, Sergeant Halgander and his men are willing to take advantage of their predicament. Sergeant Halgander orders his men to attack the characters. Since he doesn't like putting himself into personal danger, Sergeant Halgander won't enter the fray himself. If the characters are able to drop more than half his men, Sergeant calls the rest of them to retreat, and tries to apologize to the characters. "Heh. Real sorry 'bout that. It's just one o' the things ya learn 'round here: you gotta hit folks when they're weakest, even if they're friends of yours."

Development: Visiting Jherik: On one of the other cube sides, two hours' march away, is an encampment of hundreds of hobgoblins. Nearly all are ordinary hobgoblins, but many are 5th level fighters (use the statistics on page 117 of the *Dungeon Masters Guide*, if required). In the middle of the hobgoblin encampment is a broken siege tower with narrow stairs leading up to it. Atop the siege tower is a tattered pavilion tent with 15th level hobgoblin fighters standing guard (again, use the statistics on page 117 of the *Dungeon Masters Guide*, but the characters shouldn't get into a fight here). The characters are ushered inside:

The inside of the tattered tent is dominated by a sitting stone giant on the left and a large wooden throne on the right. The giant is manacled, but otherwise seems unharmed. He is playing a recorder softly.

The being in the throne must be Jherik. Jherik is an attractive man with white feathery wings. His wings have lost many of their feathers and his body is crisscrossed with scars. Jherik's head is bowed and his forehead creased, as though worried about something. A booklet of maps is open on his lap.

He looks up as you enter, eyes sad but a polite grin on his handsome face. He closes his book of maps and sets it aside, next to a short spear of rock. "Visitors? Wonders never end. How can I be of assistance?"

The stone giant is Drell; he has been Jherik's guest for several days. Although he has not been mistreated, he's anxious to resume the search for his miner friends. He spends the days playing his recorder for Jherik, who likes the music. The spear of rock is Drell's *rod of earthen allies*, which Jherik took from Drell so Drell can't use it to escape.

The winged man is Jherik, a male erinyes. Jherik is burdened with misguided plans of his own salvation. He thinks that if he can battle his way across the planes to Mount Celestia, he can gain a state of glory. Jherik is truly trying to redeem his evil nature, and has shifted

to LN alignment as a result. He is a skilled commander and a charismatic leader. Unfortunately, his armies are little more than undisciplined rabble who revel in carnage and mutiny. Jherik has been mired in the fighting on Acheron for nearly a century.

If the characters start fighting right away, Jherik *teleports* out to his troops and commands them to surround the siege tower. From there, he tries to convince the characters to surrender and parlay. He doesn't want to fight the characters, and would rather set Drell free than fight.

Roleplaying Notes: Jherik's motto is "self-reflection above all else." The characters probably just want Drell released, but Jherik would like to probe their motivations and their intentions. If they ask about releasing Drell, Jherik responds blandly, "Why should I?" Jherik considers this a serious question: he's interested in how the characters justify demanding Drell's release. He asks whether the characters would be willing to fight for him, or if they would be willing to buy Drell's release (and if so, for how much, and how does buying an intelligent being make them feel?). Jherik is sophisticated and persuasive, but an intellectual tyrant. He is perfectly willing to set Drell free, but he doesn't want the characters to know that. He would rather make them examine their own motivations first, then seem generous.

If the characters talk to Drell, he speaks slowly, as if putting a lot of thought into his words. Drell would like to be released, since he's worried about his friends.

He imagines all sorts of terrible fates the miners may be suffering while Drell languishes here. Drell suspects the *Sending Stone* has something to do with where the miners have gone, but he's been able to ascertain that they aren't here on Acheron. Drell keeps trying to talk Jherik into letting him go, but Jherik hasn't yet decided what to do with Drell. Drell knows that Jherik is usually melancholic, and Drell likes cheering him up with his music. Drell and Jherik have become friends in the past few days.

Eventually, Jherik tires of the characters and agrees to set Drell free.

Drell is being held in *dimensional shackles*. Jherik knows this (as they're his shackles), but Drell just thinks they're ordinary manacles. Note that even a stone giant is not strong enough to break dimensional shackles (+8 Strength modifier, DC 30 to break free). As soon as Drell is released from the shackles, he is instantly returned to the Ancient Chamber by the *Sending Stone* (as his 256 minutes were up several days ago).

Development: Don't Forget Your Rod: Jherik seems surprised at Drell's sudden disappearance, and remembers about Drell's *rod of earthen allies* after he's already gone. Jherik doesn't really want to keep the rod (as he can *summon* more powerful creatures naturally, and doesn't have to pay for the help with tangible items), but he isn't about to give it back to the characters for free. Jherik explains that the rod belongs to Drell, and tells them some of its powers (Drell told

him what it does a couple of days ago). Jherik agrees to return the rod to the characters if at least one of the characters agrees to owe him a little favor in the future (note this on the character's AR). Jherik promises, if asked, that the favor won't violate the character's alignment. If none of the characters agree, Jherik just shrugs and keeps the rod.

All APLs

☛ **Jherik:** male erinyes (devil); hp 85; see *Monster Manual* page 54. Unlike most erinyes, Jherik is lawful neutral in alignment, and does not have the evil subtype.

☛ **Drell:** male stone giant elder; hp 119; see *Monster Manual* page 124. Drell has a Charisma of 16 and the Craft Rod feat instead of Combat Reflexes.

Development: *Leaving Jherik's Company*—As the characters leave the hobgoblin camp, horns echo across the cube face. The far side of the camp, over a mile away, is under attack. Most of the hobgoblins hastily form up into units and march off, donning armor as they march. Jherik flies above them, shouting directions. The characters may want to see what's going on, but this isn't their fight. If they are determined to get involved, you can decide whether Jherik's Company is under attack by:

- A cabal of rakshasas leading a horde of skeletons and zombies;
- An army of orcs goading several fiendish triceratopses; or
- A mindless horde of animated Medium statues led by equally mindless stone golems.

In any case, the characters earn no experience for going out of their way to get into these fights. Once their 256 minutes has expired, the characters return to the Ancient Chamber. When the characters return to the Ancient Chamber, Drell thanks them for coming to his aid.

Go back to Encounter 4.

Troubleshooting: If the characters avoid or immediately destroy Sergeant Halgander and his squad, they'll have to wander around until they discover Jherik's company on their own. Unfortunately, the party happens to wander across a nest of bird demons (as above) on the way. Once they get to Jherik's side of the cube, they are confronted with hundreds of hobgoblins. The hobgoblins are eager to escort these newcomers to Jherik, to see what he wants done with them; the melancholy Jherik questions the characters and releases Drell, as above.

ENCOUNTER 7: MECHANUS

The characters arrive in Mechanus when they spell the name of the plane with the tiles on the *Sending Stone*.

Familiarize yourself with the qualities of Mechanus, as presented on page 163 of the *Dungeon Masters Guide*. Remember that Mechanus is strongly

law-aligned, so all non-Lawful characters suffer a –2 penalty on all Charisma-based, Intelligence-based, and Wisdom-based checks.

The *gate* opens atop a small hill on an enormous cog more than 30 miles across. The sky is a complex tapestry of interlocking gears and driveshafts. The only distinguishing landmark on this hilly cog is some sort of tower, 10 miles away, within a mile of the cog's edge. The characters may look around Mechanus if they'd like. When the characters approach the tower (be sure to note how long it takes the party to travel 10 miles), read or paraphrase the following text. This area is illustrated by the second sketch in Appendix 3.

You crest a low rise and behold an unusual sight. The wide plain below you has been gouged open in a conical open-pit mine. Humans and dwarves toil within the mine pit as large insects scuttle about.

To the right of the mine is a lodge made of gray stone. This grim windowless structure has only one entrance, facing the work pit.

To the left of the mine are tall, organic-looking towers of some resinous substance. The opening is dark, but large enough to fit a giant. The walls of the towers pulse faintly, as with some inner power.

Six groups of ant-like creatures roam the plain, guarding the structures and the mine. After only a moment of observation, you discern that the guard patrols are marching in rigid formations. Three patrols stay close to the structures, marching in a tight triangle. The other three patrols pace out a larger triangle further out.

The patrols have a look of readiness, as though anticipating attack from any direction.

The Stone Lodge: This crude stone building is where the miners eat and sleep. At any time, one-third of the miners (about 15) are here sleeping in the single open room. Piled against the stone lodge is the valueless stone rubble removed from the mine.

The Mine Pit: Two-thirds of the miners are slaving away in this pit at any time. They are working to remove traces of thinnian ore from the hard stone of the cog. Each miner works until he or she has collected about 20 pounds of the metal (which takes several hours). Then it is handed to one of the formian workers and shuttled into the Queen's Towers. The miner may then rest for ten minutes. Several formian workers shuttle around the pit providing water to the miners and punishing shirkers.

All APLs (EL 0)

☛ **Formian Workers (8):** hp 5 each; see *Monster Manual* page pages 108–110. These workers fight if pressed, but they pose no real threat even to a very weak APL 6 party, so no XP is awarded for defeating them.

The Queen's Towers: The tall resinous towers are the home of the hive queen Kik'la. The characters have no

need to enter here, and any NPC encourages them to avoid entering this structure. Should any character enter the large, open room inside the towers, he discovers the hive queen attended by four myrmarchs, six taskmasters, and several dozen workers. These foes immediately attack, attempting to *dominate*, *charm* and enslave the intruders rather than slay them. Kik'la is a paranoid young queen with a small retinue, and does not parlay with any intruders. Do not bother to play out this combat. The characters survive this attack and manage to flee but will gain no treasure or XP from this portion of this encounter. Fighting here also alerts the rest of the encampment to the characters' presence.

All APLs (EL 18)

➤ **Kik'la, Formian Queen:** hp 190; see *Monster Manual* pages 108-110. She keeps her *magic circle against chaos*, *shield of law*, and *true seeing* abilities active at all times (as they can be renewed at will), and she keeps her *mage armor* and *detect scrying* spells up at all times. Kik'la's spell selection is identical to the typical formian queen spell selection in the *Monster Manual*, except she knows *mass suggestion* instead of *analyze dweomer*, and *plane shift* instead of *summon monster VII*.

➤ **Formian Myrmarchs (4):** hp 102 each; see *Monster Manual* pages 108-110.

➤ **Formian Taskmasters (6):** hp 39 each; see *Monster Manual* pages 108-110.

➤ **Formian Workers (40):** hp 5 each; see *Monster Manual* pages 108-110. These workers are noncombatants, but will use their ability to *cure serious wounds* on the other formians if they are injured.

The Patrols: The formian patrols keep rigid schedules in their triangular routes. Three patrol a large outer triangle approximately six hundred feet on a side, and three patrol a smaller inner triangle approximately three hundred feet on a side. The patrols are equally spaced out around their triangular routes, but each patrol can see at least one other patrol at all times. Each patrol consists of one formian armadon with six warriors around it.

When the formians detect any threat, no matter how great or small, the three patrols of the outer triangle rush to deal with it. These patrols double move at 80 feet per round, and might take several rounds to get to the threat. If the interloper looks susceptible to nonlethal damage (that is, if it isn't obviously an undead, elemental, or construct), the patrols will try to subdue it. If not, the patrols attack to kill.

If a second threat presents itself while the outer triangle of patrols are already engaged (or moving to engage), all three patrols of the inner triangle rush off to deal with this second threat. This leaves the mine open for a third party of intruders.

Additionally, if the outer three patrols are all defeated, the inner three patrols immediately move to attack the intruders as well.

If at any time an intruder gets farther than 400 feet from the outermost patrol, the formians break off pursuit. They only pursue further if intruders are sniping from the hills at them, and only with approval from the queen. The formians patrols are under strict orders to not stray too far from the hive queen in her tower.

The patrols always react to threats in exactly the same way, so the characters can learn about the patrol habits through trial and error, summoning creatures, trying to trick them, and so on. A good working knowledge of how the patrols react is important for any breakout plan the characters have to succeed, so you should encourage any activity that lets the characters know how the patrols react.

The patrols do not parlay, and never surrender. Each of the six patrols is as follows:

All APLs (EL 10)

➤ **Formian Armadon:** hp 68; see Appendix 2.

➤ **Formian Warriors (6):** hp 26 each; see *Monster Manual* pages 108-110.

The Goal: The characters should realize their goal is to find a way to free the miners from the formian work pits. If they don't realize this, Drell insists upon it.

Clever players will realize that the characters don't have anywhere to take the miners once they are freed, as the *Sending Stone* won't bring back the miners with the characters.

Development: Drell's Ally: If the characters request any aid from Drell (either to help free the miners or to bring them home), Drell uses his *rod of earthen allies* to summon a xorn. This xorn immediately feels vibrations in the earth that indicate other xorn nearby, and asks permission to go speak with them for a short time in lieu of payment (Drell is willing to agree to this, but defers to the opinion of the characters).

If the xorn isn't allowed to go speak to its kin, it asks for payment as usual for whatever sort of task the characters want. Note that this payment is halved, due to the power of the *rod of earthen allies*. Drell doesn't have anything of value with him, so the characters will have to pay the xorn for anything they want it to do. If they ask it to find a way out of the plane, it tunnels off to ask its kin, and returns shortly with news of the Granite Sprocket (see below).

If the xorn is allowed to speak to its kin, it stays away for nearly half an hour. After that time, it returns with six average xorn, who are upset with the formians at the mining outpost. They explain

"Angry, angry! Bugmen rip at ground, tearing, wounding. Groundfolk want tearing to stop!"

“Bugfolk” are what these xorn call the formians, and “groundfolk” are what these xorn call themselves. The xorn consider the rock of the cog to be theirs. If the characters express a desire to rid the cog of the miners, the xorn agree to help in whatever way the characters suggest. The xorn are smart enough to realize that the miners are slaves of the formians, and wouldn’t be here if the formians hadn’t brought them (the xorn see the miners as little more than work animals). The xorn are also willing to fight the formians, who they see as trespassers and defilers.

The xorn know that the hive queen lives in the towers along with her entourage. They aren’t willing to go into the towers, and warn the characters not to do so.

The native xorn also add—whether the characters ask about it or not—that the Granite Sprocket, a cog near here, is the best way to get the miners away from this area:

“Groundfolk think miners go away though Granite Sprocket. Yes, Granite Sprocket take two-leg diggers far away.”

If the characters want more information, the xorn add:

“Granite Sprocket not solid like most cogs; Granite Sprocket has four big gaps go right through cog. Long fall for most, but every other revolution, one gaps gets magic. Things fall into gap don’t fall through. Go somewhere else instead. Little sparkle in gap shows which one is the magic gap in cog. Must look close.”

Another xorn interrupts and adds, “Two-legs like diggers, two-legs like you, come from magic gap in Granite Sprocket. Many, many revolutions ago, long before bugmen came, two-legs come from Granite Sprocket, look around some, go back into Granite Sprocket. Never saw the groundfolk, never hurt the groundfolk’s cog. I curious, spied on two-legs. Spoke of place called Greyhawk. We do not know this place. But if Greyhawk place where two-legs come from, then two-leg diggers should go back there, and rip groundfolk ground no more.”

If the characters ask any native xorn how to get to the Granite Sprocket, the xorn responds:

“Granite Sprocket off the edge.” The xorn gestures with one of its arms to the edge of the cog fairly near you, no more than a mile away. “Get off cog onto next cog. Get off next cog onto next cog. Get off that cog onto Granite Cog. Granite cog speckled black and white, tastes bad. Looks like no other cog, taste like no other cog, easy to find.”

The granite cog is off the edge of the large cog where this formian mine-pit is situated. It is a couple of miles from the mine.

The Plan: Eventually, the players must devise a plan to free the miners. Players are exceptionally

clever, and no two tables are alike; this is a chance for them to do some creative thinking, and the judge must be adaptable.

The characters might have Drell and a handful of xorn willing to do whatever they suggest in order to help free the miners, although neither Drell nor the xorn do anything obviously suicidal (like enter the ominous Queen’s Towers).

Give any reasonable plan the players devise a fair shot at success, given the formian responses noted above. Although this encounter could not possibly hope to describe every possible combination of stratagems to free the miners, here are some typical ones:

- **Double Distraction.** The characters can use Drell’s allies in a two-pronged distraction. As noted above, one single distraction won’t draw all six patrols away. If the characters provide two distractions, however, they are free to rush in and exhort the miners to flee. The formian workers try to fight, but don’t pose any threat to the party. The miners eagerly follow any call for escape, stopping only to awaken their sleeping companions in the Stone Lodge. Since the dwarven miners move at 20 feet per round, and the patrols move at 40 feet per round, escapees must assure a strong lead in order to escape to the Granite Sprocket. As long as the miners have a lead of 400 feet, they are able to outrun the formians (ultimately, the formian patrols could catch them, but they won’t go too far for fear of leaving the Queen’s Towers undefended).
- **Burrow In.** The xorns cannot dig tunnels the characters could use, but the characters might have their own ability to tunnel under the surface of the cog and right to the mine. The miners eagerly aid any chance at escape. Characters entering the mine itself must deal with the formian workers. The workers raise the alarm through the hive-mind as soon as they can act, and the outer triangle patrols rush forward to attack. With sufficient stealth and quick action, however, a burrowing plan might be successful.
- **Sneak In.** The open plain provides nothing to hide behind; unless all the characters have the hide in plain sight ability or are invisible, they cannot make Hide checks to enter the mine undetected.
- **Bluff or Disguise.** None of the formians are willing to speak with the characters. They attack immediately instead, hoping to enslave the characters.
- **Surrender.** In order to get into the camp, the characters might surrender to the formians. The formians strip such characters of their weapons and obvious magical items (like *ioun stones*) and put them to work in the mines. See the section entitled “Troubleshooting: Captured Characters,” below. The characters’ equipment is delivered to

Kik'la in the Queen's Towers, and is therefore probably lost for good (unless the characters want to face the formian queen and her retinue)—remember to cross lost items off the character's MIL. Once the characters are put to work with the miners, they may pass on information or direction for an escape plan. Remember that any breakout or obvious escape is countered by the three outer patrols first (even if the closer inner patrols seem the obvious respondents to a breakout, the patrols rigidly follow their response orders).

- **Fight the Patrols.** A powerful party, particularly at higher APLs, is probably able to defeat all the patrols. As long as each patrol is neutralized quickly, the characters can probably fight each patrol one at a time. If the characters can last through this attrition, they can simply walk out of the camp with the miners. Be warned, however, that this much combat may extend this event well past the time slot for which it was designed.
- **Using Magic.** The characters may have several magical methods to bypass the patrols and enter the mine undetected (examples include *teleport* or *dimension door*, *invisibility*, and so on). Once there, however, they must contend with the formian workers before they have the opportunity to alert the patrols. The characters also have the added difficulty of getting the miners out past the patrols, which many spells cannot accomplish. Multiple casting of spells like *invisibility sphere*, however, might allow the characters to free the miners without the patrols ever knowing.
- **Flight.** One weakness of the patrols is that they cannot fight airborne opponents effectively (the warriors cannot fight at ranged at all, and the armadon can only spray acid). The patrols follow flying interlopers, intending to combat them when they land. If the characters can also arrange for the miners to fly as well, they can safely fly off to the Granite Sprocket. Even the lengthy process of shuttling the miners off into the hills one person at a time will work, as long as the characters can deal with acid-spraying armadons.

Development: Fleeing Miners: If the characters manage to get the miners free but don't get a sufficient head start (they need a lead of about 400 feet from the outermost patrols in order to make a successful getaway), the patrols intercept the miners. Remember that the outer three patrols activate first; only if they are occupied elsewhere or defeated do the inner three patrols activate. When the patrols catch up, they kill one or two of the miners as a lesson, subdue the rest, and put them back to work.

If the characters are with the miners as the patrols are catching up, they can probably buy the miners some extra time by engaging the patrols in melee. Every round, the miners run another 80 feet away. Once they are 400 feet from the patrols, the formians

do not pursue (they are instructed not to leave the queen undefended). This might mean the characters themselves are captured or killed instead.

Troubleshooting: Captured Characters: If the characters are all captured in this encounter (or if some are captured and not rescued by the others), they are also put to work in the mines. Any character that seems completely unfit for mining is instead directed to serve as cook and maid for the miners in the Stone Lodge. This capture is not permanent however, since the *Sending Stone* recalls the characters once their 256-minute time limit expires. If the players seem dejected or frustrated that their characters have been captured, remind them of the temporary nature of their captivity with an audible "click."

If the characters are captured but the miners are free, the miners wait around in the hills near the mine for the characters to return. If the characters insist that the miners press on to the Granite Sprocket without them, the miners do so; however, they are recaptured by the inevitables there and brought back to the mine.

Troubleshooting: Without Drell: It is possible that the characters may have come here to Mechanus without Drell. They may even free the miners without having Drell's help. However, they probably have to bring Drell here in order to learn from the native xorns about the *gate* to take the miners home. If the characters can manage the entire operation themselves (a resourceful party might learn about the Granite Sprocket by spells such as *commune* or *find the path*, or even by summoning a xorn themselves; a rare few parties might have sufficient magic to somehow *plane shift* all the miners home on their own!) then by all means, they should. They can then rescue Drell from Jherik at their leisure.

Troubleshooting: Without Drell's Rod: Some parties may have adamantly refused to make a deal with Jherik in Encounter 6, and so they don't have Drell's *rod of earthen allies*. In this case, Drell uses his *stone tell* ability to gain some information about the formians, and learns of the xorn. The xorn come to investigate who is speaking with their cog, and the rest of this encounter plays out pretty much as written.

ENCOUNTER 8: THE GRANITE SPROCKET

By this point, the characters have the miners in tow, and have fled the formian work-pits toward the Granite Sprocket.

The Granite Sprocket is a small cog in the gears of Mechanus, only two hundred feet in diameter. It is made of a speckled granite-like stone that is very durable. It looks like a toothed wheel supported by four arms that meet at a wide center (see the third sketch in Appendix 3). It is set perpendicular to the huge mining cog occupied by the formians (it's "underneath" it) and connects to other small cogs perpetuating throughout Mechanus. Remember that all cogs on Mechanus have objective directional

gravity: “down” is toward the face of a cog. Stepping from one cog to the other is disorienting, but not particularly dangerous.

The Granite Sprocket makes one full rotation every six minutes. Every other rotation, one of the gaps in the sprocket becomes a *gate* to Oerth for the next six minutes. This effect is nearly invisible, however, and if a traveler on Mechanus didn't know the *gate* was there, he might fear falling through the gap in the sprocket (and falling a very long way). Only a slight shimmer in the gap alerts keen-eyed travelers when the *gate* effect is active. Normally, noticing this effect requires a DC 30 Spot check, but since the characters know where to look, the DC drops to 10.

When the characters arrive at the Granite Sprocket, Kik'la the hive queen has arranged an unpleasant welcome. She has telepathically commanded one or more inevitables to intercept the characters and capture them if possible. These inevitables were “reprogrammed” by the hive queen ages ago, and are utterly loyal to her commands. Read:

Enmeshed in the clockworks of this strange plane is a great stone cogwheel. This speckled stone wheel moves swiftly, as it is much smaller than the cogs around it, yet it still stretches two hundred feet across.

Unlike the other cogs you've traversed here, the stone cog's surface isn't solid. Four great gaps reveal a dizzying distance to grinding gears far below.

You are not the only new arrivals to this stone sprocket. As you arrive:

APL 6: *a mechanical centaur races over the far edge of the sprocket. It wields a pair of spiked chains, one attached to each arm.*

APL 8: *two mechanical centaurs race over the far edge of the sprocket. Each wields a pair of spiked chains, one attached to each arm.*

APL 10: *three mechanical centaurs race over the far edge of the sprocket. Each wields a pair of spiked chains, one attached to each arm.*

APL 12: *rising over the edge of the sprocket farthest from you is a black man-shaped statue clad in golden armor. Although it has no wings, it treads easily upon the air. Lightning crackles around its stony fists.*

APL 6 (EL 9)

☛ **Zelekhut (Inevitable):** hp 74; see *Monster Manual* page 160.

APL 8 (EL 11)

☛ **Zelekhut (Inevitable) (2):** hp 74 each; see *Monster Manual* page 160.

APL 10 (EL 12)

☛ **Zelekhut (Inevitable) (3):** hp 74 each; see *Monster Manual* page 160.

APL 12 (EL 15)

☛ **Marut (Inevitable):** hp 115; see *Monster Manual* page 160.

Tactics: The inevitables intend to subdue the characters, but will resort to lethal attacks if attempts to subdue or restrain the characters fail. If pushed or bull-rushed off the Granite Sprocket, an inevitable simply flies back up to reenter combat (zelekhts can produce wings as a free action, well before they hit the grinding gears hundreds of feet below). A character who falls off the cog falls 700 feet and probably to his death, but may make one round of actions before hitting the grinding gears below (hopefully, that action will be to cast *fly* or *dimension door* or the like).

Two minutes after combat with the inevitables is over, the characters may notice the shimmer that reveals the *gate* is open (DC 10 Spot check). Anyone that passes through the *gate* gap in the Granite Sprocket disappears, to reappear in Oerth. The miners are a little intimidated by the gap, and only go through the *gate* once one of the characters goes first. The *gate* leads to the Gnarley Forest near the Viscounty of Verbobonc, far from the mining camp.

If the last ones through the gap are the characters, you may read them the following text to illustrate how close their escape is:

Just as you move into the gap that will take you back to Oerth, a flash of light catches your eye. At the edge of the granite cog appears an enormous bloated ant, its nonfunctional legs quivering angrily in the air. It crackles with arcane power, and its eyes blaze with intelligence and malice. Attending this bloated creature are a dozen horse-sized formians, many wearing decorative bronze helmets. They point their claws in your direction, and click their mandibles together angrily.

Then you are through the gap. Green leaves wave in the blue sky above you, and you are past the reach of the angry formians.

CONCLUSION

Once the characters have escorted the miners back to their camp, some of them reveal that they were able to bring back some of the unusual ore they were mining. They offer the material to the characters as a reward. Each character may purchase one weapon made of thuvian (from *Complete Warrior*; see Appendix 2), thanks to the ore these miners brought back.

Furthermore, Drell offers his *rod of earthen allies* to the characters at any time in the future, as long as they are willing to help him finance further rod construction (that is, they have to buy Drell's rod from him at market price). Even if the characters didn't bargain to get Drell's *rod of earthen allies* back from Jherik, Drell can make them another.

The miners cluster around you, clasping your hands in thanks and retelling the stories of your brave rescue. Some of them rub the mossy bark of the great trees around you, just glad to be home. Others pat Drell on

the hip, thanking the rocky giant for his part in their rescue.

The miners agree that they won't go back to their camp, but instead seek work elsewhere. All of them agree to welcome you as heroes wherever you find them.

For his part, Drell will return to his home in the Abbor-Alz Hills, and watch over the area of the Sending Stone to be sure evil forces cannot claim it. Before he bids you farewell, the soft-spoken giant warns you that he may need to call upon the help of heroes in the future.

The End

Experience Point Summary

To award experience for this adventure, add up the values for the objectives accomplished. Then assign the experience award. Award the total value (objectives plus roleplaying) to each character.

Encounter 2

Defeat the Huntmaster and his beasts:

APL 6	240 XP
APL 8	270 XP
APL 10	360 XP
APL 12	390 XP

Encounter 5

Get the tiles from Niknik without violence:

APL 6	60 XP
APL 8	75 XP
APL 10	90 XP
APL 12	105 XP

Encounter 6

Defeat the bird demons:

APL 6	210 XP
APL 8	300 XP
APL 10	360 XP
APL 12	420 XP

Encounter 7

Successfully free the miners from the formians:

APL 6	120 XP
APL 8	150 XP
APL 10	180 XP
APL 12	210 XP

Encounter 8

Defeat the inevitable(s):

APL 6	270 XP
APL 8	330 XP
APL 10	360 XP
APL 12	450 XP

Total Possible Experience

APL 6	900 XP
APL 8	1125 XP
APL 10	1350 XP
APL 12	1575 XP

Treasure Summary

During an adventure, characters encounter treasure, usually finding it in the possession of their foes. Every encounter that features treasure has a "treasure" section within the encounter description, giving information about the loot, coins, and magic items that make up the encounter's treasure.

The loot total is the number of gold pieces each character gains if the foes are plundered of all their earthly possessions. Looting the bodies takes at least 10 minutes per every 5 enemies, and if the characters cannot take the time to loot the bodies, they do not gain

this gold. If you feel it is reasonable that characters can go back to loot the bodies, and those bodies are there (i.e., not carted off by dungeon scavengers, removed from the scene by the local watch, and so on), characters may return to retrieve loot. If the characters do not loot the body, the gold piece value for the loot is subtracted from the encounter totals given below.

The coin total is the number of gold pieces each character gains if they take the coin available. A normal adventuring party can usually gather this wealth in a round or so. If for some reason, they pass up this treasure, the coin total is subtracted from the encounter totals given below.

Next, the magic items are listed. Magic item treasure is the hardest to adjudicate, because they are varied and because characters may want to use them during the adventure. Many times characters must cast *identify*, *analyze dweomer* or similar spell to determine what the item does and how to activate it. Other times they may attempt to use the item blindly. If the magic item is consumable (a potion, scroll, magic bolts, etc.) and the item is used before the end of the adventure, its total is subtracted from the adventure totals below.

Once you have subtracted the value for unclaimed treasure from each encounter add it up and that is the number of gold pieces a characters total and coin value increase at the end of the adventure. Write the total in the GP Gained field of the adventure certificate. Characters may spend additional Time Units to practice professions or create items immediately after the adventure so this total may be modified by other circumstances.

L = Looted gear from enemy; C = Coin, Gems, Jewelry, and other valuables; M = Magic Items.

Introduction

Take the treasures from the chest.

APL 6: L: 0 gp; C: 0 gp; M: *bracers of quick strike*, 100 gp per character; *cloak of elemental protection*, 83 gp per character; *gloves of fortunate striking*, 167 gp per character; *helm of glorious recovery*, 467 gp per character; *magic sleeping bag*, 83 gp per character.

APL 8: L: 0 gp; C: 0 gp; M: *bracers of quick strike*, 100 gp per character; *cloak of elemental protection*, 83 gp per character; *gloves of fortunate striking*, 167 gp per character; *helm of glorious recovery*, 467 gp per character; *magic sleeping bag*, 83 gp per character; *boots of charging*, 417 gp per character.

APL 10: L: 0 gp; C: 0 gp; M: *cloak of elemental protection*, 83 gp per character; *gloves of fortunate striking*, 167 gp per character; *helm of glorious recovery*, 467 gp per character; *magic sleeping bag*, 83 gp per character; *boots of charging*, 417 gp per character; *amulet of fortune prevailing*, 667 gp per character; *belt of one mighty blow*, 125 gp per character; *exploding spike*, 125 gp per character; *field provisions box*, 167 gp per character.

APL 12: L: 0 gp; C: 0 gp; M: *bracers of quick strike*, 100 gp per character; *cloak of elemental protection*, 83 gp per character; *gloves of fortunate striking*, 167 gp per character; *helm of glorious recovery*, 467 gp per character; *magic sleeping bag*, 83 gp per character; *boots of charging*, 417 gp per character; *amulet of fortune prevailing*, 667 gp per character; *belt of one mighty blow*, 125 gp per character; *exploding spike*, 125 gp per character; *field provisions box*, 167 gp per character; *boots of big stepping*, 933 gp per character.

Total Treasure (Maximum Possible Treasure)

APL 6: 900 gp (900 gp)

APL 8: 1317 gp (1300 gp)

APL 10: 2301 gp (2300 gp)

APL 12: 3334 gp (3300 gp)

Items to be Listed on the AR:

Cross out any item not gained.

Thinaun: This character successfully returned missing miners to the Material Plane, and they brought some thinaun ore with them. You have access to buy any one weapon of thinaun. Your thinaun weapon can be enchanted to +1 by paying an extra 2,000 gp when it is purchased.

Jherik the Erinyes: This character owes Jherik the erinyes a favor in the future. Jherik does not seem to be as evil as some of his kin—he's actually quite friendly—but you have a deal with a devil all the same.

Rod of Earthen Allies: This bulky rocky rod is made of hard, red-brown stone. It strikes as a *+1 greatclub*, and once per day allows the user to utter a single word (as a standard action) to summon a Medium earth elemental, earth mephit, or minor xorn as from a *lesser planar ally* spell. The bearer of the rod is treated with great respect by the summoned creature; although the user must still bargain for services normally (payable in gems), the earth creature always halves the final payment as though the task were strongly aligned with the creature's ethos.

Moderate conjuration; Prerequisites: Craft Rod, creator must have the earth subtype; Market Price: 37,380 gp; Weight 16 lbs.; Frequency: Any.

Firelord's Band: the reddish-silver magic ring you found has an ancient power, nearly faded to nothing. Sometime during your recent planar travels it has activated, and you aren't certain why. At any time in the future, you may pay 16,000 gp to upgrade the ring to a *major ring of fire resistance*. At any time after that, you may pay 172,000 gp to upgrade the ring to a *ring of elemental command (fire)*.

Cross this off if you did not purchase the *minor ring of fire resistance* from *COR4-02 The Stone Man's Puzzle* before playing this adventure.

Items Found During the Adventure

APL 6 *Bracers of quick strike* (Freq: Adv, MH)

Cloak of elemental protection (Freq: Adv, MH)

Gloves of fortunate striking (Freq: Adv, MH)

Helm of glorious recovery (Freq: Adv, MH)

Magic sleeping bag (Freq: Adv, MH)

Rod of earthen allies (Freq: Any, see above)

APL 8 (as APL 6 plus the following)

Boots of charging (Freq: Adv, MH)

APL 10 (as APL 6-8 plus the following)

Amulet of fortune prevailing (Freq: Adv, MH)

Belt of one mighty blow (Freq: Adv, MH)

Exploding spike (Freq: Adv, MH)

Field provisions box (Freq: Adv, MH)

APL 12 (as APL 6-10 plus the following)

Boots of big stepping (Freq: Adv, MH)

APPENDIX 1: NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS

Encounter 2

APL 10 and 12

☛ **Silixz, Xill Huntmaster, xill Rgr1/Mnk4:** CR 11; Medium outsider (extraplanar); HD 10d8+30; hp 83; Init +10; Spd 50 ft.; AC 25 (+6 Dex, +2 Wis, +7 natural), touch 18, flat-footed 19; Base Attack +9; Grap +17; Atk +14 melee (1d8+4, claw); Full Atk +12/+12/+12/+12 melee (1d8+4 or 1d8+2, 4 claws) or +10/+10/+10/+10/+10 melee (1d8+4, flurry of blows); Face/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; SA implant, improved grab, ki strike (magic), paralysis; SQ darkvision 60 ft., evasion, favored enemy (magical beasts +2), planewalk, slow fall (20 ft.), spell resistance 21, still mind, wild empathy; AL LE; SV Fort +13, Ref +16, Will +10 (+12 against Enchantment effects); Str 18, Dex 22, Con 17, Int 10, Wis 14, Cha 10.

Skills and Feats: Balance +16, Climb +12, Diplomacy +2, Escape Artist +14, Handle Animal +7, Intimidate +8, Jump +11, Listen +10, Sense Motive +10, Spot +12, Tumble +21; Ability Focus (paralyzing bite), Deflect Arrows, Improved Grapple, Improved Initiative, Multiattack, Skill Focus (Handle Animal), Weapon Focus (claw).

Implant (Ex): As a standard action, a xill can lay eggs inside a paralyzed creature. The young emerge about 90 days later, literally devouring the host from inside. A *remove disease* spell rids a victim of the egg, as does a DC 25 Heal check. If the check fails, the healer can try again, but each attempt (successful or not) deals 1d4 points of damage to the patient.

Improved Grab (Ex): To use this ability, a xill must hit with one or more claw attacks. It can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. It receives a +2 bonus on the grapple check for each claw that hits. If it wins the grapple check and maintains the hold in the next round, it automatically bites the foe at that time. The bite deals no damage but injects a paralyzing venom.

Paralysis (Ex): Those bitten by a xill must succeed on a DC 17 Fortitude save or be paralyzed for 1d4 hours. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Planewalk (Su): These planar travelers like to slip between the folds of space to attack enemies as though from thin air. They can cross from the Ethereal Plane with a move action but take 2 rounds to cross back, during which time they are immobile. As a xill fades away, it becomes harder to hit: Opponents have a 20% miss chance in the first round and a 50% miss chance in the second. A xill can planewalk with a willing or helpless creature.

APPENDIX 2: NEW RULES ITEMS

New Wondrous Items

All these wondrous items come from the *Miniatures Handbook*. Not all are available at every APL. Most of these items need to be worn for 24 hours before they will function. A swift action, introduced in the *Miniatures Handbook*, is like a free action, except you may only make a single swift action each turn. Swift actions are normally taken on your turn like other types of actions.

Amulet of Fortune Prevailing: Blessed by the ancient gods of luck, this amulet allows its wearer to change his fortune. Once per day, after the amulet's wearer attempts a saving throw (but before it's determined whether the save succeeded), he may choose to reroll the saving throw. He must use the second result even if it's lower. The wearer can't use this ability if he has already rerolled the saving throw because of another ability he possesses, nor can he use another ability he possesses to reroll the saving throw a second time. The amulet can only be used after it is worn continuously for 24 hours. If it is taken off, it becomes inactive until it is again donned and worn for a full 24 hours.

Moderate divination; CL 9th; Craft Wondrous Item, *augury*; Price: 8,000 gp.

Belt of One Mighty Blow: Once per day, as a swift action, the wearer of this belt can activate the belt to gain extra damage on her next melee attack. A light weapon deals an extra 1d8 points of damage, a one-handed weapon deals an extra 2d6 points of damage, and a two-handed weapon deals an extra 3d6 points of damage. The belt can be used only after being worn continuously for 24 hours. If it is taken off, it becomes inactive until it is again donned and worn for a full 24 hours.

Faint transmutation; CL 5th; Craft Wondrous Item, *bull's strength*; Price: 1,500 gp.

Boots of Big Stepping: The spirit of the blink dog has been harnessed within these wolfhide boots. Once per day, as a standard action, the wearer can use *dimension door*. The boots can only be used after they are worn continuously for 24 hours. If they are taken off, they become inactive until they are again donned and worn for a full 24 hours.

Moderate conjuration; CL 7th; Craft Wondrous Item, *dimension door*; Price: 11,200 gp.

Boots of Charging: These boots give the wearer the Powerful Charge feat as long as they are worn. (Powerful Charge: when you charge, if your melee attack hits, it deals an extra 1d8 points of damage if you're Medium, 2d6 if you are Large, 3d6 if you are Huge, 4d6 if you are Gargantuan, and 6d6 if you are

Colossal. If you are smaller than Medium size, there is no effect. This feat works only when you make a charge. It does not work when you're mounted. If you have the ability to make multiple attacks on a charge, you may apply this extra damage to only one of those attacks in a round.)

Faint transmutation; CL 5th; Craft Wondrous Item, *longstrider*; Price: 5,000 gp.

Bracers of Quick Strike: The bracers provide the benefit of incredible speed. Once per day, when taking a full attack action, as a swift action the wearer may take one additional attack with any weapon he is holding. The attack is made at the wearer's full base attack bonus, plus any modifiers appropriate to the situation. (This effect is not cumulative with similar effects, such as that provided by a speed weapon or by the *haste* spell, nor does it actually grant an extra action.) The bracers can be used only after being worn continuously for 24 hours. If they are taken off, they become inactive until they are again donned and worn for a full 24 hours.

Faint transmutation; CL 5th; Craft Wondrous Item, *haste*; Price: 1,200 gp.

Cloak of Elemental Protection: This cloak, woven with threads of various colors, protects the wearer from energy attacks. Once per day, as a swift action, the wearer can activate the cloak and gain resistance 10 against a type of energy of the wearer's choice (acid, cold, electricity, fire, or sonic). The wearer can activate the cloak when it is not his turn. The wearer therefore can respond to an energy attack by immediately activating the cloak and choosing the attack's energy type. The cloak can be used only after being worn continuously for 24 hours. If it is taken off, it becomes inactive until it is again donned and worn for a full 24 hours.

Faint abjuration; CL 3rd; Craft Wondrous Item, *resist energy*; Price: 1,000 gp.

Exploding Spike: Warm to the touch, this red spike pulses with stored energy. The spike does nothing until it is planted firmly in the ground (a standard action). One round later, the spike becomes invisible. Any creature that thereafter comes within 10 feet of the spike causes it to explode in a *fireball* that deals 10d6 points of damage (Reflex save DC 14 half) to every creature within 20 feet of the spike. This blast destroys the spike.

Moderate evocation; CL 11th; Craft Wondrous Item, *fireball*; Price: 1,500 gp.

Field Provisions Box: When opened, this well-crafted wooden box produces enough basic food and water to

feed up to fifteen humans or five horses, providing a full day's sustenance. It can be used once per day.

Faint conjuration; CL 5th; Craft Wondrous Item, *create food and water*; Price: 2,000 gp.

Gloves of Fortunate Striking: Best worn by the cleverest of warmakers, these gloves allow their wearer to attempt to change an unfortunate strike at the enemy to a more accurate one. Once per day, after the wearer of the gloves has made an attack roll (but before it's determined whether the roll succeeded), he may choose to make the attack roll again. He must use the second result even if it's lower. The wearer can't use this ability if he has already made the attack roll again because of another ability he possesses, nor can he use another ability he possesses to make the attack roll again after he uses the gloves. The gloves can be used only after they are worn continuously for 24 hours. If they are taken off, they become inactive until they are again donned and worn for a full 24 hours.

Faint divination; CL 3rd; Craft Wondrous Item, *true strike*; Price: 2,000 gp.

Helm of Glorious Recovery: Once per day, the wearer of this helm can activate it by uttering the command word. The helm instantaneously cures the wearer of 4d8+7 points of damage. The helm can be used only after being worn continuously for 24 hours. If it is taken off, it becomes inactive until it is again donned and worn for a full 24 hours.

Moderate conjuration; CL 7th; Craft Wondrous Item, *cure critical wounds*; Price: 5,600 gp.

Magic Sleeping Bag: This woolen sleeping bag grants the user a comfortable and peaceful night's sleep. While the user lies within, it provides the benefits of *endure elements*. With a night's rest, the user also recovers 1 hit point per character level (in addition to hit points recovered normally). Getting into or out of a *magic sleeping bag* is a full-round action.

Faint conjuration and enchantment; CL 3rd; Craft Wondrous Item, *endure elements*, *cure light wounds*; Price: 1,000 gp.

New Special Material

Thinuan: This dark, glittering steel alloy holds an attraction to souls recently released from their bodies. Obviously, this has application for melee weapons. If a thinuan melee weapon is touching a creature when it dies, that creature's soul is sucked into the weapon rather than passing on to its final reward. The soul remains in the thinuan weapon until the weapon is destroyed or another creature dies while touching the thinuan weapon (the new soul displaces the old one). Raise dead, resurrection, and similar spells won't bring back a creature whose soul is trapped by a thinuan weapon unless the caster has the weapon in his possession. Because the soul is nearby, fewer material components are required for such spells: reincarnation, raise dead, resurrection, and true resurrection require

half as much of the relevant material component (unguents or diamonds) to cast if the soul is within a thinuan weapon.

A thinuan weapon captures the soul from anyone killed while touching the weapon. This means that if the thinuan weapon's wielder dies, her weapon captures her soul.

One melee weapons made primarily of metal can be crafted as thinuan weapons.

Type of Thinuan Item Item Cost Modifier

Light weapon
+10,000 gp
One-handed weapon, or one end of a double weapon
+15,000 gp
Two-handed weapon, or both heads of a double weapon
+20,000 gp

New Monster

Armadon (Formian) (from *Fiend Folio*)

Large Outsider (Extraplanar, Lawful)

Hit Dice: 8d8+32 (68 hp)

Initiative: +5

Speed: 40 ft.

Armor Class: 25 (-1 size, +1 Dex, +15 natural), touch 10, flat-footed 24

Base Attack/Grapple: +8/+18

Attacks: Bite +13 melee (2d6+6/17-20/x3)

Full Attack: Bite +13 melee (2d6+6/17-20/x3) and 2 claws +11 melee (1d8+3) and sting +11 melee (2d4+3 plus poison)

Space/Reach: 10 ft./5 ft.

Special Attacks: Acid spray, augmented critical, hive mind, poison

Special Qualities: Immunity to acid, cold, petrification and poison, resistance to electricity 10, fire 10, and sonic 10, spell resistance 20

Saves: Fort +10, Ref +7, Will +7

Abilities: Str 22, Dex 13, Con 19, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 11

Skills: Balance +12, Climb +17, Hide +8, Jump +17, Listen +12, Move Silently +12, Spot +12, Survival +12

Feats: Improved Critical (bite), Improved Initiative, Multiattack

Environment: Any land and underground (Mechanus)

Organization: Solitary, team (2-4), or troop (6-11)

Challenge Rating: 8

Treasure: None

Alignment: Always lawful neutral

Advancement: 9-12 HD (Large); 13-24 HD (Huge)

Level Adjustment: —

Armadons are shock troops that lead the charge into battle and tear apart anything that gets in their

way. They are utterly merciless and are sent into the most dangerous situations.

Bulky and well-armored, armadons look more like giant fleas than their antlike formian kin. Their mandibles are huge, and they have elongated arms that end in powerful claws.

Armadons do not speak.

Combat

Armadons rush into the thick of battle where they can do the most damage. They typically release a gout of acid prior to engaging in melee. Because they are immune to acid, they use their acid spray in areas with other armadons even if they are in combat.

Armadons can be summoned using a *summon monster VII* spell.

Acid Spray (Ex): An armadon can spray a 20-foot burst of acid from glands in its tail, dealing 3d8 points of acid damage to everything in the area. Once an armadon uses this ability, it can't use it again for 1d4 rounds. A successful Reflex save (DC 18) halves the damage. The save DC is Constitution-based.

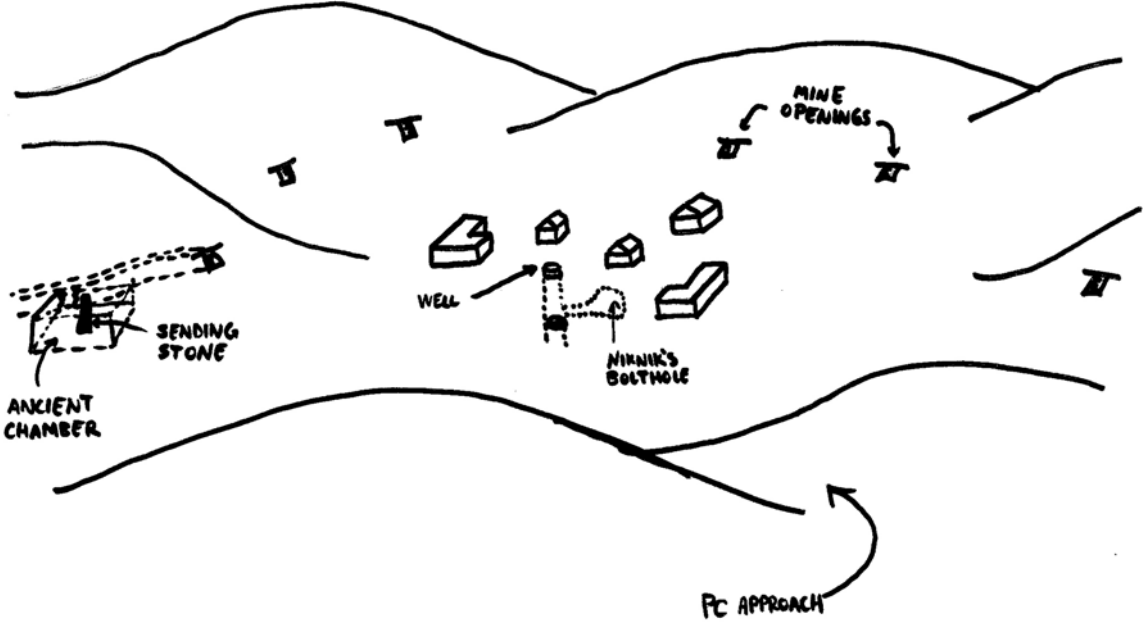
Augmented Critical (Ex): An armadon's bite attack threatens a critical hit on a natural attack roll of 17-20 because of the creature's augmented critical ability and its Improved Critical feat. On a successful critical hit with a bite, an armadon deals triple damage.

Hive Mind (Ex): All formians within 50 miles of their queen are in constant communication. If one is aware of a particular danger, they all are. If one in a group is not flat-footed, none of them are. No formian in a group is considered flanked unless all of them are.

Poison (Ex): Injury, Fortitude DC 18, initial and secondary damage 1d6 Str. The save DC is Constitution-based.

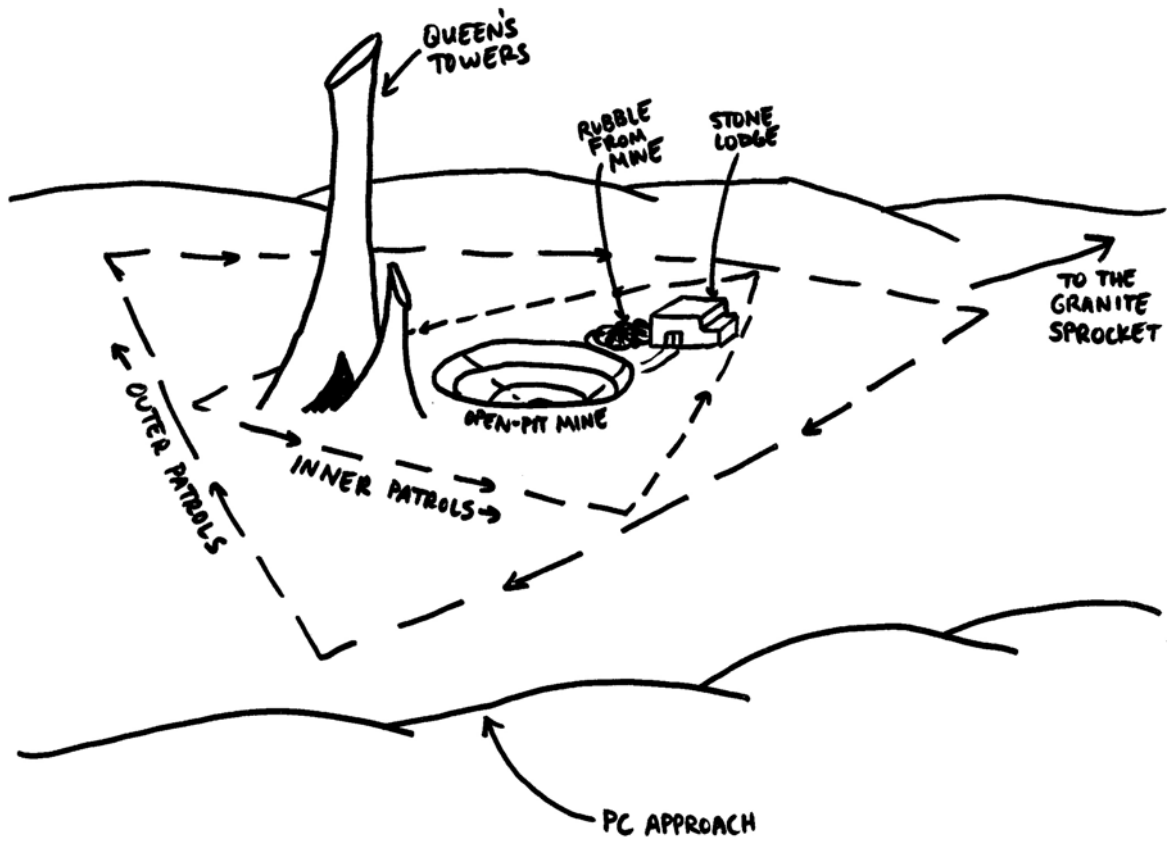
APPENDIX 3: LAYOUT ILLUSTRATIONS

This is the layout of the mining camp in Encounter 3:

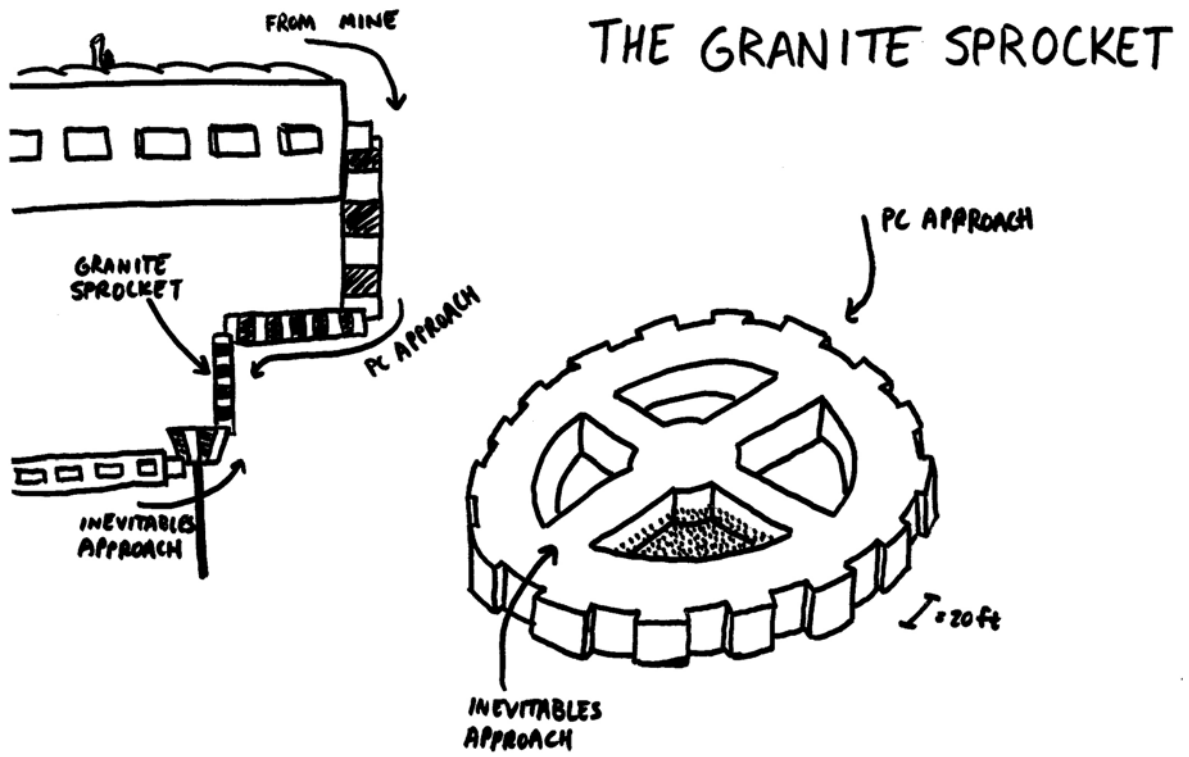


ABBORA-ALZ MINES

This is the layout of the formian outpost in Encounter 7:



This is the layout of the Granite Sprocket in Encounter 8:



PLAYER HANDOUT 1: THE LETTER

This message is hastily scrawled on the back of a ledger page listing shipments of ore.

You probably don't get many letters from giants, but I need help with a disturbing mystery. Some of my friends are missing. I have heard that a group of skilled investigators is in Megas Landing, and I hoped you would be willing to help me.

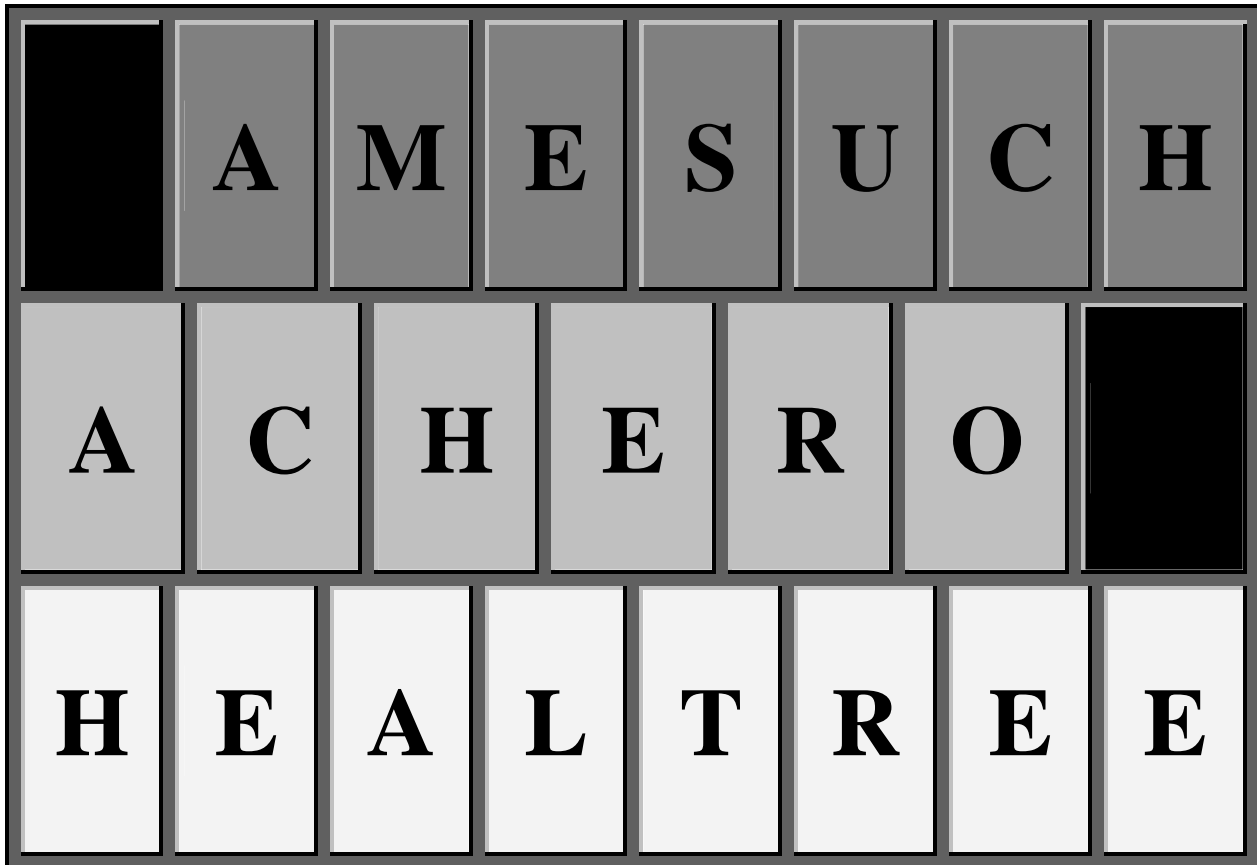
I am Drell, an elder among stone giants. I mean no harm to you or other people. I am a friend of some miners here in the Abbor-Alz Hills. I went to visit them yesterday and found they had disappeared. It looks like they just left, but they didn't take anything with them, and it doesn't seem like they left the area. Maybe they are all deep in one of the mines, but I'm too large to fit in most of their passages to find out.

I asked an ally of mine to lead you back here to the mining camp to help me. Please hurry, as I fear my friends might be in great danger.

Drell

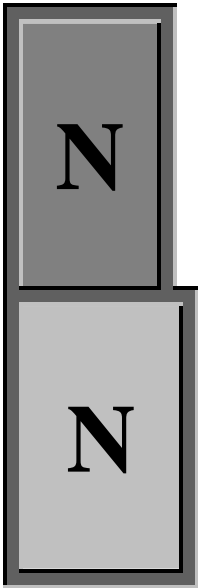
PLAYER HANDOUT 2: PLAQUE WITH TILES

These tiles are assembled on the plaque. It looks like two pieces are missing.



PLAYER HANDOUT 3: MISSING TILES

The strange creature in the well carried the following two tiles:



PLAYER HANDOUT 4: ARMADON ILLUSTRATION

