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# VILLAGE BACKDROP: VULCANBRIDGE



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# VILLAGE BACKDROP: VULCANBRIDGE

*A thriving village is the last thing a traveller expects to find on a cracked and blasted volcanic plain belching lava and poisonous gases. However, Vulcanbridge defies expectations and offers a haven for wayward souls and desperate travellers alike. Primarily home to dwarven and gnomish engineers and miners, the village also attracts adventurers and greedy merchants keen to turn a healthy profit. The village relies on trading its considerable wealth for necessities, and this influx of wealth has also attracted the wrong kind of attention. Vulcanbridge seems like a tempting target to raiders who see an isolated village endowed with treasure. This threat adds to the dangers posed by the environment itself and the fiery creatures dwelling in the magmatic caverns beneath the plain. Then there are the dark rumours the deep-dwelling owner of all the treasure harvested by the villagers has awoken and intends to take it all back...*

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## VULCANBRIDGE AT A GLANCE

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The volcanic plain upon which Vulcanbridge stands was uninhabited until 350 years ago. A group of dwarf and gnome adventurers wound up on the plain through a series of mishaps (or divine providence, depending on who tells the tale). A minor eruption spat unfinished emeralds up onto the plain, and one of the adventurers noted the lava contained traces of gold and silver. Realizing they had discovered a treasure trove beyond their wildest reckoning, the group vowed to settle the area.

The original settlers perished trying to tame the volcanic plain, but their associates and family carried on. Eventually, dwarf engineers devised several pylons and bridges between them that would allow the settlers to live safely above the plain while scooping up whatever material random eruptions provided. A gnome alchemist, Tervor Vulcan, further enhanced the pylons to protect against seismic events plaguing the settlement, which took its name from the alchemist.

Today, Vulcanbridge still reaps the benefits of the gems and minerals buried in deep caverns below the plain. However, the workers have shifted their focus to delving beneath the surface lava, which no longer has the ready treasure accounting for the village's initial success. Additionally, the village protects travellers who blunder across the dangerous land and provides a safe site for breath-taking vistas.

### DEMOGRAPHICS

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**Ruler** Korron Greymantle

**Government** Autocracy

**Population** 185 (91 dwarves, 31 gnomes, 23 half-orcs, 15 halflings, 14 humans, 11 half-elves)

**Alignments** LG, LN, NG, CG

**Languages** Common, Draconic, Dwarven, Elven, Gnome

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

**Qualities** Insular, prosperous, strategic location

**Danger** +5; **Disadvantages** Volcanic activity

### NOTABLE FOLK

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

**Ander Hale** (location 3; LN male human fighter 1/aristocrat 2) Ander, a shrewd businessman who feels he can improve the village's prospects, seeks lordship when Korron steps down.

**Dwilla Copperpot** (location 9; CG female gnome expert 4) The danger-seeking gnome Dwilla possesses remarkable engineering insight.

**Korron Greymantle** (locations 4 and 10; LN male dwarf aristocrat 1/expert 3) Current lord of Vulcanbridge, Korron looks forward to returning to "real work" in two months.

**Manda Grimsdottir** (location 7; LG female dwarf expert 4) Vulcanbridge's most successful miner, Manda has an uncanny sense for the volcanic plain's irregular eruptions.

**Tagrissa** (locations 4 and 6; LN female half-orc warrior 4) Tagrissa has served as head of Vulcanbridge's guard all her adult life, protecting against external and internal threats.

**Verrix Gravelbeard** (location variable; LG male young gold dragon) Verrix has not broken from his dwarf persona since he arrived in Vulcanbridge 27 years ago.

**Yendari Indra** (location 1; NG female halfling rogue 3/expert 3) Yendari took refuge in Vulcanbridge eight years ago and has since taken ownership of the Crimson Light Inn.

### NOTABLE LOCATIONS

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

1. **Crimson Light Inn:** Situated at the base of Centre Pylon (Pylon One), this inn gets its name from the constant glow shed by lava resting on the surface.
2. **Sorrel's Sundries:** More for visitors to Vulcanbridge, the gnome Sorrel sells protective gear and rations from this store.
3. **Hale Imports and Exports:** From here, Ander Hale conducts his business deals that have proven lucrative for Vulcanbridge.
4. **The Hall:** This utilitarian building houses Vulcanbridge's government and serves as headquarters for the guard.
5. **Cooling Vault:** This refrigerated chamber provides a safe place in emergency situations and relief for those succumbing to the constant heat.
6. **Watchtower:** Situated atop Pylon Two, this location has the clearest view of the surrounding land.
7. **Manda's Pylon:** Pylon Three is named for Vulcanbridge's most successful delver.
8. **Rooster Geyser:** West of Pylon Four, superheated water blasts up 100 feet every morning at precisely the same time.
9. **The Skunkworks:** Located on the little used Pylon Four, and named more for the smell than the experimentation, Dwilla and her subordinates perfect mineral extraction techniques.
10. **Pylon Five:** A recent powerful earthquake cracked Pylon Five's foundations, forcing an evacuation of the crew there; several engineers work day and night to repair the pylon.

### MARKETPLACE

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**Resources & Industry** Mining, shelter, sightseeing, trade

**Base Value** 1,000 gp; **Purchase Limit** 4,500 gp; **Spellcasting** 4th; **Minor Items** 2d6; **Medium Items** 1d6; **Major Items** -

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

- **Potions & Oils** *protection from energy* (fire, 375 gp)
- **Scrolls (Arcane)** *resist energy* (fire, CL 7th, 350 gp)
- **Scrolls (Divine)** *endure elements* (13 gp)
- **Wondrous Items** *elixir of swimming* (250 gp)

## VILLAGE LORE

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

**DC 10:** Founded centuries ago, Vulcanbridge built its fortune on gems and metal readily available in the lava flowing from beneath the surface. This was not a trivial matter, as those collecting the wealth endured hellish heat and poisonous gases.

**DC 15:** Vulcanbridge also serves as shelter for those desperate or crazy enough to cross the volcanic plain.

**DC 20:** The village no longer benefits from easily obtained wealth. Instead, the workers must delve beneath the plain's surface to gather its treasures.

## VILLAGERS

**Appearance** Natives of Vulcanbridge have black hair, dark eyes of various colours and reddish skin. Most residents have shorn heads, but dwarven residents still insist on wearing full beards.

**Dress** Most villagers wear loose-fitting and utilitarian clothing. Those who deal with outsiders dress more fancily and wear jewels and gems harvested from beneath the village.

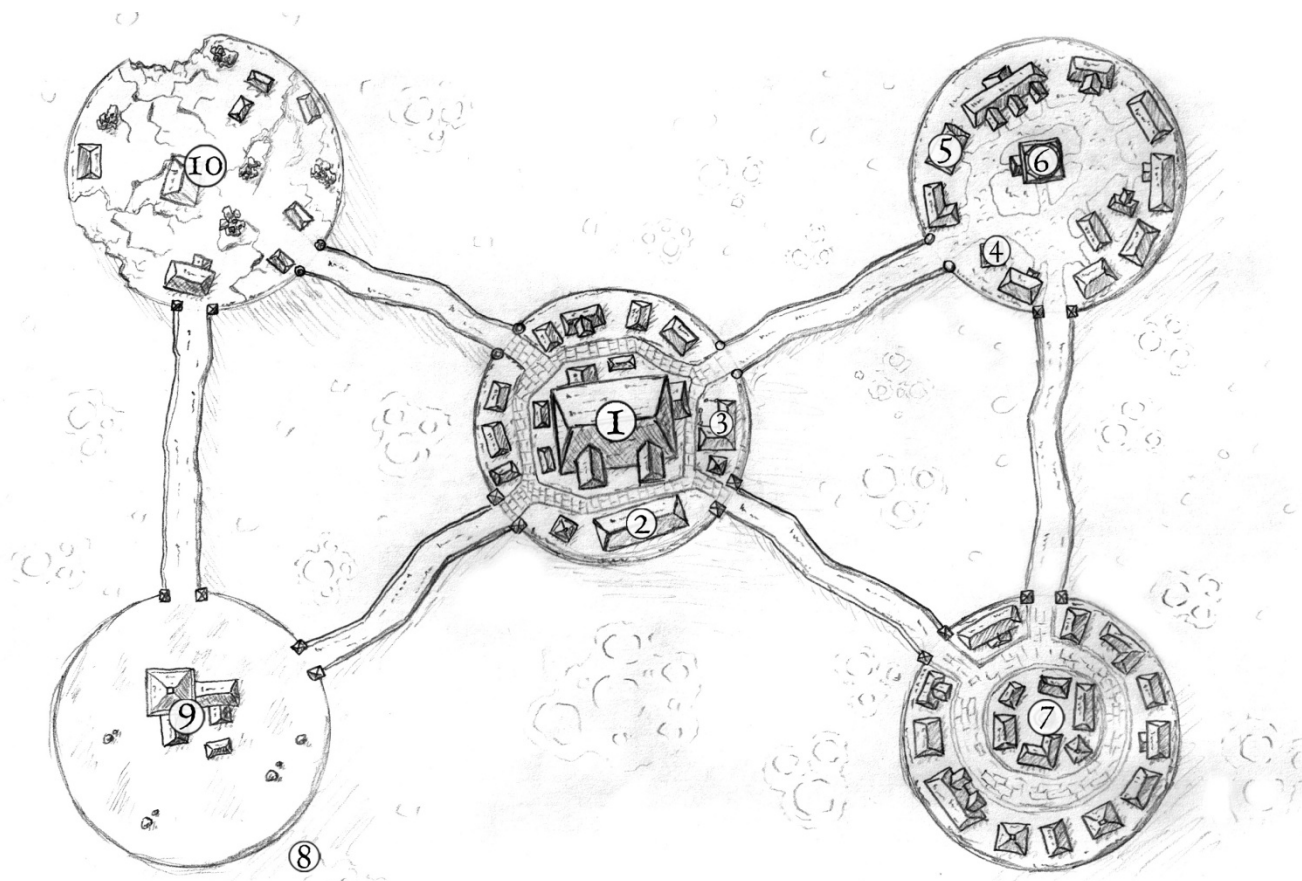
**Nomenclature** *male* Berrik, Kaarl, Trystan; *female* Dioni, Nessa, Quionne; *family* Deepdelver, Forgeborn, Vinnis.

## 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 planned Pylon Six never got completed, since it sank beneath the plain.
2	Water is naturally difficult for the village to obtain, and the latest supply never arrived.
3	When Verrix drinks too much, he turns discussion to an ancient red dragon whose hoard has fattened Vulcanbridge's coffers while the creature sleeps.
4*	Pylon Five's damage was caused by sabotage timed with a convenient earthquake.
5	To every villager's surprise, Rooster Geyser failed to erupt last week—this marks the first time in anyone's recollection this has happened.
6	A couple of villagers have seen fiery human shapes several hundred yards to the west just after sunset.

\*False rumour



## NOTABLE LOCATIONS

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### 1: CRIMSON LIGHT INN

Centre Pylon sits atop a long-dormant section of the volcanic plain and is the most hospitable location in Vulcanbridge. The majority of Vulcanbridge's residents live on the pylon's upper levels, leaving the lowest level for the village's guests. Vulcanbridge's only inn, lit by slowly cooling pools of lava that give the inn its name, dominates the pylon's bottom level. It serves not only as quarters for visitor, but also as the local watering hole. The common room occupies three-fourths of the total space covered by the inn.

Yendari Indra (NG female halfling rogue 3/expert 3), the sole survivor of an adventuring party overwhelmed by travel on the plain, decided to live in Vulcanbridge and took over the inn when the previous owner retired. Haunted by her fellow adventurers' deaths, the halfling is the first on the scene when new arrivals enter the village. She treats all her customers amiably, but sadness crosses her face in rare quiet moments.

Several halflings, gnomes, and young dwarves (LG, NG or CG commoner 1–2) work for Yendari, serving drinks and preparing rooms for rare visitors. A small, hardly-used stable adjoins the inn.

### 2: SORREL'S SUNDRIES

Quint Sorrel (CG gnome commoner 2) continues the tradition established by his grandfather, Myre, who built this store in the optimistic assumption Vulcanbridge would serve as a waystation for adventurers and travellers cutting across the treacherous volcanic plain. The friendly – some would say overly familiar – gnome sees a little business and sells general adventuring equipment, rations (at a slight mark-up), hot weather outfits as well as magical protections against fire, these at reasonable rates thanks to the efficient creation of such items. Since Quint's store only provisions travellers, he only opens up when Vulcanbridge hosts guests. Quint otherwise spends his time at the Skunkworks attempting to assist Dwilla, with whom he is smitten.

### 3: HALE IMPORTS AND EXPORTS

Ander Hale (LN male human fighter 1/aristocrat 2), a grey-haired human in his 50s, is another former adventurer who settled in Vulcanbridge after realizing he could make more money with less risk by managing trade for the village. In the relatively short 30 years Hale Imports and Exports has done business, Ander has made Vulcanbridge quite profitable and established trade partners for sundries the village cannot provide for itself.

Ander has turned his focus toward the impending election for the next 17-year term. He believes he can introduce more

efficiency to Vulcanbridge's industry to further increase the village's revenue. While many residents acknowledge he is a great businessman, they feel he does not truly understand the villagers, since he is no engineer or miner. However, much like Korron, no other reasonable candidate wants to give up his or her livelihood to manage the village's administrative concerns.

### 4: THE HALL

The smallest permanent building on Pylon Two gives proof to the lack of necessity for a governing body in Vulcanbridge. Ostensibly the location from which the dwarf Korron Greymantle (LN male dwarf aristocrat 1/expert 3) governs the village, the plainly named "Hall" stands empty while Korron travels from pylon to pylon checking on the mining and delving operations. Korron conducts business at the Hall for the rare rights dispute between miners. The dwarf views his acceptance of Vulcanbridge's lordship as a mistake and greatly desires to return to mining. The engineers and miners understand this and forgive Korron's occasional outbursts during mediation sessions. Despite this, many want the village's next lord to come from their ranks and oppose Ander Hale's selection.

Pylon Five's recent shutdown has become Korron's primary focus, and he welcomes the challenge for his waning days in office. He spends much of his time at Pylon Five overseeing the pylon's repairs. Korron's offers to help have met with polite dismissal, which chafes the dwarf.

The Hall also holds a desk for Tagrissa (LN female half-orc warrior 4) for the occasions where she must fill out reports about incidents in the village. Her desk typically stands empty as she spends most of her time meeting with stationed guards or at the Watchtower.

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## VULCANBRIDGE'S ENVIRONS

Vulcanbridge rests on a high plain rent by fissures that ooze lava and belch noxious gases. Vulcanbridge's original founders discovered a solid block of granite upon which they built Centre Pylon. After establishing this base, they erected four other pylons around Centre Pylon and over large, accessible fissures in the plain. The four stone mining, or delving, pylons feature a hollow section at the bottom, accessible from the floor and ceiling by dilating doors. This section creates a buffer against the rare eruption from the fissure and serves as an airlock to prevent poisonous gas from floating up into the pylon where the miners and engineers have their living quarters.

## 5: COOLING VAULT

Pylon Two currently endures the most volcanic activity, so it holds the largest of the so-called cooling vaults where residents may evacuate when a spectacular eruption occurs. It also serves an infirmary for those burned or otherwise injured during delves. Staffed by healers of varying power (1 cleric 4, 1d2 adept 3, 1d6 adept 1), the vault receives at least one person a week. Heat-stricken visitors in dire need receive exceptions to the rule limiting them to Centre Pylon.

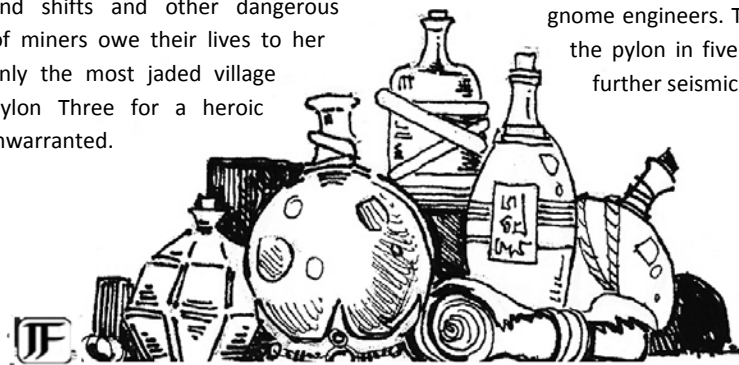
## 6: WATCHTOWER

Pylon Two rests on a rise in the volcanic plain, making its base 20 feet higher than the other pylons. This grants the top of the pylon the best view of the surrounding land. From here, two of Tagrissa's guard (or one guard and Tagrissa herself) scan the horizon for approaching threats. Other than the potential danger presented by visitors to Vulcanbridge – Tagrissa has no real concern with the village's residents – the majority of attacks derive from fiery creatures living beneath the plain, creatures the delvers inadvertently disturb. On average, Tagrissa and her guard must repel one monstrous attack a month. More worrying is the increase in raids on Vulcanbridge as the village's reputation for wealth spreads.

Verrix Gravelbeard (LG male young gold dragon) has become a frequent visitor to the Watchtower, citing the worrying reason he is watching for dragons. Many residents regard Verrix as an eccentric, albeit highly knowledgeable, dwarf, so they take much of what he says with a grain of salt.

## 7: MANDA'S PYLON

Against Manda Grimsdottir's (LG female dwarf expert 4) sense of humility, Korron decided to rename Pylon Three for Vulcanbridge's best delver. Korron admitted he felt entitled to this sole abuse of power during his full tenure. Short of stature even for a dwarf and socially reserved, Manda seems to have an innate sense for the most lucrative finds and has discovered wealth valuing tens of thousands gold pieces during her lifetime of delving. The honour comes not only from the treasure she has amassed for the village. She also has an uncanny sense for volcanic eruptions, ground shifts and other dangerous seismic activity. Dozens of miners owe their lives to her timely warnings. Thus, only the most jaded village resident feels naming Pylon Three for a heroic member of the village is unwarranted.



## 8: ROOSTER GEYSER

If Vulcanbridge were considered to have a tourist attraction, Rooster Geyser would provide it. Every morning at six o'clock, superheated water shoots 100 feet upward, and the watery spray forms a rooster's comb (if one were to squint at it the right way). More to the point, the geyser whistles shrilly when it erupts, and the sound clearly emanates for two miles, acting as a morning alarm for Vulcanbridge.

## 9: THE SKUNKWORKS

Hyperkinetic gnome Dwilla Copperpot (LG female dwarf expert 4) is the sole resident of Pylon Four, which provides access to the least lucrative underground section. Dwilla's laboratory, staffed by the gnome and four assistants (expert 1–4), belches a cloying stench that never dissipates. Dwilla does not mind the smell, so she stays near the lab in case a flash of insight strikes her while she rests.

The village's residents do not mind her virtual takeover of the pylon, since she has created a number of alchemical wonders that benefit everyone. She has the following alchemical items available for sale:

ITEM	PRICE	WEIGHT	AVAILABLE
Bladeguard	40 gp	—	4
Chill Cream	15 gp	1 lb.	7
Fire Ward Gel	150 gp	1 lb.	7
Liquid Ice	40gp.	2 lbs.	5
Soothe Syrup	25 gp	1/ lb.	3

Other than the laboratory staff, and the few delvers who travel to and from Pylon Four, only Quint Sorrel visits the pylon out of his sense of affection for Dwilla.

## 10: PYLON FIVE

Pylon Five is the third most active delve location, but it currently does not serve that purpose thanks to a strong earthquake that cracked the foundation. As one of Korron Greymantle's few challenges during his lordship, he shut down the pylon while it awaits repairs. Korron spends most of his time here, unofficially overseeing a team of dwarven and gnome engineers. The team estimates they will repair the pylon in five weeks, barring any delays due to further seismic activity.

## LIFE IN VULCANBRIDGE

Even with the protections afforded by Vulcanbridge's pylons, the residents know they live in a hostile environment. Able-bodied citizens delve below the plain to extract gems and collect metal-laden lava or devise engineering marvels to better extract metals from lava, protect the village from the environment and ensure the pylons do not fall into disrepair. Those who cannot mine or engineer – mainly children or miners who have major injuries – instead maintain residences, collect supplies or assist engineers. Life is not all work, though, and the people of Vulcanbridge get quite rowdy during their downtime.

### TRADE & INDUSTRY

Gathering and selling of precious gems and metals generates the primary income for Vulcanbridge, making it relatively affluent for a village of its size. Since very few trading partners are willing to travel to Vulcanbridge to buy its goods, Ander Hale and his team make the treacherous journey – aided by the finest in fire

protection – on a bimonthly basis. This trip serves two purposes: selling material wealth to interested parties and obtaining goods, notably food and water. Ander has developed numerous contacts in various locations, which allows him to sell Vulcanbridge's wares for a high price and to buy necessities at a fair rate. Since the majority of the residents are concerned with the day-to-day operation of the mines and pylons, Ander usually discusses terms with visitors passing through the village hoping to find warriors to guard the caravans during trading missions to more hospitable climes. He likewise dangles the twin carrots of pay and the chance to travel to an exotic location to entice guards for the journey back to the village.

As an incidental secondary market, the alchemical items and magic that provide protection from the harsh environment sell nearly as well as the village's material wealth. The processes developed over the decades have rendered the creation of fire protection items cheap, and Hale's group sells the items at a nice mark-up while keeping the prices under normal market value.

VERRIX GRAVELBEARD	CR 11 (XP 12,800)
Male young gold dragon LG Large dragon (fire)	
<b>Init</b> +1; <b>Senses</b> blindsense 60 ft., darkvision 120 ft., dragon senses, Perception +22, Sense Motive +22	
<b>Speed</b> 60 ft., fly 200 ft. (poor); <b>ACP</b> 0; Acrobatics +1 (+13 jumping), Climb +7, Fly +10, Swim +30	
<b>AC</b> 23, touch 10, flat-footed 22; <b>CMD</b> 31 (35 vs. trip)	
<b>Fort</b> +12, <b>Ref</b> +9, <b>Will</b> +13	
<b>hp</b> 126 (12 HD)	
<b>Immune</b> fire, paralysis, sleep; <b>Weaknesses</b> vulnerability to cold	
<b>Space</b> 10 ft.; <b>Base Atk</b> +12; <b>CMB</b> +20	
<b>Melee</b> battleaxe (Power Attack [-4/+8]) +14 (1d8+7/x3) or	
<b>Melee</b> bite (reach 10 ft.; Power Attack [-4/+12]) +18 (2d6+10),	
2 claws (Power Attack [-4/+8]) +18 (1d8+7),	
2 wings (Power Attack [-4/+4]) +16 (1d6+3) and	
tail (Power Attack [-4/+12]) +16 (1d8+10)	
<b>Atk Options</b> Power Attack, Vital Strike	
<b>Special Actions</b> breath weapon (40-ft. cone; DC 20 Reflex halves; 6d10 fire or weakening breath [40-ft. cone; DC 20 Will halves; 3 Str damage], change shape (3/day)	
<b>Spell-Like Abilities</b> (CL 12th, concentration +15)	
At will— <i>detect evil</i>	
<b>Sorcerer Spells Known</b> (CL 1st, concentration +4)	
1st (4/day)— <i>endure elements, shield</i>	
0 (at will)— <i>detect magic, light, mending, stabilize</i>	
<b>Abilities</b> Str 25, Dex 12, Con 19, Int 16, Wis 17, Cha 16	
<b>SQ</b> detect gems (3/day)	
<b>Feats</b> Alertness, Iron Will, Multiattack, Power Attack, Skill Focus (Knowledge [engineering]), Vital Strike	
<b>Skills</b> as above plus Diplomacy +18, Heal +18, Knowledge (engineering) +24, Knowledge (local) +18, Profession (miner) +18	
<b>Languages</b> Common, Draconic, Dwarven, Halfling	
<b>Gear</b> as above plus belt pouch, miner's outfit, pickaxe, 34 gp	

### LAW & ORDER

Tagrissa captains the guard, which normally has very little trouble from Vulcanbridge's residents except for the occasional unruly drunk. While visitors are in the village, Tagrissa stations guards at all the bridges leading from Centre Pylon. Unless Korron has given permission to the PCs to travel outside of Centre Pylon, the guards stop them from crossing the bridges. Tagrissa's group knows all the residents by sight – even dwarven characters find bluffs and disguises difficult.

### EVENTS

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

D6	EVENT
1	A mighty roar sounds from below Pylon Five and repeats on an hourly basis, shaking the pylon.
2	An unprecedented geyser-like eruption splashed lava on the upper reaches of Centre Pylon. The characters can assist in the rescue and healing of victims.
3	One of the miners has discovered molten mithral in a cavern below Pylon Three.
4	Five large fire elementals stand sentry around Manda's Pylon. They make no threatening gestures but defend themselves, if attacked.
5	Raiders clad in fireproof gear attack Vulcanbridge in search of gold and gems.
6	An envoy for a fire giant chieftain arrives to discuss the chieftain's demands that Vulcanbridge submit to his rule.



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