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VILLAGE BACKDROP: CHASM



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VILLAGE BACKDROP: CHASM

Tragedy struck the remote village of Callowright 20 years ago when a great chasm opened up under the village and swallowed nearly half the buildings and folk of the place. The terrible consequence of the sorcerer Jeriaster's meddling experimentations the disaster irrevocably changed the village. From the chasm emerged the few stunned survivors of a clan of duergar dwelling until now secretly below Callowright. In the aftermath of the disaster, the two bands of survivors struck a wary, uneasy alliance which survives to this very day. Now the unlikely allies work together to bring wealth and prosperity to the newly renamed village of Chasm.

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CHASM AT A GLANCE

This ramshackle, rough-and-tumble village is the sole stop for many miles along a well-worn road winding through the badlands. Formerly known as Callowright, the origin of the village's new name is unmistakable – a great gorge has rent the earth here, and the ruined wreck of half the village's buildings that slid into the ravine can still be seen below. A crazy latticework of rope bridges crisscross the chasm connecting ledges and caves. Skulking around in the chasm's shadowy depths are the rarely-seen deep dwarves – the evil duergar – who have been united by tragedy into an uneasy but mutually beneficial alliance with the villagers. Adventurers often come to Chasm, for arms and armour of adamantine, mithral and other more exotic materials may be found here.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Ruler Mayor Kuno Allahan (NE male human bard 5) and Clanmaster Urgot Hellhammer (LE duergar barbarian 2/fighter 4).

Government Contested

Population 198 (101 humans, 81 dwarves (all duergar), 6 half-elves, 4 elves, 3 half-orcs, 3 halflings)

Alignments LN, LE, N, NE

Languages Common, Dwarven, Undercommon

Corruption +2; **Crime** -3; **Economy** +1; **Law** +2; **Lore** -1; **Society** 0

Qualities Prosperous, racially intolerant (non-duergar dwarves)

Danger +0; **Disadvantages** none

NOTABLE FOLK

Most of the population are nothing more than hardworking peasants. A few, however, are of interest to adventurers:

Annelben Khune (Location 1; CG female human rogue 7) Khune is the proprietor of The Slide, the town's sole inn. She's mainly honest, but sometimes cheats evil folk.

Burr Kander (Location 3, LN male human expert 5) Kander is Chasm's most renowned weaponsmith. He lives in a small house adjacent to the smithy.

"Daft" Fulco (Location 8, CN male human druid 3) Every few weeks, a strange but familiar figure wanders into Chasm. This old fellow is wild-eyed and dishevelled, his mismatched clothes almost in tatters.

Pyvanel Aldarrae (Location 6, N male elf expert 4) This elf hardly looks like a smith, with a slender build even by the standards of his kind. He is the proprietor of Aldarrae's Steel Skin and lives in a small apartment over the shop.

Katredies Pick (Location 2, NG male human expert 3) Katredies runs The Dour Beagle. He is one of the few people who views the opening of the chasm as a positive event.

Vennisair (Location 11, LN male half-elf [appears human with *hat of disguise*] sorcerer 8) Publicly the owner of the Chasm Trading Post, he is in truth the only surviving apprentice of the sorceress Jeriaster whose digging led to the calamity that befell the village. He conceals his identity with a *hat of disguise*.

NOTABLE LOCATIONS

Most of the village comprises peasant homes. A few locations, however, are of interest to adventurers:

1. **The Slide:** Once a sprawling inn and tavern known as The Roadside, this structure straddles the great earthen rift.
2. **The Dour Beagle:** With the destruction of The Roadside's taproom, The Dour Beagle became the only bar in town.
3. **Kraken's Arms:** Burr Kander and a trio of harried apprentices work the forges of this armsmith.
4. **The Holy House:** This square structure has unadorned stained glass windows. Inside, shrines to various deities can be found.
5. **The Web:** Rope bridges crisscross the chasm and provide access to the duergars' mines.
6. **Aldarrae's Steel Skin:** Pyvanel Aldarrae and his two elven apprentices forge all manner of metals into armour.
7. **The Old Well:** This well is boarded up and sealed tight with crisscrossing planks and bolts.
8. **Cavern Entrances:** All entrances to the duergar caverns are guarded; access for non-duergar is forbidden.
9. **The Stone Heroes:** A quartet of statues stand here.
10. **Chasm Trading Post:** The Chasm Trading Post is home to Vennisair, a quiet, intense trader who has driven all competitors out of business.
11. **The Tower:** The tower that was Chasm's genesis still stands in the village; it hangs perilously over the edge of the chasm.

MARKETPLACE

Resources & Industry Mining, smithing, trade

Base Value 1,300 gp; **Purchase Limit** 7,500 gp; **Spellcasting** 1st; **Minor Items** 4d4; **Medium Items** 3d4; **Major Items** 1d6 (arms and armour only)

When the PCs arrive in Chasm, the following items are for sale:

- **Armour** elven chain (5,150 gp), mithral shirt (1,100 gp), *+1 scale mail* (1,200 gp), *+1 full plate of light fortification* (5,650 gp), *+1 glamer leather armour* (9,160 gp).
- **Potions & Oils** *bless weapon* (50 gp), *cure light wounds* (50 gp), *darkvision* (300 gp), *neutralize poison* (750 gp).
- **Scrolls (Arcane)** *lightning bolt* (375 gp), *unseen servant* (25 gp), *wall of fire* (1,125 gp).
- **Weapons** cold iron masterwork longsword (330 gp), *+1 ghost touch greataxe* (8,320 gp).

GOVERNMENT TYPE: CONTESTED

A contested settlement has more than one ruler. These rulers compete among themselves for control of the settlement. (*Corruption* +2; *Law* +1).

VILLAGE LORE

A PC making a Knowledge (geography) or Knowledge (local) may know some information about the village. A successful check reveals all the information revealed by a lesser check.

DC 10: Chasm is a village that stands along a trade route that passes through badlands. It got its name because years ago, a rift opened and sent half the place careening into the fissure. Dwarves are not welcome in Chasm.

DC 15: The people of Chasm have a peace agreement with a clan of duergar who bring forth rare metals from their mines. Skilled village smiths forge the metal into arms and armour.

DC 20: A sorceress built a (now abandoned) tower in the village. The sorceress disappeared at the same time as the chasm opened and the duergar emerged. Few believe this is a coincidence. Her fate, and that of her apprentices, is unknown.

VILLAGERS

Appearance Dusky skinned with slight yellow undertones, rich black or deep brown hair, and almond-shaped eyes. Most are well-tanned, with those spending a great deal of time outdoors having almost leathery skin.

Dress They dress in loose-fitting, cool clothing, often stained red by the rust-coloured mud of the badlands.

Nomenclature *male* Alaric, Horsa, Odo, Warin; *female* Adela, Frida, Ima, Saxa; *family* Batini, Fosi, Njars, Ubi.

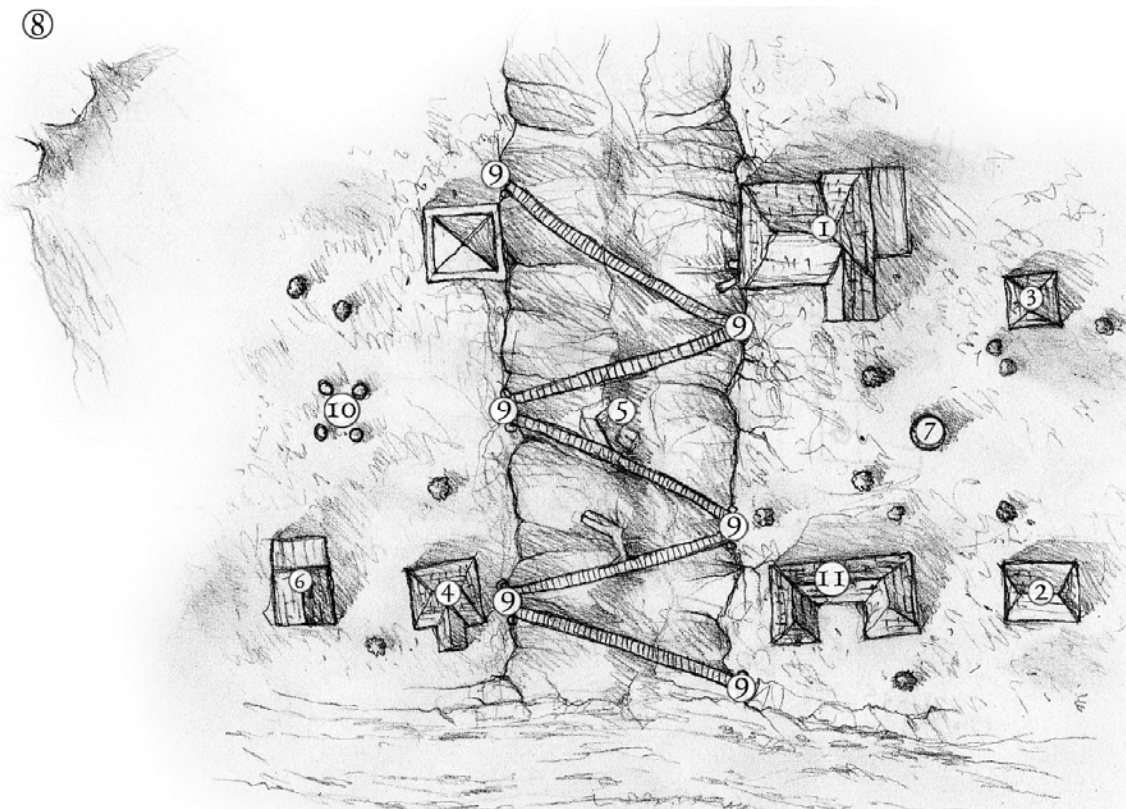
WHISPERS & RUMOURS

A PC can use Diplomacy to gather information about the village and its surroundings. This takes 1d4 hours and requires a DC 10 check. A character exceeding this check gains one additional rumour for each 5 points by which he exceeded DC 10. Use the table below to determine which rumour(s) the PC learns.

D6	RUMOUR
1*	The tower has a secret passage that leads to the duergar caverns. It is magically warded.
2	The creature that lived in the old well was a devil accidentally summoned by Jeriaster's apprentices. The creature was bound inside a magic circle, but the circle was compromised when the chasm opened.
3	The four petrified adventurers would reward their rescuers handsomely if someone could find a way to restore them.
4	"Daft" Fulco is a druid. He was driven insane when he saw something no one was meant to see. Now he just grows vegetable and mumbles to himself.
5	Mayor Allahan is a cultist of some sort of evil being. He is intent on bringing the being's influence to Chasm and has been skimming money from the village's coffers to do so.
6	Burr Kander of the Kraken's Arms isn't looking too well lately. Some say he's dying.

*False rumour

⑧



NOTABLE LOCATIONS

1: THE SLIDE

Once a sprawling inn and tavern known as The Roadside, this structure had the rift in the earth open directly beneath it. The taproom slid into the gorge, while the rest of the structure hangs precariously over it. The villagers morbidly renamed the inn “The Roadslide” which has since been truncated to The Slide. In truth, the structure is not as dangerous as it appears, having been reinforced and secured with additional underpinning. The inn has a quartet of private rooms, an equal number of semi-private rooms, and there is always space available on the floor for poor, desperate or frugal travellers. Travellers’ board is simple fare, but reasonably priced and nourishing.

The Slide is operated by Annelben Khune. Khune has heard disturbing rumours about the mayor, Kuno Allahan (N male human aristocrat 1). If wagging tongues are to be believed, Allahan worships an evil, other-worldly unnamed being representing pure insanity and has been quietly skimming money from the village’s coffers in the hopes of adding a shrine to that being in The Holy House (location 4).

2: THE DOUR BEAGLE

With the destruction of The Roadside’s taproom, The Dour Beagle became the only bar in town. The building’s namesake was owner Katredies Pick’s (N male human expert 1) pet, so beloved by him that the animal was stuffed and placed in a position of honour on the taproom wall. (He still looks unhappy even after all these years.) The Dour Beagle is the only place in the village it is not unusual to see duergar on a regular basis. The dwarves emerge from their mines sample “weak surface brews” which they zealously criticize. No one asks why they keep coming back if they dislike the alcohol so much. Although small in size, Pick’s kitchen produces a few meal items, mainly scotched eggs and homemade bread. Pick is in his mid-sixties and has been a widower for ten years. He would like nothing more than to find a good woman, sell the Beagle and retire somewhere quiet.

3: KRAKEN’S ARMS

The shingle over the door to this place depicts the creature of legend with a different sort of weapon in each tentacle. Inside, Burr Kander (LN male human expert 5) and a trio of harried apprentices work the forges. Kander is one of the finest smiths in the land, specializing in the creation of weapons crafted from exotic materials. The master smith is gruff and curt, always offering a fair yet expensive price – though he has been known to discount his work for unusual requests or those using metals he has never encountered, as he relishes the chance to unlock the secrets of a new ore. Kander dislikes Pyvanel Aldarrae

(location 6) but respects her smithing skills and business acumen. Unknown to anyone, even his apprentices, Kander suffers from a terminal disease, having spent too much time over the years around weird metals with strange properties. It has begun to impact his work, and he is considering hiring adventurers to surreptitiously seek out a cure for his malady. He fears if he becomes too ill to work, one of his apprentices will seize control of his business.

4: THE HOLY HOUSE

In a crossroads settlement like Chasm, adventurers and travellers bring a number of things with them, including their religion. The presence of houses of worship and their relentlessly preaching followers can lead to all manner of trouble. Chasm’s solution is The Holy House. This is a square structure with unadorned stained glass windows, inside which stand shrines to various deities. Each deity gets the same amount of space in their shrine, and none are prohibited – not even evil gods. In order to fund The Holy House, the faithful pay Kuno space for their shrine for 50 gp, and then pay an annual fee of 10 gp. No attempts at conversion may be made by attendees and the various faiths must be respected. Since these rules chafe followers of chaotic and/or evil deities, most of the shrines are dedicated to gods of other alignments.

5: THE WEB

The crisscrossing of rope bridges between the chasm sides and the cave openings that lead into the duergar’s territory are reminiscent of a spider’s web, hence the name. The bridges are constructed of thick hemp rope treated with a fire-resistant (resist fire 1) veneer coupled with stout cherry wood planks.

6: ALDARRAE’S STEEL SKIN

Operated by Pyvanel Aldarrae (N male elf expert 4) and two elven apprentices work the forges bending all manner of metals into armour. Pyvanel specializes in armour suits and is not a shieldsmith. However, his eldest apprentice was previously employed by one, and can make serviceable steel shields of all sizes (normal quality, not wooden or masterwork). Pyvanel is renowned not just for the quality of his armour but the lengths of time he takes to produce them. He typically takes twice as long to produce his wares; however, nothing he produces is ever less than masterwork quality. He has a mild temperament but has keen business acumen. He is wealthy enough to be able to pick and choose his work orders, and a rude customer is likely to be thrown out of his shop, regardless of how much she is willing to pay. Pyvanel is aware of Burr Kander’s dislike for him, but the stately elf considers it beneath his notice.

7: THE OLD WELL

This well is boarded up and sealed tight with crisscrossing planks and bolts. Shortly after the chasm opened, the town was beset by a nocturnal flying creature large enough to snatch people off the street. The victims were never found again. After several such attacks, the creature was spotted swooping into the well, and when daylight came, the terrified residents closed the well for good. Occasionally banging and screaming can be heard from beneath the seal, and the following day the townsfolk repair it. A new, larger well, placed on the opposite side of the village, now provides potable water for Chasm.

8: CAVERN ENTRANCES

All entrances to the duergar caverns have a number of things in common. Each entry is guarded by a pair of sentinels (LE male duergar fighter 4) equipped with signal horns. A large sign in Common and Dwarven above each entrance notes that any dwarves caught inside will be executed. Those not of Clan Hellhammer are not welcome inside, save the mayor on his weekly visit, or those expressly invited by Clanmaster Urgot.

9: THE STONE HEROES

A quartet of statues stand here, each unusual for the precise level of detail and the disturbing looks of fright upon their faces. These are in truth petrified adventurers who were hired to slay a medusa bandit that was terrorizing the area. A party of five adventurers left to slay the creature but only one returned, reporting her companions had all been petrified. Being unable to restore them to flesh, the sympathetic townsfolk brought the four victims back by wagon and placed them here. Their companion left them behind with regret. The four adventurers are a female dwarf, two male humans and a male halfling.

HISTORY OF CHASM

Callowright was a village like any other until the obsessive digging of the sorceress Jeriaster spelled disaster for the settlement and its folk. Jeriaster was a powerful spellcaster obsessed with probing secrets buried deep underground. She commanded innumerable elementals to dig deep beneath her tower and soon they created an extensive network of tunnels below the village.

She dug too deep, however. Her questing elementals came into contact with a small clan of duergar. Predictably, violence ensued and soon Jeriaster was waging a full-scale clandestine war against the duergar. The conflict reached its climax when a raiding party of duergar breached Jeriaster's tower and brought the deranged sorceress to bay. In the ensuing battle, the land was riven by a great chasm destroying half the village and killing most of the duergar. From this great disaster was born Chasm.

10: CHASM TRADING POST

Strategically located roadside, the Chasm Trading Post is home to Vennisair (LN male half-elf {appears human} sorcerer 8), a quiet and intense trader who has driven all competitors out of business. Vennisair is a master of uniting buyer and seller and specializes in procuring hard-to-find ores and weird or rare magic. Vennisair typically buys items at 70% of actual value and sells at a 20% mark-up. He also does a brisk business in buying exhausted mounts, resting and watering them and reselling them. Vennisair is paranoid he might be recognized as Jeriaster's apprentice and be blamed for his part for the catastrophe. Thus he only reveals his identity and spellcasting powers *in extremis*.

11: THE TOWER

The tower that was the genesis of Chasm still lies near the village centre, hanging perilously over the edge of the abyss. The structure is dangerously unstable and most folk feel its fall into the rift is imminent. The structure is boarded up and secured as best the residents were able, but a group of determined trouble-makers (adventurers) could certainly get inside with some effort. There is no passage between the tower and the duergar caverns below, as it was sealed long ago by the Hellhammer clan.

THE SURROUNDING AREA

A rugged strip of road passes by Chasm on its way through the badlands. Though it is well maintained and cobblestoned in the immediate vicinity of the village, the quality of the road rapidly degrades the further away one gets, eventually becoming sun-baked, packed earth and little else. The land is dotted with jagged hills, canyons and hoodoos created by erosion of rain and wind. Rain is infrequent, but torrential when it appears, and flash floods are common. The most common threats around Chasm are oversized natural predators (particularly dire animals) and monsters commonly found in arid areas far from civilization.

DAFT FULCO'S

This surprisingly verdant patch of garden greenery has been carved out of the badlands about a quarter-mile from the outskirts of Chasm. All manner of vegetables grow here, tended by Daft Fulco (CN male human druid 3) who, despite his apparent insanity, has quite the green thumb. He lives in a filthy lean-to within his small farm. He trades his fresh vegetables for trade staples that he cannot grow before wandering back to his farm. He has little ability to carry on a conversation beyond basic bartering, and often drools and mutters about "the coming of the night."

LIFE IN CHASM

The people of Chasm are rugged and independent, and take a grim, masochistic pride in how much their settlement has endured. All folk but dwarves are welcome – while most surface residents do not have a personal problem with them, they create tension with the duergar. Seeing so many travellers have led to the people being rather blasé about the exotic; only someone or something truly unusual would attract attention from the residents. The arrival of an especially large caravan turns the town almost into a carnival, with residents eagerly hawking their supplies or services and picking over exotic trinkets and products from far-away lands.

TRADE & INDUSTRY

For the duergar, mining and trading are their lifeblood. The rich veins of ore beneath the surface are mined and sold to those on the surface. These rare ores command a high price. For those on the surface, it is trade – buying and selling when merchants come to call. The superlative arms and armour crafted in Chasm also command a high price.

DUERGAR MINE GUARD

CR 3 (XP 800)

This bald dwarf has dull gray skin and dull black eyes.

Male duergar fighter 4

LE Medium humanoid (dwarf)

Init +1; **Senses** darkvision 120 ft.; Perception +3 (+5 vs. stonework), Sense Motive +2

Speed 20 ft.; **ACP** -6; Acrobatics -5 (-9 jumping), Climb +3, Stealth +3

AC 22, touch 11, flat-footed 21; **CMD** 18 (22 vs. bull rush or trip) (+9 armour [mwk full plate], +1 Dex, +2 shield [mwk heavy; Shield Focus])

Immune paralysis, phantasms, poison; **Weakness** light sensitivity

Light Sensitivity (Ex) In areas of bright sunlight (or within a *daylight* spell), duergar are dazzled.

Fort +7, **Ref** +2, **Will** +3 (+4 vs. fear); +2 vs. spells and spell-like abilities

hp 46 (2 HD)

Space 5 ft.; **Base Atk** +4; **CMB** +7

Melee mwk warhammer (Power Attack [-2/+4]) +9 (1d8+5/x3)

Ranged light hammer (range 20 ft.) +5 (1d4+3)

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 4th; concentration +1)

1/day—*enlarge person*, *invisibility*

Combat Gear light hammers (3), *oil of magic weapon*

Abilities Str 16, Dex 13, Con 16, Int 10, Wis 14, Cha 4

SQ armour training (1), bravery (+1)

Feats Power Attack, Shield Focus, Toughness, Weapon Focus (warhammer), Weapon Specialisation (warhammer)

Skills as above plus Knowledge (dungeoneering) +4, Profession (miner) +6

Languages Common, Dwarven, Undercommon

Gear as above plus signal horn, 12 gp

One recurring problem is the boom-town economy of Chasm. Because of the high prices fetched by the ores and magic items sold here, wild gyrations in the local economy sometimes occur. Locals are keen to buy when the economy stable; the sale of a major magic item can cause prices to quadruple or even quintuple for several months before returning to normal.

LAW & ORDER

The duergar handle their own business in their caverns. In an emergency, the mayor can call upon duergar warriors to supplement his town watch, though he never has. The town watch consist of about twenty able-bodied men and women (typically warrior 1, with the occasional 1st level fighter or ranger). The mayor is also the commander of the town watch though he typically leaves their management to a trio of sergeants (3rd level fighters).

EVENTS

While the PCs are in the village, one or more of the below events may occur. Choose or determine randomly:

D6	EVENT
1	Someone in town is missing and the seal over the village's old well has been smashed to pieces – from the inside out.
2	A caravan was decimated a day's ride from Chasm. The survivors brought back tales of a bullet-shaped creature of huge size. It swam through the earth like a fish through water, and had a shark-like fin.
3	Faint green lights and spine-tingling moans have been heard from inside the old tower.
4	A dwarf arrives in town with an entourage of mercenaries, claiming her husband has been enslaved by the duergar and she demands his release. Her presence is seriously escalating tensions between the surface dwellers and Clan Hellhammer.
5	A PC recognizes one of the petrified adventurers – a sibling, mentor, old friend or enemy or former adventuring companion.
6	A monster seemingly formed purely of reddish mud attacks the town, killing several people before being driven off by the watch, bubbling back into the ground and disappearing.

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