



Prologue: What Lies Beyond Reason Adventure Path

An adventure for 1st level characters

22,336

by Micah Watt

3692



Difficult Circumstances

A Prologue Adventure for the What Lies Beyond Reason Adventure Path

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Table of Contents	Page
Introduction	4
Adventure Background	5
Adventure Summary	5
Advancement Track	5
A Note on Challenges	6
A Note on NPCs	6
Prologue - It was a Dark and Stormy Night	7
Chapter 1 – Descent into Darkness	9
Chapter 2 – Freedom at Last	22
Chapter 3 – An Unsettling Journey	24
Chapter 4 – Warm Welcome to the Big City	34
Conclusion	38
NPC Capsules	40
The Ring	46
Bestiary	47
Player Handouts	50
Encounter Maps	51
Player Maps	54
Legal Appendix	56

Introduction

Difficult Circumstances marks the first in what I hope will be an ongoing series of adventures and products from Pyromaniac Press.

I could indulge myself and tell you a story about me and my love of gaming. That seems to be the thing to do in the Introduction these days in first products. These tales are usually quite entertaining, and remind us nostalgically of our own gaming origins. I have to admit that every time I pick up an official Paizo product with a new author, it's the first thing I turn to. I love reliving my early gaming experiences through the stories of the author, and it gives me a sense of who they are, and whether I might identify with their style of storytelling. I have noticed these remembrances appear less in third party publications, and I have a sense as to why that might be.

I could do that – tell my origin story - but in truth I don't really feel like I've earned that right yet. There are so many great authors out there, many of whom have worked harder and longer at being a writer that I have at anything in my life. I'm the new guy that has wandered in and taken advantage of the amazing accessibility of self-publishing in our community, pioneered by the efforts of the professionals and dedicated amateurs that have come before me.

What I would like to do is thank those whose shoulders I now stand upon. None of you know me, but without your interest, faith, dedication and love of our shared hobby I would not be able to produce this product.

To the backers of our Kickstarter campaign; the credits page will always be at the front of our products, a reminder that everything that follows is made possible because of your support;

To the gaming community members that took an interest, and the time to advise, review and encourage my work. Specific mentions to Oliver, N. Jolly, Megan, Morgan, Malwing and Thilo; and to Russ, Richard and Ismael for jumping on board despite my status as an untried author;

To the teams at Kickstarter and Drivethru RPG for making this product launch possible for myself, and the many other authors that have ideas, but no system to fund or drive them;

To Ryan Dancey for championing the OGL, which made all of this possible for all of us.

To John Reyst at d20pfsrd.com for making the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game so incredibly accessible;

And to the entire team at Paizo Publishing for the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game. Way to breathe life back into a beloved game system that seemed – at the time - to be destined for slow death;

I offer my sincere thanks and appreciation for all your efforts on my behalf, intentional or otherwise.

If you really want to know more about me, our amazing artist Dante Cifaldi, or Pyromaniac Press you can visit www.pyromaniacpress.com.

Maybe I'll include a story in the next product.

Micah Watt Author for Pyromaniac Press

Adventure Background

Three hundred years ago, a mad demigod almost destroyed the greatest city and civilisation in the world. At the heart of this city was an ancient machine capable of bending reality for those with the patience and wisdom to harness it. Possessing neither of these virtues, the godling struck a deal with the king of devils, Azmodeus, for dark secrets that would allow him to manipulate the machine to his own ends, powering it by syphoning the souls of the city's population. At the eleventh hour, a band of heroes and traitor priests struck down the godling, disrupting the process and releasing the pent up energy in a catastrophic explosion. The fallout was considerable, with much of the city damaged, and the citizens suffering greatly. The machine was also badly damaged, but worse, it was tainted and warped by the methods and intent of its use. It now radiated a destructive presence that wracked those nearby with nightmarish madness. The surviving heroes took the key components of the machine, split them up, and secreted away across the world to quell the evil and ensure the machine could never again be used for fell purposes. The components were hidden and left to disappear into legend.

But the hand of fate is not easily turned aside. Unearthed by chance or design, over time these pieces have slowly made their way back to the city, by one method or another. Powerful forces seek to rebuild the machine and finish what was started three centuries ago.

One such piece is a large metal loop, or ring. In truth it is the frame of an attuning lens for the machine, though the interior crystal was long ago destroyed. It resides in a cavern system about a week from the city, as it has for almost 50 years. Now it's time has come to surface once again.

Adventure Summary

The characters find themselves in a rural inn on a stormy night. The ramshackle structure sits above a (mostly) natural cave system, and the ongoing wild weather has eroded the area enough that the inn collapses into a sinkhole, dumping all of its occupants into the caves.

Confronted by a number of environmental obstacles, an occasional creature and the presence of a strange Ring artefact, the party must find its way to freedom, dragging with it a rag tag bunch of characters ill equipped and suited for the spelunking.

Once they escape the caves, they find themselves without resources in the wild, and in possession of an item that looks increasingly like a significant threat to their sanity, if not their very lives.

The party sets out on a week long journey to the nearest city, the expedition becoming a nightmarish trek through haunted and hostile terrain, while being hunted by an obsessed psychopath intent of wresting the artefact from them.

Finally they arrive at the city only to find they have fallen into a situation of far greater magnitude that they had ever imagined. Attacked by the local citizens, they must broker deals with shadowy cults and political powers to determine not only their own fate, but potentially the fate of the city itself.

Advancement Track

Difficult Circumstances is an adventure for 3-5 1st level characters, and uses the Medium Experience Point Track

The Player Characters should level to 2nd level at the conclusion of the adventure. GMs are encouraged to use approximate levelling milestones rather than strict adherence to the points, using experiance points gained as a general guide. This is of course entirely up to the GM.

A Note on Challenges

The challenges represented in this adventure are going to vary in difficulty based on player character numbers, NPC numbers and NPC usefulness/helpfulness (which is up to the GM to determine). The adventure has been play tested with varying numbers of players and characters, and all found it challenging in one way or another.

The adventure offers a range of physical challenges, and a range of creature opponents. Where possible an extensive range of skills have been evoked to ensure the widest possible involvement of characters. However, as always, some character types/builds will find the challenges easier than others.

The adventure requires a high level of GM input and management, particularly when it comes to controlling NPC actions and developing relationships and dynamics.

It is recommended that the GM carefully read the module and assess it against the relative abilities of the player characters. A heavily combat focussed party might benefit from additional creatures in the combats (ie extra spiders, second mud ooze, more wild dogs etc). Parties that have fewer characters with strong physical skills (Acrobatics, Climb, Swim) may benefit from having the DC of the obstacles lowered by 2, or remove one or two non essential obstacles (the 'slide' into the well, and the sharp terraces for example).

Where appropriate CRs have been noted, though many of the challenges are unique environmental and circumstantial hazards that do not lend themselves as well to CR categorisation (i.e. a fall mid-climb). Similarly, improvised challenges (when, where and how the brothers force a confrontation for example) will need to be managed 'on the fly'.

A Note on Non-Player Characters

The prologue introduces a number of NPCs, some of which are higher level than the party at the beginning of the adventure. Why? Partly to make them useful and effective in their roles (either as assistance or threat), and partly to ensure they have a reasonable level of survivability. However, it does present an interesting and potentially spotlight-stealing problem for the GM. If some of the NPCs are more effective than the party, how do we make the party relevant?

Put simply, the NPCs should be less capable than the player characters despite the higher level for two reasons – statistical optimisation and role playing.

From a statistical perspective the NPC statblocks are not optimised for adventuring. Weapons, spells, feats and skills were all chosen for concept, not ultimate efficiency. Well built first level PCs should be more successful than most of the NPCs at most actions, and could very well be more effective than the higher level ones. The NPCs do not level up in the module, so by the end of the adventure – moving into the AP proper - it will no longer be a factor.

From a role playing perspective the NPCs are not adventurers – they are gamblers, merchants, artists and mercenaries. They are way out of their comfort zone, and despite some capability, they are shaken and unsure in the circumstances. They will defer to the PCs, acting as asked, but not taking initiative. They are there to support and - in many ways - burden the characters.

It falls to the GM to undersell the NPCs early in the adventure, especially those of higher level, or if they represent classes that are also present in the PC party (cleric, bard etc). They are there essentially to make the characters look competent, while providing critical aid or supplying a missing skill or ability from the player character party makeup. The player characters are the stars of the show, and should be treated accordingly.

Read the NPC capsules first - to get the most out of the critical NPCs it is advisable that the GM be fully aware of their motivations before commencing play.



Prologue – It was a Dark and Stormy inn are as follows; Night...

Cast

The Tavern of the Sleeping Dog is a roadhouse on a set of crossroads approximately a six days travel north west of the Eternal City. It is an evening in early Spring, tempestuous weather brought on by a powerful storm has forced the characters to seek shelter for the night in a solid structure. The inn fits that description, if only barely.

It is a cold night in late spring that finds you at the "Tavern of the Sleeping Dog" a neglected one-story establishment of little comfort or appeal. Outside a wild spring storm rages, lashing the ramshackle building with howling winds and heavy rains, and occasionally illuminating the area with flashes of lightning, followed by ominous rumbles of thunder. While spring storms are not uncommon, this one is unusually strong, forcing travellers to find shelter - the only reason you would even enter this unsavoury establishment. The low beamed, sagging ceiling groans piteously under the storm's assault and the many trickling leaks splash water onto the filthy floor. The smells of stale beer and soggy patrons mix with the earthy odour of mould and rot. In the ruddy torchlight, through the accompanying haze of smoke, you can make out the room's other patrons. Numbering only about a dozen, the colourful array of characters seems to share your opinion of this place, if their expressions are anything to go by. Still, the sound of the hammering rains reminds you that poor accommodations are better than none.

In addition to the player characters, the occupants of the

Innkeeper - Bob Barmaid - Melissa Merchant - Duran Merchant apprentice – James Dwarf – Thorgrim (Clan – Shatterstone) Bard – Lucious Thannillar the third Mercenaries - Rufus and Faldor Trapper - Theric Gambler - Barrat

As the hours pass by, and the storm outside rages on unabated, there is little to do but study the other occupants of the inn. Behind the bar, the grizzled old innkeeper "cleans" mugs with a rag that has seen far better days. Peering into your own mug, you wonder just how filthy that rag actually is. In contrast to the old man, the inn's only barmaid is a young blonde woman of a surprisingly sunny disposition and fair features. Her attentions appear to be the only reason any of the gathered individuals have ventured smiles at all this evening, even if only briefly in her presence. You find yourself wondering how this pleasant woman came to work in the middle of nowhere for a grumpy old man. You glance toward the bar, and for a moment the old man's eyes catch yours. Slowly, almost as if for your benefit, he spits into the mug he is holding, and then begins to clean it again. You shudder, and push your ale further across the table.

At the closest table to your left, two men sit with their heads together, deep in conversation, oblivious to the rain and the

rest of you. The older of the two is a middle-aged man of some reasonable girth, while the younger is cadaverously thin and nervous looking. Both are well dressed, though not overly so. Given the half dozen bulging travelling packs stowed under their table you would guess merchants or a merchant and apprentice.

The next table past the merchants sits a dwarf in chain armour. Upon the table rests his helm and a massive war hammer, almost as big as the dwarf himself. Curiously, despite his warrior-like appearance, a stack of several books also lie on the table, and the dwarf's craggy features have been partially obscured for the last several hours by the tome he has been so diligently reading by lantern light.

To your right sits a young man in fine clothes, who has spent nuch of the night sulking. A troubadour of sorts, upon his arrival he made to set up to perform for the patrons. However, the grizzled innkeeper curtly noted that any noise out of the young man would result in him braving the stormy night. For the last several hours the young performer has been idly caressing his lute case, throwing the innkeeper black looks and sighing theatrically.

Finally, at the far end of the room sit the inn's last four occupants. A card game has been going for much of the night, with some unusual results. The four players include a pair of mercenaries dressed in heavy leather armour and carrying well worn weapons, brothers by the look of them. You've had enough past dealings with less than reputable individuals to recognise their type immediately – the sort that would slit your throat for a bent copper coin, and not to be trusted for a second. The third man is obviously a wilderness dweller – maybe a hunter or trapper. Dressed in thick furs and armed with a longbow and an array of knives, he is a hard looking sort. The final player is a small, thin fellow dressed in well-worn traveller's garb and a battered hat, with a ready smile and very quick hands. Following the ebb and flow of the game, wins and losses remain even across the table, with none of the players seeming to gain the upper hand.

Have all the players describe their characters and then describe the NPC's, including those that will not participate The Card Sharp (due to death) in this adventure. Allow any interactions that the players wish, before continuing.

This is the opportunity to size up potential opponents, or make allies. Interactions here will affect reactions in the adventure. All NPCs start as indifferent, except Melissa and peppered with gruff conversation, jibes and banter as and Barret (friendly) and the Brothers and the Barkeep (unfriendly). Each have listed likes/dislikes in the capsules as the barmaid delivers drinks and takes empty tankards, that will add (or subtract) 2 from any social roll. The GM is encouraged to offer roleplaying opportunities here as and deftly avoiding wandering hands. a way of facilitating player immersion, and generating a connection and genuine interest in assisting the NPCs Any players can try to influence the 'random' outcomes throughout the adventure.

GMs choosing may be added.

A Cast of Thousands

The prologue to the adventure offers an opportunity to introduce the Player Characters to each other, and an ensemble of interesting NPCs to add some colour and flavour to this adventure, and perhaps beyond.

If the intention is to run the entire Adventure Path, the latter chapters have opportunities to revisit these NPCs as allies or adversaries - see Chapter 2 'Freedom At Last' page 22.

This is also a great opportunity to introduce any NPCs the GM wishes to include, either as additions or replacements for those provided.

The NPCs are both a boon and a burden in the adventure. Some have useful skills and resources, but assisting them to overcome many of the challenges may be difficult.

In one playtest the players insisted on dragging all of the NPCs through each obstacle as it was encountered, which slowed play considerably. In other playtests the players took the 'pick of the bunch' and left the others behind to be rescued once a means of exiting the caverns was established.

In any case, of the NPCs only Barret (and Theric, though he is not present in the caves) is specifically vital to the adventure (see his statblock), and GMs can (and should) decide for themselves how much of a role the NPCs have in their game.

The GM should keep a careful track of the NPCs. As the sidebar states, none of them except Barret are individually vital, but the adventure assumes at least 3 survive to journey south with the party. If for some reason they do not, significant changes will need to be made to the encounters in that section.

A suggested roleplaying scenario:

Anyone approaching the card game can see it is Poker, and can either watch or 'buy in' at a pool of 10 coppers minimum. Each player currently has roughly 10 coppers each (give or take what's in the pot). The game is dimly lit the hands are played. Occasionally there are short breaks smiling politely at the suggestive comments of the Brothers

of the dealt cards by using Profession (Gambling) for legitimate influence, or Sleight of Hand to cheat (opposed This is also the point where any campaign NPCs of the to all the viewer's Perception checks to get away with it). A DC check of 15 or greater (for either) will begin to see a

trend of wins fall their way.

will begin to equalise. This is because Barret is cheating *seeking it. Almost...almost...* to keep the game even (see his statblock on page 43 for motivations). He is a much more skilled player than the You sit bolt upright in the darkness, and a strange sense of rest, but is far more interested in the play than the win. foreboding fills you, but you can't say if it is the lingering effects He is a very skilled cheat (Sleight of Hand +14) and the of the disturbing dream, or something else. It appears to be the other players have not seen it. Any characters viewing early hours of the morning, but given the weather it is hard to or playing may tip that balance however with a decent *determine*. Rain still lashes the creaky inn, and timbers groan Perception check.

halt, but as no one has lost any money, it'll go no further of the others are stirring as you are. Movement catches yo than harsh words. Characters revealing the deception will eye, and you note a figure crouched in the darkness. Your har not earn any respect from the other players, and it will reaches for a weapon. A flash of lightning reveals the merchant affect their potential relationship with Barret, moving apprentice (James) quietly searching through one of their packs his attitude from Friendly to Indifferent. Characters that *He notices you, and turns his head to as if to say something.* notice the cheating but do not reveal it will earn Barret's trust (he has a very high Perception also, and will likely Then suddenly there is a horrendous noise and the floor of the notice those that 'catch on') and a sly wink and smile.

pit checks vs checks) for results. Again, this ends in a more *images assault your senses*. Flashes of objects, the rush of air, positive disposition from Barret toward the character.

their own favour), the brothers overturn the table and start lungs as you try to breathe, choking out the inhaled water. a brawl. Theric might join in (GMs discretion), but Barret You flail and struggle, heavy limbs dragging you to a slick will scuttle away. No weapons, just fists. Within a few stone surface. The sounds of impact and splashing come from all rounds the innkeeper will break it up with threats of an around you. Dazed, you try to make sense of it all. You are in end to service and showing the offenders the door. After total darkness. You can feel yourself against hard rock in some this point nothing the character does will get the brothers inches of water. The sounds of dazed moans and groans, as well back on side, and given their volatile natures the character as dripping water, can be heard. might be wise to watch their back.

Chapter 1 - Descent into Darkness

The torches eventually burn low and the card game peters out. The innkeeper and the barmaid retire to separate rooms in the back, while the rest of you claim the driest spots on the common room floor. It beats sleeping outdoors, but not by much. You drift slowly off to sleep, to the distant howl of winds and creaking of timbers.

Your sleep is plagued with half remembered images of twisted creatures reaching forth from the blackness to drag screaming people away. Strange colours and distorted images come and go, blending into each other in a riot of unpleasant sensations. Nameless, faceless horrors creep forth across the world, bringing madness, pain and blood. You are both sickened and fascinated, confused and yet somehow elated, as if a great and terrible secret lies just beyond your comprehension. If you could just

reach it you would know ... something ... both momentous and calamitous. You would know something that you should not, However, as the game goes on wins across the table that no one should know, and you fear it, but you can't stop

under the unceasing assault. The common room floor is crowded with sleeping forms, the little gambler's snores almost drowning Revealing Barret cheating will bring the game to an angry out the thunder that rattles the windows periodically. A feature of the second second

inn buckles slightly. Wood twists and tears and you can see the roof begin to sag. Time seems to stand still, and even as you Characters that play or cheat well might also generate a begin to scramble for safety the building collapses and you fall friendly 'duel' of sorts with Barret as they compete (simply away into nothingness. A whirling tapestry of sensations and water on your skin, the tortured sound of tearing wood, the screams of scared and injured people - then the sudden pain of On the other hand, if a character is caught cheating (in the stop. Stinging impact and sharp, icy immersion. Burning

> The cast have fallen 60 feet into a 20 foot deep pool of water. Everyone has likely taken some injury in accordance with how the GM intends to portray the scene. Partially due to luck, and partially to the depth of the mud and water, the majority of the cast take far less than might be expected (see sidebar). The NPCs are injured as noted in their stat blocks.

> Note - while none of the NPCs will demonstrate a particularly sunny disposition under the current circumstances, Barret will undergo the greatest change, becoming sullen and even apparently fearful where previously he was light hearted and seemingly carefree. See his statblock for further information. It is unlikely the characters will deduce the reasons behind it, but if any players are astute enough to assess the NPCs reactions it should be noted.

'Cinematic' Falling and Damage

The 'cinematic' event that finds the characters starting in the cavern complex is a 60 foot fall into a 20ft deep pool of water.

The side bar on page 16 summarizes the rules for falling into water, but essentially the characters must make a DC 20 Acrobatics or Swim (extremely unlikely for 1st level characters) check or suffer 2d3 non-lethal damage and 2d6 lethal damage from the fall.

This damage could very well kill low level characters or render them unconscious for an extended period of time. If the fall doesn't kill them, drowning might.

It is highly recommended that the GM tightly manage this for everyone's enjoyment. Kind GMs might 'hand wave' the dive and allow characters to remain uninjured, or suffer some non-lethal damage. GMs seeking a grittier experience should administer some damage, but ensure it falls within a range that allows the characters to still remain functional.

The NPC capsules assume the latter, and have Hit Point totals set accordingly. They have also been designed in such a way to have healing skills and spells available to mitigate some of the loss. If the GM prefers no damage, this can easily be ignored.

The opening sequence of the adventure relies on bending the hard rules for the sake of a good story. If done sparingly and consistently it can enhance the playing experience. This is a philosophy we embrace at Pyromaniac Press.

Once a light source has been established read out the fall cavern description below;

1. Fall Cavern (CR 0, 1/2 or 1 - see sidebar)

Looking around you see that you have fallen into a natural cavern of sorts. The floor is covered in water ranging from a few inches to what appears to be around twenty feet deep in some areas. The walls are rough, with many ledges and outcroppings, and are slick with moisture. The ceiling, if there is one, is well outside coppers), and a key (DC 20 - to the chest at 1B). your light source, but you have the feeling of being enclosed, and while there are droplet streams, no rain falls from above. A number of small passages or fissures seem to lead off from the main cavern but you would need to explore them to verify this. A dull blue-green light appears to reside deep within one of the 1A. Damsel Ledge (CR 1/4) southern fissures, almost mesmerising, and you find it difficult to look away. Of more immediate concern is the remnants of the The ledge that the barmaid has fallen on to is some 40 A number of figures stir amid the debris.

(Rufus), the merchant apprentice, the dwarf cleric, the do it. Bear in mind that while statistically a 40 foot jump

bard and the gambler. The barmaid will be above on ledge 1A. Of the other brother, the merchant, the trapper and the innkeeper there is no sign. They did not fall into the cavern, but are trapped in the collapsed building above. The brother (Faldor), the merchant (Duran) and the Trapper (Theric) are alive, while the innkeeper (Bob) is dead. (See Chapter 2 - 'Freedom at Last' for their fates).

Scouting around the cavern will yield a number of interesting items. There is a great deal of wooden debris, but most is rotten and/or torn. Allow several useful pieces to be found, but none over 4 feet long and all bulky or plank-like (no poles or easy carrying). There is an intact chair, a slightly battered ale barrel (intact structurally), 2 ale casks (10lt), 2 wooden plates and 4 wooden tankards. Smashed glass and a lantern frame denote what happened to the breakables (wine bottles, lanterns etc). Additionally, the dirty bar rag floats past.

All equipment is soaked by the pool, so all material harmed by water may be damaged, though spellbooks should be considered wet but undamaged. All glass is broken unless specifically stated that it was highly protected (and the described manner would still need to protect from a 60 foot fall). For all unsecured weapons and unworn armour roll 1d8, and on a 1 the item is lost or broken (50% either or GMs discretion). Lost indicates that it has either remained in the inn or is now at the bottom of the pool. It is recoverable if the character can get to it. Anything in the inn is inaccessible until the caves are exited. The difficulty of retrieving anything from the bottom of the pool is determined by the GM, but should at least involve requiring a light source that can penetrate water and is not extinguished, a Swim check (DC 10 or higher) and Perception check (DC 15 or higher). Broken weapons gain the broken condition. Any other result assumes the item landed in a recoverable position

Allow the PCs Perception checks. Starting at DC 10 they can find the following items caught on the craggy walls - an 80 foot coil of rope (DC 10), a pair of iron pitons (DC 12), a flask of oil (DC 14), an intact lantern (DC 16), a pouch (DC 18 - bloody, containing 12 gold, 23 silvers and 47

Climbing the walls requires a Climb check at DC 10

common room and its occupants, scattered about the cave floor. feet from the cavern floor. She will call out for assistance once she realises there are people down there. The climb is relatively easy (DC 10), and she is not without some Looking around, the PCs can see one of the mercenaries skill (Climb +5) but she is afraid and does not want to



injured, young woman who does not want to jump into foot square, and ironbound. a cave pool. 'Assisted' climbing would give them both a DC of 8. An option would be to lash her to a character, but The climb is relatively easy (DC 10) due to the rough walls, if one falls, the other must make STR check at DC 12 to but the fall is more significant, similar to the initial fall into stay on the wall. Finally, she could be carried down on a the cavern. Characters suffer 2d6 lethal damage 2d3 and PC's back, but the climbing DC would be 15. Falling from non-lethal damage from the fall, a DC 20 Acrobatics or here is not so bad, as the pool is directly below it (2d3 non Swim check to avoid. lethal, DC 15 Swim or Acrobatics to avoid).

DC 10 with light, or DC 15 without). Give the following (DC 18), but the chest is not trapped. It contains 67gp, 134 description of the ceiling regardless, but if successful, sp and 132 copper, as well as an arcane scroll of Feather describe the chest on 1B.

of a better term. It appears that the bulk of the collapsing inn as "healing"). The chest is a little too big to be easily actually wedged itself into the opening, and only the middle of concealed, and almost all parties below will be interested the common room floor fell into the cave. Studying the jam of in the contents. timbers you suspect that there is little chance of finding a way out through here without bringing the entire structure down on yourselves. You can only hope there is another way out 2. Art Gallery somewhere.

into a deep pool is not overly dangerous, she is a scared, standing is a chest wedged into a crag on the wall. It is about a

The chest is the innkeeper's stash that was in a hidden From the ledge, offer the PCs a Perception check (vs compartment in the floor. The lock is of superior quality Fall, Shocking Grasp and Summon Monster 1 (1st level) in a carved ivory tube (15gp) and 2 potions of Cure From this vantage you can finally see the cavern ceiling, for lack Light Wounds in steel flasks (1d8+1 healing, labelled

The rocky tunnel opens up into a rough chamber, approximately ten feet wide and twenty feet long. The ceiling is a little over ten feet in height. There is no far wall, as the chamber opens up into a larger cavern. It is from there that the dull blue-green glow In the darkness, a glint of metal catches your eye. On a small originates. In the strange illumination you can make out a series

1B. Treasure Ledge (CR 1/4)

ledge some ten feet above and directly across from where you are of crude paintings on the walls. Obviously painted by a tribal



culture, the basic images depict scenes of slaughter and mayhem. They show humanoid figures in pitched battles, or being eaten by monsters or immolated in fire.

There is nothing of intrinsic value here, though the paintings depict the visions imparted to a tribal shaman who was once drawn to the Ring. A detailed inspection (Perception check at DC 15) will uncover a common thread within these larger scenes. In each picture there is a misshapen black figure with long arms, crude wings and a horned head. It is always in the background, almost as if the artist grudgingly put it there, but once it is found it is clear that the scenes radiate outwards from the figure's position. This is not immediately apparent otherwise.

3. Crystal Cave

As you reach the end of the rocky art gallery, you find yourself looking into a roughly spherical chamber that reminds you instantly of a crystal geode. The walls are made up of a glassy, crystalline rock that juts out at all angles in various sharp formations. All of these formations radiate toward the centre of the room. In the middle of the floor, a flat topped crystal pillar stands at about waist height, looking like a natural formation that at one point was sheared off. Upon the pillar rests a small twisted metal ring, about eight inches across. This is the source of the blue glow, which appears to be reflected and amplified by directly. As GM you are encouraged to fuel the player's the geode.

crystal shatters with little pressure into unlovely shapes and angles, and it cannot be successfully cut into jewellery experience, but the other players will notice the notes and or the like.

twisted aspect so it does not form a perfect ring. Its surface 50). is etched with strange glyphs, indecipherable by any means the PCs possess (in truth it is not a language). It will detect as faintly magical, faintly evil, is warm to the touch (though not destructive), and makes all within 5 feet vaguely uneasy. It should be beyond the characters' capability to identify (Spellcraft DC 35), though the GM could offer hints paraphrased from page 46 if desired.

As soon as it is moved, the glow will dim, and the geode will stop reflecting the light. All the NPC's (save Barrat) will express a morbid fascination in the Ring if shown, especially the merchant, the bard and the brothers, and while all are reluctant to actually touch it, none will easily be able to turn their attention from it.

From here on in, the individual carrying it should get a sense that he/she is being covertly watched (and even whispered about) by the others, a catch glances of this behaviour always out of the corner of their eye, but never

The Ring

In many ways the Ring (found in Area 3) is really the focus of this adventure. It is the source of the dreams in the Prologue and it is the source of the strange happenings in the Chapter 3 'An Unsettling Journey'.

It is an object tainted by an unspeakable evil, the story of which is continued in the Adventure Path (also see page 46). The Ring does nothing (at least not directly) and yet the players should feel it is both important and vaguely menacing in an unspecified way. If presented correctly the players should be reluctant to keep it, and yet reluctant to simply leave it or give it away because of the harm it may cause. The latter portion of the adventure assumes they have retained it.

If for whatever reason the players decide not to take it, or keep it, have one of the NPCs desire to have it, and carry it. If the players object, force a confrontation with the mercenary Rufus to keep it in the group. Even if lost at some point in the caves, it will turn up again (see Chapter 2 'Freedom at Last').

If the party somehow manages to keep its existence from the NPCs, or do manage to force the issue, let it be left behind. If the GM is running the adventure as a one-off, make escape the final goal. If running the AP, the Ring will turn up again.

paranoia (and have a little fun). It is suggested that you make a few handwritten notes to pass to the player over The geode crystal is worthless. Clear and brittle, the the course of the session conveying some of this. Not only will it help to immerse the player of that character in the begin to wonder what information is being imparted.

The loop is black in colour, feels metallic, and has a Sample notes are provided in the handouts section (page





4. Spider Lair (EL2)

The narrow passage way appears to open into a wider section with a possible other passage leading off to the right. However, the area is choked with thick spider webs, beaded with water from XP 100 the trickles cascading down the walls. The webs appear relatively N Tiny vermin thin in the open area, but become chokingly thick to the right. A Init +5; Senses darkvision 60 ft..; Perception +4 number of fist sized spiders cling miserably to the webbing, but DEFENSE rear defensively as your light source illuminates their home.

There are four reasonably large spiders here, all of which Fort +2, Ref +5, Will +0 may cause a little harm. Because of the moisture, fire will Immune mind-affecting effects cause the webs to smoulder away from the applied area, OFFENSE but not actually burn away with any speed. This will also Speed 30 ft. make the spiders hostile, as will ranged attacks, causing Melee bite +7 (1d3-4 plus poison) them to charge forward, attacking anything within reach Special Attack poison (including NPCs).

The major danger is from the "mother" spider, concealed Base Atk +0; CMB +3; CMD 9 (21 vs. trip) by a 'trapdoor' screen of webs that cunningly appears to be Skills Acrobatics +13, Climb +21, much deeper than it is. The mother will try for 'surprise', Stealth +17; Racial Modifiers +8 Acrobatics, +8 Climb +4 and the Characters must roll Perception based rolls vs Perception, +4 Stealth DC equal to her stealth +11 (her ambush chance) to avoid ECOLOGY being caught unaware (and flat footed) on the first round. Environment any

4 tiny 'scarlet' spiders - 4 hp 1 giant spider - 16 hp

SCARLET SPIDER

AC 18, touch 17, flat-footed 13 (+5 Dex, +1 natural, +2 size) Hp 4 (1d8) STATISTICS Str 3, Dex 21, Con 10, Int -, Wis 10, Cha 2 Perception +4,

CR 1/4

Organization solitary, pair, or colony (3-8)



Treasure incidental

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Poison (Ex) Bite – injury; save Fort DC 10; frequency 1/ The passage constricts considerably ahead, becoming a mere

GIANT SPIDER

CR1

XP 400 N Medium vermin

Init +3; Senses darkvision 60 ft., tremorsense 60 ft.; Perception +4 DEFENSE

AC 14, touch 13, flat-footed 11 (+3 Dex, +1 natural) Hp 16 (3d8+3)

Fort +4, **Ref** +4, **Will** +1 **Immune** mind-affecting effects **OFFENSE**

Speed 30 ft., climb 30 ft.

Melee bite +2 (1d6 plus poison)

Special Attack web (+5 ranged, DC 12, hp 2) STATISTICS

Str 11, Dex 17, Con 12, Int –, Wis 10, Cha 2 Base Atk +2; CMB +2; CMD 15 (27 vs. trip)

Skills Climb +16, Perception +4 (+8 in webs), Stealth +7 (+8 in webs), +16 Climb

ECOLOGY

Environment any

Organization solitary, pair, or colony (3-8) Treasure incidental

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Poison (Ex) Bite – injury; save Fort DC 14; frequency 1/ round for 4 rounds; effect 1d2 Strength damage; cure 1 save.

All giant spiders have a +2 racial bonus on poison save DCs.

There is no treasure here beyond an extraordinary number Diving (Acrobatics or Swim DC 15). of bat skeletons.

4A. Gold Vein

If the characters take the time to clear all the webbing from the area they may notice (Perception DC 14) a glint of gold in the wall (in the darkened section of the map). Closer inspection indicates a narrow gold vein that runs deep into the wall that with time and the proper equipment and expertise, can yield raw ore worth 2000gp (at a rate of 200gp per day of excavation and purification, -10% total worth in costs unless PCs have the skills - Alchemy or Profession (Mining) or the like - and equipment to process themselves). If they simply want to chisel out and grab what they can here and now, they can probably chip out 50gp in raw ore before the vein runs too deeply into the 6. The Old Well (CR 5*) wall to get at.

5. Slippery Passage (CR 1/2)

round for 4 rounds; effect 1 Strength damage; cure 1 save. crawl way of around two feet in diameter. It also dips sharply downwards, and the mud slicked rock looks unstable at best.

A Dungeoneering DC 15 check will alert the characters to the risk, otherwise they discover it as the first of them proceeds. Each character must make a Climb or Acrobatics check vs DC 10 while sliding down this passage, or lose control, sliding rapidly (and dangerously) out into the well shaft. Using climbing implements or sharp objects (daggers, picks) to assist grants the character a +2 circumstance bonus on their roll. If multiple characters attempt to traverse this passage at the same time, any additional character sliding more than 5 feet has a chance of knocking those ahead of them out into the well. The character nearest the well makes a STR check vs DC 8 + # equal to the amount the slider's check failed by to avoid being pushed out (ie, if the sliding character rolled a total of 7 for their initial Climb/Acrobatics, which is a failure by 3, the STR check to avoid push out is DC 11 - 8+3). If the end character is pushed out, each subsequent character (+11 in webs); Racial Modifiers +4 Perception, +4 Stealth makes a check at a cumulative +1 bonus to avoid the same fate (their momentum is arrested, making it less likely).

> If a character slides or is pushed out, they have a final chance to avoid falling by catching the edge with a STR vs DC 10+ # (equalling the number by which the relevant check failed, as above). A hanging character can catch a falling character (but only one) with a touch attack roll and a Climb check vs DC 18 (failure by 5 or more indicates both fall).

> Falling characters take 2d3 non-lethal damage and 1d6 lethal damage (see sidebar), or can negate the damage by

Falling into Water

Falls into water are handled somewhat differently from normal falling. If the water is at least 10 feet deep, the first 20 feet of falling do no damage. The next 20 feet do nonlethal damage (1d3 per 10-foot increment). Beyond that, falling damage is lethal damage (1d6 per additional 10-foot increment).

Characters who deliberately dive into water take no damage on a successful DC 15 Swim check or DC 15 Acrobatics check, so long as the water is at least 10 feet deep for every 30 feet fallen. The DC of the check, however, increases by 5 for every 50 feet of the dive.

* Only if the party tries to escape through the cover at the top of the well. If the party descends, it's a CR 1/2 area.

The tight passage ends abruptly in the side of a worked shaft that stretches both up and down beyond your light source. The shaft is approximately ten feet in diameter and the walls are smooth stone made slick with moisture. From below you can hear the splash of water falling into a pool, but it is impossible to tell amount or distance from your position.

The shaft is the old well for the inn, however the barmaid can tell the others that the innkeeper had a passing tinker board it over years ago. She assumed it was dry, and sources water from a local stream instead. She indicates the cover seemed pretty solidly constructed.

If the characters go up 60 feet (Climb DC 14), they find that the cover is indeed solidly built, with two layers of timbers, one over the top, and the second fitted into the shaft itself. Outside, the cover is secured with an iron bar slid into two fittings on the well sides. The water has warped the wood and caused it to swell, creating an even tighter seal. The cover is Hardness 5, has 35 hp and a break DC of 20. The cover is so waterlogged that fire or flame based magic has no effect other than some scorching and producing a cloud of steam. Piercing weapons are ineffective, as are any weapons of S size, or swords of any kind. Axes, hammers and other heavy swinging weapons deal damage, but the angle and position at which they are swung will rob them of power. All weapons deal half damage, and swingers may lose their purchase on impact (STR check at DC 14) and fall. Falling damage from here (2d6 non-lethal and 6d6 normal damage) would likely be lethal for most of the cast. Even diving is unlikely to save a character as the water is not deep enough to mitigate all damage (ie they would strike the bottom) and a successful dive (Acrobatics or Swimming DC 25) would still inflict 4d6 standard damage.

The well cover is not insurmountable, but has been designed to deter characters in favour of further exploration. The difficulty combined with the risk of fall should be incentive enough to move on. That being said, industrious or determined PCs may find a way through it eventually, and a well-equipped party might even anchor themselves against the risk of fall (rope and pitons etc). Indeed, some of the things that make it difficult to break past (such as the metal bar) might actually aid in escape once they do (acting as a tie off point for a rope for example). If the characters persist, the GM should allow it. While they may have missed some challenges (and treasure), they will have overcome a potentially lethal one to earn their freedom.

If the characters go down the surface is rougher (Climb DC 12) and they will discover the break in the shaft 30 feet down that looks like a rockfall/mudslide. A steady stream of water pours from the tunnel into the well. This leads on to Area 7. The well chamber (50 feet to water surface)

Drowning

Any character can hold her breath for a number of rounds equal to twice her Constitution score. If a character takes a standard or full-round action, the remaining duration that the character can hold her breath is reduced by 1 round. After this period of time, the character must make a DC 10 Constitution check every round in order to continue holding her breath. Each round, the DC increases by 1.

When the character finally fails her Constitution check, she begins to drown. In the first round, she falls unconscious (0 hp). In the following round, she drops to -1 hit points and is dying. In the third round, she drowns.

Unconscious characters must begin making Constitution checks immediately upon being submerged (or upon becoming unconscious if the character was conscious when submerged). Once she fails one of these checks, she immediately drops to -1 (or loses 1 additional hit point, if her total is below -1). On the following round, she drowns.

is actually rather full as much of the runoff has ended up here. Anyone falling into this (particularly while wearing armour) must face Swimming checks (DC 10) or begin to drown (sidebar).

Getting from the upper passage to the lower passage will be difficult. A suggested method would be to string a rope from each entrance similar to a zip line. Climb DC for this would be 6 for all characters.

7. Unstable Cavern (CR 1/3)

Ahead of you the tunnel opens up into a larger chamber. As you approach, you can hear the clatter of rock and soil falling from the ceiling. Someone behind you stumbles and you hear the clang of metal on stone and a muffled curse. Ahead, a number of rocks clatter down from the unstable cavern, including one as large as your head, which bounces past you and rolls to a stop against the wall.

The cavern's ceiling has been severely weakened by the water flow and is extremely unstable. Any noise causes a minor cave-in that will cause 1d4 points of damage (Reflex save DC 9 to avoid) to any characters in the area. A cave-in will occur only 4 times before the majority of the loose material has fallen. Characters attempting to be quiet must make a Stealth check vs DC 8 to avoid causing noise.

8. Natural Terraces (CR 1/2)

The passage ahead begins to ascend in a series of flat stone terraces, seemingly carved by the passage of water over time. The terraces are smooth, flat and around one to two feet in length. grasp the ledge. The tunnel angles sharply upwards, twisting back upon itself. In some areas the terraces are only a few inches apart, while in The walls above the waterfall are rough but moist; down the terraces, creating a series of miniature waterfalls.

Footing up these terraces difficult but not treacherous. A Dungeoneering DC 10 check will indicated these 'stairs' If a secure rope is strung through the waterfall (anchored in razor sharp crystalline mineral deposits. Anyone not DC 13) when crossing. wearing armour (light or better) will automatically take 1 point of damage from various lacerations to hands, knees Any character falling will drop 50 feet into a deep, and the like as they climb.

9. Waterfall Cavern (CR 1)

of a rather large chasm. Stretching lengthwise to the north and has a vast feel to it. The ceiling and floor - presuming there is Unsettling Journey". one – are also well outside your visual range. The far wall of the chasm is about twenty feet away, but appears to be featureless, rough stone, with no ledges or other openings. Pouring from a 10. Tree Roots (CR 1/2) crack in the far wall, around twenty feet above you, is a powerful torrent of water, creating a majestic waterfall that spans the On the far side of the waterfall, the ledge continues another crashes forcefully onto it from above.

shared).

Any character crossing unaided must make both STR and time, and can use it to change the order they progress in DEX checks vs DC 13 to remain on the ledge. Climbing if desired. equipment or sharp, wedge-like objects add +2 to each of the rolls. Roped characters that fall can be held with a successful STR check vs DC 12 by the key character, +1 for 11. 'Worm' Hole each other character holding the rope. Swinging through the waterfall below the ledge is also a viable option, The hole extends into a narrow tunnel with a width of about requiring a Successful DEX check from the swinger to two feet and a varying height of two to three feet. The tunnel reach the ledge (DC 10), otherwise they fall short or fail to

others there is a vertical drop of a number of feet. They almost requiring a Climb DC of 12, but below becomes much look like a set of distorted steps. A steady stream of water flows harder at DC 15. Directly in the path of the water is at DC 18. Again, appropriate equipment may add up to +2 to the check.

to be a natural occurrence, and will alert the charaters to or tightly held at each end) all those crossing can add +4 a potential risk. About halfway up, the ledges are covered circumstance bonus to their STR and DEX checks (vs the

fast flowing river (2d6 non-lethal / 1d6 lethal damage, Swimming or Acrobatics DC 15 to avoid). Regardless of their condition once they hit the water, unless a character is roped or otherwise anchored, they will be quickly swept downstream by the powerful currents and their fate will Emerging from the tunnel, you find yourself on a narrow ledge be up to the GM. Suggestions for characters lost appear in Section 2 "Freedom at Last". Characters and NPCs lost south, the rift disappears well out of your light source, and it this way may also be encountered again in Section 3 "An

gap, impacts on the near wall, then falls again into the darkness. 10 feet then tapers off. Just beyond the ledge hang the gnarled Straining, you think you can hear it pouring into a larger body roots of what must be an immense tree on the surface. The root of water far below your position, but you can't estimate the network appears thick and strong, reminding you somewhat distance. The ledge you are standing on ends a few feet to the unpleasantly of a spider web. Further inspection of the area south, but appears to continue toward the north. Unfortunately, reveals a hole, no more than two feet wide, in the cavern wall. to follow it, you would need to pass under the waterfall that However, the hole is fifteen feet above and ten feet beyond the end of the ledge.

This is probably the most difficult natural obstacle in the Not immediately obvious from below is that the 2 foot hole place. The water strikes the ledge with extreme force, and actually has a small ledge just below it. PCs could possibly simultaneously makes the stone slick and slippery. A climb to the hole (Climb DC 12) but unless they have rope Dungeoneering DC 10 check will give charaters insight remaining, the NPCs will find this climb difficult. The tree into the relative ease or difficulty of compared crossing roots offer a way to the hole, and a Knowledge (Nature) options (those presented below, and any they might come DC 10 check will comfirm the roots are safe to climb and up with), but not the actual DC numbers. A Dungeoneering will hold the weight of several people. This involves an DC 15 will impart a +2 circumstance bonus to all checks, initial jump (of about 3 feet – Acrobatics check vs DC 8), representing tricks or techniques a spelunker has picked and then clambering through the roots (no check) to reach up (all characters can benefit assuming the knowledge is the hole safely. Failure on the jump or climb results in the character falling (see Area 9 above). There is enough space for up to three characters to be in the root 'web' at any



is constructed of thick wet soil. The hole is smooth, but doesn't appear to be natural. Visions of giant earthworms swim through your head as an oppressive feeling of claustrophobia sets in.

A Knowledge (Nature) DC 10 check will indicate they are getting close to the surface. The tunnel is damp, musty and unpleasant, but is structurally sound and otherwise not dangerous. It does force characters to go single file, however, and this will be the order that they arrive in area 12. The composition of travel order may have a profound effect on the combat to come.

12. Mud Chamber (EL 2)

The tight tunnel opens abruptly into a roughly oval chamber, around twenty five feet in length. The ceiling appears to be about ten feet in height, and you can see a faint grey light through a rough hole in the middle of it. Stepping out of the tunnel, you sink about a foot down into a thick brown mud that grips at your boots and makes movement difficult. As <next character> begins to exit the tunnel behind you, you catch a glimpse of movement in the mud, or rather 'on' the mud. A five foot 'puddle' of mud draws together, forming a brownish mass that seems to move of its own volition in your direction.

of movement counts as 2 - 3 for diagonals - and no Run and combat.

This creature is a Mud Ooze (new monster - See entry page 47). Characters with Knowledge (Dungeoneering) 13. Crypt (CR 1/2) may be able to shed some light on its abilities

entangles its victims.

Ooze, a semi-intelligent predator comprised of magically entire room is slick with water, and small pools have collected in charged mud. It secretes an acidic solution that is harmful various places. The most striking feature of the room is the shaft to flesh, and can leave behind a heavy mud coating that of dull, greyish light emanating from a ragged hole in the ceiling, entangles its victims. Being an Ooze creature it is resistant slightly off-centre from the apex of the dome. Light drizzle falls to blows from edged and impaling weapons.

Mud Ooze - 13 Hp

muted sunlight. Escape is at hand!



discover the corpse of a tomb robber who fell victim to the mud ooze. The corpse (skeletal) has a chain shirt (tarnished but serviceable), a battered shield, a broken sword, boots, clothes, a belt pouch with 23gp, 41sp and 3 cp, and a masterwork dagger with a plain hilt. The robber carried a pack that has a pot, 30 feet of rope, a tent, blanket, rations (inedible), clothes and a few personal items (mirror, comb etc). All the items are wet and muddy, but generally serviceable.

The hole in the ceiling is not near a wall, but is only 10 feet up, meaning a person could be boosted up through it easily by the combined effort of 2 others (no check The mud makes this cavern 'difficult' terrain (each square required) or less easily by one other (Climb DC 8). The last person would need to climb a lowered rope (DC 15, or 5 or Charge actions allowed) for the purposes of movement if knotted) or have some other means of ascending (jump and 'pull up' for example, Climb DC 15).

The chamber you have entered is the only one so far that Knowledge (Dungeoneering) DC 10: This is a Mud you can definitively say is not natural. The room is round, Ooze, a semi-intelligent predator comprised of magically approximately fourty feet in diameter, with a domed ceiling peaking at a height of around twenty five feet. The floor is paved Knowledge (Dungeoneering) DC 15: This is a Mud with large flagstones, and all the walls are brick to a height of Ooze, a semi-intelligent predator comprised of magically ten feet, with the remainder appearing to be tightly packed earth charged mud. It secretes an acidic solution that is harmful and stone. Half a dozen stone buttresses brace the roof of the to flesh, and can leave behind a heavy mud coating that chamber. Spaced evenly about the chamber at cardinal points are a set of eight stone and wood sarcophagi, featuring battered brass Knowledge (Dungeoneering) DC 20: This is a Mud fittings and a small inscription plate on the lid of each one. The through the hole, and beyond you can see a cloudy sky, murky and drab, but nevertheless a welcome sight.

The sarcophagi are the remains of 8 individuals entombed A Knowledge (Nature) DC 10 check reveals the light to be here long ago. If this adventure is being played as part of the What Lies Beyond Reason adventure path, this is the final resting place of a number of heroes of the time. These If the party takes time to explore the mud, they will were Barret's companions, and while he once revered

charged mud.

them, that has turned to resentment and hate over the / Profession (Farmer) for 1 season of growth across a 1 long years. He will not intervene if the tomb is disturbed square mile area). or looted. Alternatively, if the GM may wish to substitute the names of figures relevant to an existing campaign or "Nalbaros, the Jester" setting. The significance of them, if any, is up to the GM This coffin is empty - it was actually intended for Barret to determine. Each Sarcophagus contains the skeletal upon his death. remains of a person, remnants of clothes (or armour) and a few possessions. In no particular order they are-

"Thalanus Arabast, Lord of Tarrelon"

Contains rusted plate mail (unusable) with a crown and ivy motif, rusted great sword (unusable) with golden hilt (40gp).

"Ramerion Van Velton. Castellian" Contains scraps of pearl buttoned clothes (50 gp in pearls), warped walking stick with gold inlay (10gp).

"Calissanda - Seer and Prophet"

Contains a warped quarterstaff (unusable), desiccated robes, and a golden sickle (50gp).

"Sharess - Lady of the Risen Moon"

Contains a silvered ornamental mace (25gp), remnants of grey robes, and a silver crescent moon amulet (10gp).

"Turbul, the Stoutheart"

clothes, and a pouch of earth (minor magic, will propagate check required). plants or crops if spread, +10 to Knowledge (Nature)

"Dreanic of the Broken Hills"

Contains a broken bronze great axe, desiccated hide armour (broken), and a tribal necklace (feathers and gemstones - 25 gp).

"Black Max"

Contains a blackened skeleton, ashes and small metallic fragments.

The party has limited options to reach the surface. The earthen ceiling will support very little weight, and is loose enough that grapples (or makeshift ones) will pull straight out. PCs cannot climb the walls because the earth will not support their weight, though they could conceivably climb the chamber walls to where the earth begins and dig their way out over time. Unless they come up with a novel solution, there is likely only one expedient way out. The stone sarcophagi (7 feet long/3 feet wide and high) are heavy (a combined STR 19+ to even move), but can be slid, overturned, and lifted (STR 24+). A stack of these Contains a warped scythe (unusable), remnants of plain would offer an ideal climbing platform to the hole (no



Chapter 2 - Freedom at Last

As the last person is pulled free of the crypt, you all finally have a chance to relax and take stock of your surroundings. Despite the trials you have endured, you are scarcely two dozen yards from the now destroyed inn. The entire building has collapsed into a sodden mound of wood. Strangely, the stables remained intact, and you can hear the sounds of unnerved, but otherwise unharmed animals. Not far away you see the old stone well with it's reinforced wooden cover. The ground is saturated and muddy, though the drizzle is finally starting to lessen. Momentarily, there is a gap in the grey clouds, and a shaft of morning sunlight illuminates you, warming your chilled

The surviving cast finally have a chance to rest and take stock. Now that an exit has been found, retrieving the NPCs left behind (if any) should be much easier. A hole could be dug through from above to avoid the cave system or using timber from the wrecked inn and/or stables supplies can bypass most of the skills checks on the obstacles. Assume sufficient rope, tools, tack and at least 2 donkeys (belonging to the merchants), 3 riding horses (bard and mercenary brothers) and any animals or gear belonging to the party that would have been put in the stables.

A thorough search of the inn wreckage will allow the party to find the merchant Duran, and the mercenary Faldor, pinned but alive. If their connected NPCs (apprentice and other brother) survived the caves, there will be a positive reunion, and this will reflect on their outlook on the player characters. The search will also turn up the body of the inn keeper but not the woodsman. Exceptional trackers (Survival DC 15) will notice traces of blood and washed out footsteps leading east toward the forest, before losing the trail. Anything lost in the inn can't be recovered unless significant time is spent excavating, and there is risk of further collapse into the sinkhole.

Any NPCs that are successfully escorted through the adventure will be at least basically grateful for the player character's efforts. Further reactions or relationships will be based on the character behaviour and level of success in the caves. The barmaid, dwarf cleric, bard and gambler will all be disposed to be friendly unless otherwise alienated by the characters. The merchants are disposed to be grateful, but remain at least a little distant (acquaintances), while the best the characters should hope for out of the mercenary brothers is grudging respect. In the end, it's up to the GM to determine final relationships.

If NPCs were lost in the caverns, this will have a negative affect based on who they were connected to. Losing a

single brother or merchant will likely elicit a poor overall reaction from the remaining one, and the loss of the sunny, innocent barmaid will lower everyone's spirits.

NPC deaths may be unavoidable in some cases, but anyone (including player characters) that was lost in the waterfall chasm (Chapter 1 - Area 9) would have been carried free in the fast flowing river that surfaces into an aboveground river a mile or so downstream. It's up to the GM as to their eventual fate, but lost characters could be reintroduced as survivors either by returning to the inn under their own recognisance or being found in the next Chapter – An Unsettling Journey. If going for a gritty feel, GMs could have lost NPC bodies be found in this manner. If the Ring bearer (yes I said it) is lost in the caves they should definitely turn up as a survivor to re-join the party.

If this adventure is being run as part of the Adventure Path, there will be suggested cameos for some of the cast supplied in these later products. This is entirely optional (and of course subject to the survival outcomes in this adventure) but offers players a greater sense of immersion and connection to the adventure, and imparts a sense that their actions do have a lasting impact on the campaign.

"So what do we do now?"

Once the PCs have escaped the cavern system (and undertaken rescue and salvage activities) they are likely to be at something of a loose end, having completed the obvious primary goal of the adventure – reach safety.

The next stage is dependent on player actions and GM intent. If the adventure is being run as a one-off, it can end here, or lead on to the next GM supplied hook, but this is beyond the scope of the module.

If the adventure is being run as part of the AP, and the PCs or NPCs *do not* have the Ring, there is still the matter of seeing themselves and the surviving NPCs to a more hospitable location.

The Eternal City is approximately one week to the south east, and the closest form of civilisation. Resupply and replacement of lost equipment may be motivation enough to travel there.

If she survived Melissa the barmaid has no home or possessions, and no plan or prospects. She intends to try her luck in the Eternal City, but could use an escort for the journey.

Similarly, the merchants Duran and James were making

for the Eternal City, and would gladly pay the party for guard services to their destination (a paltry 1gp each per day, but better than nothing).

The mercenary brothers (again if they survived) may assist in the cementing the party's choices, as they will be less than subtly eying both the barmaid and merchants as potential targets of nefarious activities. A Sense Motive DC 10 will indicate that if the party does not safeguard these relatively helpless individuals, the likelihood of them falling victim to the brothers is high.

Lucious the bard was also headed for the Eternal City to seek fame and fortune, and may now try to travel with the party as a source of inspiration for his 'art'.

Thorgrim was not intending to travel to the Eternal City. He was instead journeying from east to west, heading for the dwarven stronghold of Thun Geldir in the mountains. Without supplies, he can be easily convinced (Diplomacy DC 5) to head south with the rest of the group.

Barret the gambler is going **north**, and will refuse all offers or entreaties for company.

There is also the matter of the gold vein, if it was discovered, in the caves. Extracting the gold will take resources not available nearby. The Eternal City, again, is the closest opportunity for these.

This should encourage the players to choose the Eternal City as their destination. Without the Ring, the next Chapter (An Unsettling Journey) should be skipped. The GM is free to include any desired encounters, or interactions within the group (or even a confrontation with the brothers), but the journey will not be affected by the influence of the Ring. The Ring will, however, surface of its own accord, one way or another, in the future.

"What do we do with this?!!"

If the party or NPCs do possess the Ring, the choice to go south to the Eternal City should be an easier one. They are not sure of what it is, or particularly equipped to deal with it. The Eternal City has libraries and sages to help identify it, a vault to safeguard it, or even 'authorities' to turn it over to if that is the chosen course of action.

If the players don't reason this out, have the merchants, or bard suggest it. If the party heads south while in possession of (or in proximity to) the Ring move on to the next Chapter.

Why exclude Barret?

Only one of the surviving NPCs is unwilling to go south with the party. There is a very good reason for it.

Barret has a role to play in the future (and in fact has a historical role as well), but for now needs to be separated from the party.

The story reasons are partially covered in his NPC capsule, but from an adventure mechanics perspective his departure is designed to throw suspicion onto him when the party realizes it's being followed.

If done well, Theric's appearance should be a surprise twist at the end, or at least the players should have multiple suspects rather than just one.

Troubleshooting

The characters/players don't want to keep the Ring.

This is a critical event because the rest of the adventure hinges on the party having the Ring, and not simply leaving it behind or justifying throwing it away.

The Ring should have been carried out of the dungeon – after all, what self respecting adventurer ignores a glowing cavern and a mysterious artefact?

However, through the journey the events of the trek become an escalating concern, and it certainly becomes clearer that the Ring is the cause. Once the Ring starts to become 'too problematic' they may simply wish to dispose of this burden.

While you can't force players into a course of action, it falls to the GM to influence them to set aside their immediate discomfort for the 'bigger picture'. Suggested methods of doing this if necessary include;

- Remind (either in or out of character) good aligned or civic minded PCs that simply leaving the Ring behind shifts the problem but does not resolve it. What happens when the next traveller comes along? Can they, in good conscience, inflict this on someone else?
- Suggest that the Ring in their hands is a burden, but could be a significant tool for evil or destruction in the hands of the wrong people. If the brothers are still in the party, draw the players attention to what might happen if the Ring fell to them or someone worse. A Sense Motive DC 5 if the Ring is discussed or visible will reveal their poorly concealed desire for it.

· Play on their curiosity. Are they really going to

throw away a mysterious artefact when the resources to understand it are mere days away?

The players try to leave/hide the Ring and return for it later.

Not quite as bad as abandoning it, but still significantly affects the journey.

If the previous suggestions do not work, hint that the remaining NPCs are unlikely to agree to that, and allude to the fact they all seem to have a morbid fascination with it,

If they still try to force the issue, have the brothers (if available) confront the PCs for control of the Ring, of start having NPCs 'sneak' off at various times to try to retrieve it. The PCs can't watch them all the time. In fairly short order the players will realise they either have to carry the Ring, or find a way to control all remaining NPCs all of the time.

Chapter 3 - An Unsettling Journey

The Eternal City is an approximate 6 day journey south east by foot. The first 3 days are mostly through light woods that gives way to farmland on day 4 and 5. The last day will be through Pilgrimage, a sprawling borough that has extended beyond the walls of the city proper.

How Far?

The specific distance has deliberately been left vague, to allow the GM flexibility to make the journey as long as it 'needs to be'.

Setting a specific distance means calculating various speeds based on mounts or encumbrance, and this may vary greatly from group to group. A 'lightly encumbered' mounted group might cover twice as much ground as a 'heavily encumbered' group on foot in the same amount of time.

Our advice is simply tell the players it's a 6 day journey, or - if your players are detail oriented - calculate the distance your group would cover in 6 days based on the Overland Travel rules and use that.

The weather will be overcast and interspersed with slight rain showers, but the storm has blown itself out and the worst is behind the party weather wise. The party will not encounter other travellers on the road due to the poor recent weather.

While the party will not be immediately aware of it, they are being tracked and hunted by Theric, the trapper, who is deep within psychosis caused by the Ring. Its

A Week in Strange Places

This chapter is separated into these three terrains, and the encounters initiated by the escalating influence of the Ring.

Each encounter has a suggested day/ time, but the GM has the final adjudication on when, or even if, an encounter should take place.

The encounters are supposed to illustrate something of the nature of the Ring, to build tension and create mystery, not subject the party to B grade slasher-flick horror that devolves into farce.

GMs will need to determine the best level of immersion for their group without either treating it too lightly, or being too heavy handed.

'theft from sacred ground' has incensed the deranged woodsman, who will harry and try to intimidate the party into returning it. However, he is not a warrior by nature, and is not eager for a direct confrontation.

Day 1 - The River

The road south cuts through light woods, gently sloping downward, its cobbles still slick with water from the heavy rains. The forest is oddly silent, and has a slightly unnerving aspect to it, though you can't quite place why. Only the sound of your animal's hooves on stone can be heard echoing through the surrounding area.

Around a mile from the site of the inn, a swollen river has overflowed its banks, and rushing water crests the low stone bridge spanning it, making the surface slick and throwing spray into the air.

As you approach something in the water catches your attention, a shape forced up against the side of the bridge by the current.

If any of the NPCs were lost into the underground river in the cavern complex (Area 9) and the GM deems them to have not survived, this is the moment to reveal their corpse, caught up on one of the support poles by the force of the water.

If no NPC was lost, the corpse is that of a deer drowned in the sudden surge of water created by the storm.

Additionally, as the party approaches to investigate, the individual carrying the Ring begins to see distorted faces in the river wash, almost like ghosts or twisted spirits. They are subject to the Fascinated condition (Will DC 12 to avoid). Failure to resist means the bearer remains entranced until shaken free by another, or until another saving throw is granted by being under threat. It is possible for the bearer to remain this way indefinitely (or at least until they pass out) though this is unlikely to happen in company.

Night 1 - A Bug's Nightlife

If the day was eerily quiet, the night is strangely alive. Despite the near constant drizzle of rain, the forest is alive with noises. Rustling in the undergrowth, cracking and clicking and the buzzing drone of insect activity can all be heard over the spitting of your flickering campfire.

Even to a layperson, the local nocturnal activity seems excessive. Anyone making a Survival skill check, DC 5 can definitively state that nocturnal activity should be subdued in the wet and cold conditions rather than exacerbated, and that something has the local wildlife agitated. Sleeping that night is difficult, but possible.

Day 2 - Is that a Firefly? (EL 1/2)

An appropriate encounter map - Forest Road - is provided on page 51.

A light, dreary drizzle filters down through the canopy for most of the day, keeping you damp and uncomfortable. The insect activity from the night before seems to follow you as you travel deeper into the forest, with clouds of tiny biting midges harassing you and your animals. Toward mid afternoon, the insects scatter as a buzzing mote of light flies lazily through your midst. It looks like a small glowing sphere about the size of a coin. As it circles past <character with ring>, it begins to jerk in an agitated fashion, its colour and buzzing intensifying.

The creature is a Psychic Mote (new monster – See entry page 48), drawn to the psychic energy given off by the Ring, and the rising emotional states of the group. Characters with ranks in Knowledge (Planes) can determine some information about this diminutive elemental creature.

Knowledge (Planes) DC 10: This is a Psychic Mote, a flying diminutive elemental that is drawn to mental energy and can be fooled by shielding ones thoughts. Psychic Motes are more nuisance than threats to adventurers.

Knowledge (Planes) DC 15: This is a Psychic Mote, a flying diminutive elemental that is drawn to mental energy and can be fooled by shielding ones thoughts. Psychic Motes are more nuisance than threats to adventurers, but they undermine will and concentration. They can be repelled by actively concentrating to do so and are immune to poison, stunning, paralysis and sleep. Knowledge (Planes) DC 20: This is a Psychic Mote, a flying diminutive elemental that is drawn to mental energy and can be fooled by shielding ones thoughts. Psychic Motes are more nuisance than threats to adventurers, but they undermine will and concentration. Psychic Motes can form swarms that are significantly more powerful as a group. They can be repelled by actively concentrating to do so, and several individuals can combine their will to greater effect. They are immune to poison, stunning, paralysis and sleep.

If left alone, it will accompany the character like an annoying fly. It will buzz in close a few times, but generally leave the character alone for now. It might, however, become problematic at night because it doesn't sleep.

If swatted at like a traditional insect, it will make one touch attack, and then settle back into its routine. Continued efforts to swat at it will result in behaviour as if it was attacked.

If attacked it will respond in kind, but will retreat after 1d4 successful strikes on its target, or if struck (but not killed).

The best way to deal with the Mote is to psychically drive it away, as described under its entry.

Psychic Mote - 6 Hp

Night 2 - Bad Dreams

The monotonous drizzle continues on into the night, causing your fire to spit and sizzle. You huddle near it for its meagre warmth, doing your best to ignore the night chill and damp clothes. Conversation is subdued as everyone seems withdrawn or lost in thought.

That night all the characters are plagued with strange and half remembered nightmares pertinent in some way to them. The GM is encouraged to use character histories, back stories or even displayed character traits throughout the adventure. Characters that choose not to sleep, or do not require it (such as any races that do not) are still visited by visions similar to a daydream, though they are less realistic and disturbing than those of the sleepers.

The next day all of the NPCs are unsettled and look tired (dark ringed eyes, pale and drawn looking). If the PCs think to ask, most of the NPCs will admit to sleeping poorly, or having unpleasant dreams. Veiled glances are thrown in the direction of the character carrying the Ring (less subtle in the case of the brothers) but nothing is said, yet.

Day 3 - The Trees are Alive! (EL 2)

An appropriate encounter map - Forest Road - is provided on page 51.

If the party has allowed the psychic mote to remain with them, it flies off early on day 3 to rejoin its colony.

The dismal night gives way to a dismal day. For the third day in a row dirty grey clouds leak a constant drizzle of rain. Wet clothes chafe cold skin, and even those of you used to rough living are beginning to grow weary of the discomfort.

the forest remains thick and dark on either side of the road, and as you pass your tired eyes over your surroundings you realise there is a slow creep of sinister aspects of the trees. At first a few of them seemed twisted and old, then more showed signs of rot and disease, with withered, leafless branches and split trunks. The further you travel, the more twisted and sickly the trees appear. You shake your head to clear it of these strange sights, thinking that it's simply distorted perceptions of a tired mind, but you can't seem to manage. The longer you look, the more unsettling the trees become. By the way the rest of the group appears to be staring and fidgeting, they seem to be having a similar experience. Doubts begin to creep in. Maybe there really is something sinister afoot.

Ahead a large tree overhangs the road with leafless, reaching branches. It is deeply pitted and gnarled, and its split trunk looks like a cavernous maw. A faint glow seems to emanate from within it, but you can't be sure. A low growling sound can be heard just above the drizzling rain.

The tree sits at the road edge, and overhangs almost to the halfway point at a height of 8 feet. Despite the 'evidence' to the contrary the tree is not alive except in the conventional sense. However, it is home to a swarm of 12 psychic motes (the same colony as yesterday's visitor). They are the source of the glow, and their innate buzzing sound is deepened and amplified by the trunk space.

The creature is a Psychic Mote Swarm (new monster – See entry page 49).

Even if If the previous Knowledge (Planes) was unsuccessful, a Psychic Mote Swarm has significantly advanced and differing abilities and should generate a skill check in its own right.

Knowledge (Planes) DC 10: This is a Psychic Mote Swarm, comprised of a concentration of flying diminutive elementals, that is drawn to mental energy and can be fooled by shielding ones thoughts. Psychic Motes Swarms are considerably more dangerous than their individual



component creatures.

Knowledge (Planes) DC 15: This is a Psychic Mote Swarm, comprised of a concentration of flying diminutive elementals, that is drawn to mental energy and can be fooled by shielding ones thoughts. Psychic Motes Swarms are considerably more dangerous than their individual component creatures. They undermine will and concentration in a large area. They can be dispersed by actively concentrating to do so and are immune to poison, stunning, paralysis and sleep. Knowledge (Planes) DC 20: This is a Psychic Mote Swarm, comprised of a concentration of flying diminutive elementals, that is drawn to mental energy and can be fooled by shielding ones thoughts. Psychic Motes Swarms are considerably more dangerous than their individual component creatures. They undermine will and concentration in a large area, and are psychically disruptive to creatures they injure. They can be dispersed by actively concentrating to do so and several creatures can combine their wills to do so. They are immune to

The presence of the Ring has agitated them as it did with the single mote, and they swarm out at the approach or passing of the party. The swarm does not immediately attack, but is clearly agitated, and will move around the Ring bearer for 2 rounds before striking (unless attacked first). Given its speed and fact that it needs no rest, the swarm cannot be outrun.

poison, stunning, paralysis and sleep.

The swarm is a far more dangerous prospect than the single mote, but hopefully the party has learned something from the previous encounter.

If attacked, the swarm will strike its opponents randomly, or by threat assessment, rather than focusing on slaying a single opponent. It will retreat if psychically dispersed or if reduced to 1/3 hp.

For the rest of the journey the party will catch glimpses of individual motes flitting through the trees (or crops or even tents & buildings in the city outskirts) but these will not approach again.

Psychic Mote swarm - 19 Hp

Night 3 - Eyes in the Night

As night falls you pick out a clearing in the twisted forest and set camp. The rain has finally eased and you consider the prospect that you may actually be able to dry yourselves with a fire. The woods are damp, as are all of the fallen branches, but eventually a pitiful spluttering fire is established and the small smoky heat source is welcomed by all.

The insects are more subdued tonight, but there is a rustling in the undergrowth, quick and sharp movements followed by stillness. You spot a set of almost glowing points of light at the edge of camp - a squirrel with the fire reflected in its wide eyes. It sits motionless, intent of the campsite. Suddenly you realise there are more - many more - creatures at the edge of the camp, silently staring in from the darkness.

The camp is surrounded by dozens of creatures; squirrels, mice, rabbits, foxes, a feral dog, owls and other birds. There is no immediate danger, for these creatures are fascinated, similar to the occurrence in day one. It has overridden their standard instincts, including fight/ flight responses. Any can be killed outright if the party so desires, or 'shaken' out of the fascination by physical handling, though the PCs might subject themselves to some bites or scratches as the freed animals react poorly.

That night the characters are all subject to nightmares of eyes in darkness, or being chased or swarmed by small but terrible creatures that tear at their flesh slowly and painfully.

Three nights of poor sleep, two with vivid nightmares, begins to take its toll. Until the Party actually gets some proper, uninterrupted sleep, (or other respite) they all gain the *Fatigued* condition (-2 Str & Dex, no Run or Charge). This is essentially unavoidable while they are in possession of the Ring.

Day 4 (Morning) - Missing

An appropriate encounter map - Forest Camp - is provided on page 52.

You awake to sore muscles and gritty eyes as another nightmare filled night passes. The rain has ceased, but grey skies can be seen through the trees and a heavy humidity hangs in the air. You are barely starting to rouse when a shouted argument and scuffle breaks out in the camp.

In the night one of the NPCs has gone missing and a fight has broken out between two (or more) of the remaining NPCs as to the reasons. The specifics of this encounter are entirely dependent on what remains of the NPC group. The missing person has been taken as a 'warning', so the physically weaker and lighter NPCs will be targeted.

In order, the most desirable kidnap victims are Melissa, James, Lucious or Duran. The brothers don't make for very sympathetic abductees, and the logistics of carrying a powerfully built dwarf are too cumbersome.

Similarly, the remaining NPCs are (under at least some paranoid influence of the Ring) blaming each other for the disappearance. In order the most desirable antagonists are one of the Brothers, Thorgrim, Lucious or Duran (who it turns out has a well hidden spine). The brothers won't fight each other (unless no other NPCs survived this far), and one will support the other who is accused.

If the GM has most or the entire cast to work with, the author recommends Melissa to be abducted, with Lucious and Thorgrim accusing the Brothers of foul play.

Another option could see Lucious lost, and Thorgrim accusing the brothers of 'disposing of an annoyance'.

For something really different, have a secret 'love triangle' situation come to light, with the potentials being the more 'non combat' NPCs at the fore. Possible combinations include: Melissa missing, with James and Lucious at each other's throats. James might be missing and Melissa and Lucious sharpening knives, or James missing and Lucious and Duran facing off.

Remember, no one is really thinking rationally at this point, as the Ring's influence is wearing down everyone's mental resolve. Any combination is possible, and the more illogical and incongruous it seems, the better it may illustrate to the players the severity of the Ring's effect.

In any case, the players can try to defuse the situation with combat, words (Diplomacy or Intimidate DC 15)

or evidence that suggests the victim just wandered off (Survival DC 13 shows a set of boot prints near where the victim was, heading south, though these are lost quickly in the undergrowth). Once the immediacy of the situation is resolved, the involved parties resign themselves to hard stares and occasional mutterings.

There is at this stage little evidence that outside parties may be involved. Thanks to his Favored Terrain class ability, Theric leaves no trail and cannot be tracked in woodland, and he carried his victim once the camp was cleared. The abductee's footprints essentially vanish at a certain point. Clever players may realise that something is not right, but actual evidence is limited. The evidence they do have suggests the abductee wandered off in the direction of the city.

Shouldn't we have seen something?

Most encounters are designed with player interaction in mind, and the opportunity to influence the outcome – this is after all a game not a novel.

Sometimes though, you need to expedite matters for the flow of the adventure, and simply state events as having occurred a particular way.

This should not be overused as nothing alienates players faster than removing their options to act.

The story is best served by retaining the mystery at this point. Strange things are happening, and the players should be kept guessing. Did the NPC wander off, or were they taken? Did they simply vanish?

If a skill check is used - say Perception vs Stealth - a poor roll on behalf of the GM could completely ruin the plot twist. If the GM were to 'fudge' the results to maintain it, the net effect is the same.

If you require a mechanics based justification for this scene, the nightmarish influence of the Ring has dulled everyone's senses and filled them with false input. In addition, Theric is a skilled woodsman despite his mental state, and can cover his movements particularly well in woodlands (Favored Terrain).

In the end, the player characters are not directly harmed by the action, and they do receive a chance to act in both resolving the internal group conflict and regaining the abductee later in the day (next encounter).

Ofcourse, as always, the GM is free to make any changes they feel is appropriate for their game and player group.



Day 4 (Midday) - Scarecrow

The forest ends abruptly, making way for rolling farmland. So abrupt is the change that it's clear the farmland must have been reclaimed at one point by logging efforts. Fields range as far as the eye can see. Far to the east you can make out the outline of the Eternal City, its highest towers scraping the heavy grey clouds that still cover the sky from horizon to horizon. Your

goal is finally in sight, though it's still more than a day away.

The humidity is tangible as you walk down the road. Without the shelter of the trees the air has become hot and unpleasant, alleviated only by a sporadic light breeze. You see the occasional farmhouse or shed visible in the distance, set deeply into the properties you pass. A single forlorn scarecrow guards an overgrown field nearby, its slouched form and frame covered in Ravens that idly peck at their ineffectual nemesis.

The breeze whips up and you smell blood on the wind. A pained groan issues from somewhere nearby. Your tired eyes scan the field. It could be a trick of the breeze, but the scarecrow seems to twitch slightly, its occupants cawing and shifting in annoyance.

The scarecrow is actually the missing NPC, tied to a framework, with the original straw filled occupant strewn at their feet. The ravens have been drawn to the blood and await their carrion to ripen.

On closer examination the NPC is faced toward the road, is only semi conscious, and suffering from a few shallow cuts and abrasions from the rope used to hold them in place. Their clothing is torn and the words "bring it back" carved into their flesh. Several small wounds are apparent where the ravens have pecked. The raven swarm is noncombatant, and can be disbursed in a flurry of feathers and angry cawing. The NPC remembers little of their ordeal, only flashes of memory of being pushed, dragged and carried in the dark, the pain of the incisions in their flesh and being strung up.

Due to this ordeal, until the end of the adventure (unless alleviated through magical means) the NPC is treated as having the exhausted condition (move at half speed, no run or charge, -6 penalty to Str & Dex). Note that unlike the standard exhausted condition, an hour's rest will not alleviate it. The NPC has been pushed to physical and mental breaking point, and cannot 'rest' until the ordeal is over. The slowed movement rate may have an effect on the pace of the party if the GM wishes to prolong the trek, or it could simply be managed by having them ride an animal (some remained in the stables from Chapter 1 - horses & donkeys). If that is not an option and the GM does not wish to extend the journey, adjust the distance accordingly, or rule that the NPC can be 'assisted' by others to maintain a reasonable pace in overland travel, imposing the movement penalty only at the tactical (combat) level.

Any unresolved issues from the confrontation that morning become subdued, but suspicion and resentment remain just below the surface.

Night 4 - Silent Night

After the events of the day you'd think that a little quiet would be pleasant, but as you listlessly prepare the night's camp it seems, dare you think it, too quiet. There are no insects or rustling animals to disturb you, but more than that there are no sounds at all. No breeze, no movement, no rainfall pattering on the fields. The night is just empty, barren, save for the noises you make, which seem jarringly loud in comparison. Your every move and whisper seems to scream into the still night, almost painfully loud against the stark silence. As you bed down for the night amongst the group you have never felt so isolated, so alone. A handful of battered souls against...something... vast and deeply disturbing.

As much as anything else, this night is a reminder that for all the earthly concerns of fatigue, harsh weather and wounds of the flesh that the root cause of their current hardships is something strange and unfathomable. Whatever this Ring is, or what it represents, it is far beyond the experience and resources of a few bedraggled travellers.

This night's sleep is plagued by dreams of vast and cold isolation, deep darkness and endless falling. It leaves the characters with a deep sense of foreboding when they wake the next morning, as if fell and momentous events are coming.

Day 5 - Madness Takes Hold

The clearing rain has given way to hot and humid conditions, as the sun periodically breaks through the clouds to warm the waterlogged fields. Steam rises and the moist air is cloying to breathe. In the open terrain there is little protection, and the heat has become unpleasant enough for your sleep deprived mind to reflect on the rain of the last week favorably, like missing an old friend. Your thoughts wander as you walk, one step after another on blistered feet, toward the hazy form of the city in the distance. Every jarring step brings you slightly closer to succor.

Suddenly <NPC> shrieks and scrambles off the road into a drainage ditch, kneeling in the brackish runoff. He gasps out something barely intelligible. "They are coming. I can see them. I can see them". He draws a knife with a shaking hand and gouges a deep cut in his cheek, blood flowing freely down his face and chest. "I can't take it! I don't want to see them anymore!" and raises the knife with a shaking hand toward his eye.

Any NPC can be chosen, the masculine pronoun (he) is chosen based on the majority of the NPCs being male. If the GM selects Melissa, simply adjust the text. If the GM feels the players may not react swiftly, consider the next actions in respect to using the NPC for the future of the campaign. Unless the party intervenes he proceeds to remove each of his eyes, then runs blind and shrieking off into a field for a few minutes of nonsensical jabbering before finally cutting his own throat with the knife.

The NPC has snapped under the mounting pressure. He may need to be restrained initially while the violent episode passes. The party can attempt to snap him out of it with a sharp blow and the right prompts (Diplomacy, Intimidate or even Bluff DC 14) though the specific words XP 135 are irrelevant. Failure indicates he falls into a catatonic state. He can walk and be led, but will take no actions of his own. The catatonic individual will stare off into space, DEFENSE but occasionally will seem to be looking at and following the character holding the Ring.

In either event, the NPC will not remember the visions that so disturbed him.

Night 5 - Canine Dreams (EL 4)

An appropriate encounter map - Field Clearing - is provided on page 53.

As night falls your bone weary group makes camp in a cleared paddock just off the road. The Eternal City is mere hours away but you can push your battered bodies no further today. There is precious little fuel for a fire, but just as little desire for one as you slump to the ground, bereft of the energy to care where you lay. Sleep takes you almost instantly.

Dark nightmares of hell hounds wrack you, the pack of infernal beasts baying as they hunt you through twisted forests. Their burning eyes follow your every evasion, and every root or branch slows you, the hounds snapping at your heels. Finally you succumb to the chase, and the pack drags you down, tearing at your flesh. The pain is sharp, and you jolt awake. Focusing as best you can, head thick with fatigue, you realise the pain and pressure on your flesh remains, though sleep has fled. Growling and tugging, a live dog, feral and drooling, has you in its jaws. Around the camp your companions are under similar assault.

A pack of half-starved feral dogs has entered the camp, drawn by the scents of blood and fear. Already aggressive, the Ring's influence has driven them to attack. There are two dogs per player character, and 2 more (total) harrying the NPCs. All characters start the combat prone, with the dogs adjacent, but not flanking.

Once the dogs are slain, the party can rest, though their dreams are still plagued with terrifying canine hunters. The continuous assault on their senses, along with the compounding sleep deprivation results in the characters all being treated as having the shaken condition (-2

penalty to attack rolls, saving throws, skill checks and ability checks) until they divest themselves of the ring and are able to sleep and mentally and emotionally recover. This condition is likely to remain for the remainder of the adventure.

Feral dog - 6 Hp

FERAL DOG

CR 1/3 N Small Animal Init +1; Senses Low light vision, scent; Perception +8 AC 13, touch 12, flat-footed 12 (+1 Dex, +1 natural, +1 Size) Hp 6 (1d8+2) Fort +4, Ref +3, Will +1 **OFFENSE** Speed 40ft Melee Bite +2 (1d4+1) STATISTICS Str 13, Dex 13, Con 15, Int 2, Wis 12, Cha 6 Base Atk +0; CMB +0; CMD 11 (15 vs Trip) Feats Skill focus (Perception) Skills Acrobatics +1 (+9 jumping), Perception +8, Survival +1 (+5 scent tracking); Racial Modifiers +4 Acrobatics when jumping, +4 survival when tacking by scent Languages None ECOLOGY **Environment** any Organization solitary, pair, or pack (3-12) Treasure none **Fatigued and Shaken?**

It might seem a little heavy handed to apply two penalizing conditions to a low level party.

The conditions are there to make the players feel vulnerable and a little desperate, and to make the Ring more of a burden than ever.

The one remaining combat encounter is Theric, who is a single opponent for a group of PCs, and the conditions have been accounted for to ensure the combat is balanced.

If you believe two conditions are an excessive penalty, feel free to ignore one or both, and adjust the final encounter accordingly.

Day 6 - Pilgrimage (EL 4)

As you trudge wearily into the outer burg of Pilgrimage, the haphazard tent city that has grown outside the city proper, you feel the weight of eyes on you. The dirty and weathered

denizens watch you with harsh and suspicious glances. Everywhere you look the citizens of the ward stare as you pass, their whispers audible above the street noise. A number of your observers of run off or shy away, but a few begin to shadow your group from side streets to the main boulevard, seen darting in the shadows through the torn and stained canvas dwellings.

Troubleshooting the City

The City provides an uncountable number of possibilities for the PCs, far too many for the GM to control. The adventure to this point has hopefully burdened the PCs with a dangerous item, some dependent NPCs and a worsening mental state that will urge them to take the relatively straightforward path provided to resolution.

But what if they don't? Our advice is to go with it.

They can run and hide, but the presence of the Ring continues to draw an agitated mob and the tents provide no protection. The longer they hold out, the worse it becomes. Eventually they will be cornered, or be forced to start doing desperate things. The Watch will be trying to disperse the crowds, the Guard will seal all the gates as the mob grows and spreads, and Theric will still be hunting them. Even the Seekers and Damien will be on their trail.

All of the elements are still in play, so let them have some rope if they want it, then provide the final confrontation at another location. There are customs stations at all city gates.

The party will find no assistance here. Anyone they approach will shy away or send them on their way with a snarl. If they try to follow or catch their shadow group, they will lost them rapidly in the maze-like alleys. The NPCs will urge to move on to the city proper.

As the crowds begin to thicken around them, a Sense Motive DC 5 will indicate to the characters that the general level of hostility toward them is rising.

At first it might have begun as curiosity, but as the day goes on and you get deeper in to the press of the slum, your trailing group grows, and the mood begins to turn. More of them seem to carry objects that could be improvised weapons, and the whispers become a harsh and angry muttering.

Things are becoming genuinely dangerous for the party now. Any delaying or approach to the gathering mob will result in verbal and physical (though non-lethal) assault as they are met with harsh language and thrown rotting fruit and vegetables (and the odd rock). Bickering may start between the NPCs, but all are in agreement to make for the gates. If the party diverts from the direct course, the NPCs start to break off from the group and make a run for the nearest city gate.

Closer to the city gate, bystanders already line the edge of the boulevard, glaring as you stagger by. Faces in the crowd seem to contort in hatred, and you can't tell if what you are seeing is real or perceptions twisted by the presence of the Ring. By the time the gate is visible the mob follows you at a distance of only a hundred feet or so, and the tension is rising noticeably.

The gate – a massive iron reinforced portal one hundred feet in height - stands closed, shutting you out and dashing any remaining hopes you had. You see guards man the battlements high above. There are about a dozen watchmen at the foot of the great structure, milling around in agitation, gripping weapons and staring at the approaching sea of humanity.

This turned fast!

After carrying the Ring for many days with slowly mounting effects, it might seem surprising to the players that the mob forms so swiftly and is so aggressive.

The Ring essentially fuels existing paranoia and discord, and its influence grows as willpower erodes.

The occupants of Pilgrimage are the poorest, most desperate and despondent of the city's inhabitants. Pilgrimage is a slum town, and the general mood is already paranoid and discordant.

While many of the thousands of people begin to feel the influence, there are several hundred who are already in a state of mind where a small push is all they need to seek violence and retribution against 'their oppressors'

The party have the opportunity to explain or convince the Watch to assist. Almost any explanation will suffice (truth or lie), because the Watch are eager to discover why the mob has formed. The PCs are clearly the focus of the mob's ire, but the reason is not immediately apparent. A Diplomacy DC 5, or Intimidate or Bluff DC 10 will suffice to gain their assistance (or the GM could simply allow the Watch to assist without checks).

Unfortunately for the PCs, the Guard will not open the gates under any circumstance while there is a threat to the city. The mob (and the cause of it) certainly falls into that category. If the Guard learns of the Ring they will refuse the bearer entry. Messages for both Guard reinforcement and to inform the city council and magistrates have been sent. Unbeknownst to all involved, two other interested parties are on their way - both the Seekers and Damien, the former having informants within the Guard, and the latter 'sensing' the approach of the Ring.

Allow the characters to make their case to both the Watch and the Guard, but ultimately before any progress is made, move on to the following;



Watch vs Guard

In this scene, the party is essentially at the mercy of the city Guard, which intends to deny them entry based on the potential threat they seem to be. This will be at odds with the behavior of the Watch, who wish to calm the situation and resolve it.

In the peacekeeping forces of the Eternal City the Watch and the Guard are two separate entities. The Watch is equivalent of police, while the Guard is equivalent of a defensive army. More information on these organizations (among others) can be found in the Campaign Guide.

As you plead your case to the Watch Captain, you can see the nervous looks that his watchmen cast at the crowd, as they grip weapons and shuffle their feet. The tension is palpable, and one spark could ignite a full blown riot. The captain has also reached this conclusion, and he orders his men to form up between you and harm's way. A rock sails in and strikes a watchman in the face, snapping his head back and bloodying his nose. Suddenly the metaphoric damn breaks and with a roar the mob surges forward to engage the watch line, screaming incoherently. Buffeted hard by the press, you are half dragged to the side of the boulevard, rocks and bottles raining down on you. You are hustled into a building, one of the very few solid structures in the burg, the door slammed behind you. Outside you hear the muffled sounds of barked orders and the screams and clashes of combat.

The building the characters are in is a customs station. Right next to the gate, anyone trying to enter the city with banned or suspicious items is directed here to make statements and be assessed for threat or possible fines and/or charges. As a Watch building it is defensible, with barred and shuttered windows and heavy bound doors.

Only one watchman is here with the party, the rest are outside trying to subdue the mob. After barring the front door, the nervous and profusely sweating young man 'sternly' tells the party to sit on the benches and await instructions while he checks the back. That is his final mistake.

You hear glass smash in one of the windows, and the shutters buckle, but hold. There is a hammering on the door, but the heavy portal stands firm. The young watchman with you orders you to remain calm in a tone that is anything but, his voice cracking as he tries to sound authoritative beyond his years. He blushes red and mutters something about checking the back door before heading in that direction. As he opens the partition door the sound of a discharging crossbow is clear, and the boy falls back into the hall, surprised look etched forever on his features and a bolt buried to the fletching in his chest.

Standing in the doorway is the disheveled figure of Theric

the trapper, one of the card players from the inn, lost in the collapse. The last week has not been kind, with torn clothes and several scabbing wounds across his arms and torso. His face is contorted with hatred, and his eyes are unfocused. "Bring it back" he whispers, over and over again. He drops the empty crossbow and draws a long bladed knife. "BRING IT BACK!" he screams and leaps forward to attack.

Theric – 30 Hp (See NPC statblocks at the rear of the book)

Theric is well past the point of reason. His long association with the Ring has resulted in an awed possessiveness of it. He does not want it for himself, but to have it returned to its 'rightful place' within the cavern it was found in. He will focus on the person with the Ring at first, but switch to dangerous opponents as the combat plays out. Theric is not a warrior by nature, but understands tactics enough to select targets. He cares nothing for his own survival, but threats to his chances of returning the Ring must be dealt with. If an opponent goes down, he moves on. Again, his interest is not in killing, but in 'returning the Ring'.

Eventually, one way or another, the combat will draw to a close. Once Theric has been defeated, or (if the dice are cruel) the party is on the verge of defeat, the Seekers arrive to complicate matters.



THERIC



Chapter 4 – Warm Welcome to the Big City

Suddenly, there is a mighty impact on the door to the building, and the portal gives way. A dozen black clad men rush in, spreading out around the room. Dressed in blackened chainmail, they wear black and red tabards openly depicting the pentagram like symbol of Azmodeus, the King of Hell. They carry crossbows, all of which now cover the room's occupants. They call for your surrender.

If Theric remains standing he immediately attacks, only to be brought down by crossbow fire (see sidebar). Similarly, PCs who attack receive the same treatment. If this is not enough to bring antagonists down, the Seekers draw clubs and beat them unconscious. As soon as the party stops resisting, they will stop attacking.

Seekers, Enforcer CR 1/3 XP 135 Human, Male, Warrior 2 Init +0; Senses Perception +2 DEFENSE AC 16, touch 10, flat-footed 16 (+6 armour) Hp 14 (2d10+3)

Fort +3, Ref +0, Will +1 **OFFENSE** Speed 20 ft. Melee heavy mace +4 (1d8+1 / x2) or Sap +3 (1d6+1 nonlethal) Ranged light crossbow +2 (1d8* 19-20/x2) *Bluntbolts half lethal, half nonlethal STATISTICS Str 13, Dex 11, Con 10, Int 8, Wis 12, Cha 11 Base Atk +2, CMB +3, CMD 13 Feats Toughness, Weapon Focus (Heavy mace) Skills Intimidate +4, Perception +2 Language Common Combat gear Heavy mace, Sap, Light crossbow, 20 bluntbolts Other Gear Chainmail armour TACTICS During Combat Seekers will try to subdue opponents with nonlethal force first, resorting to lethal only if necessary. Morale The Seekers will fight until reaching 1/4 hp, and then they will seek to flee or surrender.

Through the open door the party can see that there is still some activity outside. The mob has been driven back and at least partially dispersed, but not entirely, and groups of watchmen and more black clad figures continue to push back particularly fractious knots of rioters. It's controlled for now, but not over by any measure.

Seeker Bluntbolts

The seekers are ruthless in their pursuit of their goals, but generally are not lethal in their actions.

Aside from the fact that killing is unlawful in most places, living prisoners are a better source of information than dead ones.

To that effect, the Seekers have developed Bluntbolts, which are essentially 'blunt' crossbow bolts.

Despite sound engineering, they are less aerodynamic than normal bolts, having a range increment of ½ standard for the type of weapon. They are B type instead of P, and damage dealt is split evenly half lethal and half non lethal (if uneven, the extra point is non lethal).

The rest of the scene cannot be strictly scripted, and falls to the GM to manage. Most players will likely find the idea of surrendering somewhat galling, and may resent the introduction of overwhelming odds at the adventure climax. This is not intended to be a combat encounter, but a negotiation, and should be conveyed as such. The PCs want to get rid of the Ring, and the Seekers want it, but neither side is likely to trust or respect the other, and no doubt the players will have reservations about giving the Ring to an organization that openly displays the symbol of an evil deity (and rightly so). Luckily, another individual has arrived to offer options.

Once the potential for combat is resolved, one of the seekers will yell that it is 'clear' and their commander will enter, a soldier is similar garb to the others, mid 30's, handsome, blonde, arrogant. This is Captain Triast, a noble scion and rising star in the seekers.

The man that enters next is tall and broad, garbed in the same black chainmail and tabard as the rest of the group, but has a massive axe slung at his side, and you hear one of the others refer to him as 'Captain Triast' as they salute He is in his mid thirties, blonde and handsome.

"Well, what do we have here?" he muses as he looks you over, clearly rhetorical "Looks about right, weeds and chaff, though I do see the odd flower", leering at <any attractive character or NPC>. "Let me guess. You found some kind of odd artifact, and now everyone and everything is out to get you?"

The simplistic summation of your trials over the last week is galling, made more so because it is an essentially correct, if incredibly patronizing, description of your situation.



TRIAST

"You peasants are out of your depth. We, on the other hand, specialize in this sort of thing. I strongly urge you to turn over to item to us, and we will ensure it is properly managed."

The way he says 'strongly urge' has a vague menace of threat behind it, though he doesn't threaten specifically.

As you are contemplating an appropriate response, there is an interruption as another man pushes past the black clad soldiers. He is also in his thirties, but more haggard looking, with grey shot through his black hair. He wears plain clothes and a voluminous travelling cloak. He seems normal enough, and his presence clearly irritates the Captain of the Azmodeans.

"Browbeating these poor travelers Triast? That seems about right. You know I saw a sack of kittens outside, are you off to the well next?"

"Hilarious, old man. I don't know how you got here so fast, but the council 'Inks' can't be far behind. Better make your pitch quickly, or they will just hand it over to me!"

"Old?" says the new comer in mock indignation, "We're of an age you and I, but time rests lightly on those bereft of wit. In this case you aren't wrong, sadly. Now get out so I can explain just how deep the water is to these poor souls without you hovering like a ravenous wolf".
Triast grimaces, but takes his leave, the black soldiers following, though only as far as the door. Clearly you aren't going anywhere until this is resolved. The weathered man wanders over and takes a seat on a vacant bench, drawing a flask from his cloak and taking a long pull.

"Well, my name is Damien, though I guess 'old man' is probably an accurate description these days", he says finally, all traces of banter gone and a serious expression on his craggy features. "I don't think you need me to tell you that you are in deep trouble here. Drink?" he asks, offering the flask.



DAMIEN

Damien actually knows more than any living soul about what the PCs are facing, and what it means. However, for both his own reasons, and for the sake of the characters - who at this stage are simply 'in the wrong place at the wrong time' - he will put a limit on what he is willing to share.

Read or paraphrase the following in response to Player questions:

What is this thing? What does it do?

The object you have is part of a greater collection of such

objects, that we suspect have been tainted by a great evil. They are all different, and appear to have no specific function in and of themselves, but spread discord and misery wherever they are found.

Where does it come from? What Evil?

There is much we just don't know about these objects. Their origin is shrouded in mystery. We know they come in various shapes and forms, but their source is unknown. (This is a massive evasion on his part. Damien knows a lot more about the objects, though nothing he has said is specifically untrue).

How do you know we have one?

This isn't the time to play games. The evidence is clear for those with the wit to see it. The nightmares, visions and agitation of creatures around you are all common signs. You all reek of its influence.

How do YOU know about it? Who are you?

A number of groups know about them. This is not the first such object to show up in the city, nor will it be the last. There are several others that have appeared over the last thirty or so years. I am considered something of an expert due to my experience with such things. As much as I'd prefer it otherwise I have seen a number of these over the years.

As for myself, I am a scholar, alchemist and occasional merchant. I was heir to a merchant empire long ago, but it is no more.

Who are the guys in black? Why are they involved?

They are the Seekers of Azmodeus to their faces, or the Reapers behind their back, though I expect they themselves started the nickname and secretly encourage its use. They are a militant organization dedicated to the purpose of collecting what is legally owed to Azmodeus. They are essentially debt collectors. They work within the Law, but almost always find ways to manipulate it to their favour. You'll notice they carry blunted weapons, but can be quick to bloodshed if legally sanctioned. They walk a fine line, and they are very good at it.

As to why they are involved I am not sure. These artifacts bear no connection to Azmodeus that I am aware of, but the Seekers have managed to convince someone high up in the ruling council of the city that they have legitimate business with them. To that end they have currently been given temporary 'peacekeeping' powers, and essentially in matters of these items have similar authority to the Watch.

Why would the Seekers let you mediate if you don't see eye to eye?

They don't have a lot of choice really. They walk a fine line but they can't stop us talking. Plus they know me well enough to know I'll present all your options to you, including them. Finally, there's the politics. They don't want to alienate me further at this point. I still have enough pull to make trouble for them. It won't last of course. Once I no longer represent a political power I imagine they will become far less cordial. I may even wind up on the end of an 'accident' myself. But that's neither here nor there at the moment. We have far more pressing matters.

Who are the Council? Who are the Inks?

The council rules the city, more or less. They are the leaders or representatives of the various guilds that serve as the city administration and functional services. But this is not time for a lesson in politics. The critical issue here is they have final say in all matters pertaining to the city. The Inks are the council's functionaries. Their official title is Arbiter, but they are called Inks because they are bureaucrats and paper pushers, and in particular the lower ranked members are often seen with constantly ink stained fingers. It's a hazard of the job I'm told.

Why are the Inks turning up an issue?

In the short term it's a problem for you. In the long term it's a problem for us all. The Seekers have favour right now, and the unrest being caused by the appearance of these objects is legitimizing it. Currently the council's collective thinking is to let the Azmodeans 'deal with it', but as their connection or endgame is not public knowledge I have concerns about the long term consequences of that particular policy. In the short term, if the Inks arrive before you make a decision they will likely issue you with a formal writ, denying you entry into the city unless you give the item to the Seekers. You may well choose to do it anyway, but once they arrive your options will be removed.

So we have a choice? Why leave it up to us?

are limited. As the origin of the objects is a mystery, there is no true ownership established. Technically, by city law, if you possess it you are the current owners. This is why the Seekers can't take it by force - it would be theft. If you further though. give it up willingly, it's theirs.

What are our options?

As I see it, you have 5 options, though some are less appealing than others;

1) You could keep the object, but if your appearance, and the civil disturbance outside, is anything to go by you have no way of managing it or protecting yourselves. It is also highly unlikely you'd be allowed into the city in this case.

2) You can leave and try to find another option elsewhere, but as with your first choice, I'm not sure you'd survive the journey. If the object itself didn't cause or contribute to your demise, I'm almost sure you'd meet with an 'unfortunate accident'.

3) You can give it to the Seekers. For all their questionable motives, they have proven capable of managing at least one other similar object that I am aware of. In the short term it would solve your problem.

4) You can find another party to take it, but again, you'd have to find someone who would want it, and could safely contain it, or what you see out there (gesturing to the shanty town outside) will continue. There are plenty who might want it, but few that could contain it, and even fewer that can be trusted. In my experience those with power rarely have moral clarity. The only group in the city I can think of that could manage it and be trusted is the Healing Hands - but I know they won't want it, so you'd have to be incredibly convincing.

5) You could keep it and put it in the Vault. The Vault is located in the city's treasury, and contains a set of powerfully warded safes for hire. Anyone with anything vastly dangerous or expensive tends to commit it to the vault. The security there is unlike anything seen anywhere else on this world. That being said it is ruinously expensive, and may not actually contain the object's influence long term.

What has been done with the 'other' objects like this one?

There are a total of three that I know of for sure. The Seekers have at least one, possibly more. How they contain it I do not know. A second one is rumoured to be in the city, magically contained somehow. It's exact location and containment is fuel for much speculation. The third was here at one time, but its whereabouts has been lost. It could be gone. It could be the very one you carry.

You have a choice for now, though I suspect your options Damien is closest to lying with this answer. The second object is subject to rumour, but Damien actually knows where it is and how it's contained because he himself contained it. He is not willing to discuss the details

Don't you want it? Why are you assisting us? What's in it for you?

Heavens no - I don't want it and would not try to talk you into giving it to me. A man can bear only so many burdens, and I have more than my share already. Not everyone has an agenda, though most do and I encourage you to be suspicious. I assist you because I care for this city and its people. My family was once a great contributor to it, and played the game of politics. Though that is long gone, I am still a patriot and a believer that this city can reclaim its glory days. Some of us just want what's best for the city. That being said, my star (if I ever had one) is on the decline and the Seekers are on the rise. Soon few will

listen to me, or my advice I suspect.

Who are the Healing Hands?

The Healing Hands are an order of adepts and mystics dedicated to help and healing, and they work out of the Sanitarium, a large hospice in the city. They have few true clerics, but they have mastered some healing magic. In my opinion they lack any ambition beyond the common good, and they manage maladies of the mind as well as flesh. If anyone in the city might be preferable to the Seekers, it would be them. However, they will not willingly take on the burden of an object that causes or contributes to madness and psychological instability. Convincing them would be a significant task.

Tell us more about the Vault?

Are you perhaps secretly wealthy? If not then there isn't much to say. Leasing a small magically warded safe would run about 1000gp per week, maybe more. The wards act to both strengthen the physical aspects of the vault, and defend against magic, such as divination or magical transport. If anywhere in the city is 'safe' to hold this object, it would be there. It is run by the Golden Guild, essentially the noble's guild. No surprise as I suspect they have the most to hide.

Resolution - Making the Choice

The party may chose any of the options suggested by Damien, or somehow come up with another viable option. Whatever resolution they chose effectively ends the adventure for them.

If the PCs wait for the city representatives, they get the decision Damien predicted. Give up the Ring to the Seekers or leave the city. Once any official writ is issued, the Watch escort the party from the city if they fail to abide by it, regardless of any sympathies they may have.

If they choose to give it to the Seekers, the smug Captain Triast takes the Ring. He will also try to take Theric (or his body) into custody (for questioning or evidence), regardless of the final fate of the Ring. If Theric is still alive the PCs could successfully argue he should be turned over to the Healing Hands for care rather than the judiciary as he is a victim of the Ring as much as anyone. Voicing such an argument in public will succeed, but will earn Triast's ire.

Damien convinces the Captain to give up Theric's possessions to the party as compensation for 'adverse actions and injury'. Triast has no interest in a peasant's possessions, and is unwilling to test his authority over trinkets.

If the PCs choose to try to convince the Healing Hands to take custody of the Ring, the group will send a representative group to meet with the PCs (a 3rd level Adept and 5 1st level Adepts). A Diplomacy check at DC 15 would be convincing enough for them to try (and award up to a +2 bonus if the players make a good verbal pitch), but they will add the caveat that if they are unable to successfully contain the Ring they will turn it over to the Seekers. A 'Blessed' (as per the spell) customs box and the collective will of the mystics allow a temporary reprieve to get the Ring through the city to the Sanitarium. A failed check means that the party will have to promise to assist in offsetting the costs of managing the box, to the tune of 500gp per week, and volunteer at several of the charity locations they run around the city (soup kitchens, halfway houses, free clinics etc). They will also add the above caveat of surrendering it to the Seekers if it becomes untenable. If Theric is still alive they would be willing to take him as a patient in the hospice, as they will with any NPCs suffering injury or ongoing effects (such as catatonia, or lacking eyes, for example).

If the PCs choose to store the Ring in the Vault, they still cannot enter the city with it. A Vault official (3rd level Adept) and 'heavy' escort (20 riders in gilded full plate) arrive at the customs station, with a heavily warded 'portable' carrier. The official assesses the object (mostly by size, weight and magical aura). The Fee is 1000gp per week, payable upfront, no negotiation. The PCs are to pay on the first day of each week or remove the contents. If not removed within 24 hours of default, they forfeit the contents of the safe. A contract is drawn up on the spot, signed by all and copies distributed to all. The Ring is then taken to the Vault for safekeeping.

The PCs can venture any other viable option for the Ring, but remember that while it is causing problems (essentially without containment) they will be denied entry to the city. It is up to the GM to determine the viability of such options.

Conclusion

Once the Ring is contained (one way or another) its influence will fade, and the paranoia and agitation felt by the PCs, NPCs and the citizens of Pilgrimage will rapidly diminish. The event will, however, become fuel for rumour and tavern tales for some time to come.

With the matter resolved, the party will be free of the Ring, and should be free to enter the city – unless they committed any crimes in the last scene, in which case they may be arrested and charged, though lenience will likely be granted based on circumstances (i.e. under an evil, magical influence). Damien and the Seekers will drift away to their own interests.

Any surviving NPCs should be dealt with at the GMs discretion. Depending on circumstances and player choices, the characters may have forged lasting friendships or bonds of debt, or created implacable enemies for the future.

Story Award – award the PCs 100xp for every NPC brought intact to the city. NPCs killed, lost, blinded (or otherwise self-mutilated), catatonic, or fought do not count toward this total (those fought are treated as a combat encounter and XP is awarded normally). Additionally, the characters earn story XP based on the final resolution with the Ring;

- Give the Ring to the Seekers 200xp
- Store the Ring in the Vault 400xp
- Convince the Healing Hands to take it 600xp

• Any other viable option – between 200xp-500xp at GMs discretion.

At the end of the adventure, the characters should have earned enough experience to reach 2nd level.

If this adventure is run as part of the What Lies Beyond Reason epic adventure, the character's journey is just beginning.

NPC Capsules

The Innkeeper (Bob) has been built with 3 points and adjusted to old age. All other NPCs (PC class or NPC class) have been built with 15 points (equivalent to fantasy standards). This is because they are potentially all campaign spanning characters, allies or enemies, and should they advance in the future they should be reflective of useful or challenging standard.

All NPCs that are trapped in the caves have certain skills reflected at untrained base values (Acrobatics, Climb & Swim) if they have not allocated points as they will almost certainly be called on to use the skills untrained.

Readers will also notice that the NPCs have not been given alignments. This serves two purposes; firstly to allow the GM to make them 'their own' and secondly the flexibility for the NPCs to become whatever the campaign requires (cohorts, allies, acquaintances, villains) based on the events of the adventure. If the GM needs for some reason assign an alignment before the end of the adventure, assume all are Neutral, except Melissa is Neutral Good and the Brothers Neutral Evil. Yes, even Theric is Neutral. By the time the party encounters him on the journey he will be Neutral Evil by virtue of his insanity. At the end of the adventure any surviving NPCs should be given an alignment by the GM appropriate to future uses.

Bob, Innkeeper

CR 1/3

XP 135 Human, male, old, commoner 1 **Init** +0; Senses Perception +7 DEFENSE AC 10, touch 10, flat-footed 10 Hp 3 (1d6) Fort +0, Ref +0, Will +1 **OFFENSE** Speed 30 ft. Melee club -1 (1d4-1) or dagger -1 (1d4-1/19-20) **Ranged** by weapon thrown +0 (1d4-1) STATISTICS Str 9, Dex 10, Con 9, Int 12, Wis 12, **Cha** 12 Base Atk +0, CMB +0, CMD 10 Feats Alertness, Skill focus (Bluff) Skills Bluff +5, Perception +7, Profession (Innkeeper) +5, Sense Motive +4 Language Common, Dwarven Combat gear none Other Gear dishrag, bottle, dagger Bob TACTICS

During Combat Bob is offensive, abrasive and

unpleasant, but if threatened in any way plays the 'feeble old man' card, trying to seem helpless. If the opportunity presents itself he will strike an opponent in the back, but if they are not incapacitated immediately he will try to surrender, or escape if that is possible.

Morale Any damage causes Bob to fall to his knees and beg for mercy.

Social Likes – none, Dislikes – everything & everyone (-2 to social interactions)

Melissa, Barmaid

XP 270 Human, female, commoner 2 Init +1; Senses Perception +0 DEFENSE AC 11, touch 11, flat-footed 10 (+1 dex) **Hp** 10 (2d6+4) 5 (+2 non lethal) after fall Fort +2, Ref +1, Will +2 OFFENSE Speed 30 ft. Melee by weapon +1 (as per item) Ranged by weapon thrown +2 (as per item) STATISTICS Str 12, Dex 13, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 15 Base Atk +1, CMB +1, CMD 12 Feats Iron will, Skill Focus (Diplomacy) Skills Acrobatics +1, Climb +5, Craft: weaving +4, Diplomacy +6, Profession (Barmaid) +4, Swim +5 Language Common Combat gear none Other Gear nothing at all TACTICS

During Combat Melissa is young and naive in some ways, but grew up on a farm, and has worked hard since she was a child. She has seen animals slaughtered and does not shy away at difficult tasks. She will fight if she must.

Morale At less than $\frac{1}{2}$ hp she will try to surrender or run. **Social** Likes – stories of places & people, future hopes (+2 to social interactions), Dislikes – violence, arrogance (-2 to social interactions).

Duran, Merchant XP 270 Human, Male, Middle aged, Expert 2 Init +0; Senses Perception +7 DEFENSE AC 10, touch 10, flat-footed 10 Hp 12 (2d8+4) 7 (+3 non lethal) after fall Fort +1, Ref +0, Will +5 OFFENSE Speed 30 ft.



CR 2/3

CR 2/3

Melee light mace +1 (1d6 / x2) **Ranged** by weapon +0 (as per item) STATISTICS

Str 11, Dex 10, Con 13, Int 15, Wis 15, Cha 13 Base Atk +1, CMB +1, CMD 11

Feats Skill focus (Sense motive), Skill Focus (Bluff) **Skills** Acrobatics +0, Appraise +7, Bluff +9, Climb +0, Diplomacy +6, Profession (Merchant) +7, Knowledge (Local) +7, Knowledge (Nobility) +7, Perception +7, Ride +5, Sense motive +10, Swim +0

Language Common, Dwarven, Orcish

Combat gear light mace, light crossbow (broken, in fall), 12 bolts (lost in fall)

Other Gear money pouch (33gp, 16sp, 25cp), packs lost in Inn collapse

TACTICS

During Combat Duran is a merchant, and will seek to negotiate or bribe rather than fight, but has had on occasion the need to defend a shipment or wagon and will fight if he must. **Morale** At less than ½ hp he will try to surrender or run.



Social Likes – enquiries about trade opportunities, departures and

destinations (+2 to social interactions),

Dislikes – questions about his specific cargo (-2 to social interactions).

Special – Duran has very little with him. Trapped in the collapsed tavern are his travel packs, and these contain 400gp in spices, cloth, incense and perfume.

James, Merchant Apprentice

CR 2/3

XP 270 Human, Male, Commoner 1/Expert 1 Init +1; Senses Perception +0 DEFENSE AC 11, touch 11, flat-footed 10 (+1 dex) Hp 11 (1d8+2/1d6+2) 8 (+2 non lethal) after fall Fort +2, Ref +1, Will +2 OFFENSE Speed 30 ft. Melee dagger +1 (1d4 19-20/x2) Ranged by weapon +2 (as per item) STATISTICS Str 13, Dex 12, Con 14, Int 14,

Wis 10, Cha 12 Base Atk +0, CMB +1, CMD 12 Feats Skill Focus (Appraise), Skill Focus (Handle Animal) Skills Acrobatics +1, Appraise +9, Bluff +5, Climb +6, Diplomacy +5, Handle Animal +8, Profession (Merchant) +6, Knowledge (Local) +6, Knowledge (Geography) +6, Perception +4, Ride +5, Swim +6



Language Common, Dwarven, Orcish Combat gear dagger

Other Gear nothing at all – packs lost in Inn collapse (see Duran Special above) TACTICS

During Combat James is young, fit and surprisingly tough from his labours, but is not particularly brave. He will fight only as a last resort, after talking or running. **Morale** At less than ¹/₂ hp he will try to surrender and beg

for mercy. **Social** Likes – being treated as important and/or knowledgeable (+2 to social interactions), Dislikes – being ignored in favour of Duran (-2 to social interactions).

Lucious Thannillar, Bard CR 1/2 XP 400 Human, Male, Bard 1 Init +6; Senses Perception +5 DEFENSE AC 12, touch 12, flat-footed 10 (+2 dex) Hp 5 (1d8) 5 (+0 non lethal) after fall (assume successful acrobatics to avoid damage) Fort +0, Ref +4, Will +2 **OFFENSE** Speed 30 ft. Melee rapier +2 (1d6 18-20/x2) **Ranged** dagger +2 (1d6 19-20/x2) Special Attacks Bardic performance (7 rounds/day): Countersong, Distraction, Fascinate, Inspire Courage +1. Bard Spells Known (CL 1st; concentration +4) 1st (2) - Charm person, Hideous laughter 0th (at will) - Dancing lights, Detect magic, Ghost sound, Mage hand STATISTICS Str 10, Dex 14, Con 10, Int 14, Wis 10, Cha 16 Base Atk +0, CMB +0, CMD 12 Feats Improved initiative, weapon finesse

Skills Acrobatics +6, Bluff +6, Climb +4, Diplomacy +6, Disguise +6, Knowledge (Nobility) +6, Perception +5, Perform: String +7, Perform: Sing +7, Sleight of Hand +6, Stealth +6, Swim +0

Language Common, Elvish, Orcish, **SQ** Favoured class (bard +1 skill point/level),

Combat gear rapier, dagger **Other Gear** masterwork lute, money pouch (23gp, 21sp, 21cp) TACTICS

During Combat While preferring negotiation to combat, lucious can fight, using his rapier in melee, and throwing his dagger if required

Morale he will fight until 1/4 hp, then will try to flee. **Social** Likes – music (particularly his own), culture, cities and nobility (+2 to social interactions), Dislikes –



criticism, mocking, uncultured behaviour (-2 to social interactions).

CR1

Rufus

Rufus & Faldor, Mercenaries XP 400

Human, Male, Fighter 2 Init +2; Senses Perception +0 DEFENSE

AC 14, touch 12, flat-footed 12 (+2 armour, +2 dex)

Hp 16 (2d10+4) 12(+4 non lethal)/13(+5 non lethal) after fall respectively Fort +5, Ref +2, Will +0 (+1 vs Fear) OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.

Melee longsword +6 (1d8+3 19-20/x2)

or Power Attack w/longsword +5 (1d8+5 19-20/x2), Ranged dagger +4 (1d4+3 19-20/x2) / javelin +4 (1d6+3 x2)

STATISTICS

Str 16, **Dex** 14, **Con** 14, **Int** 10, **Wis** 10, **Cha** 10 **Base Atk** +2, **CMB** +5, **CMD** 15

Feats Cleave, Endurance, Power attack, Weapon focus (longsword)

Skills Acrobatics +2, Climb +7, Intimidate +4, Ride +6, Swim +7

Language Common,

SQ Favoured class (fighter +1 hp point/level), Bravery +1 **Combat gear** Longsword, dagger, javelin (rufus only), **Other Gear** leather armour, money pouch (10gp, 3sp, 7cp) & (6gp, 13sp, 16cp)

TACTICS

During Combat The brothers love a scrap, and fight together ensuring they try to take advantage of flanking opponents for maximum advantage.

Morale The brothers will fight until one reaches 1/4 hp, and then they will seek to flee. If both cannot escape, or one is cut down they will fight to the death.

Social Likes – war stories, winning at poker, discussions about women or the 'assets' of the barmaid (+2 to social interactions), Dislikes – both will react negatively unless they are treated as the most 'important' people in the

room (-2 to social interactions). **Special** – The Brothers are a dangerous set of opponents for a low level party, and designed that way to ensure they are seen as a credible threat for various potential set ups throughout the module. For the purposes of build, both brothers had shields at the inn, though neither survived the collapse.



Faldor

Thorgrim Shatterstone, Cleric CR 1/2 XP 400 Dwarf, Male, Cleric 1 Init +0; Senses Perception +3 DEFENSE AC 16, touch 10, flat-footed 16 (+6 armour) Hp 11 (1d8+3) 8 (+3 non lethal) after fall Fort +5, Ref +0, Will +4 OFFENSE Speed 20 ft. Melee *large* war hammer +0 (2d6+3 / x3) Ranged none Special Attacks Channel positive energy 3/day (DC 11, 1d6) **Domain Spell-Like Abilities** metal fist 5/day (1d6+2, ignore 10 hardness), artificer's touch 5/day (1d6 touch to objects/constructs, bypass 2 hardness). Cleric Spells Prepared (CL 1st; concentration +4, spontaneous casting; Cure) 1st - Command, Sanctuary, Magic StoneD 0th (at will) – Detect magic, Light, Stabilize D domain spell; Domains Artifice, Metal (Earth) STATISTICS Str 14, Dex 10, Con 16, Int 10, Wis 15, Cha 10 Base Atk +0, CMB +2, CMD 12 Feats Toughness Skills Acrobatics +0(-5)*, Climb +2(-3)*, Craft: Weaponsmith +3, Heal +6, Knowledge (Religion) +4, Swim +2(-3)* * Denotes skill after armour check penalty Language Dwarven, Common SQ Aura, dwarf traits, Domains: Artifice, Metal (Earth), favoured class (cleric +1 skill point/level) Combat gear large war hammer, Chainmail (worn) Other Gear holy symbol + basic spell components, healer's kit (10 uses), pipe (but no tobacco), money pouch (18gp, 12sp, 14cp) SPECIAL ABILITIES Cleric Abilities: Thorgrim follows a dwarven god of forge and craft, which has a favoured weapon of war hammer, and the Artifice and Metal (sub-domain of Earth) domains. Metal Fist (Su): As a swift action, you Thorgrim can turn your fists into metal for 1 round, allowing you to make unarmed strikes that deal 1d6 points of bludgeoning damage plus your

Strength modifier. These unarmed strikes do not provoke attacks of opportunity, but attacking with both uses the two-weapon fighting rules as normal. In addition, these unarmed strikes ignore the hardness of items with a hardness of 10 or less. You can use this ability a number of times per day equal to 3 + your Wisdom modifier. **Artificer's Touch (Sp)**: You can cast mending at will, using your cleric level as the caster level to repair

42

damaged objects. In addition, you can cause damage to objects and construct creatures by striking them with a melee touch attack. Objects and constructs take 1d6 points of damage +1 for every two cleric levels you possess. This attack bypasses an amount of damage reduction and hardness equal to your cleric level. You can use this ability a number of times per day equal to 3 + your Wisdom modifier.

TACTICS

During Combat No stranger to combat, Thorgrim cracks skulls first, then patches up the wounded after. Morale Thorgrim is tough and proud, and will not surrender or flee.

Social Likes - dwarf culture, metalwork, books & learning (+2 to social interactions), Dislikes - crass behaviour, being bothered without cause (-2 to social interactions).

Special notes: Thorgim has some of the most useful abilities to the party. Aside from being no slouch in a fight, he has access to healing magic, some useful utility magic, his Heal skill (which can be used to treat wounds) and in his two domain abilities would be useful for bypassing certain obstacles (the well cover in particular) and/or mending broken items. To offset his particular usefulness he has terrible Acrobatics, Climb and Swim skills. Thorgrim also wears chainmail armour, further penalising his physical skills. A Diplomacy check at DC 13 (Indifferent, simple request, +2 Wisdom bonus – as it's a wise idea) will convince him to temporarily remove the chainmail, reducing his AC to 10 and removing the armour check penalty. This can be rechecked every time he fails a physical skill roll, and eventually (5 physical skill roll fails) his sense will overcome his stubbornness and he'll remove it unrequested. An Intimidate check will get the same result, but likely not endear him to the characters going forward.

Barrat, Gambler

CR4

Barrat

XP 1200

Human, Male, Rogue 5 Init +7; Senses Perception +8 (+10 to detect Traps)

DEFENSE AC 13, touch 13, flat-footed 10 (+3 dex, uncanny dodge cannot be flatfooted)

Hp 32 (5d8+10) 32 (+0 non lethal) after fall (assume successful acrobatics to avoid damage)

Fort +3, Ref +7, Will +1 (Trapsense +1 Ref/AC vs Traps), Evasion

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.

Melee +1 dagger +7 (1d4+1 19-20/x2), sneak attack +3d6 **Ranged** dagger +6 (1d4 19-20/x2)

STATISTICS

below)

Base Atk +3, CMB +3, CMD 16

Feats Improved Initiative, Skill Focus (Bluff), Skill Focus (Sleight of Hand), Weapon Finesse.

Skills Acrobatics +11, Appraise +6, Bluff +12, Climb +8, Diplomacy +6, Disable Device +11 (+13 traps), Escape Artist +8, Knowledge (Local) +10, Perception +8 (+10 traps), Sense Motive +5, Sleight of Hand +14, Stealth +11, Swim +8, and Use Magic Device +6 Language Common, elvish

SQ Favoured class (rogue +1 skill point/level), Trapfinding, Trapsense (+1 Ref/AC vs traps), Evasion, Rogue Talents; Fast Fingers (2/day roll twice on Sleight of Hand and take better result), Wall Scramble (roll twice on Climb checks and take better result) Combat gear +1 dagger*, dagger*

Other Gear deck of cards*, money pouch

(13gp, 26sp, 11cp)*

* The combat gear and other gear appear in Theric's statblock. These are only in Theric's possession after escaping from the caverns. If for some reason these are lost beforehand, remove them from Theric's statblock. SPECIAL ABILITIES

Rogue Talent - Fast Fingers: Once per day, a rogue with this talent can roll two dice while making a Sleight of Hand check and take the better result. She must choose to use this talent before making the Sleight of Hand check. A rogue can use this ability one additional time per day for every 5 rogue levels she possesses.

Rogue Talent - Wall Scramble (Ex): A rogue with this talent rolls twice when making Climb checks and takes the better of the two rolls. If she already rolls twice while making a Climb check because of another ability or effect, she gains a +2 insight bonus on both of those rolls instead. If the rogue is under the effect of a spell or ability that forces her to roll two dice and take the worse result, she only needs to roll 1d20 while making Climb checks. TACTICS

During Combat Barrat has a pathological fear of combat, and will try to avoid it with diplomacy, or by fleeing (or surrendering)

Morale If combat is unavoidable Barrat will fight like a berserker to survive.

Social Likes - light hearted conversation, clever or witty people, carefree attitudes (+2 to social interactions), Dislikes - discussions on age, history, or his plans, purpose or travel origin or destination (-2 to social interactions).

Special - Barrat is effectively immortal, and is over 300 years old. He has the 15 point starting statistics, but has not had these modified by age. Why? Physically he has not aged, so he has not lost physical statistics, but his connection to the Ring has not allowed him to grow and gain experience and wisdom. Constantly battling the Str 10, Dex 16, Con 14, Int 12, Wis 10, Cha 12 (See Special Ring's influence has stunted his ability to 'move on' and

43

extract anything meaningful from his extra years, hence no increase in statistics, or new levels earned in that time.

Motivations - Unlike the rest of the cast, Barret is not simply at the wrong place at the wrong time. His full detailed history will be revealed later in the 'What Lies Beyond Reason' epic adventure, but for now the GM needs to know that he is an unwilling immortal metaphysically tied to the Ring by accident. Sworn to guard it, he cannot bear the ring, but he cannot bring himself to completely abandon it, and the last 300 years have not been kind. Already possessed of a less than reliable character, the ring has worn him down to a shell of a man, though he hides it well under a charming and witty facade. He cannot die. Every time he is brought to physical death (wounds, drowning etc) he will eventually rise again (2d6 days) fully healed. During this 'dead' period, he is subject to excruciating mental torture, and thus avoids combat (and other lethal dangers) at all costs. Beyond all hope, he wastes his days in endless pursuit of shallow pleasures (gambling, women, drink etc), circling back to check on the Ring periodically, and whatever current possessors are up to. He has simply lost all empathy for people, no longer trying to warn them or limit interactions with the artefact. He is no longer a guard, he is a prisoner. However, as he is tied to the Ring he can 'feel' it being called back to the machine, and is in the vicinity when the events of the adventure occur. During the first part of the adventure he will do his part, so he doesn't spend eternity in the caves, or die in the process, but will only do as asked (never volunteering) and nothing that will risk himself (ie he will never go first into an obstacle or fight). He will even go so far as to feign incompetence (using Bluff) on most tasks, yet somehow always seem to do just enough to save himself. His high skills and rogue talents ensure he can manage the cave system with little difficulty. He will never discuss the Ring, its history or his connection to it, even if somehow discovered for what he is.

Once the surface is reached, Barret does not want to travel with the Ring. He will seek to go north, though Theric has other ideas. Secretly Theric will kill Barret on the road an hour or two to the north of the collapsed inn. Barret spends the rest of the adventure 'dead', only to return again in 2d6 days. If Difficult Circumstances is being played as part of the 'What Lies Beyond Reason' enic adventure, the p

the 'What Lies Beyond Reason' epic adventure, the player ranger, but his bow was broken in the Inn collapse. characters will see Barret again. With no time to fix it or procure another he will rese

Theric, Ranger XP 800

Human, Male, Middle age, Ranger 4

Init +7 (+9 in forest); Senses Perception +8 (+10 in forest) DEFENSE

AC 15, touch 13, flat-footed 12 (+2 armour, +3 dex) Hp 34 (4d10+12) 30 after Inn collapse **Fort** +5, **Ref** +7, **Will** +2 OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.

Melee +1 dagger +8 (1d4+2 19-20/x2), vs humans +10 (1d4+4 19-20/x2)

Ranged dagger +7 (1d4+1 19-20/x2), vs humans +9 (1d4+3 19-20/x2)

Ranger Spells Prepared (CL 1st; concentration +5) 1st – Longstrider

STATISTICS

Theric

CR 3

Str 12, **Dex** 16, **Con** 12, **Int** 11, **Wis** 13, **Cha** 13 **Base Atk** +4, **CMB** +5, **CMD** 18

Feats Endurance, Improved initiative, Precise shot (archery style), Skill focus (Stealth), Weapon finesse Skills Climb +8, Handle Animal +8, Knowledge (Geography) +8, Knowledge (Nature) +8, Perception +8 (+10 in forest, +10 vs humans), Stealth +13 (+15 in forest), Survival +8 (+10 in forest, +10 vs humans), Swim +8 Language Common

SQ Favoured class (ranger+1 hp point/level), favoured enemy; Human +2, Track +2, Wild Empathy (Diplomacy vs Animals +5), Combat style (Archery; Precise Shot), favoured terrain; Forest +2, Hunters Bond (see Special below).

Combat gear +1 dagger*, 4x dagger*, Quiver of 13 arrows, leather armour

Other Gear deck of cards*, money pouch (21gp, 37sp, 18cp)*, fox fur boots (20gp), malachite pendant (45gp), assorted rare furs (150gp), masterwork longbow (broken). * The marked gear belongs to (or includes) Barrat's gear. These are only in Theric's possession after escaping from the caverns. If for some reason these are lost beforehand,

remove them from Theric's statblock.

TACTICS

During Combat Theric has little subtlety in combat, selecting dangerous targets and repeatedly stabbing until they are down. He will target the holder of the ring preferably - or exclusively if they attempt to flee - but freely switches target based on threat level.

Morale Theric will fight to the death. **Social** Likes – hunting, wilderness, survival stories (+2 to social interactions), Dislikes – cities, culture or nobility (-2 to social interactions).

Special – Theric is an archer style

With no time to fix it or procure another he will resort to melee to get the job done. Much of his effectiveness as a combatant has been limited by removal of his bow, but this is offset by the fact the party should be staggered and fatigued by the point of combat. If the GM is not using these conditions, Theric's stats should be altered to represent more of a challenge. Even without his bow, he is a potentially overwhelming foe for a party of human characters. Theric used to have a Hunter's Bond with a wolf, but since the discovery of the Ring, his bond has somehow transferred to it. While this has no statistical effect, it does represent his obsession with returning it to its 'rightful' place.

Motivations – Similar to Barrat, Theric finds himself connected to the Ring. He is also not at the inn by chance. He spent most of his youth as a bounty hunter of men, and his recent years as a hunter and trapper in the forests surrounding the inn. A few years ago, when his wolf companion was mauled to death by a bear, he found himself inextricably drawn to the caves below the inn, where he bonded to the Ring. Feeling something akin to awe, he was content to visit it periodically, going about his business believing the Ring was his secret alone. He's no fool, and recognises Barret as being out of place. Theric has tracked him locally when he's travelled by, and has suspicions about Barret's connection to the Ring, but as it remained undisturbed was content to merely watch for a time.

The events of the adventure trap Theric in the collapsed inn. He frees himself and moves into a forest hideaway to recover.

Once the Ring reaches the surface, he feels its movement in his bond, and as it begins to move south his tenuous grip on reality finally snaps at the thought of losing it. Returning to the inn he encounters Barret, and recognising him as a potential threat - slays him, then heads south after the 'thieves' (using the Longstrider spell to catch fast moving groups).

Despite his obsession, Theric is not a fighter, and initially seeks to scare the party into returning the ring by kidnapping and 'displaying' one of them as a warning. As the party reaches the city, and potentially out of his reach, Theric becomes desperate, using the distraction of the mob to kill a guard and take a crossbow. As the party is sheltered in the customs station, he is forced to confront them face to face.

The Ring

What is the Ring? In short it is a disconnected and damaged component from a magical machine that resides under the Eternal City. This machine (when functional) is capable of altering reality, using the city itself as the focal point, and powered by slowly gathered planar energies, siphoned through the nexus of ley lines and planar connections located in and around the city, and stored in reservoirs until sufficiently concentrated enough to use.

The machine was created uncounted millennia ago by a race of unknown builders as an experiment, designed to safely draw energy over a thousand years, and fitted with safeguards preventing all but the wisest from using it. Maybe it functioned as it should in the time of the builders, but eventually fell to abuse, and with each use reality became worse off, usually at the hands of the selfish desires of the unenlightened. In the last half dozen uses, the civilisation inhabiting the Eternal City has been brought undone and fallen, one way or another.

The last attempted use was three hundred years ago, almost 500 years before sufficient energy had been gathered. A demigod, driven mad by his contact with the Great Old One Cthulhu, sought a way to open a portal to Cthulhu's realm of R'lyeh. He discovered the machine, but also his inability to use it. The demigod sought out Azmodeus, king of hell and one of the oldest beings in creation, and cut a deal, his soul (upon his death) in exchange for the knowledge and resources to make the machine work. The resulting 'retrofitting' of hellish components allowed the machine to be overridden, and powered by the soul energy of the city's population, to be drained in sacrifice at the appointed time. The Ring was part of the original machine, but was repurposed to channel energy into a newly constructed gateway which would act as the door between realms. However, at the last moment the demigod was struck down by a band of heroes and traitors within his own priesthood, and the machine was torn asunder by the released energies just as contact was made between the realms. In addition to the energy release, a wave of primal chaos and madness emerged from the portal, twisting and reshaping aspects of the city and its population, and infusing the machine.

The Ring, being directly connected to the portal, was most affected by the backlash, its crystal lens shattering and its frame (the Ring itself) becoming physically twisted and deeply infused with the essence of chaos and madness. Of all the Machine relics, it is one of the most potent, along with the Keystone and the Soul Gem (to be detailed in later products). The Ring has no game statistical effects, but amplifies feelings of paranoia and desperation, while wearing down the mental resolve and will power of creatures nearby. It has no specific range, its influence varying depending on dormancy or activity in the local area, and proximity to the machine and other machine relics. In addition, the more psychic disturbance it causes the more active it becomes. At the start of the adventure it is almost completely dormant, with only a handful of creatures in the general area at any time, and none in close proximity. By the end of the adventure it is highly active, spreading chaos and madness across the slums of Pilgrimage. Theoretically, if not contained, it could affect an area larger than the Eternal City.



Bestiary

Ooze, Mud

Before your eyes a slick puddle of mud ripples and rises into an ooze-like creature that flows toward you like a breaking wave.

MUD OOZE

CR 2

XP 600 N Medium ooze Init -2; Senses blindsight 60 ft.; Perception -5 DEFENSE AC 8, touch 8, flat-footed 8 (-2 Dex) Hp 13 (2d8+4) Fort +2, Ref -2, Will -5 DR 5/bludgeoning; Immune mind-affecting effects, ooze traits **OFFENSE** Speed 10 ft., climb 10 ft. Melee slam +1 (1d4 plus 1 acid and entangle) Space 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft. Special Attacks acidic entangle STATISTICS Str 10, Dex 7, Con 14, Int -, Wis 1, Cha 1 Base Atk +1; CMB +3; CMD 10 (can't be tripped) Skills Climb +10 ECOLOGY Environment any Organization solitary Treasure none SPECIAL ABILITIES Acid (Ex): A mud ooze secretes a very mild digestive acid that dissolves only flesh (not bone) when it strikes a foecreatures not made of flesh (including most constructs and oozes, skeletal undead, plants, and incorporeal creatures) are immune to the mud ooze's acid damage. **Acidic Entangle (Ex):** Any creature struck by a mud ooze is coated in thick layer of weak acidic mud. The creature is subject to an entangle effect (as per the spell) until it breaks free (Reflex save DC 9), or the mud sloughs off in 1d4 rounds. Each round entangled the creature takes 1 point of acid damage.

Ooze Traits As an Ooze, it has the following traits; • Mindless: No Intelligence score, and immunity to all mind-affecting effects (charms, compulsions, phantasms, patterns, and morale effects). An ooze with an Intelligence score loses this trait.

• Blind (but have the blindsight special quality), with immunity to gaze attacks, visual effects, illusions, and other attack forms that rely on sight.

• Immunity to poison, sleep effects, paralysis, polymorph, and stunning.

• Not subject to critical hits or flanking. Does not take additional damage from precision-based attacks, such as sneak attack.

Oozes eat and breathe, but do not sleep

A Mud ooze is a rare type of ooze creature formed from the slow leach of a magical or alchemical runoff, or as a by product of a degrading magical item. Mud oozes are animated by this basic force, but without sustenance tend to become inactive until a 'food source' presents itself. Completely unintelligent, this creature seeks only to prey on anything it can digest.



Psychic Mote

This tiny creature appears to be a ball of energy, humming as it streaks by in irregular patterns

PSYCHIC MOTE

CR 1/2

XP 200 N Diminutive Elemental Init +9; Senses Mindsight 60 ft.; Perception +5 DEFENSE AC 19, touch 19, flat-footed 14 (+5 Dex, + 4 Size) Hp 6 (1d8+2) Fort +2, Ref +8, Will +5 Immune elemental traits

OFFENSE

Speed Fly 30 ft (perfect) (no land speed) **Melee** touch +1 (1 point of force damage) **Space** 0 ft.; **Reach** 0 ft. **Special Attacks** Psychic Static

STATISTICS

Str 2, Dex 20, Con 14, Int 5, Wis 10, Cha 1 Base Atk +1; CMB +2; CMD 7 (can't be tripped) Feats Improved Initiative

Skills Acrobatics +9, Fly + 18, Perception +5, Stealth +21(+1 Conspicuous) Racial/Size Modifiers +6 Fly, +6 Perception, +12 Stealth

Languages Psychic Harmonics (can't speak) SQ Psychic Repulsion, Conspicuous ECOLOGY

Environment localised to the Eternal City and surrounds Organization solitary or colony (swarm) Treasure none

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Mindsight (Su): Psychic motes are drawn to mental energy. If a creature has an Intelligence score of 1 or higher, a psychic mote can always see it. Psychic motes cannot detect unintelligent (Int 0) creatures with this sense. Mindsight can be fooled by magic or effects that shield or misdirect from mental or magical location or detection (ie the misdirect spell). The Psychic Mote must make a Perception check versus the DC of the spell or effect to overcome it.

Psychic Static (Su): A psychic mote emits a buzzing resonance in its vicinity that is psychically disturbing to intelligent living creatures. All Will saves and Concentration checks required within 5 feet of a psychic mote suffer a -1 penalty.

Psychic Repulsion (Su): A psychic mote is sensitive to powerful emotion and thought. A creature (or creatures) can use this sensitivity to repel a mote by force of will. This is a standard action (provoking an Attack of Opportunity), at a range of up to 20 feet from the mote, and creates an effect to which the mote must successfully resist with a Will save, the DC equal to 10+the creature's Wis modifier. Several creatures can combine their will, increasing the DC to 10+highest Wis modifier of group, +1 per creature. Failure on the part of the mote causes it to gain the panicked condition for 1 minute. Creatures can attempt as many times as they like to repulse a mote. **Conspicuous (Su):** Despite its small size and agility, a psychic mote is not particularly stealthy courtesy of the light and sound in generates at all times. Unless in an environment where the light or sound it generates is mitigated (extremely bright or noisy conditions eclipsing the motes natural emissions, silence, or deaf/blind opponents) each imparts a -10 penalty to stealth (total -20).

Languages Psychic motes cannot speak, but can communicate with other motes through psychic harmonics

Psychic Mote Swarms

Psychic mote swarms are a far more dangerous prospect than the same number of individual motes because their combined psychic energy resonates, creating a far more intelligent and powerful 'hive mind' creature. Capable of complex thought and tactics, a psychic mote swarm no longer thinks like an elemental insect, but instead a dangerous psychic predator.

In order to form a swarm, there needs to be at least 5 motes present. There is theoretically no limit to the number of motes that can form a cohesive swarm. A swarm can form or disperse as a full round action.

Psychic mote swarms gain the Swarm subtype (variant), the Iron Will feat, the Psychic Shock special attack, and replaces the Psychic Repulsion quality with the Psychic Dispersion special quality. For every 5 motes in the swarm, the swarm gains;

- +1 HD
- +2 Int

• Its Psychic Static ability becomes more powerful, increasing in radius by 5 feet and incurring an additional -1 penalty

The Psychic Mote Swarm subtype is a variant. While technically made up of diminutive creatures, it acts as a swarm made up of 'tiny' creatures (1/2 damage from slashing/piercing weapons) and is made up of far less individual creatures. Similarly, it is unaffected by high winds. It does generate the distraction ability. Swarm damage caused by a psychic swarm is force damage.

An example 10 mote swarm

This creature appears to be a swarm comprised of numerous tiny balls of energy, humming as they move erratically aound each other.

PSYCHIC MOTE SWARM XP 600 N Diminutive Elemental (Swarm) Init +9; Senses Mindsight 60 ft.; Perception +10 DEFENSE AC 19, touch 19, flat-footed 14 (+5 Dex, + 4 Size) Hp 19 (3d8+6) Fort +3, Ref +10, Will +7 **Defensive Abilities** swarm traits (1/2 damage from slashing/piercing) Immune elemental traits **OFFENSE** Speed Fly 30 ft (perfect) (no land speed) Melee Swarm (1d6 points of force damage, plus Distraction plus Psychic Shock) Space 0 ft.; Reach 0 ft. Special Attacks Psychic Static, Psychic Shock, Distraction (Fort DC 13) STATISTICS Str 2, Dex 20, Con 14, Int 11, Wis 10, Cha 1 Base Atk +3; CMB +5; CMD 9 (can't be tripped, grappled or bull rushed) Feats Improved Initiative, Iron Will Skills Acrobatics +9, Fly + 18, Perception +8, Stealth +21(+1 Conspicuous) Racial/Size Modifiers +6 Fly, +6 Perception, +12 Stealth Languages Psychic Harmonics (can't speak) SQ Psychic Dispersion, Conspicuous ECOLOGY Environment localised to the Eternal City and surrounds Organization colony (swarm)

Treasure none

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Distraction (Ex): A creature with this ability can nauseate the creatures that it damages. Any living creature that takes damage from a creature with the distraction ability is nauseated for 1 round; a Fortitude save (DC 10 + 1/2creature's HD + creature's Con modifier) negates the effect

Mindsight (Su): Psychic motes are drawn to mental energy. If a creature has an Intelligence score of 1 or higher, a psychic mote can always see it. Psychic motes cannot detect unintelligent (Int 0) creatures with this sense. Mindsight can be fooled by magic or effects that shield or misdirect from mental or magical location or detection (ie the misdirect spell). The Psychic Mote must make a Perception check versus the DC of the spell or effect to overcome it.

Psychic Shock (Su): Any creature damaged by s Psychic mote swarm must make a Will save DC 13 (10+1/2 HD +Con mod) or become psychically disoriented for 1d6 rounds. A psychically disoriented character incurs a -2 penalty to attack rolls and AC, and must make a concentration check to cast spells or spell like abilities. **Psychic Static (Su):** A psychic mote emits a buzzing resonance in its vicinity that is psychically disturbing to intelligent living creatures. All Will saves and Concentration checks required within 15 feet of a psychic mote suffer a -3 penalty.

Psychic Dispersion (Su): A psychic mote swarm cannot

by psychically repulsed as single motes can, but is subject to being dispersed into its single component motes through force of will. This is a standard action (provoking an Attack of Opportunity), at a range of up to 20 feet from the mote swarm, and creates an effect to which the mote swarm must successfully resist with a Will save, the DC equal to 10+the creature's Wis modifier. Several creatures can combine their will, increasing the DC to 10+highest Wis modifier of group, +1 per creature. Failure on the part of the mote swarm causes it to disperse into its component motes for 1d10 rounds before it can reform. Creatures can attempt as many times as they like to disperse a mote swarm. Once dispersed, the individual motes can be repulsed.

Conspicuous (Su): Despite its small size and agility, a psychic mote swarm is not particularly stealthy courtesy of the light and sound in generates at all times. Unless in an environment where the light or sound it generates is mitigated (extremely bright or noisy conditions eclipsing the motes natural emissions, silence, or deaf/blind opponents) each imparts a -10 penalty to stealth (total -20).



Player Handouts

The GM should separate these short descriptions, and hand them out periodically to the player carrying the Ring, with the express instructions not to share the contained information with the other players.

The handouts can be given at any time, in any order, as deemed appropriate by the GM. Where a companion is mentioned, the GM should select an appropriate NPC.

You see something move slowly in your peripheral vision. You quickly glance in the direction but see nothing specific. This happens several times, but no matter how quickly or slyly you look you cannot catch any detail to this shadow.

You can hear a slight whispering behind you, and when you look over your shoulder two of your companions glance away. Maybe they heard something too, or maybe they were whispering and don't want you to hear.

Every time you look at your companions they seem to be looking everywhere but at you. It's like none of them want to meet your gaze...

A deep shadow seems to ripple nearby. You stare intently at it, but can make out nothing unusual. You could have sworn it shifted, like silk in a breeze. You stare hard until your eyes become unfocused. Still nothing...

You can feel eyes on your back, a deep sense that you are being watched. You turn and look but there's no one there. As you turn away you feel it more intensely, and the hairs on your neck stand on end. You look again. Still nothing...

You glance at one of your companions in passing, and then do a double take. You could have sworn you saw murderous hatred on their face, but when you look they seem normal. Maybe you imagined it. They notice you looking and smile thinly, muttering something pacifying. Your suspicion grows.

A chill runs up your spine and you shiver. You are not overly cold, but something raises goose bumps on your skin. You can't put your finger on it exactly, but something seems...wrong.

A companion grabs your arm and you start, realizing you must have been staring off into space. They inquire if you are ok, but there's an unusual edge to it. Are they concerned, or sizing you up for weakness?

You can hear whispering, but can't determine its source. Looking around nothing seems likely. You open your mouth to ask a companion if they hear anything and the whispering stops. Wait...were you the one whispering?

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Encounter Maps

The following maps are intended to be somewhat generic to allow the GM to apply where and when is appropriate, and include optional encounters or the like.

In terms of the set encounters, the following map - **Forest Road** - is intended for use with - Is that a Firefly?, The Trees are Alive!



Encounter Maps

In terms of the set encounters, the following map - **Forest Camp** - is intended for use with - Eyes in the Night (if desired) and 'Missing'



Encounter Maps

In terms of the set encounters, the following map - **Field Clearing** - is intended for use with - Scarecrow (if desired), Madness Takes Hold (if desired) and Canine Dreams.



Player Friendly Maps

All of the maps are reproduced here without numbering or a map key, so that they can easily be used as a playerfriendly map. Permission is given for all maps in the product to be reproduced as handouts for private games only.



Player Friendly Maps



55

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Part 1: Into Fear

March 2016

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