



Blackwheel Company: *A Few Good Gnolls*

A One-Round DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® FACTION
Adventure Packet for 7th to 10th-Level Characters
BLACKWHEEL COMPANY™ Faction Adventure for the
XEN'DRIK EXPEDITIONS™ Campaign

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Adventure Background

After gathering various fragments of giant history from Ek Tlelnak and using those to help interpret portions of the Caldyn Fragments, Blackwheel scholars discovered the location of a cache of information on one of the giants' long-forgotten armageddon machines. Unfortunately, knowledge of its whereabouts also fell into the hands of the Cabal of Shadows.

A group of hires recently retrieved two schemas — of four in total — that comprised the most important part of the device. The Cabal of Shadows recovered the other two parts. Since then, Arclight has been studying the schemas in a special skunkworks building in Stormreach to determine first whether Blackwheel can use anything from them, and second, how to ensure that the device can't be used.

Unfortunately, the Cabal of Shadows has a friend within Blackwheel Company. General Mach Ogdin, a slovenly, foul-tempered man has decided that the best way to break free from the Dragonmarked houses is to splinter Blackwheel from within, wrest control from Field Marshal Maceck, and put it all back together under his command.

He has provided the Cabal the plans to the skunkworks building, logs and orders for the security details there, and provided them with inside access to the building. For months now, the Cabal have been planning to steal the Arclight Division's research on the Ek Tlelwot Device, bomb the building to destroy any evidence of their involvement, then assemble and set off the device in the Southern city of Ek Tlelwot with the intent to destroy as much of Xen'drik as possible.

Adventure Synopsis

Introduction

The adventure opens with the PCs relaxing at a tavern on *The Glory Road*. From outside, a massive explosion is heard. Rushing outside, they are met with Quartermaster Gridd, who recognizes the building as an undercover Arclight skunkworks building. Without waiting for orders, he presses the PCs into service, giving them control of an airship and ordering them to investigate while he goes through the chain of command.

Part One

Inside Job

The PCs investigate the site of the Arclight lab; they discover some evidence suggesting that the Arclight members here were working on the Ek Tlelwot armageddon device. They find that the two pieces of the device previously held by Blackwheel are missing. More distressing, it's clear from the evidence that the bombing was prepared methodically, with the bombs placed inside the building.

Dragonmarked Involvement

During their investigation, a dragonmarked warlock arrives on the scene to ensure no evidence remained after the blast. Though she retreats as quickly as possible, she inadvertently provides additional clues to the crime. The PCs are able to piece a trail together leading them to a nearby Cabal safehouse, from which the operation was conducted.

Cabal Safehouse

The PCs find a Cabal safehouse practically across the square from the covert Arclight laboratory. A quick casing of the joint reveals that the number of Cabalists in the safehouse would quickly outnumber them if they use the "gnoll" approach. Luckily for them, the Cabalists are preparing to flee the scene, and are disorganized, so several other options are available to them. Once inside, the PCs discover evidence clearly implicating General Mach Ogdin; General Tubald d'Cannith is implicated, as well.

The Old Dwarf

With their trail run dry, the PCs must return to *The Glory Road* and report. With evidence implicating individuals as high in the chain of command as General Ogdin, the PCs' best option is to present to Maceck himself. He gives them orders to steal an airship from *The Glory Road* and pilot to Ek Tlelwot to stop the Cabalists' plan to set off the Ek Tlelwot device.

Part Two

Back to Ek Tielwot

The PCs arrive in Ek Tielwot and find the entrance to the Temple of End Days, where the Cabalists, along with a contingent of Blackwheel guards, have started the ritual to bring about armageddon.

Exploring the Temple of End Days

Although the Cabalists have been through the temple, they could not disable all of its traps. The PCs must navigate several environmental hazards and ancient foes to proceed deeper into the temple.

End Days

The PCs reach the final chamber of the temple and interrupt the Cabalists' ceremony — they must stop the ceremony from concluding before the Ek Tielwot device's power is unleashed.

Troubleshooting

Navigating Stormreach

Stormreach is a massive city with any number of wonders, locations, and events that can sidetrack a party. Focus on getting the party to the main adventure points. Details are always nice, but the limited time spent in Stormreach in this module should be spent only on the specific encounters from the module. The time pressure put on the PCs should keep them from wandering too much, but if they get side-tracked by the vastness that is Stormreach, give them a nudge in the right direction.

The Grinder

During each part of this adventure, the PCs will proceed from one encounter to the next with very little time to rest or prepare. There are several encounters which you could use to provide the party with *cure* and *repair* magic if necessary. Do not heal the party completely, but use this to avoid wiping them out if the combats and traps are taking a heavier than normal toll on them.

Overwhelming Forces

In Cabal safe-house, the PCs are grossly outmatched in an all-on-all fight. If the party seems intent on using the “gnoll” technique to get through that encounter, you may need to encourage them to do otherwise. Of course, if the PCs have been presented with every possible warning and insist on “going in through the front door”, let them have it.

Tone

BWC-8 A Few Good Gnolls is a fast-paced module, with few places for the PCs to catch their breath. From the initial encounter to the destruction of the Ek Tielwot device at the conclusion, the sense of urgency and danger should not let up. Do not let the sense of urgency down for a moment; during the first half, if they dawdle, they will lose the trail of the Cabalists and the adventure will be over for them. In the second half, taking too much time means the destruction of a significant portion of Xen'drik.

Adventure Start

The adventure starts with the party onboard the Blackwheel Company pride and joy, *The Glory Road*, in one of many small taverns kept aboard to entertain hires in their downtime.

Part One: The Bombing of Arclight

The adventure begins as the PCs are relaxing between missions on *The Glory Road*.

Read the following to the players:

From the well-intentioned but piss-poor singing in the corner to the stacks of empty tankards on each table, the tavern is filled with evidence of excess — hires between missions use this place to unwind with both friends and strangers alike.

Nearby, a table of recruits mutter about recent assignments; you catch just snippets of the conversation, which seems to be centered around General Ogdin yet again using hires outside his own battalion for bizarre, purposeless, and suicidal missions.

Suddenly, The Glory Road shudders and pitches to the side momentarily. There is a dull roar, then several loud bursts — explosions, and nearby!

Development

The PCs are likely to run out onto deck, to see what's happening. The tavern is deck-side, so the PCs can reach the deck in mere moments. When they do, read the following:

Below you, but not far off from where The Glory Road is anchored, a building is engulfed in flames. Several more explosions rock through it, practically leveling the ancient structure in mere seconds. The deck of The Glory Road is filled with hires come to see the trouble.

A spindly half-orc — you recognize him as Quartermaster Gridd — presses his way through the crowd to where you're standing. he is shirtless, and his back is covered entirely with a massive black tattoo of a 12-spoked wheel. He points at you, "You lads, come wi' me. An' be quiet abou' it."

Gridd takes the PCs to the far side of the ship, where several smaller airships are docked at *The Glory Road's* side. He refuses to answer any questions the PCs might have until reaching the small requisitions office. There, he tells them:

Gridd wipes the sweat from his brow, and begins, "Not many hires're goin' to know this, but that buildin' is not as abandoned as it looks — it's one o' ours. Arclight, the artificers' division, does covert work down there. Ain't got no idea what they were doin' down there, but I can't imagine that explosion is any sort o' accident. Maceck's goin' ta know about it soon enough, an' when he does, he's goin' to need volunteers to already be down there. Whatever caused that mess could be down there still, but it ain't gonna be if we wait much longer."

He motions past several guards still stationed nearby, towards one of the airships docked nearby. "Take the Gnoll's Rage there. I'm sure one 'a you can pilot 'er." He pauses for a moment, as if he's slightly unsure he believes what's coming out of his own mouth, then continues. "Now get down there and figure out what happened."

Gridd gives them a few moments to ask questions, which he'll answer to the best of his ability, but he knows time is of the essence, and won't brook more than a few questions before sending them on their way.

What is Arclight Division?

"Arclight is the artificer's division — they figure out what the stuff the rest o' us find down there does."

What was Arclight doing in that building?

"All I know is that they were workin' on somethin' secret down there, something too secret an' too dangerous to bring aboard The Glory Road. The lab was not exactly known t'most folks, outside a select few — the Generals, the Field Marshal himself, and a few others."

How do we pilot the airship?

"It's easy — take th' helm there, and tell the elemental inside where t' go. Helps if y'got any experience on a ship, too."

Piloting the Airship

A PC at the helm of the six-person airship can control the ship by communicating with the elemental bound within it. Guiding the vessel requires a Profession (Sailor) check, to which the PC can add their Charisma bonus. Any PC that does not have a dragonmark gets a -4 penalty on this check.

This check is compared to the result of a Charisma roll by the bound elemental (this ship's unusually docile elemental has a -1 Charisma modifier to this roll). If the PC's result is higher, the PC gains control of the ship for 1 hour; each hour thereafter, the PC must make another check.

A PC can cast *charm monster* or *dominate monster* while touching the Khyber shard binding the elemental to control the elemental, as well. With durations measured in days, this method is particularly effective when there is no skilled pilot.

Lastly, a cleric with the Air, Earth, Fire, or Water domain (the exact type does not matter) can expend one use of the appropriate elemental command ability to control the elemental for 1 minute.

Platoons unable to pilot the airship successfully take 3d6 points of falling damage from an extremely rough landing at the end of their journey. Reward creative role-play or novel approaches to piloting the airship. Treat this encounter as a stumbling block, not as a barrier — the party should venture to the warehouse alone, with only Quartermaster Gridd knowing their whereabouts.

The burning building is almost directly below where *The Glory Road* is docked, and requires under a minute to travel to.

Encounter 1: Inside Job

Once the PCs land, they can explore the ruins of the Arclight lab. The lab, like *The Glory Road* is in a section of Stormreach that hasn't been repopulated yet. Most of the area is comprised of faint outlines of buildings' foundations, while scattered clusters of building still remain. Many of these are nothing more than a few walls, but a small number still have roofs and other evidence of being used by civilizations that came after the giants.

Read the following to the players:

The building that once housed the Arclight laboratory is in ruins. Gouts of flame engulf sections of crumbled wall. Little remains of the original building. Piles of strange equipment litter the square surrounding the building. Within, you see a gruesome sight — charred remains of the Arclight brigade workers.

A cursory search of the buildings reveals several items of note:

Search

DC 10: There are 20 bodies scattered throughout the building's remains.

DC 15: None of the bodies have any identifying marks.

DC 17: 6 of the bodies were wearing plate mail and are positioned near the entrances.

DC 21: None of the deceased appear to have had any warning of the explosions.

DC 23: The fragments of six elemental bombs are scattered in and near the building.

Knowledge (Engineering)

DC 17: Most of the debris is outside the perimeter of the building.

DC 21: The elemental bombs were tied to structural supports on the interior of the building.

Encounter 1: Dragonmarked Involvement

During the PCs' exploration of the building, Dackys (DAY-sus), a member of the Cabal of Shadows, arrives on the scene to ensure no evidence linking either the Cabal or General Mach Ogdin to the bombing survived. She is caught off-guard by the PCs already being on the scene, and attempts to retreat back to the Cabal safe-house to warn them.

After the PCs finish searching the building, read the following:

You hear a crash of stone from around a wall. Turning, you see a figure cloaked in shadow, using the blazing remnants of the building to cover her retreat.

Tactical Map Details

If you have access to the Magma Keep map from *Fantastic Locations: Hellspike Prison*, use that map; otherwise, draw a similar map as shown below.



Creatures

Dackys begins on the map at the square marked (D), the Human Artificer Zombies begin in the squares marked (Z), and the Human Artificer Skeletons begin in the squares marked (S). The PCs can set up in any of the squares marked on the right half of the map.

Fire

These squares are on fire. Characters standing in these squares take 2d6 points of fire damage per round. Any character that remains in a square adjacent to these squares, or stands in them must make a DC 15 Reflex save to avoid catching on fire, and takes 1d6 points of damage immediate, and another 1d6 points of damage each round thereafter until he succeeds a DC 15 Reflex save. If you are using the Magma Keep map, all pit squares marked on the map are fire squares.

Low Stone Walls

Crumbling block stone walls are in these squares. The walls are 5 feet thick, and characters can stand on them to gain a bonus for higher ground (+1 to attack rolls). They can also be used for cover against attacks from the other side of the wall (+4 AC, +2 Reflex). Climb DC 20, break DC 35, hardness 8, 90 hp. If you are using the Magma Keep map, all wall squares marked on the map are low stone wall squares.

Dackys d'Orien **CR 9**

Complete Arcane 5

hp 78 hp (9 HD)

Female human warlock 7/fighter 2

LE female humanoid (human)

Init +2; **Senses** Listen -1, Spot +0; see *invisibility*; darkvision 60'

Languages Common

AC 18, touch 12, flat-footed 16; **DR** 2/cold iron; Dodge, Mobility

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

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares); Spring Attack

Melee *hideous blow* slam +10 (1d4+4d6+3 + *frightful blast*)

Melee *hideous blow* masterwork long spear +11 (1d8+ 4d6 + 3 + *frightful blast*)

Melee masterwork long spear +11/+6 (1d8+ 3)

Ranged +9 *eldritch blast* (4d6; 30 ft. range)

Base Atk +7; **Grp** +9

Atk Options Combat Reflexes, Spring Attack, Centipede Poison

Special Actions See *the Unseen*, *The Dead Walk*, +1 *chain shirt of displacement* (1/day, swift, 50% miss chance for 5 rounds), *helm of glorious recovery* (1/day, swift, heal 4d8+7 points of damage); Least Mark of Passage (1/day)

Combat Gear *potion of cure moderate wounds*, *potion of resist energy (fire)*

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 7th):

at will—*hideous blow*, see *the unseen*, *the dead walk*

Invocations Known *the dead walk*, *frightful blast*, *hideous blow*, see *the unseen*

Abilities Str 14, Dex 14, Con 16, Int 10, Wis 8, Cha 12

Feats Combat Casting, Weapon Focus (long spear), Least Mark of Passage, Dodge, Mobility, Spring Attack, Combat Reflexes

Skills Bluff +5, Concentration +16, Jump +7, Sense Motive +3

Possessions combat gear plus +1 *chain shirt*, *helm of glorious recovery*, +1 *cloak of resistance*, masterwork long spear

Centipede Poison (Ex) The first attack with her spear contains centipede poison (DC 16; Str 1d6/Str 1d6).

Deceive Item (Ex) Dackys can take 10 on Use Magic Device checks even when distracted or threatened.

Frightful Blast (Sp) A creature struck by Dackus' *eldritch blast* or *hideous blow* must make a Will save (DC 13) or become shaken for 1 minute.

Eldritch Blast (Sp) Dackys can make ranged touch attacks with her *eldritch blast* at will.

Hideous Blow (Sp) Dackys adds the damage from her *eldritch blast* to her first melee attack each round.

The Dead Walk (Sp) Dackys can create 14 HD worth of Human Artificer Skeletons or Human Artificer Zombies as a standard action. They crumble into dust after 7 minutes.

Least Mark of Passage (Sp) Once per day, as a standard action, Dackys can teleport up to 90 feet.

See the Unseen (Sp) Dackys can see invisible creatures and objects (as see *invisibility*) and has 60' darkvision.

3 Human Fighter Zombies **CR 1**

MM 265

HP 30 each (2 HD); **DR** 5/slashing

NE Medium undead

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

Languages understands creator's commands

AC 20, touch 10, flat-footed 20

Immune undead immunities (*MM 317*)

Fort +1, **Ref** +1, **Will** +3

Speed 20 ft. in half-plate (4 squares, can't run), base speed 30 ft.

Melee longsword +3 (1d8+3/19-20)

Base Atk +1; **Grp** +3

Abilities Str 15, Dex 11, Con —, Int —, Wis 10, Cha 1

SQ single actions, undead traits

Feats Toughness

Skills Listen +0, Spot +0

Possessions half-plate armor, light steel shield, longsword

Single Actions (Ex) One move or attack action per round. Can move its speed and attack if charging.

4 Human Artificer Skeletons **CR 2**

MM 226

HP 39 each (2 HD); **DR** 5/bludgeoning

NE Medium undead

Init +7; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +0, Spot +0

Languages understands creator's commands

AC 15, touch 13, flat-footed 12

Immune undead immunities (*MM 317*)

Fort +2, **Ref** +5, **Will** +5

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares)

Melee slam +6 (1d6+3)

Base Atk +3; **Grp** +6

Abilities Str 18, Dex 16, Con —, Int —, Wis 10, Cha 1

SQ undead traits

Skills Listen +0, Spot +0

Tactics

Dackys uses her *The Dead Walk* ability first, raising 3 Human Fighter Zombies and 4 Human Artificer Skeletons to block her route, then cautiously retreats, engaging the party as necessary. She does not use her dragonmark except as a last resort, to use it to jump into the Cabal safehouse once she gets near it. On the ground, Dackys stays behind a wall of undead, sniping at the characters. Each of the undead advances on the character nearest it, then attacks until it or the character is dead.

Development

If Dackys survives, she heads across the square to the safehouse, activating her dragonmark to jump inside and warn the Cabal members there. If the party manages to capture her, Dackys uses her dragonmark to teleport out of their grasp and run to the safehouse and find cover amidst the hill giant brutes. If the party kills Dackys, they find nothing of note on her body. While they search her body, or as they survey the area after the combat, have them make a Spot check (DC 10); PCs who succeed catch a glimpse of movement (the hill giant brutes milling about in the courtyard of the safehouse). The area of the city they are in is otherwise abandoned.

Encounter 2: Cabal Safehouse

After the party discovers the safehouse, read the following:

Ahead of you is a surprisingly intact building — it looks like the giant ruins were recently retrofitted with humanoid-sized accommodations. A low stone wall surrounds a courtyard in front of three large buildings connected by a pair of hallways.

In the courtyard stand two giants — they have an oddly simian appearance, with overlong arms, stooped shoulders, and low foreheads. Unlike most hill giants you've encountered, these brutes seem more intelligent, more alert, and better equipped. A familiar thick, black ichor drips from the giant's impossibly huge greatswords.

Have the party make Spot checks to determine other features visible from their approach:

Spot

DC 10: *There are two long-dry fountains in the courtyard. Flanking the entrance — an open doorway — are two pedestals that might once have held statues. Whatever statues might have been there have long since worn away.*

DC 15: *There are four windows — two on each of the flanking buildings. Out of the left-most two windows, you see a pair of human-sized figures keeping watch.*

DC 19: *In addition to the figures on the left, in one of the two windows on the right-hand building, you see a figure stooped, as if rapidly packing materials from a table or desk.*

DC 22: *There are two small windows in each of the halls connecting the smaller buildings to the larger. Through the windows, you see a small hallway, with light streaming in through windows on the backside of the hallways.*

There are several entrances to the building. In addition to the open doorway in the courtyard, there is a door in the rear of the building leading to the larder, two window entrances (large enough for a medium creature to squeeze through) on the front and back of the two hallways. Finally, the roof of the left-hand (Library and Servant's Quarters) building has long since gone, leaving that wing open to the sky.

Although originally built for giants, the building was retrofitted by drow hundreds of years ago for medium creatures, and the Hill Giants can not fit into the side buildings, nor can they traverse the stairs leading to the upper floor.

Except as noted here, the rooms are completely empty except for structural details.

There are a total of 5 Cabalists in the building. One in each of the Servant's Bedrooms, as lookouts. One in the Master Bedroom, asleep, one in the Dining room, packing plans into a trunk, and lastly, one in the basement, packing the alchemy lab into several *bags of holding*.

Hill Giant Brute **CR 8**

MM 123

hp 111 each (13 HD)

Male hill giant fighter 1

CE Large giant

Init -1; **Senses** Spot +6, Listen +9

Languages Giant, Common

AC 25, touch 8, flat-footed 25

Fort +14, **Ref** +3, **Will** +4

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares)

Melee large masterwork greatsword +18/+13 (3d6+10) or

Melee slam +17/+17 slam (1d4+7)

Base Atk +10; **Grp** +21

Atk Options Power Attack, Cleave; Centipede Poison

Combat Gear *potion of resist energy (fire)*

Abilities Str 25, Dex 8, Con 19, Int 9, Wis 12, Cha 6

Feats Cleave, Improved Bull Rush, Power Attack, Improved Sunder, Weapon Focus (greatclub)

Skills Listen +6, Spot +9

Possessions combat gear plus masterwork greatsword

Centipede Poison (Ex) The first attack with each giant's greatsword delivers centipede poison (DC 16; Str 1d6/Str 1d6).

5 Cabal of Shadows Acolytes **CR 6**

DMG II 164

hp 36 each (6 HD)

Male huan cleric 3/rogue 3

CE Medium humanoid (human)

Init +0; **Senses** Listen +6, Spot +6

Languages Common

AC 13, touch 10, flat-footed 13

Resist evasion

Fort +7, **Ref** +5, **Will** +8

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares)

Melee +1 *short sword* +7 (1d6+2)

Base Atk +4; **Grp** +5

Atk Options +2d6 sneak attack

Special Actions command undead 4/day (+1, 2d6+4, 3rd), death touch 1/day (3d6), *dimension leap pendant*

Combat Gear *potion of pass without trace, potion of sanctuary*

Cleric Spells Prepared (CL 3d):

2nd — *enthrall* (DC 15), *invisibility*, *undetected alignment*

1st — *cause fear* (DC 14), *command* (DC 14), *cure light wounds*, *obscuring mist*

0 — *create water*, *cure minor wounds*, *guidance*

Abilities Str 13, Dex 10, Con 14, Int 8, Wis 16, Cha 12

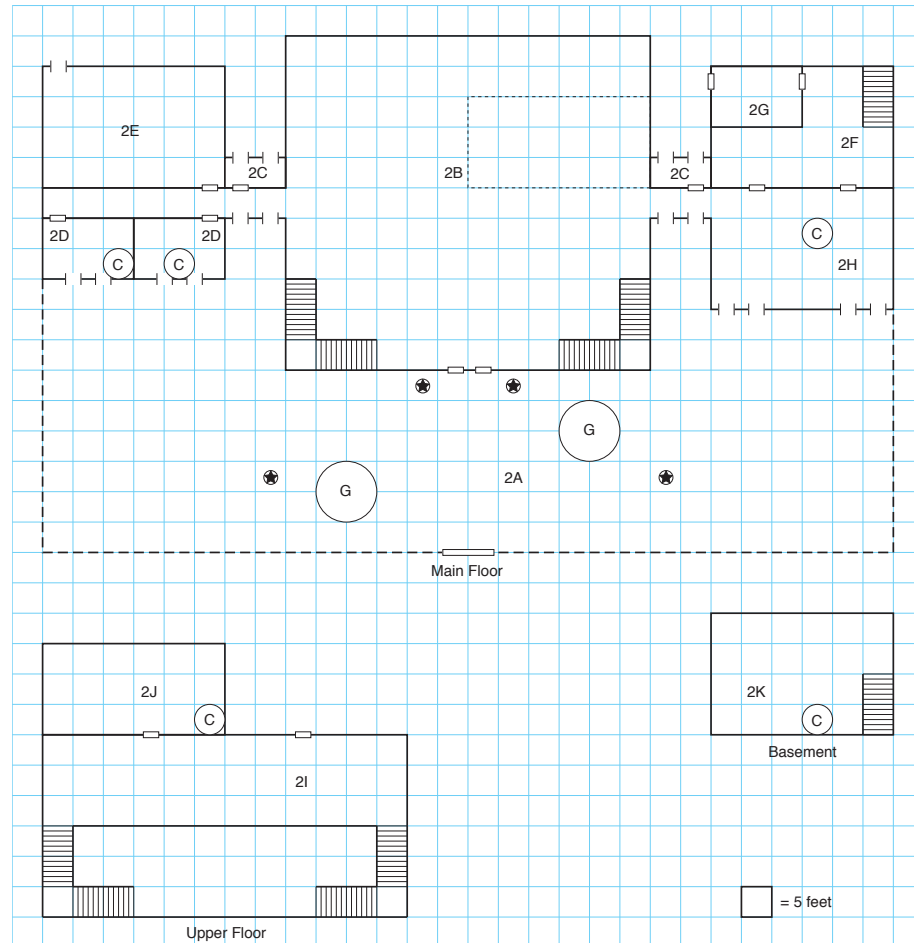
SQ trap sense +1, trapfinding

Feats Combat Casting, Skill Focus (Bluff), Weapon Focus (short sword)

Skills Bluff +13, Concentration +8, Diplomacy +3, Disguise +7, Intimidate +3, Knowledge (Local) +2, Knowledge (Religion) +2, Listen +6, Spot +6, Use Rope +3

Possessions combat gear plus +1 *leather armor*, +1 *short sword*, *cloak of resistance* +1

Dimension Leap Pendant (Sp) Once per day, each Acolyte can activate their *dimension leap pendant* as a standard action; it works as a *dimension door* spell (CL 20th), but does not require line of sight or effect to the destination.



Scaling the Encounter

8th-Level Characters

Remove the restriction of the hill giants being able to follow the characters into the safe house.

9th- and 10th-Level Characters

Add an additional pair of hill giant brutes.

Development

If the hill giants are engaged in combat, in the first round of combat, the two lookouts use the opportunity to flee, using their *dimension leap pendant* to jump to a secure location 200 feet from the safehouse and move quietly on foot from there. In the second round of combat, the Cabalist packing in the Dining Room does the same. Finally, on the fifth round of combat, the sleeping Cabalist wakes, panics, and runs through the courtyard, even through combat, before using his *dimension leap pendant* to flee. None of the Cabalists think to warn the bomb maker in his sound-proof lab, so he remains in the building until discovered by the party.

If the PCs manage to kill the packing Cabalist, they find a treasure trove of documents: maps of the Arclight laboratory with locations of where to best place the elemental bombs, copies of the research on the Ek Tielwot Device, the schedule of guards and their placements within and around the site, and a map of the Temple of End Days (give the players Player Handout A).

In the basement, the PCs discover a letter implicating General Mach Ogdin directly in the plot, along with various (non-useful in their current form) alchemical items, and a *beetlelord pendant*, a magical pendant carved in the shape of a beetle (see Beetlelord's Domain for more information on this pendant).

Encounter 3: The Old Dwarf

Once the party has retrieved as much information out of the Cabal safe-house as they can, they must decide what to do with that information. In many cases, the party will decide to report back to Quartermaster Gridd or — given the highly sensitive nature of the evidence they've discovered — directly to Field Marshal Maceck himself.

If the party does report to Quartermaster Gridd, he wastes no time in telling them to take their evidence to Maceck himself. If necessary, encourage the hires to report this sensitive information to their superiors without delay.

Once the party heads to Maceck's office, read the following:

Field Marshal Maceck's voice comes through the door as you approach: "Come in, report!" Inside, the office is well-appointed, if somewhat sparse for a dwarf of his means. The Field Marshal sits at his desk, a glass of Mror whiskey in hand. "At ease, hires. Gridd tells me you have information for me."

Mace listens intently to the PCs' presentation of the evidence discovered in the Cabal safehouse.

After you're done, the Field Marshal remains quiet for a moment, taking long sips of his drink. "We'll take care of the rot within, but you hires will have to take care of the device. Can't let anyone know where you're going, so word doesn't get back to Mach. Nothing to it but to steal an airship from Gridd — can't say I envy your meeting him on your return — and head to Ek Tielwot and stop this madness." He finishes his drink, uncorks the bottle, and sniffs the cork. After a moment, and before pouring another drink, he re-corks the bottle. "Well. I've got my task, and you've got yours. I dare say yours is a bit more critical than mine, so go to it, and quickly."

The PCs are likely to have questions for Mace, but he has little time.

What do you mean, "rot from within"?

General Ogdin's evil, through and through — at least, he is now. Used to be a good commander, but something changed, about a year ago. He started sending hires from other battalions on incomprehensible missions.

Why haven't you done anything before now?

Haven't had two and two to put together, but we do now. I need you to find out what he's been plotting and stop it.

What if we find Ogdin in Ek Tielwot?

Stop him, catch him, bring him back.

Can you equip us?

No time, hires. Get on that airship and get to Ek Tielwot.

As they leave his office, Maceck catches the arm of the PC in charge of their platoon.

Maceck catches you by the arm and looks into your eye, "Hire, enough bloodshed has been shed in General Mach Ogdin's schemes. Do what you have to do, but we cannot allow any more of Blackwheel Company to die because of him. Not even while trying to stop him."

There are currently three skiffs docked by the Quartermaster's office — the *Gnoll's Rage*, designed as a short-range skiff, the *Bloodscale*, an unwieldy troop transport, and *Fragment of Night*, a cargo sloop. There are three low-level hires guarding the ships, and Quartermaster Gridd is nearby in his office.

The guards are no-spokers, and will take reasonable orders from higher-ranked PCs (which should be most of them).

Piloting the Airships

Guiding an airship requires a Profession (Sailor) check, to which the PC can add their Charisma bonus. Any PC that does not have a dragonmark gets a -4 penalty on this check. See The Bombing of Arclight, above, for full details on piloting airships. The three crafts and their elementals' Charisma modifiers are as follows:

Gnoll's Rage: small, open-air skiff (-1, room for 6)

Bloodscale: large troop transport, covered quarters and helm (+6, room for 32)

Fragment of Night: cargo sloop, covered quarters, open-air helm (+3, room for 6)

Have the PC make a single check for the entire trip, though they may re-try this check until they get a successful result.

Development

If the PCs engage the Blackwheel guards directly in combat, other hires come in waves of 4 until the PCs eventually are captured and thrown in the brig. For them, the adventure is over. The PCs may, however, use cunning, guile, charm, rank, intimidation, threat of force, and even non-damaging magic to assist in taking the ship.

Part Two: Back to Ek Tlelwot

It takes a week of air travel over the jungles of Xen'drik for the PCs to make it to the Southern city of Ek Tlelwot. The air becomes increasingly cold as they travel South.

Read the following to the players:

As you crest a glacier-topped mountain, the ruined city of Ek Tlelwot comes into view. Like most cities from the age of giants, little remains but plazas and the faint traces of walls. Steam clouds obscure the vista, and jets of hot water geyser hundreds of feet in the air.

If the players found the map to the entrance of the Temple of End Days, they can easily navigate the *Gnoll's Rage* to the entrance of the necropolis. Otherwise, they must scout around until they find the entrance by chance — once they get near, the location is obvious, as the Cabal's airship is moored just outside the entrance:

Two larger-than-life statues — one of a giant with streams of beetles pouring out of his mouth, and the other of a winged and veiled giantess with arms outstretched — flank the entrance to the underground temple. Moored just outside is an airship, left unguarded.

Skill Checks

Additionally, the PCs might glean some information via Profession and Knowledge checks.

Profession (Sailor)

DC 15: The *Gnoll's Rage* is flying over Southern Xen'drik, near the Bluespire Mountains, and heading south.

Knowledge (history)

DC 20: Ek Tlelwot is a small city of religious significance to the giants,

DC 20: Ek Tlelwot is somehow connected to Ek Tlelnak (where the events of *BWC-5 Tarnished Reputation* took place).

DC 25: Ek Tlelwot was located in a place where the giants could tap the power of the earth through the region's volcanic activity.

DC 30: Ek Tlelwot is connected with resurrection and decay, as a counterpoint to Ek Tlelnak's connection to birth and death. Characters who participated in *BWC-6 None Left Behind* know this without requiring a check.

Knowledge (geography)

DC 20: Ek Tlelwot is located to the far south of Xen'drik, almost as far as the Iceflow Sea. Characters who participated in *BWC-6 None Left Behind* know this without requiring a check.

DC 25: The region is still an active volcanic region, with hot springs, steam vents, mud-pots, and other geothermal features. Characters who participated in *BWC-6 None Left Behind* know this without requiring a check.

Encounter 4: The Temple of End Days

The Temple of End Days is located deep in the Bluespine Peaks.

The smooth-hewn, roughly cylindrical tunnel ahead of you stretches as far as the eye can see, leading downward into the mountain. Every hundred feet, the floor, ceiling, and walls are carved in a ring with a tableaux depicting giants waging war with demons, dragons, and even more obscure creatures. These carvings glow faintly with blue, green, purple, and red hues, pulsing slightly. A quick estimate of the rings receding into the distance tells you that they stretch at least a mile into the Bluespine Peaks.

While the carvings are harmless, they glow brighter as the characters approach them, fading again as they pass. Some crackle with energy, while others flicker on and off.

As the characters descend into the mountain, the air becomes steadily more heated and humid. In some areas, a thick fog roils momentarily, before being magically dissipated by some ancient air circulation system.

At the end of the tunnel, a chamber serves as the entrance to the temple itself. Read the players the following:

Your decent ends in a 40-foot square chamber, dominated by a statue of a giant impaling a feline-headed wizard. The pedestal the statue rests on contains a single, highly stylized rune carved on it, which glows with a steady purple light. The light coming off of the rune is calming. A tunnel leads east, though to where is unclear, as the tunnel is completely filled with steam.

Aura of Calm

Have the characters make Will saves (DC 19) as they enter this chamber. Characters that fail this save cannot attack or target an enemy with any detrimental ability or spell while in any room of the temple. This effect is temporarily removed when a character is injured (but if the character is healed to full again, the effect is in force again). In addition, characters that fail the save are affected as with the *calm emotions* spell for the duration they remain in the temple.

Heated Room

The temple is extremely hot and humid. Each character must make a Fortitude save (DC 15) in this room or take 1d4 points of nonlethal damage. Characters wearing heavy clothing (such as cold weather gear) or armor of any sort take a -4 penalty on this save. A character reduced to unconsciousness by this damage immediately takes 1d4 points of damage per hour. A character damaged by this effect is fatigued. This penalty ends if the character recovers the nonlethal damage taken from the heat.

Background Information

If the characters ask to determine any significance of the rune, have them make skill checks as appropriate. Characters that found the *beetlelord pendant* in the Cabal safe-house recognize the symbol as the same on that device.

Knowledge (arcana)

DC 15: The rune is in giant. A character who speaks giant will know this without requiring a check.

DC 17: The rune corresponds to the sound "CHK".

Knowledge (history)

DC 25: The rune is typically associated with an ancient tribe of giants with great alchemists and artificers with a penchant for death and decay.

Knowledge (religion)

DC 25: The rune is typically associated with an unnamed god of decay, possibly an earlier manifestation of Boldrei.

Development

Once the characters move into the heated tunnel, they arrive at **Steam Tunnel**.

Encounter 5: Steam Tunnel

As the players enter the heated tunnel, read the following:

The steam envelops you, hot and noxious. It clouds your vision to an incredible degree — you can barely see your hand in front of your face as you cautiously continue forward.

The last 30 feet of the corridor are taken over by a pit trap whose false floor folded long ago, creating a thin ledge on one side. The pit is 30' deep and filled with boiling mud and blackened metal spikes. The first 10' of the pit is in the steam, while the remaining 20' is clear enough to see across. Because vision is so limited, the lead character must make a Reflex save (DC 15) to avoid falling into the pit. A Balance check (DC 17) allows a character to navigate along the ledge at half-movement. A character failing this check cannot move that round, and a failure by 5 or more causes the character to fall into the pit, taking the mudpit damage indicated below, as well as 2d6 falling damage plus 1d6 damage from the spikes.

As the characters navigate the pit trap, have them make a skill check. The body of a Cabalist who failed to make it across the pit is stuck near the far side of the pit. The Cabalist has no other equipment of note.

Spot

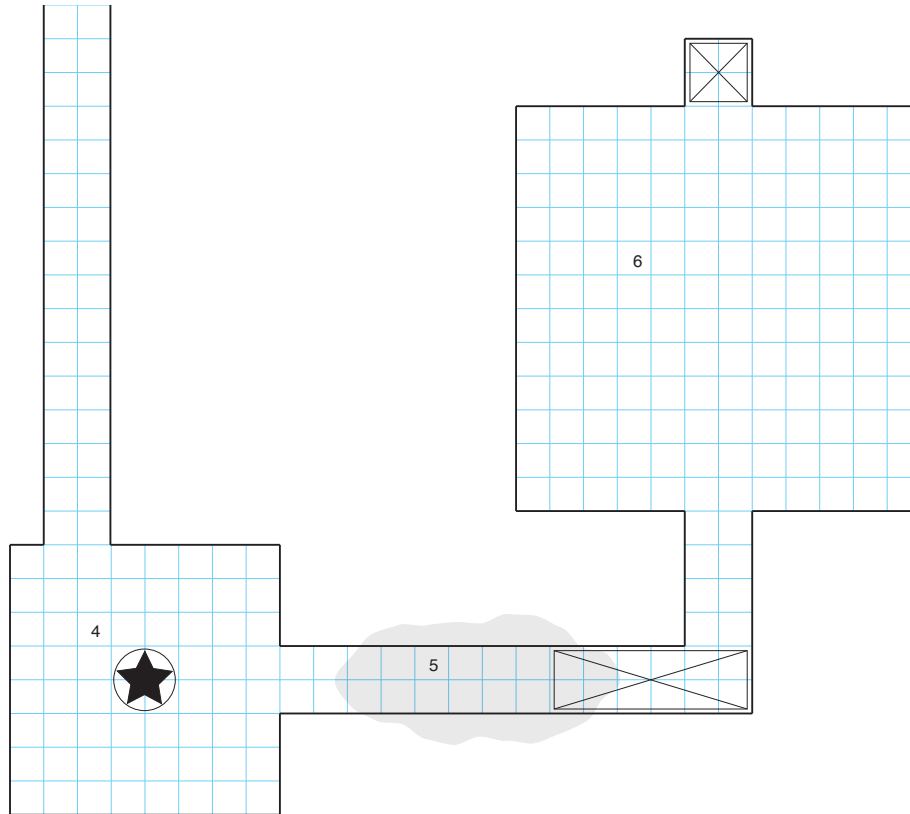
DC 15: A body lies half-submerged in the mud and impaled on a spit just below the far lip of the pit.

DC 25: A small pendant is tied around the body's neck.

DC 30: The pendant is a stylized purple rune, the same as on the statue in the previous room.

Tactical Map Details

A map of the first level of the Temple of End Days is shown below:



Steam-Filled Tunnel

The tunnel to the east is filled with steam from a steam vent opened since the giants abandoned the city. It obscures all vision, reducing vision to the square the character is standing in only. Characters standing in these squares are treated as though blinded, and all attacks are made at 50% miss-chance.

In addition, the steam raises the temperature to such a degree that characters without protection from extreme temperatures may have negative consequences.

Heated Room

The temple is extremely hot and humid. Each character must make a Fortitude save (DC 17) in this room or take 1d4 points of nonlethal damage. Characters wearing heavy clothing (such as cold weather gear) or armor of any sort take a -4 penalty on this save. A character reduced to unconsciousness by this damage immediately takes 1d4 points of damage per hour. A character damaged by this effect is fatigued. This penalty ends if the character recovers the nonlethal damage taken from the heat.

Mudpit

A boiling mudpit was originally used as a pit trap for unwary visitors to the temple. The trap's mechanism is long since gone, and the pit is now open. In addition, boiling mud has poured into the pit from a crack in the wall. A creature standing in or above a mudpit square takes 1d4 points of fire damage per round. Such creatures must also make a DC 15 Fortitude save each round due to the noxious nature of the gasses infused in the mud. A creature that fails this save takes 1d6 points of nonlethal damage and has a -1

cumulative penalty on successive saves against this effect. A creature reduced to unconsciousness by this effect begins taking 1d4 points of damage per round (in addition to the nonlethal damage).

Development

An arched entryway leads into the next room; go to **Beetlelord's Domain**, below.

Encounter 6: Beetlelord's Domain

As the players enter the Beetlelord's Domain, read the following:

The room in front of you is 60' square. The floors and walls are covered in carved insects — beetles, larvae, flies, and others. Eight holes, four on each side, line the walls.

As soon as the majority of the PCs enter the room, or as soon as one PC crosses fully to the other side, 8 Alchemy Beetles crawl out of the holes and attack.

Alchemy Beetle **CR 2**

What at first glance appeared to be an enormous insect is actually some sort of construct. A black iron exoskeleton holds a glass hemisphere churning with a molten green liquid. Smoke rides where the mandibles drip the liquid to the ground.

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hp 21 each (2 HD)

N Small construct

Init +0; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; **Spot** +0, **Listen** +0

Languages None

AC 15, **touch** 11, **flat-footed** 15

Immune construct immunities (*MM* 307)

Fort +0, **Ref** +0, **Will** +3

Speed 40 ft. (8 squares)

Melee bite +4 (1d3+1 plus 1d6 energy damage and 2 claws -2 each (1d4))

Special Abilities Alchemical Bite, Alchemical Blast

Base Atk +; **Grp** +21

Abilities Str 13, Dex 10, Con —, Int —, Wis 14, Cha 8

Feats Weapon Focus (bite)

Skills Hide +4, Jump +5, Listen +0, Spot +0

Alchemical Bite (Ex) The alchemical beetles' bites deliver an extra 1d6 points of damage; two beetles of each type — acid, cold, electricity, and fire — are in the room.

Alchemical Blast (Ex) When an alchemical beetle is reduced to 0 hit points, it explodes in a 10-foot radius. Creatures must make a DC 13 Reflex save or take 3d6 points of damage of the appropriate type. A successful save results in half damage.

Tactics

The alchemical beetles attack any creature that enters the room, preferring to swarm a single creature with as many alchemical energy types as possible. The alchemical beetles will not attack any creature that enters the room wearing the symbol of the creators of the temple (found in the first room in the temple, and possibly in the Cabal safehouse in Stormreach).

Development

Once the characters bypass the alchemical beetles, they can proceed to **Going Down**.

Encounter 7: Going Down

When the players investigate the exit on the far side of the beetle room, read the following:

A shaft descends beyond the range of your vision. Fifty feet down, the shaft is filled with steam, and its walls are coated with condensation. The walls are rough-hewn and crumbling with age, unlike any of the construction you've seen so far in the temple. On the ceiling above the shaft, a schema embedded in the stones flickers with a waning orange light.

Though the walls are slick, they also afford numerous hand-holds; in addition, the walls are not quite as decayed as they appear, and the hand-holds that do exist are relatively safe to use to descend. A Climb check (DC 20) is required to scale the walls unassisted. With the assistance of a rope anchored at the top of the shaft, the DC for the Climb check is reduced to 0.

The shaft descends 150' to a landing. Once the characters reach the bottom of the shaft, read:

The bottom of the shaft is filled with a slab of rock that appears to have fallen into the shaft, and now rests haphazardly at the foot of the descent. It mostly blocks the only exit.

Medium and smaller creatures can squeeze through the exit.

Skill Checks

A character might opt to repair the broken lift mechanism, with varying results:

Craft (armorsmithing)

DC 20: The device flashes orange, and purple sparks rain down the shaft. After a moment, the device stops glowing and becomes inert.

DC 25: Purple traces of light outline the device, then the center of the schema glows orange. There's a humming sound, then a battered but mostly intact platform rises out of the mists. (The device is repaired, and characters can now use the lift to ascend and descend in the shaft.)

Encounter 7: The Temple of the End

At the base of the elevator shaft, a long hallway leads to the main sanctuary of the Temple of End Days. There, Branwyn, a fire giant artificer attempts to enable the Ek Tlelwt device, guarded by a number of Blackwheel hires loyal to General Mach Ogdin and his evil schemes.

When the PCs enter the Temple, read the following:

The corridor passes a pair of statues — giants brandishing still-glowing magical energies. Beyond, the hallway opens into a room filled with carvings. Black rock is embedded in the walls like splashes of paint; your soul almost feels pulled through your eyes into these crevasses of darkness.

Ahead of you, three gnolls stand guard near a giant device which shakes and hisses as a fire giant places schemas, into it. Inky black swirls of negative energy roil around the device lazily, before being drawn upward into the sky through a massive chimney.

Heated Room

The temple is extremely hot and humid. Each character must make a Fortitude save (DC 19) in this room or take 1d6 points of nonlethal damage. Characters wearing heavy clothing (such as cold weather gear) or armor of any sort take a -4 penalty on this save. A character reduced to unconsciousness by this damage immediately takes 1d4 points of damage per hour. A character damaged by this effect is fatigued. This penalty ends if the character recovers the nonlethal damage taken from the heat.

Branwyn **CR 10**

MM 121, ECS 29

hp 153 (16 HD)

Female fire giant artificer 1

CE Large giant

Init +3; **Senses** Spot +14, Listen +9

Languages Giant, Common

AC 19, touch 8, flat-footed 19

Fort +14, **Ref** +4, **Will** +11

Speed 40 ft. (6 squares)

Melee large masterwork greatsword +20/+14/+10 (3d6+15) or

Melee slam +20/+20 slam (1d4+10)

Base Atk +11; **Grp** +25

Combat Gear *potion of cure serious wounds*

Abilities Str 31, Dex 9, Con 21, Int 15, Wis 16, Cha 11

Feats Cleave, Great Cleave, Improved Initiative, Improved Sunder, Iron Will, Power Attack

Skills Listen +9, Spot +14, Craft (Armorsmithing) +12

Possessions combat gear plus masterwork greatsword

3 Gnoll Ogdin Separatists **CR 7**

MM 130

hp 58 each (7 HD)

Male gnoll fighter 6

CN Medium humanoid (gnoll)

Init +0; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +2, Spot +3

Languages Common, Gnoll

AC 20, touch 10, flat-footed 20

Immune undead immunities (*MM 317*)

Fort +10, **Ref** +2, **Will** +4

Speed 20 ft. in half-plate (4 squares, can't run), base speed 30 ft.

Melee +1 *greatsword* +13/+8 (2d6+7/20)

Base Atk +7; **Grp** +9

Atk Options Flay

Abilities Str 18, Dex 10, Con 13, Int 8, Wis 10, Cha 8

Feats Power Attack, Cleave, Weapon Focus (greatsword), Flay, Improved Sunder, Weapon Specialization (greatsword), Iron Will, Improved Bull Rush

Skills Listen +0, Spot +0

Possessions +1 *full plate*, +1 *greatsword*

Flay (Ex) Against opponents with no armor bonus, any attack using a Power Attack that hits forces a Fortitude save (DC 10 + bonus from Power Attack). Failure means the target takes a -2 penalty on attack rolls for 1 round.

Ek Tlelwot Device **CR 7**

Description Once per round after the device is activated until it is destroyed, the device shudders and gouts of inky blackness snake out, causing a variety of effects.

Search —; **Type** mechanical

Trigger continual; Init -1

Effect Roll 1d20 — on a 1-5, the room is affected as with a *deeper darkness* spell for one round; on a 6-10, two random targets in the room switch positions as an immediate action; on a 11-18, one random target and is affected with an effect similar to *vampiric touch*, causing 3d6 points of damage, and the device is repaired one quarter the amount of damage dealt; finally, on a 19-20, all creatures in the room gain one negative level (no save).

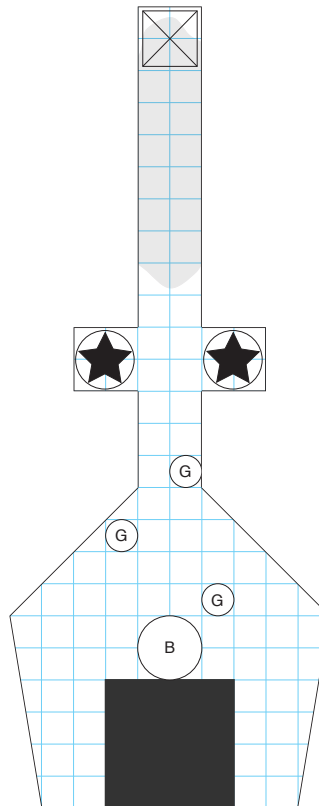
Duration Once activated, continuous until destroyed

Destruction AC 23, hardness 6, 160 hp

Disarm DC 28 disables the vampiric touch effect only (treat any rolls of that effect in subsequent rounds as “no effect”).

Tactics

A map of the lower level of the Temple of End Days is shown below. The Ogdin Separatists begin at the squares marked 'G', while Branwyn begins in the square marked 'B'. Branwyn attempts to enable the Ek Tlelwot Device by making Craft (Armorsmithing) checks (at +12). Starting the device requires a DC 28 check. Once the device begins, she revels in its destructive power and gleefully joins the Loyalists in killing the characters.



Development

At the end of each round, one of 12 small segments of a schema embedded in the device begins glowing. If the device is not destroyed by the 13th round after the device is enabled, the characters have failed, as the device becomes fully active.

The Gnolls are absolutely loyal to General Mach Ogdin, and are fully aware of his alliance with the Cabal of Shadows. They will not voluntarily lay down their arms.

Ending the Adventure

The adventure ends when the PCs eliminate the possibility of the Ek Tlelwot device from being set off.

Read the following if the PCs manage to destroy the Ek Tlelwot device:

Although it's unlikely many will know about it, you feel some satisfaction in preventing the destruction of Xen'drik and saving the lives of many thousands of creatures. Though you suspect otherwise, with any luck, General Mach Ogdin is already captured and in the cramped brig of The Glory Road.

Read the following if the PCs do not prevent the device from going off:

With a shudder, a final, massive wave of black energy roils out of the machine. You are thrown aside like rag dolls, and deafened from the roar as you pass out. You can only hope that whatever the machine does, General Ogdin is caught in its effects, as well.

Adventure Questions

1. How did the PCs handle Dackys and the investigation of the Arclight laboratory?

- a. Dackys escaped unharmed; the PCs found little evidence in the lab.
- b. Dackys escaped, but the PCs found as much as they could about the plot from the lab.
- c. Dackys was captured or killed, but the PCs found little evidence in the lab.
- d. Dackys was captured or killed, and the PCs found as much as they could about the plot from the lab.

2. How did the PCs tackle the Cabal safehouse?

- a. They kicked in the front gate and defeated all the Cabalists, including the giants.
- b. They kicked in the front gate and were beaten to a pulp by the giants.
- c. They used stealth or guile to get into the building unimpeded.

3. By what method did the PCs acquire an airship for the journey to Ek Tlelwot?

- a. They killed the Blackwheel guards and were overwhelmed by other hires, ending their adventure.
- b. They incapacitated the Blackwheel guards and managed to get away.
- c. They pulled rank on the Blackwheel guards and departed, though not without notice.
- d. They managed to escape undetected until it was too late.

4. How did the PCs handle the obstacles in the Temple of End Days?

- a. They were stymied by the mud pit trap and were unable to proceed.
- b. They got past the pit trap, but were held off by the alchemy beetles.
- c. They got past the pit trap and the beetles, but couldn't navigate the lift.
- d. They easily defeated each of the traps the Temple had to offer.

5. How did the PCs fare in the Temple of End Days?

- a. Xen'drik is in dire trouble — the PCs did not prevent the fire giant from setting off the device.
- b. The PCs defeated the fire giant and his Blackwheel guards, but it was a close call.
- c. Xen'drik's fate was never in doubt. The PCs handily destroyed the device.

6. Rate the players' role-playing:

- a. Fantastic; everyone was clearly a member of Blackwheel Company. United aim!
- b. Good; the players made an effort to role-play where given clear opportunity.
- c. Poor; the characters were just numbers on a sheet of paper.

Story Objects

Beetlelord Pendant

Object ID: EXBC25

Object Name: Beetlelord Pendant

Object Description: Once per adventure, by activating this pendant as a full-round action, your skin hardens, darkens, and glosses over. Short antennae sprout from your head. You gain darkvision out to 60 feet and a +2 enhancement bonus to your existing natural armor. These effects last for 1 hour.

Mark of Six Paths

Object ID: EXBC26

Object Name: Mark of Six Paths

Object Description: Only a very select few members of Six Paths Battalion are given this insignia. Made of enameled gold in the shape of six stylized lines, this insignia indicates extraordinary valor. The bearer of this pin may spend two action points after determining the success of an attack roll (but before rolling damage) to add an additional bonus to the roll equal to their character level.

Player Handout A

