

DUNGEON™

Dungeon #152

Dungeon #152 features all-new D&D adventures by long-time designers Ari Marmell ("Last Breaths of Ashenport") and Robert Schwalb ("Essence of Evil"), a pair of Side Treks by **D&D** designer David Noonan. Plus, new installments of *Dungeoncraft*, *Save My Game*, and *Roll vs. Role*, and an adventure tie-in to the new **Forgotten Realms** product *Anauroch: The Empire of Shade*.



Features

Essence of Evil

Dungeon Adventures

The dark orb Shothragot is ascending, heading skyward to an unholy symbol that glows over the land. If the elder evil reaches its destination, can the apocalypse be far behind?

by Robert J. Schwalb



Moagim's Clone

Dungeon Adventures

Long ago, a mighty battle took place between two powerful wizards -- a battle that resulted in unforeseen consequences for the kingdom and all its denizens that are only being felt a century later.

by Ryan Smalley

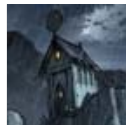


The Last Breaths of Ashenport

Dungeon Adventures

Entering Ashenport, a quiet coastal town in the middle of nowhere, is easy. It's leaving that could prove difficult.

by Ari Marmell



The Plague Tree

Dungeon Adventures

Running *Anauroch: The Empire of Shade*? Here's a bonus adventure that fits smoothly into your game. Not running *Anauroch*? Use "The Plague Tree" as a short adventure in any campaign.

by Greg A. Vaughan



The Best Adventure I Never Wrote...

Dungeon Features

The final results are in!

We've come to the best adventures our freelancers never actually wrote... until (potentially) now. They propose the adventures. We develop the most popular proposal, as voted by the player community.



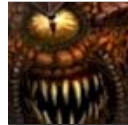
Blood Road

Roll vs Role

Roll vs Role

A caravanserai is an elaborate roadside inn that caters more to trade caravans than lone travelers. What would the ramifications be if a group of vampire lords secretly controlled such a place?

by Bruce R. Cordell and Chris Sims



Cruel Shadows

Roll vs Role

Roll vs Role

What if two competing factions of shadar-kai held power in differing sections of an adventure site? What if each side held goals in common with the PCs? Come take a look at what you, as the Dungeon Master, can do with the shadar-kai.

by Bruce R. Cordell and Chris Sims



Marking Marked and Other 4E-isms

Save My Game

Save My Game

"Okay, which ones are hurt most again? Those two? Which one is affected by the paladin's ability?" Come take a look at how Stephen deals with such situations, but he does so with a twist: He's using 4th Edition as the basis of his article.

by Stephen Radney-MacFarland



Save Against Plot Corruption

Save My Game

Save My Game

Face plot corruption with aplomb. Deal with spotlight hogs. Figure out what your next campaign setting will be. Make combat go faster. Read on to see how we tackle these topics in this month's *Save My Game*!

by Stephen Radney-MacFarland



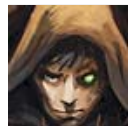
The Fine Art of Table Management

Save My Game

Save My Game

"What? Oh, sorry. Whose turn is it? Mine? Oh, I think I want to... no, wait. Yeah. I swing my sword at that guy over there. No, not that one. That other one. Oh, the one next to it is already hurt?"

by Stephen Radney-MacFarland



Columns



The Essence of Evil

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... And in the last days, the sleep of a thousand years shall end when the herald appears, blotting out the sun in all its awesome glory. Its shuddering bulk shall sound the trumpets of destiny, those clarion calls to bring forth He Who Waits, the Dark God, the Wrongly Held. The 333 jewels that contain the dread master shall shatter, and the world shall tremble, wailing and clawing, begging their petty gods for escape from the wondrous return of the Unraveler, whose appearance shall set to right all wrongs, restore all balance, and reduce the abomination of creation to its primal, primitive state. Rejoice, for the end is at hand . . .

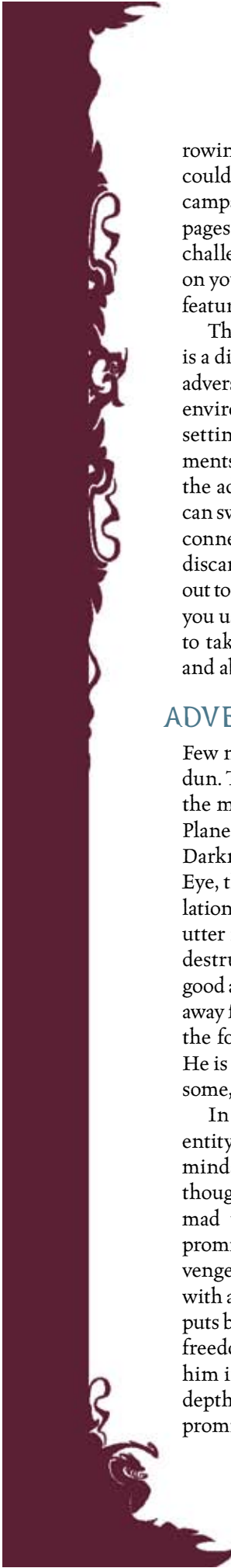
“The Essence of Evil” is a DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® adventure designed for four to six 20th-level characters. Player characters who complete this climactic event should advance to 21st level or higher. “The Essence of Evil” is designed to be the conclusion of a long campaign—a capstone to an excellent series of adventures. The plot is broadly sketched to allow Dungeon Masters to link it to nearly any campaign in any campaign setting. Alternatively, this adventure can make for a brutal stand-alone scenario, allowing players and DMs a deadly scenario to explore high-level games.

WHAT YOU NEED TO PLAY

“The Essence of Evil” is a DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game. You need the *Player’s Handbook* and *Dungeon Master’s Guide* to play. This adventure references a broad range of materials including *Book of Vile Darkness* (BV), *Complete Arcane* (CAr), *Complete Divine* (CD), *Complete Warrior* (CW), *Epic Level Handbook* (ELH), *Fiend Folio* (FF), *Fiendish Codex I* (FC1), *Lords of Madness* (LM), *Magic Item Compendium* (MIC), *Monster Manual* (MM), *Monster Manual III* (MM3), *Monster Manual IV* (MM4), *Monster Manual V* (MM5), *Players Handbook II* (PH2), *Races of Stone* (RS), *Spell Compendium* (SpC), and *Tome of Battle* (ToB), though none of these materials are necessary for play. All pertinent material including statistics and feat summaries are included in the tactical encounters. If you don’t have *Spell Compendium*, simply select other spells from a supplement you do have.

PREPARATION

“The Essence of Evil” is an unusual adventure in that it leaves much of what has come before to the DM to design. Suggestions and ideas are included here, but how this adventure site fits into your campaign is entirely at your discretion. You could, for instance, start at the dungeon’s “doorstep,” sending the PCs into a har-



rowing descent into madness and appalling evil, or you could seed the adventure background into an ongoing campaign to foreshadow the events described in these pages. Whatever you decide, this adventure will be a challenge, and its outcome could have lasting effects on your campaign setting, as is fitting for any scenario featuring an elder evil as the principle villain.

This adventure is designed for experienced DMs. It is a difficulty foray, featuring numerous monsters and adversaries with a broad range of abilities, in deadly environments, and with the fate of your campaign setting at stake. You could downplay any of these elements, altering the nature of the elder evil and recast the adventure to have less impact on your world. You can swap out monsters for those you feel have a stronger connection to your personal campaign setting, or even discard the adventure entirely and pull the creatures out to populate a dungeon of your own design. However you use this adventure, “The Essence of Evil” is bound to take your players to the brink and test their skills and abilities in ways they’ve never been tested before.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Few names strike as much fear as the dreaded Tharizdun. The Dark God has many names, looming large in the minds of every sentient race to walk the Material Plane. He is known as the Patient One, He of Eternal Darkness, while others call him the Elder Elemental Eye, the Ebon God, or by any of countless other appellations. All of these are masks—facades to conceal utter malevolence and evil. A god so powerful and so destructive, his mere existence compelled the gods of good and evil to set aside their differences and lock him away for all time. This is Tharizdun, the lord of entropy, the force of decay and destruction in the multiverse. He is the god of madness, the father of endings, and to some, he is the sire of elder evils.

In spite of the gods’ efforts to contain this malign entity, Tharizdun’s touch has not been far from mortal minds. In their dreams, their fantasies, their feverish thoughts, he whispers unspeakable secrets, driving mad those who would listen, seducing them with promises of power, wealth, the fulfillment of their lust, vengeance, and anything else he can to fill their souls with an unquenchable thirst to serve his awful will. He puts before his servants one dreadful task. He demands freedom—release from the hateful bonds that contain him in the far-flung prison deep inside the gloomiest depths of the Ethereal Plane. It is a task many have promised to fulfill but none have achieved, for the

enemies of the Dark God are many and varied, drawn to oppose the certain destruction his release threatens. So it is that history is littered with corpses of Tharizdun’s failed servants, of bold cultists cast down, and of entire civilizations brought to ruin for their allegiance to this foul master. To many, it seems Tharizdun is a tired threat, an old menace easily thwarted and one not worth committing the resources and heroes to defeat, for too often his minions find defeat. While some still remain committed to being vigilant against Tharizdun’s endless legions, the cancer spreads and complacency blooms in the hearts of those that matter. It is but a matter of time before the world becomes too soft—too weak—to oppose him and his children, and that time is now.

Deep beneath a forlorn volcano, long dormant but active with the servants of the Elder Elemental Eye, lays a dreadful thing—a fragment of He of Eternal Darkness brought low ages ago by powerful magic. For centuries, the abomination has waited, growing fat on the prayers of those mortal above that gave their lives and those of their sacrifices to honor their insane master. Never content with such petty supplications, the entity divided its minions into factions and turned them against one another, compelling them to fight and murder, to harvest the souls of their brethren in evil. Each new death fed the elder evil, awakening a dire intelligence and a grim awareness until it took a name and found its purpose. It became Shothragot, the Herald of Tharizdun and the key to unlock the dread prison.

As it stirred and trembled, it called upon awful servants to slaughter those remaining enemies, to winnow the ranks of those divine servants who would stand against it as it blossomed into the fullness of its horrid form. It assumed control over the scattered cultists, compelling them to seek out the keys that would unlock the dark god’s prison, to find the 333 *Gems of Tharizdun* and return them to it so the Herald might consume them and grow powerful on their energies. For eight long years, the Herald feasted, growing fat on the burgeoning wickedness, greedily swallowing the stones as quickly as they arrived. The last gemstone devoured, Shothragot is ready to seek out its dread master. It tears free from its hidden redoubt and drifts into the heavens to make its final journey.

What the PCs Know

As an elder evil, Shothragot’s appearance in the world triggers the appearance of a sign of the apocalypse, a potent sigil that warns mortals of the impending doom.

SEALS OF BINDING

The Seals of Binding interfere with most conjuration spells and many divination spells. By closing off the avenues that enable mortals to interact with the planes, clerics find their connections with the divine severed, summoned creatures remain trapped, and the most expedient means of travel cease to function.

To identify the features of the sign, a character may make a Knowledge (religion) check. If the check succeeds by 5 or more, it identifies the sign's strength. Success by 10 or more reveals the sign's full effects at all levels of strength.

Faint (DC 45): All conjuration (calling, summoning, and teleportation) and divination spells and spell-like abilities are impeded. A spellcaster must succeed on a Spellcraft check (DC 20 + the level of the spell) or the spell fails and the spell or spell slot is lost. In addition, spells that return creatures to their native plane, such as *banishment* or *dismissal*, automatically fail.

Moderate (DC 35): As *faint*, but also summoned creatures no longer return to their native plane. The summoned creature remains under the caster's control for the duration of the spell, but is free to act normally once the duration expires.

Divine spellcasters cast their spells at -1 caster level and turn or rebuke attempts take a -5 penalty on the check and damage rolls.

Strong (DC 25): As *moderate*, but when a conjuration (teleportation) spell or spell-like ability is cast, there's a 20% chance for a mishap. On a mishap, the caster and anyone else affected by the spell takes 5d6 points of damage.

Divine spellcasters cast their spells at -2 caster levels. As well, turning and rebuking attempts take a -10 penalty on the check and damage rolls.

Overwhelming (DC 15): All conjuration (calling, summoning, and teleportation) spells cease to function. Divination spells that contact extraplanar beings (*commune* and *contact other plane* for example) are likewise foiled. Divine spellcasters cast all spells at -4 caster levels and when praying for new spells, they have a 20% chance per spell of losing it. Last, turning and rebuking attempts take a -20 penalty on the check and damage rolls.

In the case of this abomination, the sign is of divine origin, a seal to contain the wickedness of this appalling entity and prevent its reunion with Tharizdun.

Undoubtedly, the player characters as well as countless others, have felt the sign intensify, catching sight of its manifestation, first in subtle ways, but growing more powerful as Shothragot grows in power. The Herald's particular sign manifests as the Seals of Binding, a strange glyph that spreads across the heavens to interfere with conjuration magic. For details on the sign's full

effects, see the Seals of Binding sidebar. At the start of *The Essence of Evil*, Shothragot's sign is at Overwhelming strength. If you intend to run this adventure as the conclusion of your campaign, consider revealing the sign earlier to signal the approaching doom.

Since noticing something is wrong is unavoidable, the player characters should have plenty of opportunity to research the sign's implications and associations and perhaps learn something more of Tharizdun in the process. Regardless of the PCs' preparations, the full weight of the threat reveals itself when Shothragot tears free from the Crater Ridge Mines (*Return to the Temple of Elemental Evil*) and drifts into the sky toward the glyph burning in the heavens. Whatever the thing is, it aims to reach the fiery sign, and who can say what will happen when it reaches it?

What the PCs Don't Know

Bloated on the Gems of Tharizdun, the elder evil is ready to make its journey. However, it is contained by the fiery glyph in the heavens. As long as it remains, it cannot leave the Material Plane. Thus, the elder evil commands its servant Lareth the Beautiful to destroy the Gems it has swallowed, but the cleric is reluctant for it knows guardians protect the stones and he fears he lacks the power to destroy them. Thus the elder evil hovers until its servant finds the courage to do as he is bid.

Another complication is that as the elder evil grew, it attracted the noisome attention of all manner of fiends. Demons, elementals, and corrupted abominations have burrowed into its form, some to worship it, others to accompany it as it makes its passage into the Ethereal Plane. If the elder evil cares, it shows no sign and seems content to let the parasites exist for now.

ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

The sign is at full strength and the land shudders under the weight of the elder evil and its progress. Since Shothragot's agents murdered or imprisoned most other would-be champions and heroes, it falls to the player characters to attend to this apocalyptic threat. Fighting the elder evil itself is impossible since it is too big and too resilient to be destroyed from outside. Instead, the heroes must journey inside the elder evil, seek out its essence, and destroy it.

A number of complications combine to make this task extraordinarily difficult. First, there's the matter of reaching the elder evil. Certainly, characters of this level should have means to reach the mass by means of an *overland flight* spell, but note that so long as the glyph

continues to burn in the heavens, conjuration (teleportation) spells automatically fail. Once the characters reach the elder evil, they have to find a way inside.

Within, the player characters learn there is no way to reach the essence of Shothragot due to a sealed portal that, thanks to the glyph, no longer functions and blocks the passage. Diminishing the glyph is possible if the PCs destroy all of the *Gems of Tharizdun* (see area 4). This causes the glyph to recede and gives the PCs the chance to jump through the portal at area 6 to face the essence in area 22. Unfortunately, weakening the glyph also enables the elder evil to slip free from the Material Plane. Once there, the PCs must overcome the essence before it reaches Tharizdun's prison plane.

A better solution is to find the *torch of revealing* and the *incense of dreaming* (found in area 18). If the adventurers bring the lit torch to the portal, the light it radiates opens the portal and allows the PCs to slip through without releasing the elder evil.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

The PCs can become involved in this adventure in a number of ways.

Sudden Appearance: The elder evil tears free from the earth in an enormous explosion that causes earthquakes and tidal waves, and that also vomits up plumes of dust and debris into the atmosphere. Following the event, the elder evil appears in the sky, slowing climbing toward the fiery glyph that now spreads across the heavens as if it were some incredible world-spanning eldritch shield. As a result of the heavenly phenomena, magic is damaged, spells fail, and other, subtler effects take hold, plunging the world into turmoil. It falls to the PCs to fight this potent menace and put to right the world by eliminating it.

Impending Doom: For ages, prophets and mystics have foretold a coming calamity—warned all who would listen that the end was nigh. No one believed them until the skies ignited with flames and magic unraveled. As the sign intensified, the earth swelled and gradually there emerged a massive ball of darkness. The various churches and temples declared war on the thing, knowing the end of all things was at hand. The PCs, along with others, are recruited to fight this menace. Tragically, all attempts to defeat the monstrosity have failed, leaving it to one final band of heroes to set things aright.

Planar Catastrophe: Shothragot emerges from the land on an alternate Material Plane only to be cast out by powerful magic, shunted into the Plane of Shadow.

Drifting through the endless darkness and leaving a swathe of destruction in its wake, it finally emerges into the PCs' Material Plane. When it does, it tears a hole in reality, bringing with it a tide of horror. Legions of twisted shadow creatures spread like black ink across the land. While the people rally to fight back the hordes, the elder evil rages in the heavens sowing destruction wherever it goes. It's believed that if someone can destroy the abomination, the fiery glyph will vanish and allow the gods to lend their aid to fighting the shadowy hordes.

INTO THE HEART OF DARKNESS

Drifting in the heavens is a great ball of roiling darkness, an uncertain orb that shudders and writhes, belching forth its corruption to wash over the land. Horrid creatures fly about the mass, shrieking and gibbering in celebration of the Herald's passage. As it ascends, ever so slowly, the light of the fiery glyph shines in the heavens, intricately carved as if by the hands of the gods themselves.



USING THIS ADVENTURE

Although the elder evil described in this adventure has overt connections to Tharizdun, a major and enduring threat in the GREYHAWK campaign setting, you can easily adapt this scenario for use with a variety of other game settings.

Forgotten Realms: In the FORGOTTEN REALMS, Shothragot is the Herald of Ghaunadaur. Created to wipe out mortal worshipers of his enemy gods, the Elder Eye uses the Herald to distract the gods while he mounts an offensive against his rivals. Using the power he steals from his defeated enemies, he plans to cast down Ao and seize the multiverse and the secrets of creation for himself. The PCs must stop the Herald before Ghaunadaur can make his move.

Eberron: Forged by a powerful and nearly forgotten daelkyr warlord, Shothragot lays in wait for the moment its master calls. When foul agents of evil descend into the Khyber, they uncover Shothragot's resting place and awaken the abomination. Tearing loose from the ground, the elder evil intends to breach the bounds of reality and bring forth the Realm of Madness fully into the mortal realm.

Dragonlance: Having been stirred to consciousness during the War of Souls, the Herald erupts from the soil to escape the Material Plane and seek out its maker, a fragment of Chaos locked inside the mysterious Void.

Demiplane of Dread: Shothragot has torn free from a Material Plane, destroying it and everyone in it. As it drifts through the Ethereal Plane, the mists of the Demiplane of Dread ensnare it and draw it and all of its wickedness

within the boundaries of the horrific plane. Shothragot cackles with glee as the Domain Lords vie and wage war against one another in the effort to claim the elder evil for themselves.

Mystara: Spawned by the united will of the Outer Beings, Shothragot instead emerges from the Nightmare Dimension intent on raining death and destruction upon the world. As it passes over the lands, it births countless abominations, seeding the world with creations born from the diseased minds of inexplicable forces of chaos and entropy.

Dark Sun: Believed to be a sentient fragment of the force responsible for the Dead Lands, the horror is born in a torrent of unleashed destruction. Rather than flying through the heavens, Shothragot spreads across the land, pulling itself along with its inky tentacles. Like spilled ink, what little life that remains on Athas is now in jeopardy unless bold heroes can stop the elder evil before it's too late.

Birthright: The Cold Rider awakens Shothragot in the hopes of using it to restore its former power and might, to regain the mantle of Azrai, the dark god. The elder evil drifts into the heavens to pierce the Evanescence and merge the Material Plane with the Shadow World, while the Cold Rider provokes its bestial servants to wage war across the lands in preparation for the dreadful event that could plunge this war-torn world into ruin.

Key Features

The elder evil's interior is a shuddering network of living tunnels, dripping passages filled with noxious fumes and beads of acid sweat oozing from the porous walls. The air is laden with the stench of rot and decay, and coarse hair reaches out to snatch those that pass by. Each chamber is a new vista of horror, twisted and corrupt, born from Tharizdun's insane mind.

Ceilings: Passages and chambers are usually as tall as they are wide.

Floors: Unless otherwise mentioned, all spaces in this environment count as difficult terrain thanks to the animated hairs that reach up and coil about the legs of people exploring the tunnels.

Walls: The walls of the complex are made from particularly tough flesh. Each 10-foot section has 120 hit points, damage reduction 20/good and silver, and fast healing 5. Any *weapon* attack against the wall that deals 50 or more points of damage causes the section to rupture and create a 30-foot cone of acid. All creatures in the area take 10d6 points of acid damage (Reflex DC 25 half). The rupture clots and seals after 1 round.

Lighting: The entire place is dark—so dark it even mutes light sources brought inside. Treat all nonmagi-

cal light sources as shedding shadowy light out to their normal bright ranges and no light beyond. Magical light sources have their ranges of illumination halved. Characters with darkvision can see normally.

Sounds: The elder evil's form is alive with noise; there's always some groaning sound, some distant shriek, or a deep and rumbling chuckle, as if the PCs amused the place. All Listen checks take a -5 penalty.

Defenses

The elder evil is infested with creatures—dreadful beings trapped in the Material Plane because of its presence or horrors hoping to curry favor with the Dark God. The PCs are not in danger of encountering wandering monsters unless they cast a damaging spell whose area comes in contact with a wall. Should this occur, the wall bulges as a black tumescent tumor forms. After 1d3 rounds, the tumor splits open in a torrent of caustic fluids dealing 5d6 points of acid damage to all creatures within 20 feet (DC 20 Reflex save for half). Following the vile fluid is a black cyst, an awful servitor of Shothragot. The newly created abomination attacks the closest creature each round until it senses no creatures within range of its blindsight. Once created, a black cyst remains until destroyed.

BLACK CYST**CR 18****hp** 346 (33 HD); regeneration 10; **DR** 15/lawful and silver

Always CE Large outsider (chaos, evil, extraplanar)

Init +7; **Senses** blindsight 120 ft., darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +39, Spot +39**Aura** warping (60 ft., DC 33)**Languages** A black cyst cannot speak but understands telepathic instructions from the essence of Tharizdun**AC** 35, touch 17, flat-footed 32; Dodge (-1 size, +3 Dex, +5 insight, +18 natural)**Immune** critical hits, massive damage, mind-affecting effects, paralysis, petrification**Resist** acid 10, cold 10, electricity 10, fire 10; **SR** 26**Fort** +29, **Ref** +26, **Will** +26**Weakness** vulnerability to sonic**Speed** 50 ft. (10 squares), fly 100 ft. (perfect); Flyby Attack**Melee** 8 tentacles +40 (1d6+8/19-20)**Space** 10 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.**Base Atk** +33; **Grp** +45**Atk Options** Cleave, Great Cleave, Improved Bull Rush, Improved Sunder, Power Attack, Quicken Spell-Like Ability (*confusion*), aligned strike (chaos, evil), entropic touch, magic strike**Special Actions** spawn elemental**Spell-Like Abilities** (CL 16th):At will—*confusion* (DC 19), *ethereal jaunt*1/day—*insanity* (DC 22), *power word stun*, *waves of exhaustion***Abilities** Str 26, Dex 16, Con 22, Int 3, Wis 17, Cha 21**SQ** blessing of Tharizdun**Feats** Ability Focus (warping aura), Cleave, Dodge, Flyby Attack, Great Cleave, Improved Bull Rush, Improved Critical (tentacle), Improved Initiative, Improved Sunder, Mobility, Power Attack, Quicken Spell-Like Ability (*confusion*)**Skills** Hide +35, Listen +39, Move Silently +39, Spot +39**Warping Aura (Su)** Each round, at the start of the black cyst's turn, all living creatures within 60 feet must succeed on a DC 33 Will save or take -5 insight penalty on all attack rolls, saving throws, skill checks, and ability checks for 1 round. This is a mind-affecting effect.**Regeneration (Ex)** A black cyst takes lethal damage from lawful and silver weapons as well as from effects with the sonic descriptor.**Entropic Touch (Su)** As the *harm* spell, Will DC 31 half,

caster level 15th. Once the black cyst uses this ability, it cannot use again in the same 24-hour period unless it takes 50 or more points of damage.

Spawn Elemental (Su) Whenever a black cyst is reduced to 200 hit points or less, it spews forth an elder elemental into an adjacent square. Roll 1d4 to determine the elemental's type: 1—air; 2—earth; 3—fire; 4—water. The spawned elemental is a normal elemental for its kind except its alignment is chaotic evil. The elemental is under the control of the black cyst that spawned it. Should the black cyst's hit point total rise above 200, the elder elemental vanishes.

Blessing of Tharizdun (Ex) A black cyst may add its Charisma bonus as an insight bonus to AC and as a resistance bonus on all saving throws. These bonuses are included above.

ENCOUNTER AREAS

The following locations correspond to those indicated on the dungeon map.

1. Suppurating Valves

The elder evil's body floats above the surface of the world. Its altitude depends on how long it takes the PCs to reach it. For each day after its first appearance, it ascends 500 feet.

When the player characters come within 100 feet of the elder evil, read:



The massive, spinning ball of glistening darkness hangs in the air, slowly and steadily rising into the firmament. Its surface writhes as if alive, and its foul fluid wars with waves of mud. Toxic fumes vent into the air. Plumes of black fire scorch the sky.

When the player characters come within 50 feet of an entrance, read:

A shuddering valve, fleshy in appearance, opens onto a dim passageway into the form's interior. Spilling forth from the wound is a torrent of bright purple fluid, which rains down on the land far below.

When the characters come within 50 feet of the elder evil, they trigger the tactical encounter.

Tactical Encounter: Suppurating Valves (page 17).

2. Cyst of Madness

Obox-Ob, the Prince of Vermin, brought with him a number of servants to safeguard his presence while in the company of the elder evil. Once inside the abomination, the fickle lord abandoned its scions and left them in this chamber to find their own fates.

When the PCs come to the edge of the map, read:

Pools of phosphorescent fluid cast the chamber in ghastly lime-colored light. Several misshapen lumps of flesh quiver in the gloom.

When the PCs enter the room, they trigger the tactical encounter. The draudnus's true seeing ability allows them to spot invisible or otherwise hidden characters.

Tactical Encounter: Cyst of Madness, page (page 19).

3. Crying Room

The Crying Room takes its name from the violet condensation collecting on the walls of this odd chamber.

When the PCs enter this room, read:

The walls bleed a running violet fluid that dribbles down to collect into small puddles on the floor. Scattered around the place are loose coins and an assortment of oddities.

Believed by the denizens to be a place sacred to Tharizdun, those intelligent creatures inhabiting the elder evil occasionally make offerings here.

Treasure: Scattered across the floor are 6,066 gp, a small inverted basalt pyramid studded with tiny

amethysts (worth 3,000 gp), a pink rhomboid ioun stone, and a ring of avoidance^{MIC}. If you don't have the *Magic Item Compendium*, replace the ring of avoidance with a ring of force shield and a potion of cure serious wounds.

4. Pool of Molten Ice

This room houses a trio of the Dark God's servants. Charged with guarding the digested Gems of Tharizdun, these guardians attack anyone they deem to be an intruder.

As part of the safeguards that protect the gemstones, a prismatic wall trap stretches across the entrance of the room, activating 2 rounds after the first person crosses its threshold.

Prismatic Wall Trap: CR 10; magic device; proximity trigger; automatic reset; spell effect (*prismatic wall*, CL 15th, see PH 264); Search DC 33; Disable Device DC 33.

Once the PCs enter the chamber, read:

Murky water floods this large room and rising from the center is an island of dark stone studded with black jewels that reflect the light of two large balls of roiling fire hovering in the air on either side of the entrance.

Once the trap activates, when a PC enters the water, or when a character touches the islands, the PCs trigger the tactical encounter.

Tactical Encounter: Pool of Molten Ice (page 21).

5. Carnage

When the elder evil consumed the last Gem of Tharizdun, cultists clambered to find a place within the abomination, to be carried forth and witness firsthand the power of the Dark God. Gathering in this chamber to chant their prayers and supplications, they waited for the appointed time. However, a molydeus in the service of Orcus had other plans.

After the demon prince of undeath learned of Obox-Ob's interests in Shothragot, Orcus dispatched an enforcer to weaken the cult of the Elder Elemental Eye in the hopes of dashing the obyrith lord's plans. The demon arrived just as the elder evil made its destructive journey to the surface and, like others, it hitched a ride inside of its bulk. It followed the cultists into this room, where it immediately chopped them into bloody chunks of meat.

When the PCs enter this room, read:

The cause of this room's stench is soon made clear by the hundreds of dismembered corpses cooling in pools of their own blood

throughout this massive chamber. Humans, kuo-toas, goblinoids, and more all lie scattered about in various forms of mutilation, congealing into a macabre carpet of flesh and gore.

If the PCs have not yet encountered the molydeus, they face it here.

Tactical Encounter: Carnage (page 24).

6. Puce Portal

This room holds the portal that grants passage to the essence of Shothragot. Pounding on the gate is a frustrated inevitability. A DC 5 Listen check (modified by distance) reveals the sounds of its hammering.

If the PCs have not yet destroyed the Gems of Tharizdun in area 4, read:



A pale yellow disk surrounded by a scorched ring of blackened flesh hangs against the far wall. Hammering against the disk is a large abstract being, its body made up of intricate clockwork sheathed in greenish-blue metal plating. Its head, a flattened disk, pivots to face your direction and a single blazing red eye fixes upon you.

The creature is a varakhut, an inevitable created to defend the gods and their works. It and several others like it appeared in the Material Plane shortly after the elder evil awakened. All of the other inevitables that made the journey met various nasty fates until only this construct remained of the original expedition.

The varakhut is hostile to any creature it encounters inside the elder evil. It does, however, give the PCs long enough to explain their presence. It attacks unless the characters improve its attitude to friendly (DC 35).

Tactical Encounter: Puce Portal (page 26).

Should the adventurers succeed on improving its attitude, it turns back to pounding on the portal, ignoring the PCs. Only if the characters improve its attitude to helpful (DC 50) will it talk with them. The inevitable knows everything described in the adventure background and relates this information if asked. It offers to assist the PCs in their efforts to destroy the abomination and accompanies the adventurers so long as they make clear progress toward their goal. If the PCs falter, the varakhut abandons them.

If the PCs have destroyed the *Gems of Tharizdun* in area 4, read:

Lambent flames burn the walls all around a large disk of pulsing puce light. Vague shapes can be seen within. Monstrous things, dark and feminine, flit back and forth. The dim room beyond seems otherwise empty.

Whenever the portal opens, the varakhut slips through the gate to attack the essence of Shothragot. As one might expect, the blackstone gigants and the essence make short work of the inevitable, destroying it after 1d4+2 rounds.

If the PCs bring a lit torch of revealing into this chamber, read:

When the eerie light of the torch falls upon the disk, the cloudiness vanishes and you can see clearly into a massive chamber. Four enormous stone statues stand guard over a great pit, where something black and profoundly evil throbs and groans.

With the light of the torch, the PCs can cross over and confront the essence of Shothragot in its lair.

7. Pits and Pillars

Several traps ward this chamber. When the PCs enter this room, read:

Ten-foot wide pillars sculpted to resemble tortured human men and women, their flesh flayed from their bodies, fill this room.

In each space indicated on the map, there are two traps, one on the floor and another on the ceiling. Any pressure placed on a floor in these spaces causes them to swirl open, revealing a gap that travels through the elder evil and out into the open air below. Damage from the fall depends on the elder evil's altitude (typically 20d6 points of falling damage).

Open-Air Pit Trap: CR 11; mechanical; location trigger; automatic reset; Reflex DC 25 avoids; 20d6, fall; multiple targets (all targets within a 10-ft.-by-10-ft. area); Search DC 25; Disable Device DC 25.

Characters flying or levitating in these spaces trigger the second trap, which causes the ceiling to open up and triggers a *control winds* spell at hurricane force to blow the creature up and out of the elder evil. Characters blown out through the top of the elder evil fall as above unless they are under the effects of a *fly* or similar spell. Those that land on the exterior are subject to the elder evil's epidermis (see Features of the Area on page 18).

Control Winds Trap: CR 7; magical; location trigger; automatic reset; spell effect (*control winds*, hurricane force, Fortitude DC 15 negates; multiple targets (all targets within a 10-ft.-by-10-ft. area); Search DC 30; Disable Device DC 30.

8. Corridor of Sighs

Numerous orifices whisper in the dark of this corridor, imparting fell secrets on those who traverse its length.

When the characters enter this corridor, read:

A susurrus sounds as you press on through this corridor carrying with it faint whispering noises and mournful cries.

Characters traveling through this area are entitled to a DC 25 Listen check. Those that succeed hear "the gems" repeated and mixed with sobs and cries. The noise emanates from the petitioners of Tharizdun, who, because their god is chained in the Ethereal Plane, have nowhere to go and are thus condemned to join the elder evil, trapped between worlds.

9. The Dark God's Prison

Service to the Ebon God is difficult at best. Enemies oppose the god from all sides, even within the cult's own ranks. To make matters worse, mortal servants are often driven insane by the whispers of their unspeakable master, by the sights they see in their brief service, and by the knowledge of the doom they bring unto the world by chasing after the objectives of their foul master. Most cultists that lack the will to serve are destroyed because the Dark God doesn't tolerate weakness in his minions. Those who disappoint their master find terrible fates as is revealed by this room.

This chamber contains the raving servants of Tharizdun. Deemed flawed, the cult sealed them inside the cages and left them in the care of the scions of madness to guard.

When the PCs reach the edge of the chamber, read:

The passage widens into a large chamber filled with smoke and fire. Narrow pathways wind through the conflagration, passing near black iron cages hanging from thick chains set into the ceiling.

When the PCs enter the room, they trigger the tactical encounter.

Tactical Encounter: The Dark God's Prison (page 28).

10. Antechamber

This odd room serves as the antechamber for a cluster of beholders in area 11. Seventy-feet up on the far wall are three large holes cut through the flesh of the elder evil by the beholders' disintegration rays. Unless the PCs go to investigate or make a lot of noise, the beholders in the adjacent room are content to serve the whims of their corrupted hive mother.

When the PCs enter this room, read:

This bleak chamber is cold and patches of ice cling to the walls and floor. The ceiling rises far above, and against the far wall, you see three brown waterfalls, frozen in motion by the chill of the room.

The waterfalls are actually the ichors of the elder evil, created by the tears in its flesh. The room is indeed below freezing, but the temperature is not a threat if the PCs don't linger overlong. Every 10 minutes the characters remain in this room, they must succeed on a Fortitude save (DC 15, +1 per previous check) or take 1d6 points of nonlethal damage. Characters wearing winter clothing need only check once per hour. A character that succeeds on a DC 15 Survival check gains a +2

bonus (+4 if stationary) on the Fortitude save and may extend this bonus to one other character per point by which he beat the DC.

11. Fetid Cluster

A cluster of corrupted beholders and their equally disturbing hive mother lair in this chamber. These deviant aberrations believe the elder evil is the avatar of the Great Mother and have come to pay fealty by infesting its foul form.

Three portals about 70 feet above area 10 cut through the dark hide of the elder evil and allow access to this chamber. The ice that coats the wall makes climbing perilous (Climb DC 30), though characters likely have other means of accessing this chamber.

When the PCs enter one of the portals, they trigger the tactical encounter.

Tactical Encounter: Fetid Cluster (page 31).

Treasure: At the bottom of the unoccupied pit is the beholders' sacrifices to the Great Mother. They include 2,751 pp, 4,089 gp, two star rubies (worth 1,000 gp each), three bright green emerald (worth 5,000 gp), a platinum idol of the great mother (worth 10,000 gp), *Manual of Gainful Exercise* +1, *white robe of the archmagi*, and a +4 *longsword of speed*.

12. Chamber of Delights

The door to this chamber is locked (Open Lock DC 35) and is protected by a *symbol of weakness*.

Symbol of Weakness Trap: CR 7; magical; proximity trigger (pass through the door); no reset; spell effect (*symbol of weakness*, 13th-level cleric, 3d6 Strength, Will DC 20 negates); Search DC 32; Disable Device DC 32.

When the PCs examine the door, read:

A huge iron door stands before you. It is carved with hundreds of tiny screaming faces, their eyes weeping real tears that leave rusty streaks across the door's face.

Once the PCs open the door, read:

A 10-foot-wide corridor with rough black walls stretches ahead some 40 feet before expanding into a larger chamber. Bones litter the corridor and the place reeks of decay.

At the end of the corridor, read:

An appalling mess of broken bodies and splattered gore covers this horrific chamber of death. A filthy purple carpet covers the floor, torn and stained with blood. Rising in the center is



an altar of flesh, an unholy fusion of glistening organs that twitch with unlife.

This chamber was the site of a particularly gruesome ritual that saw the destruction of many innocents offered up by Lareth the Beautiful (see area 21) to Tharizdun. Resulting from this profoundly evil act, a potent deathshrieker was born.

If the PCs walk down the corridor and enter the room, they trigger the tactical encounter.

Tactical Encounter: Chamber of Delights (page 34).

13. The Gauntlet

The klurichir demons in area 14 watch over this room from their lair. To deal with intruders, each has inscribed a *symbol of pain* where indicated on the map.

Symbol of Pain Trap: CR 5; magical; proximity trigger (pass over the glyph); no reset; spell effect (*symbol of pain*, 20th-level sorcerer, as the spell, Will DC 21 negates); Search DC 30; Disable Device 30.

If the PCs trigger the trap, the demons cast *greater invisibility* followed with *magic missile* and *destruction* to lure the adventurers into area 14. If the PCs don't take the bait, the demons come after them, using tactics as described in Tactical Encounter 14.

14. Demonic Sentinels

This large chamber is the barracks for a trio of deadly sentinels. Charged by Lareth the Beautiful to watch over the entrance nearby, these demons set up a nasty trap guarding the exits from area 13. The demons prefer to mount their attack from this room rather than engage the PCs in the area of the *symbols of pain*, lest they themselves trigger the wards. Thus, they cast spells into the adjacent room in the hopes of luring the PCs to their position and thus trigger the other *symbols of pain* safeguarding the entrances to this chamber.

When the PCs engage the demons, they trigger the tactical encounter.

Tactical Encounter: Demonic Sentinels (page 36).

15. Flesh Chamber

This disturbing chamber makes manifest the true nature of this dungeon.

When the characters enter this chamber, read:

The dark walls lighten as you make your way into the gloomy corridor. Eventually, rugged black walls give way to gray and then finally a pink surface when you come to the corridor's end. Pale green moisture collects on the walls and the entire place reeks of ammonia.



The walls here are indeed fleshy, and using a slashing or piercing weapon causes them to bleed fiercely. Worse, such injury causes the entire elder evil to shake and shudder, knocking all creatures prone unless they succeed on a DC 15 Balance check. If the PCs deal 20 or more points of damage to the walls here, the entire corridor constricts, dealing 10d6 points of bludgeoning damage. Each round thereafter, the PCs take 4d6+12 points of bludgeoning damage, 2d6 points of acid damage, and 6 points of vile damage as the walls grind and struggle to digest the PCs. Characters can cut their way out by using a light slashing or piercing weapon to deal 20 points of damage to the gizzard (AC 26). Once the character exits, muscular action closes the hole; another PC must cut his or her own way out. After 1d6 rounds, the corridor relaxes and frees any remaining PCs that are still trapped.

16. The Blister

More cyst than chamber, a disgusting skin of congealed fluid holds back a corrosive flood.

If the characters examine the barrier, read:

A pliable membrane the color of sickness stretches taut across this passage.

It takes only 10 points of damage from a slashing or piercing weapon to break the membrane. Any character that does so causes the acidic fluid to spray forth. All creatures within 30 feet of the spray takes 10d6 points of acid damage (DC 25 Reflex save halves). Once the blister is broken, it reveals an empty chamber beyond.

17. Keepers of the Eye

Two deathdrinker demons protect this room. Contemptible creatures, Lareth the Beautiful enlisted them as guardians, posting them here to watch for intruders.

When the PCs enter this room, they trigger the tactical encounter.

Tactical Encounter: Keepers of the Eye (page 38).

18. The Emissary

Rumors of the elder evil's existence and awakening have spread throughout the Infinite Layers of the Abyss, and various demon princes have each taken an interest in what Shothragot intends. Some are opposed to the machinations of the Chained God (such as Orcus), while others are keenly interested in seeing Tharizdun released. The main demon prince to seek an alliance is Obox-Ob, whose own agenda is close to that of the Dark God. Obox-Ob dispatched his dread aspect to treat with the Dark God. Until the elder evil reaches Tharizdun's prison, the aspect is content to wait here.

When the PCs approach this room, read:

A foul stench emanates from this chamber, and from inside the gloom of this place, you hear the chittering of countless insects, each clicking and clacking as they scuttle in the dark.

The aspect of Obox-Ob is not interested in a fight since it has but one chance to encounter Tharizdun and defeat here would ruin its plans. Having been slain once before, forced to remake itself from a surviving aspect, this aspect knows that an unnecessary risk could prove to be an insurmountable setback, especially if the PCs have not yet destroyed the *Gems of Tharizdun* in area 4. Rather than wiping out the party at once, it keeps

itself concealed in the corner and uses telepathy to communicate with the PCs using the Abyssal tongue. It questions them to find out where they have been, to confirm what it believes has been their mission, and to learn what progress they have made thus far. The aspect knows the sign of apocalypse contains the elder evil and it can complete its mission only if the sign is weakened. Thus, it is keenly interested in whether the PCs have weakened the sign so far.

If the characters have not yet weakened the sign, Obox-Ob suggests destroying the *Gems of Tharizdun*, claiming such an act would surely weaken the elder evil. Under no circumstances does Obox-Ob mention the Puce Portal (area 6) and its ability to transport the PCs to the essence of Shothragot.

Obox-Ob has little to gain from concealing his identity and should the characters ask, he reveals himself and that he, like the PCs, is an enemy of the tanar'ri. He explains his own quest to destroy the usurper race and claims he's been imprisoned here along with everyone else. A character that succeeds on a DC 30 Knowledge

(religion) check knows Obox-Ob is an ancient demon of a race that precedes the tanar'ri. A check that succeeds by 5 or more also reveals that Obox-Ob seeks the annihilation of all things much like Tharizdun.

The aspect of Obox-Ob is well aware of the function of the *torch of revealing* and *incense of dreaming*. If queried about these items, he lies and suggests they are in fact worthless accoutrements of the Dark God's cultists (Bluff +8). If the PCs try to take the items, refuse to ally with the aspect, or enter the room, they trigger the tactical encounter.

Tactical Encounter: The Emissary (page 40).

Treasure: Hanging from two hooks near the portal to area 19 are four *purple robes of Tharizdun*. In addition, a *torch of revealing* sits in an iron sconce and from it hangs a purple pouch containing four blocks of *incense of dreaming*. See the sidebar for details on these items.

Incense of Dreaming

Price (Item Level): 50 gp (1/2)

Body Slot: —

Caster Level: 3rd

Aura: Faint; (DC 16) evocation

Activation: —

Weight: —

This cone-shaped block of incense gives off a spicy and unpleasant aroma.

When you burn *incense of dreaming* in a *torch of revealing*, it causes that torch to chase away the gloom found in temples and shrines dedicated to the Dark God and also reveals magically hidden items and features of these locations. Burning this incense outside of the torch produces no effects.

Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item, darkness.

Cost to Create: 25 gp, 2 XP.

Purple Robe of Tharizdun

Price (Item Level): — (—)

Body Slot: Body

Caster Level: 10th

Aura: Moderate; (DC 20) abjuration

Activation: —

Weight: 1 lb.

This purple robe has a pointed hood and long sleeves that extend past the hands by at least 6 inches or more.

The *purple robe of Tharizdun* protects you from the cold peculiar to temples dedicated to the Dark God. It has no other function.

The secret of manufacturing these robes has long since been lost to the world.

Torch of Revealing

Price (Item Level): — (—)

Body Slot: —

Caster Level: 10th

Aura: Moderate; (DC 20) transmutation

Activation: —

Weight: 1 lb.

This black iron torch has a cupped head.

When you place *incense of dreaming* into the cup and light it, the *torch of revealing* casts violet light in a 10-foot radius and fills the air with a dreadful chill. These torches have a specific purpose: the revelation of specific, magically hidden objects within temples and shrines devoted to Tharizdun.

The secret of manufacturing these items has long since been lost to the world.

19. Temple of Shadow

An impenetrable darkness fills this room, defeating any light source, magical or otherwise, brought into this room. Only a character with a lit *torch of revealing* can see the room as it actually is.

In addition to the darkness, the room carries an incredible chill. Anyone not wearing a *purple robe of Tharizdun* takes 1d6 points of cold damage and 1d6 points of vile damage per minute spent in the temple. Anyone unprotected that touches a metal object takes an additional 2d6 points of cold damage, while characters wearing metal armor take 2d6 points of cold damage per round spent in this room.

If a character enters the room with the lit torch, read:

The queer violet light of the torch reveals a dreadfully cold, disturbing chamber. Three obsidian pillars veined with lilac worms support a soft and dripping ceiling overhead. The floor is equally giving and puddled with sickening green fluid that reflects the light strangely, offering up images of dancing demonic figures, scenes of death and carnage, and worse.

Opposite from the entrance is a great altar of basalt, constructed to resemble an upside-down ziggurat with two steps. It is the source of the impossible darkness and it holds your eye, as if seeking to draw you inside its depths.

The Obex: Any living creature that looks upon the Obex—the strange altar—must succeed on a DC 25 Will save or become hypnotized for 1d6 rounds, transfixed by the perfect darkness. At the end of this time, the victim must succeed on a second Will save against the same DC or its soul is wrenched from the body and absorbed by the Obex, where it is utterly destroyed. A character slain in this way can be brought back only by a *miracle* or *wish* spell to restore the soul and may then be raised normally.

A character that succeeds on either save cannot again be affected by the Obex for 24 hours.

The Obex has an AC 3, hardness 10, and 333 hit points. Damaging the Obex causes one black cyst to appear (see page 7 for statistics). If the characters destroy the altar, the darkness and the chilling effect in the temple end and the Essence of Shothragot takes a –5 sacred penalty on attack rolls, saving throws, skill checks, and ability checks.

20. Templars of Tharizdun

As the elder evil pulled itself free from the earth, those surviving cultists clambered inside to accompany the

abomination on its journey. The fate these servants found was death, violent and painful, at the hands of a dread demon. The only survivors of this original band were Lareth the Beautiful and his companions. While powerful in their own right, they are terrified by the forces at work inside the elder evil and rightly believe that if they venture far from their quarters they might be added to the ranks of the dead.

Since entering the temple, visions of the *Gems of Tharizdun* have plagued Lareth, along with a powerful compulsion to destroy them. He's tried to convince his allies to assist him, but neither one seems willing to risk his life on such a venture.

Although disappointed at the treatment they have received in the service of the Dark God, they are not so naïve to think they have any chance at redemption. Consequently, when confronted with a party of adventurers, each templar is prepared to fight to the death.

When the PCs enter the room, they trigger the tactical encounter.

Tactical Encounter: Templars of Tharizdun (page 42).

Taking Prisoners: Captured templars are wholly uncooperative and prove to be difficult prisoners at best. Of the three, only Lareth knows how to get through the portal without destroying the *Gems*, though he's loathe to reveal this since he knows Tharizdun will punish him. This counts as a suicidal act for the purposes of charm or compulsion spells. If the PCs intimidate the other two, they admit they believe the *Gems* might be the key to reaching the essence.

21. The Essence of Shothragot

The Essence of Shothragot is the mind and soul of the elder evil and serves as the focus of all its malevolence. If destroyed, the elder evil's body collapses in on itself, imploding and leaving nothing behind. The only way to stop this abomination and thwart its plans is to destroy the essence and thus spare countless Material Planes the destruction Tharizdun promises.

The only way to reach the Essence is through the Puce Portal (area 6), which activates only if the elder evil's sign is diminished or if the PCs find the *torch of revealing*. Once the PCs fulfill these requirements, they are free to enter the portal.

When the PCs enter the portal, they trigger the tactical encounter.

Tactical Encounter: The Essence of Shothragot (page 45).



CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

The ideal outcome for this adventure is for the PCs to navigate the perils of the elder evil's body, find a way through the portal, venture to the essence, and defeat it. With its destruction, the elder evil dies and decays rapidly, depositing the player characters several hundred feet over the surface of their world or stranding them in the Ethereal Plane. At your option, the PCs might appear before the elder evil's prison plane and be the first mortals to look upon the awful demesne of Tharizdun, a sanity-blasting experience to be sure.

Failure does not necessarily indicate the end of all things as the release of Tharizdun seems to suggest. If the PCs used the *torch*, but still fail to defeat the elder evil, Lareth, if he still lives, eventually destroys the *Gems of Tharizdun*, enabling the elder evil to escape the Material Plane and embark on its final journey. Faced with such a dreadful end, the gods themselves attend to the abomination. Unfortunately, the elder evil's malefic property drives them insane, causing them to fight one another, which could have incredible repercussions in your campaign. Whether or not Shothragot reaches his master is ultimately left to you, but such an event could reshape your world and prepare the way for something entirely new. Whatever you decide, the emergence and destruction of Shothragot

is a signature event that can have sweeping change on your setting, making a fight with this monster a thrilling conclusion for your campaign.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Robert J. Schwalb is a contract designer for Wizards of the Coast and has contributed to numerous books, including Tome of Magic, Player's Handbook II, Fiendish Codex II, Complete Scoundrel, Drow of the Underdark, Monster Manual V, Exemplars of Evil, and Elder Evils. Robert rarely emerges from his Tennessee office these days, except when dragged away from his keyboard by his incredibly patient wife, Stacey, and his pride of fiendish werewolves.

SUPPURATING VALVES

Encounter Level 17

SETUP

Two invisible cyclonic ravagers, unwholesome thralls from the Elemental Plane of Air, guard the entrances to the elder evil. They attack any creature that comes within 50 feet of a valve.

There are three locations keyed to this encounter. If a fight breaks out at one, the others do not come to help.

Before running this encounter, be sure to review Tactical Aerial Movement on page 20 of the DMG. When the PCs come within 50 feet of an entrance, read:

The light breeze disperses much of the awful stench but suddenly whips up into a screaming gale. To either side, you see two large funnel clouds form and spin toward you.

2 CYCLONIC RAVAGERS

CR 15

MM4 10

hp 169 each (26 HD); DR 10/magic

NE Large elemental (air, extraplanar)

Init +14; Senses darkvision 60 ft., scent; Listen +26, Spot +16

Languages Auran, Common, Infernal

AC 25, touch 25, flat-footed 15; Dodge, Mobility, deflecting winds
(-1 size, +10 Dex, +6 deflection)

Miss Chance 50 % invisibility

Immune critical hits, flanking, paralysis, poison, sleep, stunning

Resist improved evasion; SR 23

Fort +10, Ref +27, Will +11

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares), fly 90 ft. (perfect); Flyby Attack

Melee smite of seven winds +28 touch (4d6+7 or 1d6+7; see text)

Space 10 ft.; Reach 10 ft.

Base Atk +19; Grp +28

Atk Options Combat Reflexes

Special Actions buffeting winds

Abilities Str 21, Dex 31, Con 15, Int 12, Wis 12, Cha 16

SQ elemental traits

Feats Alertness, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Flyby Attack, Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes, Mobility, Weapon Finesse

Skills Escape Artist +32, Hide +29, Knowledge (the planes) +13, Listen +26, Move Silently +32, Spot

+16, Survival +23 (+25 on other planes), Use Rope +10 (+12 bindings)

Deflecting Winds (Su) A cyclonic ravager gains a +6 deflection bonus to AC.

Invisibility (Ex) As the *greater invisibility* spell, always active.

Smite of Seven Winds (Su) A cyclonic ravager can make a melee touch attack that generates a brief, rending gust of wind within its target dealing 4d6+7 points of damage. Creatures not subject to critical hits instead take 1d6+7 points of damage.

Buffeting Winds (Su) As a standard action, a cyclonic ravager can cause a tremendous surge of storm-strength winds in a 100-foot radius burst centered on itself. A creature within this area must succeed on a DC 28 Reflex save or be pushed up to 30 feet in a direction of the ravager's choice. A creature can choose to fail this save voluntarily. A ravager can push a creature to a location outside the area of this effect, but the pushed creature can't end up in another creature's or object's space. The save DC is Strength-based.

A creature takes a -4 penalty on this save per size category below Medium. Bigger creatures gain a +4 bonus per size category above Medium.

When the ravager activates this ability, it can choose to affect some creatures within its area while ignoring others.

TACTICS

Both cyclonic ravagers use their buffeting winds ability to disperse the player characters, sending some against the outer walls of the elder evils, others into acidic waterfalls, and move lightly armored spellcasters to well within the ravager's reach to provoke attacks of opportunity. Characters on the decks of vehicles, *flying carpets*, and similar conveyances that fail their Reflex saves are knocked back 30 feet and may fall off to plummet to the ground. Thereafter, the cyclonic ravagers use Flyby Attack to harass the PCs.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

The area has the following features.

Acidic Waterfall: Spilling forth from the valve is a torrent of thin acid. Any creature that enters a space containing acid, including those beneath the waterfall, take 5d6 points of acid damage (Reflex DC 20 half).

Contracting Entrance: Once every 1d4 rounds, the valve seals shut at the start of the round. Any creature standing on the edge of the entrance must succeed on a DC 25 Reflex save or take 10d6 points of bludgeoning damage as the walls close. Those who succeed on the save may place themselves beyond the walls or inside the complex. A closed valve reopens after 1d4 rounds.

Elemental Bursts: The elder evil's epidermis is an unholy fusion of all four elements—air, earth, fire, and water, and periodically, the instability of its form unleashes a burst of elemental energy. Any creature within 20 feet of the elder evil's exterior has a 10% chance of being exposed to such a burst. If so, the target takes 4d6 points of cold damage, 4d6 points of fire damage, and 4d6 points of unholy damage (Reflex DC 25 half).

Epidermis: The elder evil's outer walls writhe with profane energies. Any living creature that touches the elder evil's outer walls automatically gains one negative level and takes 6d6 points of cold damage, 6d6 points of fire damage, and 6d6 points of unholy damage (Reflex DC 25 half).



CYST OF MADNESS

Encounter Level 20

SETUP

Have the players place their miniatures at the bottom of the map in the entrance. Once they are positioned, place the slaves of Obox-Ob where indicated on the map. When the PCs enter the room, read:

A number of three-legged creatures rise from the floor of this irregularly-shaped chamber, fixing their multitudinous eyes upon you.

8 SLAVES OF OBOX-OB CR 14

hp 187 each (22 HD); fast healing 5; DR 15/lawful

Elite draudnu^{MM5}

CE Medium outsider (chaotic, evil, extraplanar, obyrith)

Init +5; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., true seeing; Listen +28, Spot +28

Aura form of madness (60 ft., DC 25)

Languages Abyssal, Common; telepathy 100 ft.

AC 22, touch 15, flat-footed 17; Dodge, Mobility (+5 Dex, +7 natural)

Immune acid, mind-affecting effects, poison

Resist cold 10, electricity 10, fire 10; **SR** 22

Fort +17, **Ref** +18, **Will** +16

Speed 50 ft. (10 squares); Spring Attack

Melee 3 flesh hooks +26 (3d6+4/19–20 plus immobilize)

Space 5 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft. (20 ft. with flesh hook)

Base Atk +22; **Grp** +26

Atk Options Combat Expertise, Combat Reflexes, Whirlwind Attack, aligned strike (chaos, evil)

Special Actions acid spray

Abilities Str 18, Dex 20, Con 18, Int 13, Wis 16, Cha 18

Feats Combat Expertise, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Improved Critical (flesh hooks), Improved Natural Attack (flesh hook), Mobility, Spring Attack, Track^B, Whirlwind Attack

Skills Balance +42, Climb +29, Escape Artist +30, Jump +49, Knowledge (the planes) +10, Listen +28, Search +17, Spot +28, Survival +28 (+30 on other planes, +30 following tracks), Tumble +34, Use Rope +5 (+7 bindings)

True Seeing (Ex) As the *true seeing* spell, always active.

Form of Madness (Su) All creatures within 60 feet of a slave of Obox-Ob must succeed on a DC 25 Will save or believe something grows inside them, becoming

sickened permanently. Only a *greater restoration*, *heal*, *miracle*, or *wish* spell cures this insanity. A creature that successfully saves cannot again be affected by the same slave's form of madness for 24 hours, and a creature that fails can be affected only once until cured. Chaotic evil outsiders are immune to this ability. This is a mind-affecting effect and the save DC is Charisma-based.

Immobilize (Ex) When a draudnu deals damage with a flesh hook, it can detach the end of that hook in the foe it struck, fastening the opponent to a surface such as a floor or wall. (The draudnu's hook end regrows immediately.) That enemy must succeed on a DC 21 Reflex save or be immobilized (unable to move from the space in which it starts its turn). This ability doesn't work if the hook can't fasten a creature to a surface.

An immobilized creature can pull itself free by taking a move action and making a DC 21 Strength check or Escape Artist check. The act of pulling free deals 1d10 points of damage unless it or someone else first spends a standard action to successfully make a DC 21 Heal check to first dislodge the hook. The save DCs are Strength-based.

Acid Spray (Ex) Whenever a draudnu takes damage, it deals 2d4 points of acid damage to all creatures in a 5-foot-radius burst (Reflex DC 21 half). The save DC is Constitution-based.

TACTICS

The demons herd the PCs to spaces containing acid and use flesh hook attacks to pin them in place. The demons then use Spring Attack to lance lightly armored characters and then fall back to lure warriors deeper into the room.

DEVELOPMENT

The molydeus in area 5 automatically hears a pitched battle in this location. Starting on the second round, it moves 80 feet each round, joining the combat 3 rounds into the combat. It hates the slaves of Obox-Ob as much as it hates the PCs and attacks the closest creature each round. See Tactical Encounter 5 for tactics.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

The room has the following features.

Acid Pool: The acid pools are 1 foot deep and cost 2 squares of movement to enter. The DC of Tumble checks in such a square increases by 2. Creatures that move through a space containing an acid pool take 2d6 points of acid damage (Reflex DC 15 half), while characters ending their movement in these squares take 4d6 points of acid damage (no save). An equal amount of water dilutes the acid so that it deals no damage.

Lighting: Illumination from the acid pools fills this chamber in shadowy light, granting all creatures concealment (20% miss chance).

Rubble: A space containing rubble costs 3 squares of movement to enter and the DC of Move Silently and Tumble checks in such a square increases by 5.



POOL OF MOLTEN ICE

Encounter Level 18

SETUP

Guarding this chamber is a waterveiled assassin and two holocaust disciples. The creatures detest the other and they frequently trade insults in Common. However, sounds of combat from an adjacent room cause them to be silent. Place the holocaust disciples on the map where indicated. Wait to place the waterveiled assassin on the map until its turn or until a character has line of sight to its position and beats a Hide check with a Spot check. If any character touches the water or lands on the island, or if the PCs trigger the trap, read:

The balls of fire unfold into vague humanoid shapes, flaring brightly above the waters and emanating waves of heat from their forms.

When the waterveiled assassin reveals itself or is spotted, read:

Surging from the foul water is a great tidal wave and in its midst, a grotesque face forms and looses a dreadful howl.

WATERVEILED ASSASSIN

CR 15

MM4 13

hp 169 (26 HD); fast healing 5; DR 10/—

NE Large elemental (extraplanar, water)

Init +10; Senses blindsight 60 ft., darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +20, Spot +20

Languages Aquan, Common

AC 25, touch 15, flat-footed 19
(-1 size, +6 Dex, +10 natural)

Immune critical hits, flanking, paralysis, poison, sleep, stunning

Resist liquid body; SR 23

Fort +17, Ref +16, Will +13

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares), swim 60 ft.; malleable form

Melee slam +26 (4d8+10)

Space 10 ft.; Reach 20 ft.

Base Atk +19; Grp +30

Atk Options Combat Reflexes

Special Actions churn, engulf

Abilities Str 25, Dex 23, Con 15, Int 10, Wis 16, Cha 12

SQ elemental traits, one with water

Feats Alertness, Combat Reflexes, Lightning Reflexes, Improved Initiative, Improved Natural Attack (slam),

Iron Will, Skill Focus (Hide), Skill Focus (Move Silently), Weapon Focus (slam)

Skills Hide +19, Listen +20, Move Silently +23, Spot +20, Swim +15

Liquid Body (Ex) A waterveiled assassin exercises supreme control over its watery form, allowing it to flow around attacks, flatten itself against the ground to avoid a spell's blast, and so forth. Any effect or spell that allows a Reflex save for half damage has a 50% chance to have no effect on a waterveiled assassin.

Malleable Form (Ex) A waterveiled assassin's control over its form allows it to flow through tiny cracks in objects and move through the earth, walls, and other obstacles. The assassin moves at normal speed through terrain that slows movement. It can move through permeable objects at half speed, but it cannot move through completely solid barriers.

If the assassin ends its movement completely within an object, opponents do not have line of sight or line of effect to it. Its reach drops to 0 feet. Any creatures engulfed within the assassin (see entry) fall out, dropping prone at the end of the object. If only part of the assassin is in any object, but its remaining space cannot hold all the creatures within it, the assassin chooses which ones to release.

Churn (Ex) As a swift action, a waterveiled assassin can create mighty currents within its body that grind engulfed creatures, dealing 5d6 points of bludgeoning damage. An engulfed creature that succeeds on a DC 30 Fortitude save takes half damage. The save DC is Strength-based.

Engulf (Ex) As a standard action, a waterveiled assassin can flow over Medium or smaller creatures, entrapping them within its liquid form. The assassin simply moves into the opponents' spaces; any creature whose space it completely covers is subject to the engulf attack. The assassin cannot make a slam attack during a round in which it engulfs. It can engulf as many creatures as fit in its space.

Opponents can make attacks of opportunity against the assassin, but if they do so they are not entitled to a saving throw. Those who do not attempt attacks of opportunity must succeed on a DC 30 Reflex save or be engulfed; on a success, a creature moves aside or back (opponent's choice) to move out of the assassin's path. The save DC is Strength-based.

Engulfed creatures are considered to be grappled within the assassin's body, and they are subject to its churn attack. Engulfed creatures that breathe air might drown (DMG 304).

2 HOLOCAUST DISCIPLES

CR 15

MM4 11

hp 221 each (26 HD); fast healing 5; DR 10/magic

NE Large elemental (extraplanar, fire)

Init +9; Senses darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +23, Spot +23

Aura heat (15 ft., DC 27)

Languages Common, Draconic, Ignan, Terran

AC 21, touch 14, flat-footed 16

(-1 size, +5 Dex, +7 natural)

Immune critical hits, fire, flanking, paralysis, poison, sleep, stunning

SR 23

Fort +20, Ref +28, Will +21

Weakness vulnerability to cold

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares), fly 40 ft. (perfect)

Melee fire bolt +24 touch (8d6 fire/19-20)

Ranged fire bolt +24 touch (8d6 fire/19-20)

Space 10 ft.; Reach 10 ft.

Base Atk +19; Grp +28

Atk Options magic strike

Special Actions flame wave

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 18th):

At will—*fireball* (DC 19), *fire shield* (warm only, DC 20)

3/day—*wall of fire*

1/day—*meteor swarm* (DC 25)

Abilities Str 21, Dex 21, Con 19, Int 14, Wis 20, Cha 22

SQ elemental grace

Feats Ability Focus (flame wave), Alertness, Combat Casting, Great Fortitude, Improved Critical (fire bolt), Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes, Weapon Focus (fire bolt)

Skills Climb +21, Concentration +24 (+28 casting on the defensive), Knowledge (arcana) +18, Knowledge (the planes) +18, Listen +23, Spellcraft +20, Spot +23, Survival +5 (+7 on other planes)

Heat Aura (Su) At the end of each of their turns, creatures within 15 feet of a holocaust disciple must succeed on DC 27 Fortitude saves or be fatigued. A successful save negates the effect. A fatigued creature that fails its save becomes exhausted. A creature must attempt this saving throw each round it is within range, whether or not it has succeeded on an earlier save. A creature that has resistance or immunity to fire damage is immune to this effect, as is a creature that is not subject to the effects of extreme heat conditions. The fatigued and exhausted conditions end 1 minute after leaving the aura's area of effect. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Fire Bolt (Su) A holocaust disciple can aim a bolt of fire at a single target as a melee or ranged touch attack. The ranged touch attack has a maximum range of 200 feet with no range increment.

Flame Wave (Su) Once per round as a standard action,

a holocaust disciple can generate a wave of flame that rolls out from its body. Any creature within 60 feet of the holocaust disciple must succeed on a DC 29 Reflex save or take 13d6 points of fire damage. A successful save results in half damage. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Elemental Grace (Su) A holocaust disciple gains a bonus equal to its Charisma bonus on all saving throws (included).

TACTICS

Both holocaust disciples position themselves so most, if not all, of the PCs are within 60 feet. Then, they use their flame wave ability, spreading fiery death in all directions. One disciple then casts *meteor swarm* at a heavily armored character (+24 ranged touch) standing in the largest group of characters, while the second rings the PCs with a *wall of fire*. Over the following rounds, the first holocaust disciple hurls fire bolts at isolated PCs, while the other casts *meteor swarm* and *fireball* spells to harass larger groups of characters. Should any of the PCs close on the elementals, neither hesitates to generate another flame wave.

Meanwhile, the waterveiled assassin stays underwater but moves to shore's edge to make attacks of opportunity against characters that enter spaces it threatens or cast spells, using Combat Reflexes as needed. Should any PC enter the water, the waterveiled assassin moves to engulf the hapless character and churns as a swift action.

If the PCs negate the *prismatic wall*, the holocaust disciples pursue the characters. The waterveiled assassin stays behind.

DEVELOPMENT

If the PCs have yet to deal with the Molydeus in area 5, it moves to investigate the sounds of combat, arriving in 2 rounds. The demon is as likely to attack the PCs as it is the elementals, so it trains its attacks on the closest foe each round.

CONCLUSION

Embedded all over the island are the 333 *Gems of Tharizdun*. Each gemstone has a hardness of 20 and 5 hit points. For every 111 gemstones destroyed, the essence of Shothragot takes a -2 circumstance penalty on all attack rolls, saving throws, ability checks, and skill checks. In addition, destroying all the gems reduces the sign's intensity by one step.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

The room has the following features.

Island: The island rising from the center of the pool counts as difficult terrain. Each space costs 2 squares of movement and the DCs of Tumble checks increase by 2.

Water: The water in this room is 60-foot deep and is stagnant. Characters can move through the water with a successful DC 10 Swim check. Efforts to destroy the water work for 1 round before more fluid seeps from the walls to restore it to its proper depth.

The waterveiled assassin gains a +8 bonus to AC and +4 bonus on Reflex saves against attacks made from characters on land.

Treasure: Behind the island and under the water is a *bag of holding* type IV. Finding the bag requires a DC 25 Search check. If located, opening it reveals 1,493 pp, a lead scepter studded with opals (worth 2,500 gp), a bright green emerald (worth 5,000 gp), an *angelhelm*^{MIC}, and a *torc of displacement*^{MIC}. The elder evil swallowed the *bag* along with a recovered *gem of Tharizdun* months ago.



GEMS OF THARIZDUN

When Tharizdun was chained in his prison, sealed away for eternity, his last act was to contain fragments of his essence in 333 black gemstones that would enable his scions and servitors to unlock the shackles that bind him. Each gem is a fist-sized rock resembling obsidian, but queerly translucent if held to the light. Prying a gem free from the rock requires a DC 20 Strength check.

Most believe these gems to be simple baubles or props used by mad clerics in their rituals, but in truth, these items have power. Characters wielding a stone can cast spells and spell-like effects with the chaos or evil descriptors at +1 caster level (this stacks with the Chaos and Evil domains' granted powers). In addition, the wielder of the gem can unlock its wisdom and gain a +20 insight bonus on any one attack roll, saving throw, skill check, or ability check as an immediate action. Once used, the stone loses all properties until the next midnight.

Unfortunately, these stones are also infused with the raw essence of the Dark God and those who carry these items soon feel the weight of their power in the form of madness and physical corruption. Each day, the wielder must succeed on a DC 20 Will save or take 1 point of Wisdom drain, and succeed on a DC 20 Fortitude save or take 1 point of Constitution drain.

CARNAGE

Encounter Level 19

SETUP

The molydeus is invisible and occupies a spot indicated on the map if the PCs come from the bottom. Otherwise, it starts on the opposite side if they come from the top. When the molydeus attacks, or if the demon is detected, read:

Charging toward you, barking a challenge from both its vicious hyena head and its spitting serpent head, is a massive fiend drenched in blood. It grips a terrifying battleaxe stained black with gore and flings droplets of blood into the air as the horror whips the blade about.

MOLYDEUS

CR 19

FC1 46

hp 275 (19 HD); fast healing 30; **DR** 15/cold iron and good

CE Large outsider (chaotic, evil, extraplanar, tanar'ri)

Init +10; **Senses** all-around vision, darkvision 60 ft., true seeing; Listen +29, Spot +29

Languages Abyssal, Auran, Celestial, Common, Draconic, Ignan, Infernal; telepathy 100 ft.

AC 40, touch 17, flat-footed 33

(-1 size, +6 Dex, +4 armor, +3 deflection, +18 natural)

Immune electricity, flanking, poison

Resist acid 10, cold 10, fire 10, evasion; **SR** 30

Fort +21, **Ref** +17, **Will** +18

Speed 40 ft. (8 squares)

Melee +1 *dancing vorpal cold iron greataxe*
+28/+23/+18/+13 (3d6+14/19-20/x3) and
bite +25 (2d6+4) and
bite +25 (1d6+4 plus poison) or

Melee +1 *dancing vorpal cold iron greataxe*
+28/+23/+18/+13 (3d6+14/19-20/x3) and
2 claws each +27 (1d6+9) and
bite +25 (2d6+4) and
bite +25 (1d6+4 plus poison)

Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.

Base Atk +19; **Grp** +32

Atk Options Combat Expertise, Improved Disarm, Improved Trip, Quicken Spell-Like Ability (*telekinesis*), aligned strike (chaos, evil), piercing strike, poison, snakebite

Special Actions *summon tanar'ri*

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 19th):

At will—*baleful polymorph* (DC 24), *blasphemy* (DC

26), *blindness/deafness* (DC 20), *charm person* (DC 20), *fear* (DC 23), *fly*, *greater dispel magic*, *invisibility*, *greater teleport* (self plus 50 lb. of objects only), *suggestion* (DC 23), *telekinesis* (DC 24), *vampiric touch* (+23 melee touch)

7/day—*dimension lock*, *lightning bolt* (DC 22)

3/day—quicken *telekinesis* (DC 24)

1/day—*trap the soul* (DC 28)

Abilities Str 28, Dex 22, Con 30, Int 21, Wis 24, Cha 28

Feats Combat Expertise, Improved Critical (greataxe), Improved Disarm, Improved Initiative, Improved Trip, Multiattack, Quicken Spell-Like Ability (*telekinesis*), Track^B

Skills Bluff +31, Concentration +32, Diplomacy +35, Disguise +9 (+11 acting), Forgery +27, Intimidate +33, Knowledge (religion) +27, Knowledge (the planes) +27, Listen +29, Search +27, Sense Motive +29, Spot +29, Survival +29 (+31 following tracks, +31 on other planes), Use Magic Device +31

Possessions +1 *dancing vorpal cold iron greataxe*, *ring of evasion*, *ring of protection* +3, *bracers of armor* +4, gems worth 1,000 gp

All-Around Vision (Ex) A molydeus gains a +4 racial bonus on Search and Spot checks (included) and cannot be flanked.

True Seeing (Ex) As the *true seeing* spell, always active.

Dancing Vorpal Axe (Ex) A molydeus's +1 *dancing vorpal cold iron greataxe* is an extension of its being. If the molydeus is slain, its axe melts away into ichor. A molydeus whose axe is destroyed can manifest a new one by taking part in a ritual on the Woeful Escarand (the 400th layer of the Abyss), where it uses manes as the raw materials to forge the weapon anew. Once the new axe is created, the previous axe (or its remains) melts away.

Piercing Strike (Su) The first time a molydeus strikes a foe, damage reduction applies normally. All following strikes automatically ignore damage reduction, save for damage reduction that requires a specific material to bypass, epic damage reduction, or damage reduction that doesn't allow any form of bypass.

Poison (Su) Snake bite—Injury, Fort DC 29, 2d6 Con drain/2d6 Con drain. A creature reduced to 0 Constitution by this poison immediately transforms into a mane (FC1 45 or substitute with a dretch). Only a *miracle* or *wish* can reverse this transformation. Molydeus poison is a supernatural substance and can harm creatures ordinarily immune to poison, although the effects are reduced to 1d6 Con for initial and secondary damage.

Snakebite (Ex) A molydeus can use its snake head to

make a single attack each round as a free action. The snake head always strikes as a secondary attack.

Summon Tanar'ri (Sp) Automatically summon 1d6 babaus, 1d4 chasmes (FC1 34), or 1 marilith, 1/day. Caster level 19th. This ability is the equivalent of a 9th-level spell.

TACTICS

Lacking many of its more useful spell-like abilities, the molydeus relies on a straightforward approach. It charges the closest character, letting loose its dancing weapon and following up with its bite and claw attacks. It focuses its attacks against one opponent at a time, periodically falling back to cast *blasphemy* and a quickened *telekinesis* to drive off its target's allies.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

The room has the following features.

Bloody Bodies: The bloody bodies count as difficult terrain and when combined with the normal terrain effects, each space requires 3 squares of movement to enter. Chaotic or evil creatures that begin their turns in these spaces gain a +2 profane bonus on attacks and damage rolls, while chaotic *and* evil creatures gain a +5 profane bonus instead. A successful turn undead attempt against a 20 HD monster destroys one 5-foot square of bloody bodies.



PUCE PORTAL

Encounter Level 19

SETUP

Place the varakhut where indicated on the map. Have the players put their miniatures near the entrance of the map unless they first parlayed with the inevitable, in which case they may place their miniatures wherever they wish in the room. When the varakhut attacks, read:

The fiery red eye flares with outrage as it intones dread words of grave magical power.

VARAKHUT

CR 19

FF 103

hp 151 (22 HD); fast healing 30; DR 20/adamantine and chaotic

LE Large construct (extraplanar, lawful)

Init +10; Senses darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; Listen +4, Spot +4

Languages Abyssal, Celestial, Infernal

AC 35, touch 11, flat-footed 33
(-1 size, +2 Dex, +24 natural)

Immune ability damage, ability drain, critical hits, death effects, disease, energy drain, exhaustion, fatigue, mind-affecting effects, necromancy effects, nonlethal damage, paralysis, poison, sleep, stunning, any effect that requires a Fortitude save, no risk of death from massive damage

SR 30

Fort +9, Ref +11, Will +13

Speed 50 ft. (10 squares), fly 50 ft. (good); Flyby Attack

Melee 2 slams +21 each (2d10+6)

Space 10 ft.; Reach 10 ft.

Base Atk +16; Grp +26

Atk Options adamantine strike, aligned strike (lawful)

Special Actions dispelling blast

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 19th):

At will—*circle of death* (DC 22), *dimension door*, *dominate monster* (DC 25), *haste*, *hold monster* (DC 21), *locate creature*, *true seeing*

3/day—quicken *circle of death* (DC 22), quicken *dimension door*, *forcecage*, *greater teleport* (self plus 520 lb. objects only), *limited wish*, *mark of justice*, *time stop*

1/day—*geas/quest* (DC 22), *meteor swarm* (DC 25), *plane shift* (+22 melee touch, DC 23), *soul bind* (DC 25), *wish*

Abilities Str 22, Dex 15, Con —, Int 18, Wis 19, Cha 22

SQ construct traits

Feats Flyby Attack, Great Fortitude, Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes, Quicken Spell-Like Ability (*circle of death*), Quicken Spell-Like Ability (*dimension door*), Superior Initiative

Skills Decipher Script +29, Jump +14, Knowledge (arcana) +29, Knowledge (history) +29, Knowledge (religion) +29, Knowledge (the planes) +29, Spellcraft +33, Survival +4 (+8 on other planes)

Dispelling Blast (Sp) As *greater dispel magic*, 3/day, caster level 19th. This ability functions as the spell but it affects everything in a 30-foot-radius burst.

TACTICS

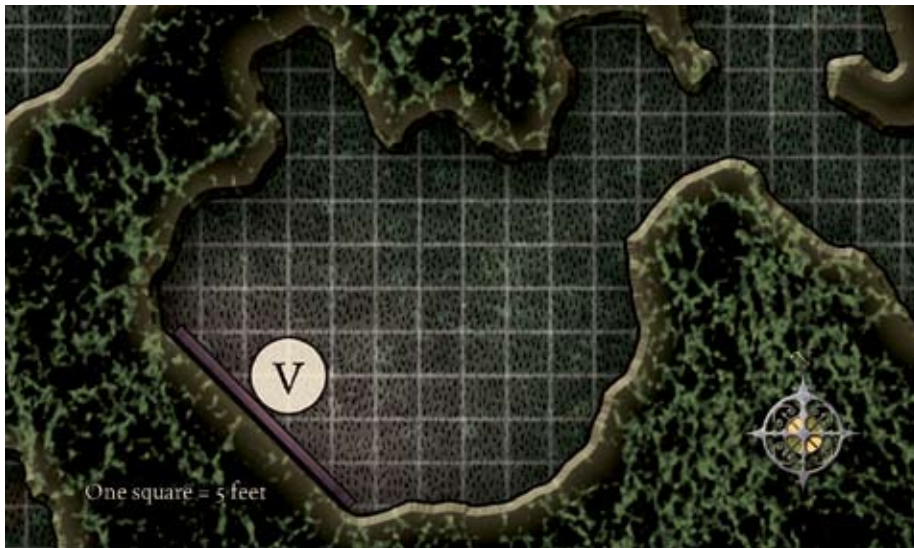
The varakhut casts a quickened *circle of death* spell to wipe out any cohorts, followers, and animal companions and then casts *forcecage* to entrap any obvious spellcasters, using the windowless cell option. If possible, the inevitable positions the *forcecage* in a place to block the party's means of escape.

On the round following, the varakhut casts *meteor swarm* (+17 ranged touch), targeting heavily armored characters first and then nondivine spellcasters second. Each round thereafter, the varakhut uses *hold monster* and *forcecage*, though it is sure to hold at least one *forcecage* back for the elder evil.

The varakhut, being a defender of the gods, has little interest in destroying divine servants, even ones it suspects of being in cahoots with the elder evil. Rather than attacking these creatures, the varakhut uses *dominate monster* to force them to fight at its side and aid it in its quest to destroy the elder evil and its minions.

BEFRIENDING THE INEVITABLE

Even after combat begins, the PCs may persuade the inevitable of their intentions. Allow any PCs who wish to keep trying to befriend the inevitable to make Diplomacy checks as full-round actions (note that hasty Diplomacy imposes a -10 penalty on the check). If the PCs improve the inevitable's attitude to indifferent, it breaks off the attack and returns to its pounding. Improving its attitude to friendly has the same effect, except the inevitable releases any PCs trapped by *forcecages* or influenced by other magical effects it cast.



FEATURES OF THE AREA

The room has the following features.

Portal: While the elder evil's sign is at overwhelming strength, the portal does not function. Only when the light of a *torch of revealing* shines upon its surface can the PCs make the journey to area 22. Otherwise, the PCs must destroy the *Gems of Tharizdun*.

Any living creature adjacent to the portal when active or not must succeed on a DC 25 Will save or take 1 point of Wisdom drain.

THE DARK GOD'S PRISON

Encounter Level 20

SETUP

The scions of madness are positioned where shown on the map. Smoke and fire conceals them, so wait to place them until the PCs spot them. Have the players place their miniatures anywhere at the bottom of the map, but not on the paths or in the burning cinders. When a character enters a space adjacent to the effigy, read:

Hanging from the ceiling on a thick iron chain is a cage holding a smoking prisoner, its face blackened by the flames. Its mouth stretches wide, frozen in a perpetual scream. Bits of cloth, still aflame, cover the remains of the wretched inhabitant. Suddenly, a cloud of fire leaks out of the corpse's mouth and eyes to form into a transparent humanoid shape cloaked in fire.

When a character first comes within 30 feet of a scion of madness, read:

Striding forth from the smoke and fire is a 10-foot-tall giant wreathed in yellow flames. Two great horns protrude from its brow, casting its monstrous face into shadows. The greatsword it readies flares with life as if eager for your blood.

3 SCIONS OF MADNESS

CR 16

MM5 48, ToB 15

hp 224 each (18 HD)

Male ken-li elemental mage^{MM5} swordmage 6^{ToB}
CE Large giant (fire)

Init +6; **Senses** low-light vision; Listen +14, Spot +9

Aura wreathed in flame (5 ft.)

Languages Common, Giant, Ignan

AC 30, touch 19, flat-footed 26
(-1 size, +4 Dex, +4 class, +2 armor, +2 deflection, +9 natural)

Immune fire, smoke

Fort +18, **Ref** +13, **Will** +15

Weakness vulnerability to cold

Speed 50 ft. (10 squares)

Melee +3 greatsword +22/+17/+12 (3d6+12/19-20) or
2 slams +18 each (1d6+6) or
gore +18 (1d8+6)

Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.

Base Atk +13; **Grp** +23

Atk Options Cleave, Great Cleave, Power Attack, disci-

pline focus (Stone Dragon; insightful strike, Weapon Focus)

Special Actions flame breath

Maneuvers and Stances Known (1L 6th):

Stances—blood in the water, child of shadow, step of the wind

Strikes—bonecrusher, charging minotaur†, clinging shadow strike†, death mark†, flashing sun†, mighty throw†, sapphire nightmare blade, stone bones, stone vise†

Boosts—distracting ember, sudden leap

Disciplines: Desert Wind, Diamond Mind, Setting Sun, Shadow Hand, Stone Dragon, Tiger Claw

† Readied maneuvers

Abilities Str 22, Dex 18, Con 26, Int 13, Wis 18, Cha 10
SQ shared strength

Feats Cleave, Great Cleave, Improved Natural Armor, Improved Sunder, Iron Will, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (greatsword)

Skills Balance +12, Climb +10, Concentration +14, Handle Animal +4, Hide +2, Intimidate +8, Jump +18, Knowledge (nature) +5, Listen +14, Move Silently +8, Search +5, Spot +9, Tumble +5

Possessions +3 greatsword, ring of protection +2, bracers of armor +2, gauntlets of ogre power, shards of obsidian (600 gp)

Wreathed in Flame (Su) Creatures take 1d3 points of fire damage at the end of a scion's turn if they are within 5 feet of it. Furthermore, creatures that strike or touch a scion with their body or a weapon take 1d3 points of fire damage. A creature can take damage from touching or striking a scion only once per turn. The scion may suppress this ability at will.

Elemental magi are immune to this ability.

Discipline Focus (Ex) The scions function as if they had Weapon Focus for the greatsword, heavy mace, and unarmed strike. In addition, whenever it executes bonecrusher, charging minotaur, or stone vise, it deals an additional 4 points of damage.

Flame Breath (Su) 30-foot line, once every 1d4 rounds, damage 6d6 fire, Reflex DC 24 half. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Elemental mages are immune to this ability.

Shared Strength (Su) When a scion is within 60 feet of one or more elemental mages and must make a saving throw, it uses the highest save bonus among the group.

EFFIGY

MM2 89
hp 202 (27 HD)

CE Medium undead (fire, incorporeal)
Init +6; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +35, Spot +35
Languages understands Common

AC 20, touch 19, flat-footed 18
(+2 Dex, +3 deflection, +5 natural)

Immune undead immunities

SR 28

Fort +9, **Ref** +13, **Will** +20

Weakness vulnerability to cold

Speed fly 60 ft. (perfect); Flyby Attack

Melee touch +13 (1d6/19–20 plus 2d6 fire plus energy drain)

Base Atk +13; **Grp** —

Atk Options Blind-Fight, Combat Expertise, energy drain, fiery touch

Special Actions infuse

Abilities Str —, Dex 15, Con —, Int 16, Wis 17, Cha 17

SQ incorporeal traits, undead traits

Feats Alertness, Blind-Fight, Combat Expertise, Flyby Attack, Improved Critical (touch), Improved Initiative, Improved Toughness, Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes, Weapon Focus (touch)

Skills Balance +34, Hide +28, Listen +35, Search +33, Spot +35, Survival +5 (+9 following tracks), Tumble +32

Energy Drain (Su) Living creatures hit by an effigy's touch attack gain two negative levels. The DC is 26 for the Fortitude save to remove a negative level. The save DC is Charisma-based. For each negative level bestowed, the effigy gains 5 temporary hit points. Temporary hit points last for 1 hour, and an effigy can only gain a maximum number of temporary hit points equal to its normal hit point total.

Fiery Touch (Ex) An effigy deals an extra 2d6 points of fire damage on a successful touch attack.

Infuse (Su) As *magic jar*, at will, Will DC 26 negates. This ability functions as the spell, except that the body's natural attacks and attacks made by weapons deal an additional 2d6 points of fire damage. In addition, the possessed body takes 2d6 points of fire damage and gains two negative levels each round. Once reduced to –10 hit points, the effigy leaves the flaming corpse.

Each round, the subject is entitled to an opposed Wisdom check to eject the effigy. A success forces the effigy to leave and retreat 30 feet. A failed check indicates the effigy remains in control for another round. A successful save or Wisdom check makes the target immune to the same effigy's infusion attacks for 24 hours.

CR 17

TACTICS

Whenever a scion of madness first perceives a foe, it drops into the step of the wind stance as a swift action (allowing it to ignore difficult terrain and gain a +2 bonus on attack rolls and a +4 bonus on Strength or Dexterity checks on bull rush and trip attempts against opponents that take a move penalty from the terrain) and then activates the charging minotaur maneuver to push the opponent off the path and into a flame jet if possible. The scion then uses stone vise to restrict the target's movement and ensure additional fire damage, Improved Sunder to destroy weapons, and mighty throw to fling its enemies into flame jets or areas of flaming cinders. The scions reserve their flame breath attacks for retreating PCs.

The effigy slips loose from its cage whenever a PC comes within 10 feet. It uses Flyby Attack to deliver a touch attack and on a success, it attempts to infuse itself with its victim. If this fails, it selects a new target until it successfully infuses itself. Once installed, it turns on the PCs, aiding the scions of madness by gaining flanks or attacking soft targets such as wizards, warlocks, and similar foes.

TOME OF BATTLE MANEUVERS

If you don't have *Tome of Battle*, you can use these maneuver summaries to help run the encounter.

Charging Minotaur: As a full-round action, charge and make bull rush as part of the charge without provoking an attack of opportunity. If your Strength check beats your opponent's, you deal bludgeoning damage equal to 2d6 + your Strength modifier in addition to the effects of the bull rush.

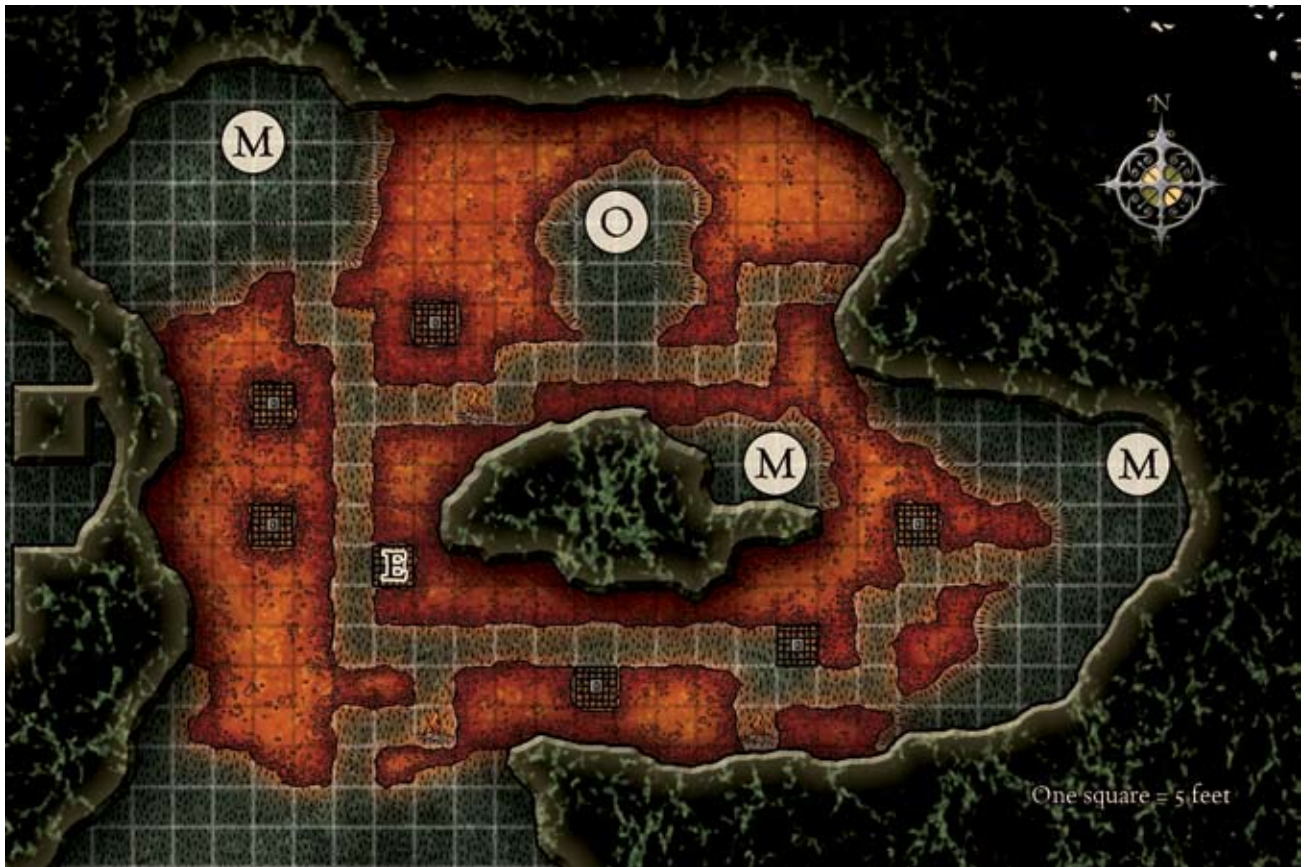
Clinging Shadow Strike: As a standard action, make a single attack. If it hits, you deal an extra 1d6 points of damage and your target must make a DC 15 Fortitude save or take a 20% miss chance on all attacks for 1 round.

Death Mark: Standard action; make one attack, if successful the opponent bursts into flames (Small 5 ft., Medium 10 ft., Large 20 ft.) dealing 6d6 points of fire damage to all creatures in the area (DC 17)

Flashing Sun: As a full-round action, make normal attacks plus one attack at the highest attack bonus. All attacks take a –2 penalty.

Mighty Throw: As standard action, make a touch attack to trip an opponent. If successful, you throw the opponent up to 20 feet away. Thrown targets do not provoke attacks of opportunity from their movement.

Stone Vise: As a standard action, make a single melee attack that deals an extra 1d6 points of damage. If the target is on the ground, the attack reduces its speed to 0 feet for 1 round. A DC 18 Fortitude save negate the immobilization.



FEATURES OF THE AREA

The room has the following features.

Slope: Spaces containing slopes are filled with rubble and count as difficult terrain, and the DCs for Move Silently and Tumble checks increase by +2.

Smoke: This room is filled with smoke, granting concealment (20% miss chance) to all creatures in the area. In addition, all living creatures must succeed on a Fortitude save each round (DC 15, +1 per previous check) or spend that round choking and coughing. A character who chokes for 2 consecutive rounds takes 1d6 points of nonlethal damage. The scions of madness are accustomed to the poor air and are immune to its effects.

Flaming Cinders: Spaces containing flaming cinders count as difficult terrain, and characters who begin their turn in these spaces take 6d6 points of fire damage if on

the ground or 2d6 points of fire damage if flying or levitating.

Fire Jet: 30-ft. line, 8d6 fire, Reflex DC 25 half. Any character stepping into this space triggers the jet.

Cages: The cages hang 10 feet above the floor and contain the remains of dead clerics, levels 10+1d6 (see *DMG* for statistics). The clerics are aware of the elder evil's intent plus everything in the adventure background, and they may reveal information from that section based on the questions the PCs ask. If *raised* or *resurrected*, the clerics prove ungrateful and uncooperative.

Offering: A +3 *cold iron greatsword* lies on a rocky outcropping toward the back of the room. Once owned by a mighty champion of Kord, the weapon was left here to melt to slag after his brutal murder.

FETID CLUSTER

Encounter Level 20

SETUP

Place the corrupted hive mother where indicated on the map. Choose two of the beholder pits to hold the other corrupted beholders, but wait to place them until their turn. Have the players place their miniatures near the lip of the portal when the encounter begins.

The corrupted hive mother should make Listen checks to hear the sounds of climbing PCs (DC 15), conversation (DC 17), or any other noises. If she succeeds, she readies an action to use Disjunction Ray on the first intruder she sees so that she can cancel any magical effects cast by him. When the first character reaches the edge of the portal, read:

Hovering in the air is a spheroid creature bristling with eye-stalks and razor-sharp plates of chitin and bone. Orange corruption oozes from numerous rents and fissures in its hide. Burst blisters weep an equally noxious substance and its many rheumy eyes glare in outrage. Its broad mouth spreads in a frown causing a fresh torrent of slime to spill onto the floor. Numerous pits pierce the floor. Statues of robed men and women stand scattered throughout the chamber, all carved in terrified positions.

The corrupted beholders that hide in the pits reveal themselves on their turns, rising just far enough for their eyestalks to crest the lips of the pits. Whenever a corrupted beholder emerges from the pit, read:

A forest of dripping eyestalks climbs up from the darkened pit to look around.

CORRUPTED HIVE MOTHER

CR 19

BV 186, LM 135

hp 250 (20 HD); fast healing 10; DR 15/good and silver
CE Huge aberration

Init +5; Senses darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +27, Spot +31

Languages Abyssal, Beholder, Common, Draconic, Ignan

AC 42, touch 9, flat-footed 41
(-2 size, +1 Dex, +33 natural)

Immune acid, flanking

Fort +16, Ref +7, Will +16

Speed 5 ft. (1 square), fly 20 ft. (good); Flyby Attack

Melee bite +22 (3d6+13 plus 10 vile)

Ranged eye rays +14 touch

Space 15 ft.; Reach 10 ft.

Base Atk +15; Grp +32

Atk Options disruptive attack, improved grab, swallow whole

Special Actions antimagic cone, command beholder, Disjunction Ray, eye rays

Abilities Str 28, Dex 12, Con 26, Int 21, Wis 15, Cha 23

SQ all-around vision, flight

Feats Alertness^B, Disjunction Ray^{LM}, Flyby Attack, Focused Antimagic^{LM}, Great Fortitude, Improved Initiative, Improved Natural Attack (bite), Iron Will

Skills Hide +16, Intimidate +29, Knowledge (religion) +28, Knowledge (the planes) +28, Listen +27, Search +31, Spot +31, Survival +2 (+4 on other planes, +4 following tracks)

Disruptive Attack (Su) A corrupted hive mother deals an additional 10 points of vile damage on a successful bite attack. Vile damage can be healed only by magic cast within the area of a *consecrate* or *hallow* spell.

Improved Grab (Ex) To use this ability, a corrupt hive mother must hit with its bite attack. It can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If it wins the grapple check, it establishes a hold.

Swallow Whole (Ex) A corrupted hive mother can try to swallow a grabbed opponent of up to two sizes smaller by making a successful grapple check.

The swallowed creature takes 2d8+7 points of bludgeoning damage and 2d8 points of acid damage and 10 points of vile damage per round from the corrupt hive mother's gizzard. A swallowed creature can cut its way out by using a light slashing or piercing weapon to deal 15 points of damage to the gizzard (AC 26). Once the creature exits, muscular action closes the hole; another swallowed opponent must cut its own way out.

A corrupted hive mother's gizzard can hold 2 Medium, 8 Small, 32 Tiny or smaller opponents.

Antimagic Cone (Su) A corrupted hive mother's central eye continually produces a 240-foot cone of antimagic. This functions just like an *antimagic field* (caster level 20th). All spell-like and supernatural powers and effects within the cone are suppressed—even the corrupted hive mother's own eye rays. Once each round, during its turn, the corrupted hive mother decides whether the antimagic cone is active or not.

Command Beholder (Sp) As the *dominate monster* spell, at will, Will DC 30 negates, caster level 20th.

This ability function as the spell but it functions only

on beholders and beholderkin. Hive mothers are immune to this ability. If the corrupt hive mother loses control of a dominated beholder, the corrupt hive mother immediately senses the loss of control, and knows the position and distance to the beholder at the time control was lost.

Eye Rays (Su) Each of a corrupt hive mother's ten small eyes can produce a magical ray once per round as a free action. A corrupted hive mother can rotate and adjust its position with much greater speed and skill than normal beholders, and can aim up to six eye rays at targets in any given 90-degree arc.

Each eye's effect resembles a spell (caster level 20th). Each eye ray has a range of 240 feet and a save DC of 30. The save DCs are Charisma-based and include a +4 profane bonus.

The ten eye rays include:

Charm Monster: As the *charm monster* spell, Will negates.

Charm Person: As the *charm person* spell, Will negates.

Disintegrate: As the *disintegrate* spell, Fortitude partial.

Fear: As the *fear* spell, Will partial.

Finger of Death: As the *finger of death* spell, Fortitude partial.

Flesh to Stone: As the *flesh to stone* spell, Fortitude negates.

Inflict Critical Wounds: As the *inflict critical wounds* spell dealing 4d8+20 points of damage, Will half.

Sleep: As the *sleep* spell, except it affects one creature with any number of Hit Dice, Will negates.

Slow: As the *slow* spell, one creature, Will negates.

Telekinesis: A corrupt hive mother can move objects or creature that weigh up to 375 pounds as though with a *telekinesis* spell, Will negates.

All-Around Vision (Ex) A corrupted hive mother is immune to flanking and gains a +4 racial bonus on Search and Spot checks (included).

Flight (Ex) A corrupted hive mother's body is naturally buoyant, enabling it to fly at a speed of 20 feet. This buoyancy also grants it a permanent *feather fall* effect (as the spell) with personal range.

2 CORRUPTED BEHOLDERS

CR 16

BV 186, MM 25

hp 115 each (11 HD); fast healing 5; DR 5/good and silver

CE Large aberration

Init +5; Senses darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +17, Spot +21

Languages Beholder, Common

AC 29, touch 10, flat-footed 28

(-1 size, +1 Dex, +19 natural)

Immune acid, flanking

Fort +11, Ref +4, Will +10

Speed 5 ft. (1 square), fly 20 ft. (good); Flyby Attack

Melee bite +9 (2d6+3 plus 5 vile)

Ranged eye rays +8 touch

Space 10 ft.; Reach 5 ft.

Base Atk +8; Grp +14

Atk Options disruptive attack

Special Actions antimagic cone, eye rays

Abilities Str 14, Dex 12, Con 22, Int 17, Wis 13, Cha 13

SQ all-around vision, flight

Feats Alertness^B, Flyby Attack, Great Fortitude, Improved Initiative, Iron Will

Skills Hide +11, Knowledge (arcana) +17, Listen +17, Search +21, Spot +21, Survival +1 (+3 following tracks)

Disruptive Attack (Su) A corrupted beholder deals an additional 5 points of vile damage on a successful bite attack. Vile damage can be healed only by magic cast within the area of a *consecrate* or *hallow* spell.

Antimagic Cone (Su) A corrupted beholder's central eye continually produces a 150-foot cone of antimagic. This functions just like an *antimagic field* (caster level 13th). All magical and supernatural powers and effects within the cone are suppressed—even the corrupted beholder's own eye rays. Once each round, during its turn, the corrupted beholder decides whether the antimagic cone is active or not.

Eye Rays (Su) Each of a corrupt beholder's ten small eyes can produce a magical ray once per round as a free action. Corrupted beholders can rotate and adjust their position allowing them to aim up to three eye rays at targets in any given 90-degree arc.

Each eye's effect resembles a spell (caster level 14th). Each eye ray has a range of 150 feet and a save DC of 20. The save DCs are Charisma-based and include a +4 profane bonus.

The ten eye rays include:

Charm Monster: As the *charm monster* spell, Will negates.

Charm Person: As the *charm person* spell, Will negates.

Disintegrate: As the *disintegrate* spell, Fortitude partial.

BEHOLDER FEATS

The corrupted hive mother has several feats from *Lords of Madness*. These feats are summarized here for your convenience.

Disjunction Ray: As a standard action, the hive mother can reduce the cone-shaped area of her central eye's antimagic cone down to a razor-thin eye ray (+14 ranged touch). If the ray hits a magical effect or item, it disjoins the effect as if she had cast *Mordenkainen's disjunction*.

Focused Antimagic: The hive mother can reduce the cone-shaped area of her central eye to affect a single creature or object (+14 ranged touch). The target must be within 240 feet.

Fear: As the *fear* spell, Will partial.

Finger of Death: As the *finger of death* spell, Fortitude partial.

Flesh to Stone: As the *flesh to stone* spell, Fortitude negates.

Infllict Critical Wounds: As the *inflict critical wounds* spell dealing 2d8+10 points of damage, Will half.

Sleep: As the *sleep* spell, except it affects one creature with any number of Hit Dice, Will negates.

Slow: As the *slow* spell, one creature, Will negates.

Telekinesis: A corrupt hive mother can move objects or creature that weigh up to 325 pounds as though with a *telekinesis* spell, Will negates.

All-Around Vision (Ex) A corrupted beholder is immune to flanking and gains a +4 racial bonus on Search and Spot checks (included).

Flight (Ex) A corrupted beholder's body is naturally buoyant, enabling it to fly at a speed of 20 feet. This buoyancy also grants it a permanent *feather fall* effect (as the spell) with personal range.

TACTICS

The corrupted hive mother uses Disjunction Ray each round as a standard action and fires six rays at PCs coming from the portals, favoring *slow*, *finger of death*, *disintegrate*, *flesh to stone*, *telekinesis* (to throw them off the ledge), and *inflict critical wounds*. Her lesser kin use a similar selection of rays, supporting the hive mother's attacks. Starting on the third round, the hive mother closes to bite and swallow solitary PCs, using her rays to force her target's allies to keep their distance. The beholders fight to the death and may pursue the PCs if they flee this chamber.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

The room has the following features.

Foul Ice: Spaces containing foul ice are extremely slippery. Characters running or charging through these spaces must succeed on a DC 15 Balance check per square.



Failure by 4 or less indicates the character cannot run or charge, and failure by 5 or more means the character falls prone and slides back down the waterfall to plummet 70 feet to area 10. A prone character can catch himself by succeeding on a DC 20 Climb check.

Beholder Pits: The beholders carved out 10-foot wide pits in which to hide from the hive mother's wrath. A beholder that partly emerges may use its eyestalks but not its central eye. Beholders attacking in this way gain a +4 cover bonus to AC and a +2 cover bonus on Reflex saves. A beholder pit is 70 feet deep. A character that falls takes 6d6 points of damage and may climb out with a DC 25 Climb check.

Statues: The PCs aren't the first ones to attack the beholders. A statue has AC 3, hardness 8, and 900 hit points. A DC 15 Climb check is sufficient to climb the statue. Characters standing behind a statue gain cover (+4 AC and +2 on Reflex saves).

CHAMBER OF DELIGHTS

Encounter Level 19

SETUP

Allow the PCs to place their miniatures at the end of the corridor on the opposite side of the door. Agony is currently inside the floor and only emerges when someone or something steps onto the carpet. When the PCs enter this room, read:

Upon taking in this grisly scene, you spy a shape emerging from the floor, a wispy being consisting of a skull perched atop a fluttering knot of ethereal robes. It howls with rage and horror, drifting toward you, eyes blazing with hatred.

AGONY

MM3 33
hp 187 (25 HD)

CR 19

Advanced deathshrieker
CE Medium undead (incorporeal)
Init +12; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +22, Spot +17
Aura despair (DC 27)
Languages Common, Sylvan

AC 31, touch 31, flat-footed 23; Dodge (+8 Dex, +5 deflection, +8 profane)

Immune undead immunities

Resist +4 turn resistance

Fort +10, **Ref** +18, **Will** +18

Weakness silence vulnerability

Speed fly 40 ft. (good)

Melee incorporeal touch +20/+15/+10 (1d4 Cha drain)

Base Atk +12; **Grp** —

Atk Options Combat Reflexes, Charisma drain

Special Actions death rattle, scream of the dying

Abilities Str —, Dex 27, Con —, Int 8, Wis 14, Cha 20

SQ death's grace, undead traits

Feats Ability Focus (scream of the dying), Alertness, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Great Fortitude, Improved Initiative, Improved Toughness, Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes

Skills Hide +23, Intimidate +22, Listen +22, Search +20, Spot +17, Survival +2 (+4 following tracks)

Despair (Su) A creature that sees Agony must succeed on a DC 27 Will save or become paralyzed with fear for 1d4 rounds. Whether or not the save succeeds, the creature cannot again be affected by Agony's despair ability for 24 hours. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Silence Vulnerability (Ex) To enter into the radius of

a *silence* spell, Agony must first succeed on a Will save (DC 12 + caster level). Agony takes 1d10 points of damage (Will save against the same DC for half) each round it remains in the area of a *silence* spell.

Charisma Drain (Su) Creatures struck by Agony must succeed on a DC 27 Fortitude save or permanently lose 1d4 points of Charisma (2d4 points on a critical hit). Agony heals 5 points of damage (10 on a critical hit) whenever it drains Charisma, gaining any in excess as temporary hit points. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Death Rattle (Su) When Agony is reduced to 0 hit points, it releases a final, devastating shriek. All living creatures within a 300-foot spread must succeed on a DC 27 Will save or gain 1d4 negative levels. Creatures that cannot hear or are under the effects of a *silence* spell gain a +4 bonus on the save to resist this effect. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Scream of the Dying (Su) Once per day, as a full-round action, Agony can release a soul-numbing scream that lasts for up to 3 rounds. After this first round, Agony can use a standard action to sustain the scream. This attack affects all living creatures within a 30-foot spread centered on it, or within a 60-foot cone extending from Agony at its option. Once it chooses the shape of this effect, it must maintain that shape for all 3 rounds. In the case of a cone, it can aim in a single direction during its turn. Creatures caught in the area must succeed on a DC 29 Will save or suffer the effects described below. The save DC is Charisma-based. Creatures that can't hear or are under the effect of a *silence* spell gain a +4 bonus on their saves. The effects are cumulative and concurrent:

Round 1: The creature is deafened for 1d4 rounds.

Round 2: The creature is stunned for 1d3 rounds.

Round 3: The creature suffers the effects of *insanity*, caster level 18th.

The effects are so loud that normal conversation is impossible. Spellcasters who attempt to cast spells with a verbal component must make a DC 29 Concentration check or the spell fails.

Death's Grace (Ex) Agony gains a +8 profane bonus to AC (included).

TACTICS

Agony uses its scream of the dying after rising from the floor. It maintains the scream each round, moving closer to the PCs to blanket them with this destructive ability. If pressed, Agony lashes out with its touch attack, diving into the walls and floor to evade the attacks of its enemies.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

The room has the following features.

Altar: The fleshy altar emits a *desecration* effect out to the edges of the carpet. So long as Agony is in the area of the effect, it gains a +1 profane bonus on attack rolls, damage rolls, and saving throws.



DEMONIC SENTINELS

Encounter Level 20

SETUP

The klurichir demons are positioned as indicated on the map. Unless the PCs have some ability to perceive invisible creatures, don't place the demons on the map. Have the players position themselves in the bottom left corner. When this is done, read:

Four alcoves grant access to a larger chamber beyond. A few depressions in the floor hold some foul fluid that bubbles and burps as you watch. In the far corner, blood and gore paint the walls.

If any character can perceive invisible creatures or negates the *greater invisibility* spells, read:

A demonic figure stands some 30-feet tall and possesses a powerful and muscular body. Massive crimson wings flare out from its back while four powerful arms twitch and claw at the air. Its head is monstrous and snarling, while a second mouth flanked by grotesque pincer snaps out from its prodigious gut.

3 KLURICHIRS

CR 17

FF 48

hp 210 each (20 HD); DR 20/cold iron and good

CE Huge outsider (chaotic, evil, extraplanar, tanar'ri)
Init +6; Senses darkvision 60 ft., see invisibility; Listen +26, Spot +26

Aura fear (30 ft., DC 26)

Languages Abyssal, Common, Celestial, Draconic, Ignan, Undercommon; telepathy 100 ft.

AC 42, touch 14, flat-footed 40
(-2 size, +2 Dex, +4 *mage armor*, +4 deflection [*unholy aura*], +24 natural)

Immune electricity, poison

Resist acid 10, cold 10, fire 10; SR 36

Fort +18, Ref +14, Will +15; +4 *unholy aura*

Speed 50 ft. (10 squares), fly 90 ft. (poor)

Melee +3 *battleaxe* +30/+25/+20/+15 (3d6+12/19-20) and 2 pincers +28 each (2d6+4/19-20)

Ranged spines +20 (2d4+4 plus poison)

Space 15 ft.; Reach 15 ft.

Base Atk +20; Grp +37

Atk Options improved grab, poison, rend 2d6+13, vorpal pincers

Special Actions summon tanar'ri

Sorcerer Spells Known (CL 10th):

5th (4/day)—*hold monster* (DC 21)

4th (6/day)—*dimensional anchor* (+20 ranged touch), *greater invisibility*

3rd (7/day)—*displacement*, *lightning bolt* (DC 19), *protection from energy*

2nd (8/day)—*bear's endurance*, *bull's strength*, *mirror image*, *scorching ray* (+20 ranged touch)

1st (8/day)—*expeditious retreat*, *magic missile*, *mage armor*, *ray of enfeeblement* (+20 ranged touch), *true strike*

0 (6/day)—*arcane mark*, *dancing lights*, *detect magic*, *ghost sound* (DC 16), *mending*, *message*, *open/close*, *prestidigitation*, *touch of fatigue* (+27 melee touch, DC 16)

†Already cast

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 20th):

At will—*blasphemy* (DC 23), *deeper darkness*, *desecrate*, *detect good*, *detect law*, *dispel good* (DC 21), *fear* (DC 20), *greater dispel magic*, *greater teleport* (self plus 50 lb. objects only), *magic circle against good*, *mass charm monster* (DC 24), *mass suggestion* (DC 22), *pyrotechnics* (DC 18), *read magic*, *symbol of pain* (DC 21), *telekinesis* (+26 attack, DC 21), *tongues*, *unhallow*, *unholy aura* (DC 24), *unholy blight* (DC 20), *wall of fire*

3/day—*destruction* (DC 23), *enervation* (+20 ranged touch), *fire storm* (DC 24), *implosion* (DC 25), *slay living* (+27 melee touch, DC 21)

†Already cast

Abilities Str 29, Dex 15, Con 22, Int 20, Wis 16, Cha 23

Feats Cleave, Great Cleave, Improved Critical (battleaxe), Improved Critical (pincers), Improved Initiative, Multiattack, Power Attack

Skills Bluff +29, Concentration +29, Diplomacy +33, Disguise +6 (+8 acting), Hide +17, Intimidate +31, Knowledge (religion) +28, Knowledge (the planes) +28, Listen +26, Move Silently +25, Search +28, Sense Motive +26, Spellcraft +28, Spot +26, Survival +3 (+5 on other planes, +5 following tracks)

Possessions +3 *battleaxe*, spell component pouch

See Invisibility (Su) As the *see invisibility* spell, always active (CL 20th). This ability works as the spell except its range extends out to the limits of the klurichir's vision.

Aura of Fear (Su) At the beginning of each of a klurichir's turns, all creatures within 30 feet must succeed on a DC 26 Will save or become panicked for 10 rounds. A successful save indicates the creature is instead shaken for 1 round, but cannot be affected by the same klurichir's aura of fear ability for 24 hours.

Improved Grab (Ex) If a klurichir hits a Large or smaller creature with its pincer attack, it may attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If it wins the grapple check, it

establishes a hold and draws the victim to its mouth, where it can immediately attempt to attack the opponent with its vorpal pincers. It may use this ability or its rend ability, but not both in the same round.

Poison (Ex) Injury—spine, Fort DC 26, initial and secondary damage 2d4 Strength.

Rend (Ex) If a klurichir hits a single target with both pincers, it latches onto the opponent's body and tears the flesh, dealing 2d6+13 points of damage. It may use its rend ability or its improved grab ability, but not both in the same round.

Vorpal Pincers (Ex) A klurichir can make a vorpal pincers attack against a grappled opponent in its pincer, once each round, as a free action. The pincers have an attack bonus of +25 and deal 2d6+13 points of damage with a successful attack. The pincers threaten a critical hit on a 19–20. On a confirmed critical hit, the pincers sever the opponent's head from its body. Creatures immune to critical hits are immune to the vorpal effect of this attack.

Summon Tanar'ri (Sp) Automatically summon 4d10 quasits, 1d6 hezrous, 2 nalfeshnees, or 2 glabrezus, 1/day. This ability is the equivalent of a 9th-level spell.

TACTICS

Before the combat begins, the demons have cast *greater invisibility* and *mage armor*. Once the PCs close, the demons cast *unholy aura* (included in their statistics above). The demons are eager to engage the PCs in melee, but are clever enough to soften them up first. So, over the course of the first 3 rounds, the demons take turns casting *destruction*, *enervation*, and *implosion* until they've all used these abilities each one time, reserving *implosion* for last so they can concentrate on the spell to target each character in turn. The demons gladly keep casting spells until the characters close. Should these spells fail to affect the PCs, the demons mix up their spellcasting to target characters with *hold monster*, *fire storm*, and *scorching ray*.

Characters that approach within 30 feet of the demons must save against the aura of fear ability. If any characters flee, one klurichir follows, chasing the character or characters so it can butcher them alone.

While the demons possess a terrifying array of spells and spell-like abilities, they truly shine in melee. The first round the demons fight in melee, they modify their attacks with a 10-point Power Attack. Following their battleaxe attack, they also get an attack with their vorpal pincers to grapple the character. Once grappling, a klurichir keeps focusing its attacks on its grappled victim until the character escapes or is killed.

The demons do not let the PCs escape easily. They chase them if they try to flee—even out of the elder evil itself, such is their hunger for fresh meat. The situation



only worsens if the PCs have diminished the elder evil's sign. The demons summon two glabrezus each and send them after the characters to cut off their retreat.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

The room has the following features.

Symbols of Pain: Each entrance to this room is protected by a *symbol of pain* (caster level 20th). Any creature passing over the symbol triggers them, forcing that creature and all creatures within a 60-foot radius to succeed on a DC 21 Will save or take a –4 penalty on attack rolls, skill checks, and ability checks. The demons must also make this save if the symbols get past their spell resistance. The penalty applies for 1 hour after the characters leave the area. There is no additional effect for failed saves against multiple *symbols of pain*.

Pockmarks: The floor is dimpled with foul pockmarks that contain the elder evil's ichors. Any creature that enters a space containing the fluid must succeed on a DC 33 Fortitude save or be reduced to a spongy mass of flesh. This effect functions like the essence of Shothragot's corporeal instability ability (see page 46 for details).

Blood and Gore: The far corner of this room witnessed the death of another adventuring party who came to destroy the elder evil. The demons captured and slowly tore them to pieces here, tossing their equipment on top of the torn flesh and splattered organs. The items not destroyed by the demons include a suit of *banded mail of luck*, +2 *acidic burst short sword*, *ring of major cold resistance*, *ring of protection* +3, *lesser metamagic rod of Maximize*, *cloak of resistance* +5, *druid's vestments*, *eternal wand of cure serious wounds*^{MIC}, *dark blue rhomboid ioun stone*, and a *vest of free movement*^{MIC}.

KEEPERS OF THE EYE

Encounter Level 20

SETUP

Place the deathdrinker demons where indicated on the tactical map. The players may place their miniatures anywhere within the first three squares of the right side of the map. Once the players have placed, read:

Glistening pools of bright green fluid illuminate this chamber and reveal two 30-foot-tall, red-skinned guards dressed in sinister breastplates and wielding massive longswords. Branching out from either side of their heads are broken and splintered antlers. Carved into their foreheads between their white eyes are symbols reminiscent of inverted black pyramids.

2 DEATHDRINKERS

CR 18

MM4 40

hp 337 each (27 HD); DR 15/good and lawful

CE Huge outsider (chaotic, evil, extraplanar)

Init +6; Senses true seeing; Listen +30, Spot +30

Aura unlife (10 ft.)

Languages Abyssal, Common

AC 35, touch 10, flat-footed 33

(-2 size, +2 Dex, +7 armor, +18 natural)

Immune negative energy, poison

Resist acid 10, cold 10, electricity 10, fire 10; SR 29

Fort +23, Ref +17, Will +17

Speed 35 ft. in breastplate (7 squares), base speed 50 ft.

Melee +3 *adamantine longsword* +38/+33/+28/+23 (3d6+18/17-20 plus 1d6 fire plus 1d6 fire 1 round later)

Space 15 ft.; Reach 15 ft.

Base Atk +27; Grp +45

Atk Options Cleave, Combat Reflexes, Great Cleave, Power Attack, Quick Draw, Quicken Spell-Like Ability (*greater teleport*), Quicken Spell-Like Ability (*greater dispel magic*), aligned strike (chaotic, evil), glory in slaughter

Combat Gear *oil of align weapon*, *oil of bless weapon*, *oil of corrupt weapon*

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 20th):

At will—*air walk* (self only), *greater dispel magic*, *greater teleport* (self plus 50 lb. of objects only)

3/day—quicken *greater dispel magic*, quicken *greater teleport* (self plus 50 lb. of objects only)

Abilities Str 30, Dex 14, Con 27, Int 10, Wis 11, Cha 11

SA aura of unlife, aligned strike (chaotic, evil), glory in slaughter

SQ deathdrinker

Feats Cleave, Combat Reflexes, Great Cleave, Improved Critical (longsword), Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Power Attack, Quick Draw, Quicken Spell-Like Ability (*greater dispel magic*), Quicken Spell-Like Ability (*greater teleport*)

Skills Concentration +38, Hide +21, Intimidate +30, Jump +37, Knowledge (the planes) +30, Listen +30, Move Silently +29, Spot +30, Survival +0 (+2 on other planes)

Possessions combat gear plus +2 *breastplate*, +3 *adamantine longsword* with a *greater crystal of fire assault*, 7,000 gp in assorted gems and jewelry.

True Seeing (Su) As the *true seeing* spell, continuous, caster level 20th.

Aura of Unlife (Su) At the end of each of the deathdrinker's turns, creatures within 10 feet take 2d6 points of damage. This is a negative energy effect. Undead are instead healed of a like amount of damage.

Glory in Slaughter (Ex) A deathdrinker gains a +5 morale bonus on attack rolls, damage rolls, and saving throws for 1 minute after it kills an opponent with 10 or more Hit Dice.

Deathdrink (Su) If a deathdrinker deals enough damage to a creature to kill it with either its aura of unlife or melee attack, it instantly heals 1d8 points of damage per HD of the creature it killed.

TACTICS

The deathdrinkers apply *oil of corrupt weapon* to their weapons and then charge on the next round to attack anyone they deem to be an intruder, using an 8-point Power Attack. The deathdrinkers are inherently selfish and they do not use team tactics. Instead, each one focuses on a separate opponent until they kill their victim, which activates their glory in slaughter ability. Note that characters within 10 feet of the deathdrinkers take 2d6 points of damage each round.

DEVELOPMENT

Sounds of combat from this room may alert nearby creatures. Have the templars of Tharizdun in area 21 make Listen checks each round the combat continues (being sure to account for distance and the presence of the door). Similarly, the aspect of Obox-Ob in area 18 is also entitled to a Listen check. If either the aspect or the templars hear the combat, they do not join the fight, but ready actions as noted in their respective entries

FEATURES OF THE AREA

The room has the following features.

Acid Pools: Spread out in places throughout this large room are pools of caustic fluid. Any character standing in an adjacent space to an acid pool must succeed on a DC 25 Fortitude save or become nauseated for 1 round.

The pools are each as deep as they are wide. Coming into contact with a pool deals 2d6 points of acid damage. Any creature unfortunate enough to be immersed takes 20d6 points of acid damage per round of immersion. Damage from the acid continues for 1d3 rounds after exposure, but the damage is only half that dealt during actual contact (1d6 or 10d6 per round). Immunity to acid damage prevents creatures from taking damage from the pools, but such creatures are still at risk of drowning.



THE EMISSARY

Encounter Level 22

SETUP

Place the aspect of Obox-Ob where indicated on the tactical map. The players may place their miniatures anywhere near the entrance. When the PCs see the aspect of Obox-Ob, read:

A nightmare of spider limbs fused into the form of a vile demon surges out of the darkness, cackling aloud and in your minds to create an unbearable chorus of madness. The form defies description and threatens to blast your sanity away, leaving you a shuddering, gibbering shell.

ASPECT OF OBOX-OB

CR 22

FC1 71

hp 455 (26 HD); fast healing 15; DR 20/cold iron and good

CE Huge outsider (chaotic, evil, extraplanar, obyrith)
Init +7; Senses darkvision 60 ft., true seeing; Listen +36, Spot +36

Aura discordant drone (40 ft. radius, Will DC 31), form of madness (120-ft. radius, Will DC 31)

Languages Abyssal; telepathy 100 ft.

AC 41, touch 11, flat-footed 38
(–2 size, +3 Dex, +30 natural)

Immune disease, mind-affecting effects, poison

Resist acid 10, cold 10, electricity 10, fire 10; SR 33

Fort +28, Ref +18, Will +22; +4 against Dark Speech

Speed 40 ft. (8 squares), climb 40 ft., fly 60 ft. (good); Flyby Attack

Melee 3 stings +36 (3d6+12/19–20 plus poison) and bite +34 (2d6+6) and tongue +34 (1d8+6 plus implant chaos)

Space 15 ft.; Reach 15 ft.

Base Atk +26; Grp +46

Atk Options Cleave, Power Attack, aligned strike (chaotic, evil), epic strike, implant chaos, poison

Special Actions Dark Speech

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 20th):

At will—*astral projection*, *desecrate*, *detect good*, *detect law*, *greater dispel magic*, *greater teleport*, *giant vermin*, *telekinesis* (DC 23), *summon swarm*, *unhallow*, *unholy blight* (DC 22)

3/day—*quicken giant vermin*, *quicken telekinesis* (DC 23), *symbol of insanity* (DC 25)

1/day—*polymorph any object* (DC 26, vermin shapes only)

Abilities Str 34, Dex 17, Con 36, Int 23, Wis 24, Cha 27

Feats Cleave, Dark Speech (see sidebar), Flyby Attack, Improved Critical (sting), Improved Initiative, Multi-attack, Power Attack, Quicken Spell-Like Ability (*giant vermin*), Quicken Spell-Like Ability (*telekinesis*)

Skills Balance +7, Climb +41, Concentration +42, Diplomacy +10, Hide +24, Intimidate +37, Jump +43, Knowledge (arcana) +35, Knowledge (religion) +35, Knowledge (the planes) +35, Listen +36, Move Silently +32, Sense Motive +36, Spellcraft +37, Spot +36, Survival +7 (+11 on other planes), Tumble +34

True Seeing (Su) As the *true seeing* spell, continuous, caster level 20th.

Discordant Drone (Su) Whenever the aspect of Obox-Ob moves at least 5 feet, he emits a cacophony of shrieking and wailing. All creatures within 40 feet must succeed on a DC 31 Will save or be deafened and confused for 1 round. This is a mind-affecting effect. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Form of Madness (Su) Any creature within 120 feet that observes the aspect of Obox-Ob must succeed on a DC 31 Will save or have its mind forever after haunted by Obox-Ob's unholy shape. Henceforth, each time the affected creature tries to rest, it is subject to the effect of a *nightmare* spell (no save; CL 20th). As well, the creature automatically becomes shaken whenever he is within 30 feet of a vermin creature he can see. This form of madness is permanent. A *heal* or *greater restoration* spell can cure the effects if the caster succeeds on a DC 30 caster level check. A *miracle* or *wish* spell automatically removes the effect.

A creature that makes this save is immune to the aspect's form of madness for 24 hours. This is a mind-affecting effect. Chaotic evil outsiders are immune to this ability. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Poison (Ex) Sting—Injury, Fortitude DC 36, 2d8 Int drain/2d8 Int drain. A creature drained to 0 Intelligence by Obox-Ob's sting is immediately transformed into a fiendish monstrous scorpion of the same size as its previous form. The victim retains none of its previous abilities or memories. Only a *miracle* or *wish* restores the victim to its original form and raises its Intelligence to 1. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Implant Chaos (Su) A creature that takes damage from Obox-Ob's tongue attack must succeed on a DC 31 Fortitude save or become implanted with the raw stuff of chaos. The victim gains 1d4 negative levels and 1d4 additional negative levels each round at the start of the victim's turn as the chaos transforms

its body and soul. Once the victim has a number of negative levels equal to its Hit Dice, the chaos consumes it utterly, leaving behind only the victim's gear. A creature destroyed in this way can only be brought back to life with a *miracle*, *true resurrection*, or *wish* spell, and even then the caster must succeed on a DC 30 caster level check or the implanted chaos immediately begins to destroy the victim again as it is restored to life. *Dispel chaos* halts the deterioration caused by the implantation but does not remove negative levels.

DARK SPEECH

The aspect of Obox-Ob has the Dark Speech feat, which is fully described in *Fiendish Codex I*. For your convenience, its salient functions are included here.

Benefit: Dark Speech has four basic uses, three of which pertain to this encounter.

Dread: Using Dark Speech in this way deals 1d4 points of Charisma damage and every creature in a 30-foot radius must succeed on a DC 31 Will save or suffer the effects of the speech as shown on the following table.

Level (Alignment)	Result
1st–4th (non-evil)	Listener is shaken for 1d10 rounds and must flee until speaker is out of sight.
1st–4th (evil)	Listener cowers for 1d10 rounds.
5th–10th (non-evil)	Listener is shaken for 1d10 rounds.
5th–10th (evil)	Listener is charmed (as <i>charm monster</i>) for 1d10 rounds.
11th+	Listener is filled with loathing, but not affected.
11th+	Listener is impressed, speaker gains +2 competence bonus on attempts to change listener's attitude in the future.

Corruption: As a full-round action, the aspect of Obox-Ob can whisper vile words at an inanimate object and reduce its hardness by half. The aspect can affect an object just once.

Dark Unity: The aspect of Obox-Ob can use Dark Speech to establish a hive mind in any swarm of vermin or animals with an Intelligence score of 2 or lower. Thereafter, the aspect can give the swarm one command as per the *suggestion* spell (caster level 26th). Infusing a swarm in this manner deals 1d4 points of Constitution damage to the aspect.



TACTICS

Once committed to combat, Obox-Ob does not grant quarter. He moves at least 5 feet each round to create his discordant drone and positions himself in full view of as many PCs as possible. He trains his attacks on PCs that try to get past him, using quickened *telekinesis* to toss back ambitious characters toward the entrance.

Obox-Ob's true power lays within his melee attacks. The first chance he gets, he makes a full attack action, holding back his Power Attack until he has infected his victim with poison and implanted chaos. As the poison and steady supply of negative levels neutralize his opponent, he swings toward another target.

TEMPLARS OF THARIZDUN

Encounter Level 23

SETUP

Lareth, an infamous cleric of the Dark God who has escaped death on numerous occasions, positioned his personal guard—the deathdrinkers—at area 17 to dissuade intruders from venturing close to the last cultists' redoubt. If Lareth or his cronies hear the sounds of battle with the demons or the aspect of Obox-Ob, Lareth readies a *fire storm* (cold) spell to cast on the first people through the door, while Azugel readies a charge. Vadaeth withdraws into his chambers and emerges only if he hears fighting here.

The placement of the figures assumes the inhabitants are aware of the PCs. If not, place Azugel and Lareth both in the side rooms. When the PCs enter this room, read:

Beyond the door, a vast sea of green slime bubbles before you. On either side, you see a few flickering torches, each giving off a pale blue flame. Iron walls set in the strange substance of the walls give the chamber the appearance of having rooms.

Charging you is a frothing half-orc wearing a breastplate and wielding a greatsword. At the opposite side of the room, you see a tall blonde man with purple robes. One side of his face is extraordinarily attractive, while the other is a gruesome mass of scars.

Behind the man, you see a massive altar. On it rests an inverted two-step pyramid.

When Vadaeth emerges, read:

A hulking humanoid, larger than a man but smaller than an ogre, lumbers forward. Encased in enameled black full plate and armed with an impossibly large greataxe, he howls "Tharizdun!" as he charges forward.

FRENZIED RAGING AZUGEL

CR 20

CW 34

hp 255 (20 HD); DR 2/—

Male half-orc barbarian 10/frenzied berserker 10^{CW}

CE Medium humanoid (orc)

Init +3; Senses darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +14, Spot +1

Languages Common, Orc

AC 23, touch 10, flat-footed 23; improved uncanny dodge

(+3 Dex, +10 armor, +3 deflection, +3 natural, -4 frenzy, -2 rage)

Fort +25, Ref +14, Will +14

Speed 30 ft. in breastplate (6 squares), base speed 40 ft.
Melee +3 keen unholy greatsword +39/+34/+29/+24
(2d6+27/17-20 plus 2d6 against good)

Base Atk +20; Grp +36

Atk Options Cleave, Defensive Sweep, Destructive Rage, Great Cleave, Improved Sunder, Intimidating Rage, Power Attack, deathless frenzy, frenzy 5/day, greater frenzy, improved power attack, rage 3/day, supreme cleave, supreme power attack

Special Actions inspire frenzy 3/day

Combat Gear 2 potions of cure serious wounds, potion of resist fire 30, potion of shield of faith +4

Abilities Str 42, Dex 16, Con 22, Int 8, Wis 12, Cha 6

SQ tireless frenzy

Feats Cleave, Defensive Sweep^{PH2}, Destructive Rage^{CW}, Diehard^B, Great Cleave, Improved Sunder, Intimidating Rage^{CW}, Power Attack

Skills Intimidate +21, Jump +31, Listen +14

Possessions combat gear plus +5 breastplate of speed^{MIC}, +3 keen unholy greatsword, ring of protection +3, amulet of natural armor +3, belt of giant Strength +6, gloves of Dexterity +2, vest of resistance +5^{MIC}

Deathless Frenzy (Ex) While Azugel is in a frenzy, he is not considered disabled at 0 hit points, nor is he treated as dying at -1 to -9 hit points. Even if reduced to -10 hit points or less, he continues to fight normally until his frenzy ends. At that point, the effects of his wounds apply normally. This ability does not prevent death from massive damage or from spell effects such as *slay living* or *disintegrate*.

Frenzied Rage (Ex) If Azugel takes damage and still has uses of greater frenzy remaining for the day, he goes into a greater frenzy as a free action during his next turn unless he succeeds on a Will save (DC 10 + points of damage). Azugel's frenzy lasts for 9 rounds if raging. While in a frenzy, he must attack foes, or a random creature if no foes remain. Each round of the frenzy, Azugel takes 2 points of nonlethal damage. He may end a rage prematurely with a successful DC 20 Will save. Otherwise, this ability functions as a barbarian's rage. When not in a frenzied rage, Azugel uses the following statistics.

AC 29, touch 16, flat-footed 29

hp decrease by 40

Fort +23, Ref +14, Will +12

Melee +3 keen unholy greatsword +31/+26/+21/+16
(2d6+15/17-20 plus 2d6 against good)

Abilities Str 28

Skills Jump +24

Supreme Cleave (Ex) Azugel can take a 5-foot step between attacks when using the Cleave or Great Cleave

feat. He is still limited to one adjustment per round.
Supreme Power Attack (Ex) Azugel gains a +4 bonus on melee damage rolls for every -1 penalty he takes on the attack roll when using the Power Attack feat.
Inspire Frenzy (Ex) While frenzied, Azugel can inspire frenzy in all willing allies within 10 feet. Affected allies gain a +6 bonus to Strength, an extra attack when making a full-attack action, -4 penalty on AC, and take 2 points of nonlethal damage each round. The frenzy lasts for 3 rounds plus a number of rounds equal to the creature's Constitution modifier. The creature can prematurely end the frenzy by succeeding on a DC 20 Will save.

LARETH THE BEAUTIFUL **CR 20**
 hp 133 (20 HD)

Male human cleric 15/hierophant 5
 CE Medium humanoid
Init +5; **Senses** Listen +8, Spot +8
Languages Abyssal, Common

AC 31, touch 12, flat-footed 30
 (+1 Dex, +13 armor, +6 shield, +1 deflection)

Miss Chance 20% blur

Fort +20, **Ref** +14, **Will** +26

Speed 20 ft. in full plate (4 squares), base speed 30 ft.
Melee +3 profane morningstar +16/+11/+6 (1d8+3 plus 1d6 against living or 2d6 against good outsiders)

Base Atk +13; **Grp** +13

Atk Options Sudden Maximize, divine reach 60 ft., reroll any damage 1/day

Special Actions Divine Metamagic (Transdimensional Spell), Embody Energy (cold), blast infidel (lawful good), rebuke undead 6/day (+5, 2d6+18, 15th)

Combat Gear circlet of rapid casting^{MIC}

Cleric Spells Prepared (CL 20th):

9th—*Bigby's crushing hand* (grp +44, PH 203), *energy drain* (+14 ranged touch), *miracle*, *rapid summon monster VIII*, *summon monster IX*

8th—*fire storm* (cold) (DC 26) (3), *mass cure critical wounds*, *unholy aura* (DC 27, CL 21st)^D

7th—*blasphemy* (DC 26, CL 21st), *destruction* (DC 25), *ethereal jaunt*, *forcecage*^D, *regenerate*, *repulsion* (DC 25)

6th—*greater dispel magic*, *heal* (2), *mass bull's strength*, *repulsion* (DC 24)^D, *word of recall*

5th—*dispel good* (DC 24, CL 21st)^D, *flame strike* (cold) (DC 23) (2), *righteous might*, *slay living* (DC 23), *spell resistance*, *true seeing*

4th—*air walk*, *cure critical wounds* (2), *dimensional anchor* (+14 ranged touch), *divine power*, *freedom of movement*, *poison* (+14 ranged touch, DC 22), *unholy blight* (DC 23, CL 21st)^D

3rd—*bestow curse* (+13 melee touch, DC 21), *blast of force* (+14 ranged touch, DC 21)^{D, SC}, *blindness/deafness* (DC 21), *cure serious wounds* (2), *dispel magic* (2), *wind wall*

2nd—*aid*, *align weapon*, *bear's endurance*, *cure mod-*

erate wounds, *death knell* (DC 21, CL 21st), *hold person* (DC 20), *magic missile*^D, *resist energy* 1st—*command* (DC 19), *divine favor*, *doom* (DC 19), *entropic shield*, *obscuring mist*, *protection from good* (CL 21st)^D, *sanctuary* (DC 19), *shield of faith* 0—*detect magic* (2), *guidance*, *light*, *read magic*, *resistance*

D: Domain spell. Deity: Tharizdun. Domains: Evil, Force^{SC}

Abilities Str 10, Dex 12, Con 14, Int 13, Wis 26, Cha 16
SQ overwhelming aura of chaos and evil

Feats Divine Metamagic (Transdimensional Spell)^{CD}, Embody Energy (cold)^{ELE}, Energy Substitution (fire)^{CAR}, Improved Initiative, Lightning Reflexes, Rapid Spell^{CD, B}, Spell Focus (conjunction), Spell Focus (evil)^{CD}, Sudden Maximize^{CAR, B}, Transdimensional Spell^{CD, B}

Skills Concentration +21, Diplomacy +21, Intimidate +5, Knowledge (arcana) +6, Knowledge (religion) +24, Spellcraft +26

Possessions combat gear plus +5 *full plate of light fortification*, +4 *animated greater blurring*^{MIC} *heavy steel shield*, +3 *profane*^{MIC} *morningstar*, *ring of protection* +1, *cloak of Charisma* +2, *gauntlets of ogre power*, *peripart of Wisdom* +6, *vest of resistance* +5^{MIC}, cold iron unholy symbol of Tharizdun, reliquary for *unholy aura* (500 gp), *true seeing ointment* (250 gp), ruby dust (1,500 gp for *forcecage*)

Blast Infidel (Su) Any spell Lareth casts that involves inflicting or channeling negative energy (*inflict* spells, *harm*, *enervation*) cast on a lawful good creature works as if under the effect of a Maximize Spell feat but without using a higher-level spell slot.

VADAETH BLOODSEEKER **CR 20**
 hp 183 (17 HD); DR 10/magic

Male half-fiend goliath^{RS} fighter 10/blackguard 7
 CE Medium outsider (native)

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

Aura despair (10 ft.)

Languages Abyssal, Common, Gol-Kaa, Terran

AC 35, touch 16, flat-footed 34; Dodge, Mobility (+1 Dex, +13 armor, +5 shield, +5 deflection, +1 natural)

Immune poison

Resist acid 10, cold 10, electricity 10, fire 10; **SR** 27

Fort +23, **Ref** +13, **Will** +13

Speed 20 ft. in full plate (4 squares), base speed 30 ft.; Spring Attack

Melee +4 *keen greataxe* +33/+28/+23/+18 (3d6+21/19-20/x3) and

bite +22 (1d8+5) or

Melee 2 claws +27 each (1d6+10) and

bite +22 (1d8+5)

Space 5 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft.

Base Atk +17; **Grp** +31

Atk Options Cleave, Combat Expertise, Combat Reflexes, Improved Sunder, Power Attack, Whirlwind Attack, smite good 1/day (+17 damage), smite good 2/day (+6 attack, +7 damage), sneak attack +2d6

Special Actions rebuke undead 9/day (+8, 2d6+13, 5th)

Blackguard Spells Prepared (CL 7th):

3rd—*cure serious wounds*

2nd—*cure moderate wounds*, *demonhide*^{SC}

1st—*corrupt weapon*^{DMG}, *divine sacrifice*^{SC}, *resurgence*^{SC}

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 17th):

3/day—*darkness*, *poison* (+27 melee touch, DC 20), *unholy aura* (DC 24)

1/day—*blasphemy* (DC 24), *contagion* (+27 melee touch, DC 20), *desecrate*, *horrid wilting* (DC 24), *summon monster IX* (fiends only), *unhallow*, *unholy blight* (DC 20)

Abilities Str 30, Dex 14, Con 20, Int 14, Wis 14, Cha 20

SQ acclimated, fiendish servant (none), mountain movement, poison use, powerful build, strong aura of evil

Feats Cleave, Combat Expertise^B, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Improved Sunder^B, Mobility, Power Attack^B, Spring Attack^B, Weapon Focus (greataxe), Weapon Specialization (greataxe)^B, Whirlwind Attack^B

Skills Climb +16, Concentration +12, Hide +10, Intimidate +26, Knowledge (religion) +11, Sense Motive +4, Swim +12

Possessions +5 *full plate*, +3 *animated heavy steel shield*, +4 *keen greataxe*, *ring of protection* +5, *belt of giant's Strength* +6, *cloak of Charisma* +6

Aura of Despair (Su) All enemies within 10 feet take a –2 penalty on all saving throws.

Acclimated (Ex) Vadaeth is automatically acclimated to life at high altitudes and takes no penalty for altitude.

Mountain Movement (Ex) Vadaeth can make standing long jumps and high jumps as if they were running jumps. Vadaeth can engage in accelerated climbing without taking a –5 penalty on the Climb check.

Powerful Build (Ex) Whenever Vadaeth is subject to a size modifier or special size modifier for an opposed check, he is treated as if Large size if doing so would be advantageous. He is also treated as Large size when determining whether a creature's special attacks based on size can affect him. He can use weapons designed for a creature one size larger than he is without penalty.

TACTICS

None of the templars works especially well with the others and each fight independently, looking to kill as many PCs



while preserving their own skins. Of the three, Azugel is the most straightforward. On the first round, he activates his armor, flies into a frenzied rage, and charges the closest character. He attacks the closest PC, using a 20-point Power Attack to deal +80 points of damage. Should he fail to hit his opponent, he drops the Power Attack by 5 each round until he does consistently hit his opponent.

Lareth runs through his direct damage spells first, freely catching Azugel in the area. If the elder evil's sign is diminished, Lareth uses rapid *summon monster VIII* followed by a *summon monster IX* to even the odds. Lareth is reluctant to get into melee, but if it seems unavoidable, he casts *righteous might* and *divine power*.

Vadaeth spends the first round casting *unholy aura* and *demonhide*. When he emerges, he casts *horrid wilting* on an arcane caster and moves to engage in melee.

All three templars fight to the death.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

The room has the following features.

Light: Positioned around the perimeter of this chamber are *everburning torches*, shedding bright light in a 20-foot radius and shadowy light 40-feet further.

Virulent Green Slime (CR 10): The center of this chamber is filled with a pool of nasty green slime. The slime deals 2d6 points of Constitution damage per round after contact. The slime cannot be scraped off and, upon contact, the only way to remove the slime is to deal cold or fire damage to the victim, automatically destroying the stuff. A *remove disease* spell destroys a 5-foot square of virulent green slime. Virulent green slime deals 4d6 points of damage per round to wood or metal and ignores metal's hardness.

ESSENCE OF SHOTHRAGOT

Encounter Level 26

SETUP

The player characters appear on the ledge surrounding the essence's pit. The players may place their miniatures anywhere inside the dotted red box. Place the blackstone gigants where indicated and the elder evil at the bottom of the pit. Neither the constructs nor the elder evil anticipate the PCs' arrival, so the characters automatically gain surprise. When the characters appear, read:

You find yourself in a massive chamber with smooth black stone walls and floor. The ceiling stretches nearly 100 feet overhead. Hovering in each corner of the room are four 66-foot-tall black statues of horrible demons, fusions of snakes and beautiful women. Each wears a necklace of petrified human heads whose faces are contorted as if wailing. The statues, as one, turn their stony heads to face you, faces twisting with anger.

In the center of the chamber is a 60-foot-wide pit, its edges fractured and cracked. Black mist rises from the depths, coiling up like serpents.

ESSENCE OF SHOTHRAGOT

CR 22

hp 420 (20 HD); regeneration 10; DR 15/epic and good

CE Gargantuan outsider (air, chaos, earth, evil, extraplanar, fire, water)

Init +9; Senses blindsight 500 ft., true seeing; Listen +34, Spot +34

Aura madness (120 ft., DC 35), divine madness (100 miles)

Languages telepathy 1,000 ft.

AC 40, touch 22, flat-footed 39

(-4 size, +1 Dex, +15 deflection, +18 natural)

Immune ability damage, ability drain, cold, energy drain, fire, massive damage, mind-affecting effects, petrification, polymorph

Resist acid 20, electricity 20; SR 32

Fort +40, Ref +28, Will +38

Speed 60 ft. (12 squares), fly 120 ft.; Spring Attack

Melee 4 tentacles +40 each (2d6+24 plus corporeal instability) and
4 bites +35 each (2d8+12 plus wounding)

Space 20 ft.; Reach 20 ft.

Base Atk +20; Grp +56

Atk Options Cleave, Combat Expertise, Great Cleave,

Improved Sunder, Improved Trip, Power Attack, Quicken Spell-Like Ability (*chain lightning*), Quicken Spell-Like Ability (*cone of cold*), aligned strike (chaos, evil), constrict 2d6+36, corporeal instability, elemental seepage, epic strike, improved grab, tremendous blow, wounding

Special Actions summon black cyst

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 20th):

At will—bolts of bedevilment (+17 ranged touch, DC 30)^{SC}, chain lightning (DC 31), cone of cold (DC 30), control water, control weather, control winds, ice storm, magic missile, stone shape, wall of fire, wall of stone 1/day—acid fog, earthquake (PH 225), fire storm (DC 32), insanity (DC 32), wall of force, whirlwind (DC 33, PH 301)

Abilities Str 58, Dex 13, Con 36, Int 25, Wis 32, Cha 41
SQ anathematic secrecy, force mastery, freedom of movement, nondetection, seals of binding, unholy blessing

Feats Cleave, Combat Expertise, Great Cleave, Improved Sunder, Improved Trip, Power Attack, Superior Initiative^{ELH, B}, Quicken Spell-Like Ability (*chain lightning*)^B, Quicken Spell-Like Ability (*cone of cold*)^B, Spring Attack^B

Skills Balance +34, Bluff +38, Concentration +36, Diplomacy +19, Disguise +15 (+17 acting), Hide +20, Intimidate +40, Jump +38, Knowledge (arcana) +30, Knowledge (history) +30, Knowledge (religion) +30, Listen +34, Move Silently +24, Sense Motive +34, Spellcraft +32 (+34 deciphering scrolls), Spot +34, Tumble +32, Use Magic Device +38 (+40 scrolls)

True Seeing (Ex) As the *true seeing* spell, always active.

Aura of Madness (Su) At the beginning of each of the essence of Shothragot's turns, all living creatures within 120 feet take 1d6 points of Wisdom drain and are confused for 1 round. A DC 35 negates this effect.

Divine Madness (Su) All extraplanar outsiders with divine ranks that come within 100 miles of Shothragot are affected as if by the *insanity* spell (no save). When rolling to determine their action, any result that would have the afflicted creature attack the caster instead forces the god to attack the closest creature not the elder evil.

Telepathy (Su) The essence of Shothragot can communicate telepathically with any creature that has a language and is within 1,000 feet.

Regeneration (Ex) The essence of Shothragot takes lethal damage from good- and lawful-aligned attacks and spells and effects with the good or lawful descriptor.

Constrict (Ex) The essence of Shothragot deals 2d6+36 points of damage on a successful grapple check, in addition to damage from its tentacle attack.

Corporeal Instability (Su) A blow from the essence of Shothragot's tentacle attack against a living creature can cause a terrible transformation. The creature must succeed on a DC 33 Fortitude save or become a spongy, amorphous mass. Unless the victim manages to control the effect (see below), its shape melts, flows, writhes, and boils.

An affected creature is unable to hold or use any item. Clothing, armor, rings, and helmets become useless. Large items worn or carried—armor, backpacks, even shirts—hamper more than help, reducing the victim's Dexterity score by 4. Soft or misshapen feet and legs reduce speed to 10 feet or one-quarter normal, whichever is less. Searing pain courses along the nerves, so strong that the victim cannot act coherently. The victim cannot cast spells or use magic items, and it attacks blindly, unable to distinguish friend from foe (–4 penalty on attack rolls and a 50% miss chance, regardless of the attack roll).

Each round the victim spends in an amorphous state causes 1 point of Wisdom drain from mental shock. If the victim's Wisdom score falls to 0, it becomes a chaos beast (MM 33).

A victim can regain its own shape by taking a standard action to attempt a DC 15 Charisma check. A success reestablishes the creature's normal form for 1 minute. On a failure, the victim can still repeat this check each round until successful.

Corporeal instability is not a disease or a curse and so is hard to remove. A *shapechange* or *stoneskin* spell does not cure an afflicted creature but fixes its form for the duration of the spell. A *restoration*, *heal*, or *greater restoration* spell removes the affliction (a separate *restoration* is necessary to restore any drained points of Wisdom).

Elemental Seepage (Ex) Whenever the essence of Shothragot takes 20 or more points of damage from a single hit, it looses a blast of elemental energy, dealing 1d6 points of acid damage, 1d6 points of cold damage, 1d6 points of electricity damage, and 1d6 points of fire damage to the creature that attacked it. A successful DC 33 Reflex save halves this damage.

Improved Grab (Ex) To use this ability, the essence of Shothragot must hit an opponent of any size with a tentacle attack. It can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If it wins the grapple check, it establishes a hold and can constrict.

Tremendous Blow (Ex) As a full-round action, the essence of Shothragot can make a devastating attack with a tentacle against a single opponent. If the attack hits, the target must immediately succeed on a DC 44 Fortitude save or fly straight back a number of 5-foot squares equal to the damage dealt. If the target strikes an object or a creature in its path, it stops and it and the obstacle struck take 12d6+24 points of damage.

Wounding (Ex) Any living creature damaged by the essence of Shothragot continues to bleed. Each time the essence strikes an opponent with its bite attacks, that creature takes 1 point of Constitution damage in addition to any normal damage taken. If the essence strikes an opponent but does not deal damage, the opponent does not take this Constitution damage. Creatures immune to critical hits (such as plants and constructs) are immune to the Constitution damage dealt by this ability.

Summon Black Cyst (Sp) Automatically summon 1 black cyst; 4/day; caster level 20th. The essence's sign does not affect this ability. This ability is the equivalent of a 9th-level spell.

Anathematic Secrecy (Ex) Any divination spell from a divine origin used to ascertain information about Shothragot fails. This ability is always active.

Force Mastery (Ex) An essence of Shothragot is immune to all spells and spell-like effects with the force descriptor. In addition, it may move through any ongoing force effects (such as *wall of force* and *forcecage*) as if they were not there.

Freedom of Movement (Ex) As the *freedom of movement* spell; always active.

Nondetection (Ex) As the *nondetection* spell; always active.

Seals of Binding (Ex) The seals of binding herald the appearance of Shothragot. See Signs of the Apocalypse sidebar for details.

Unholy Blessing (Ex) The essence of Shothragot adds its Charisma modifier as a deflection bonus to Armor Class and as a resistance bonus on all saving throws (included).

Skills The essence of Shothragot gains a +8 racial bonus on Balance, Hide, and Tumble checks.

4 BLACKSTONE GIGANTS

CR 18

FF 21

hp 236 (32 HD); DR 15/adamantine

CE Gargantuan construct

Init –2; Senses darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; Listen +15, Spot +15

Languages Abyssal

AC 31, touch 4, flat-footed 31

(–4 size, –2 Dex, +27 natural)

Immune ability damage, ability drain, critical hits, death effects, disease, energy drain, exhaustion, fatigue, mind-affecting effects, necromancy effects, nonlethal damage, paralysis, poison, sleep, stunning, any effect that requires a Fortitude save, no risk of death from massive damage (MM 307)

Resist acid 20, cold 20, electricity 20, fire; SR 32

Fort +10, Ref +10, Will +12

Speed 40 ft. (8 squares), climb 20 ft., fly 40 ft. (perfect)

Melee 4 slams +38 each (4d8+17/19–20 plus petrification)

Space 20 ft.; **Reach** 20 ft.

Base Atk +24; **Grp** +53

Atk Options Blind-Fight, Cleave, Combat Reflexes, Great Cleave, Improved Bull Rush, Improved Sunder, Power Attack, petrification, trample
8d8+25

Special Actions animate statue

Abilities Str 45, Dex 7, Con —, Int 6, Wis 10, Cha 10

SQ construct traits

Feats Blind-Fight, Cleave, Combat Reflexes, Great Cleave, Improved Bull Rush, Improved Critical (slam), Improved Sunder, Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (slam)

Skills Climb +30, Listen +15, Spot +15

Petrification (Su) Creatures struck by a blackstone giant's slam attack must succeed on a DC 26 Fortitude save or be turned to stone. This ability functions like *flesh to stone*, caster level 20th.

Animate Statue (Su) A blackstone giant can use one or more of its attacks to touch and animate any creatures it turned to stone. This ability functions like an *animate object* spell (CL 20th). The animated stone statue has the statistics of an animated object of its size and composition with hardness 8. Typical petrified creatures have the improved speed ability (+10 feet for two legs or +20 feet for more legs). All animated statues are under the mental control of the blackstone giant or its creator (the essence of Shothragot). Statues remain animated for 20 rounds. A blackstone giant cannot animate a petrified statue more than once.

TACTICS

After the surprise round, the blackstone giants sweep in to bull rush PCs into the pit. Those knocked down fall 60 feet, at which point they provoke an attack of opportunity from Shothragot in addition to taking 5d6 points of falling damage. Characters landing on the essence may ride it as it rises, but it attacks them each round.

Against opponents having success with weapons, the blackstone giants use Improved Sunder to remove these irritants and then hammer the PCs with 10-point Power Attacks. Once a giant drops a foe, it uses its next action to trample a number of PCs on its way to the next target.

The essence ascends from the pit on the second round and stops about 10 feet over the top of it. It uses a quickened *chain lightning* in conjunction with a full attack to grapple and crush its foes. If any opponent



deals 50 or more points of damage to the essence in a single round, it uses its tremendous blow ability to splatter the offending character against the wall.

If the *Gems of Tharizdun* were destroyed, the essence summons a black cyst to replace a blackstone giant whenever they fall.

CONCLUSION

Once the PCs destroy the essence of Shothragot, the surviving blackstone giants wail in horror as they crumble to dust. Rents appear in the walls tearing through the elder evil's body and giving the PCs an avenue of escape. If the PCs don't move quickly, the walls contract, shrinking by 1 foot every round until the elder evil implodes. Any creatures inside are utterly destroyed.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

The room has the following features.

Pit: The pit is 60 feet deep. Characters falling in the pit take 5d6 points of damage.

Cracked Floor: Squares containing cracks and fissures count as difficult terrain.



Moagim's Clone

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A century ago, Gilead Artymas engaged in an arcane duel of epic proportions with his fellow archmage the Hornlord Moagim. Though Gilead gained the upper hand, all was not well; the energy unleashed during the two-day duel somehow bound the rival archmages to one another. Gilead realized that slaying his defeated opponent would result in his own death. Further, Gilead suspected Moagim had previously prepared a clone in the event of his death. Gilead thus cast *imprisonment* on his unconscious enemy and watched with mute exhaustion as the body of the land's greatest foe sank into the earth's crust. Moagim had brought war and destruction to the land of Adrigal and now, with his defeat, peace returned.

The Hornlord's soul, however, lives. Even now, it speeds toward its clone.

"Moagim's Clone" is a DUNGEONS & DRAGONS adventure suitable for four 14th-level characters. This adventure is designed to work with any campaign setting. Though the adventure begins within the city of Adrigal, the characters' destination is an abandoned quarry that can be located within any remote, wilderness region.

Within this adventure, superscripts are used to denote game elements and abbreviations indicate materials that appear in other supplements. Those books and their abbreviations are as follows: *Dungeon Master's Guide* (DMG), *Draconomicon* (Dr), *EBERRON® Campaign Setting* (ECS), *Libris Mortis* (LM), *Monster Manual* (MM), *Monster Manual III* (MM3), and *Player's Handbook* (PH).

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Adrigal's troubles began in an abandoned quarry hundreds of miles from the city proper, decades before the advent of the Hornlord War. There, within the bowels of the bedrock, orc miners and their goblin slaves uncovered a horrific figure from the forgotten past. Despite the fact that the creature was petrified and apparently inert, its terrible aspect, massive size, and expansive black horns incited savage yearnings within all those who gazed upon it. Evil denizens of the uncivilized lands nearest the quarry began to gather to pay homage to the deificlike figure. Within months, a cabal of worshipers known as the Pronged Sect was born, and within years, it gained widespread influence and control over the sentient savages on the borders of Adrigal.

The greatest and most devoted adherent of the Pronged Sect was a human wizard known as Moagim, though some whispered that this was not his true

name. Moagim suffered no equal among the other leaders of the Pronged Sect. He had those who would not recognize him as the Hornlord hunted mercilessly. With demonic pacts, ruthless efficiency, and arcane constructs, Moagim solidified his absolute tyranny over the once-disorganized humanoid armies. His blood-drenched ascent to supremacy convinced other paragons of evil to answer his call. Within a year, a vast horde of savages capered about the outskirts of the neighboring nation of Adrigal.

After replenishing the ranks of the sect he had decimated, the Hornlord fell upon Adrigal with the ferocity of a summer storm. The once-peaceful kingdom reeled under the onslaught and was nearly overwhelmed. If not for the emergence of the archmage Gilead Artymas, a relatively obscure mage who had concentrated on scholarly pursuits before this, Adrigal would have fallen in one campaigning season.

Gilead neutralized Moagim's sorceries. Bereft of the Hornlord's magic, the rampaging humanoids were suddenly vulnerable to Adrigal's legions. Years of bloodshed followed with neither side gaining any significant advantage. Entire towns were deserted, mass burials dotted the once pristine countryside, and the skies over Adrigal grew black beneath the shadows of carrion birds.

Moagim was no fool. He intended to rule Adrigal, not destroy it. Thus the Hornlord sent an invitation to Gilead to meet him, alone and unescorted, within a secretive location in the mountains east of Adrigal. There, Moagim suggested, the two of them could duel to the death. After taking precautions to verify the veracity of Moagim's offer, Gilead covertly slipped from Adrigal and traveled to the agreed-upon site.

An unmatched battle ensued. For two days the rival archmages warred with spells and summoned creatures. The earth heaved and strange lights played across the land. In the end, Gilead achieved victory, though his own life force was irrevocably bound with that of his

greatest foe. Because of this arcane connection, and due to the suspicion that Moagim had readied a clone in the chance of his defeat, Gilead chose to cast *imprisonment* on his foe rather than slay him.

With the disappearance of their leader and his iron rule, the Pronged Sect generals slowly lost control of the rampaging hordes. Order became chaos, and chaos lead to rout. After seventeen years of horror, peace once again embraced the land.

Gilead, Hero of the Hornlord War and Savior of Adrigal, intended to rest and further improve his considerable arcane powers before destroying Moagim outright. Yet the allure of his studies and Adrigal's numerous postwar issues demanded Gilead's attention. Decades passed. As it turned out, Gilead's arcane might was matched only by his power of procrastination. The archmage ignored the voice in his head urging him to finish what he started—until recently.

Now Gilead realized he faced a foe that no amount of magic could dissuade. Ominous and inevitable death approached the venerable wizard. Wracked with guilt over his decades of idleness, Gilead Artymas vowed to destroy the Hornlord. He opened texts left unexamined since the time of the Hornlord Wars and, with meticulous study, discovered the location of Moagim's clone. Before he drew his last breath, Gilead swore to destroy the clone and thereafter kill Moagim outright—even though such would mean his own death.

Only days ago, Gilead departed Adrigal en route to the location of Moagim's clone. His aspirations were dashed when death refused to wait upon him. A massive heart attack caused the archmage to fall upon the roadway. Gilead knew his imminent death would cause the Hornlord to die as well, but thereafter Moagim's soul could safely transfer into the clone. Gilead therefore used his considerable talents to slow the transfer of the clone, and sent word to Queen Aliz of Adrigal of the dire necessity of his mission. In short, the Hornlord's clone needed to be destroyed before Moagim's soul could complete its transfer.

With only hours to spare, who will answer the call to save Adrigal from a second devastation?

CAMPAIGN SETTINGS

Adrigal has enjoyed a relatively extended period of peace. If you are running a GREYHAWK campaign, you could replace Adrigal with the isolated Grand Duchy of Geoff. Depending upon your FORGOTTEN REALMS campaign's timeline, the Witch King of Vassa or one of his progeny could replace the Hornlord Moagim. EBERRON's nation of Aundair suffered less than most in the Last War. Gilead Artymas could be a positive postwar influence within the court, perhaps as a respected member of Aundair's Arcane Congress.

ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

In "Moagim's Clone," the party receives a frantic appeal for assistance from Queen Aliz of Adrigal. The characters are asked to travel to an abandoned quarry, find the Hornlord's clone, and destroy it. It won't be easy. The characters must first deal with the last surviving Pronged Sect general (Wodan) and his band

of murderous satyrs, vanquish lingering undead and Moagim's construct guardians, overcome powerful magical wards, and finally slay Moagim's greatest guardian—the horned devil Efizance. The party has 4 hours to complete their mission before Moagim's soul has the opportunity to transfer to the Hornlord's clone.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

The easiest way to begin "Moagim's Clone" is to have Queen Aliz of Adrigal urgently request the party's assistance. The characters' past exploits have likely garnered them some fame. Aliz turns to the characters because she does not have their equal within her ranks of soldiers and advisors. She fears the Hornlord will be released once more on the world if his clone is not destroyed.

If the party includes a religious character, High Priest Danavan makes a worthy patron. Simply match Danavan's religion with that of the character or characters. Though Danavan cannot locate Gilead, he divined the location of Moagim's clone and asks the characters to destroy it before it is too late.

For characters motivated best by the promise of loot, rumors reach them telling of the Hornlord's valuable cache. The trove is purported to be somewhere within the mountains east of Adrigal. The time to strike may be now, before Moagim can return to his redoubt or transfer to his clone. As an added bonus, Queen Aliz is known to be generous to those who help her.

Regardless of the adventure hook you choose, the tactical encounter Hell Hath No Fury (page 14) offers a method to kick off the action in dramatic fashion.

A QUEEN'S PLEA

The characters receive an urgent summons from Queen Aliz of Adrigal (or another patron, if you have chosen to employ a different adventure hook). Aliz sits uneasily upon the throne; she is a young and fair ruler, but much of her wisdom came from the whispered counsel of Gilead. Without her chief advisor, she feels exposed.

The queen directed one of her chief counselors to locate the party and deliver her plea. If possible, the appointed official is someone that has previously dealt with the PCs on a friendly basis. The counselor hands one of the characters a vellum scroll sealed by Adrigal's royal crest. The words, written in the queen's own hand, are simple: "Adrigal is in need of heroes. I fear for my subjects, and appeal to your sense of honor. If you find it in your hearts to aid us, please accompany the bearer

MELENTES

Melentes (see page 15) is inconsequential to the adventure other than serving as a target for this initial attack. If your party has a trusted ally within Adrigal, you should consider replacing Melentes with him or her to better draw the party into the upcoming adventure. The ally could have angered the Hornlord in any number of ways and thus be a target for his revenge. If the ally is a dwarf or elf, there is a chance he or she participated in the original conflict nearly a century ago and thereby gained Moagim's enmity from success in the field. Otherwise, the ally could simply be the sole surviving relative of one of Moagim's enemies from those days—or even a distant relative of Gilead Artymas himself.

of this writ to the palace. I am not without means of rewarding you for your efforts."

When the characters arrive outside the castle, the young queen herself beckons them forward through the main gate. Aliz is obviously flushed with nervousness; her attempts to remain regally composed fail. She stammers a quick introduction before leading the characters to a private chamber located off the main hall. While polite, the queen dispenses with small talk the moment the doors are closed. High Priest Danavan and a handful of the queen's counselors remain within the room; these worthies remain silent unless the characters directly question them.

When the PCs are ready to hear the queen's plea, read the following:

"I thank you for coming. As you may have noticed, I am greatly concerned for the welfare of my subjects and my realm. My chief advisor, the Archmage Gilead Artymas, the Hero of the Hornlord War, has died . . ."

The queen grows silent for a moment as she decides how best to continue. "Gilead departed on a mission without my consent. Years ago, during my great grandsire's rule, Gilead defeated an archmage known only as the Hornlord Moagim. Gilead would not speak of his duel save to say that Moagim had been imprisoned with the most powerful sorceries. We were led to believe—or, perhaps, chose to believe—that the Hornlord's threat was forever erased from the world.

"We now know the folly of that hope. Gilead contacted me only hours ago, just before he died. Moagim has a clone. Doubtless you know more than I about this powerful type of magic, but this knowledge was enough to terrify Gilead. The clone, Gilead instructed me, must be destroyed. We have only hours to spare before the Hornlord's soul enter his corporeal vessel."



The queen offers 20,000 gp to each character should they succeed on the quest. Alternatively, she offers lands and titles commensurate with that amount to characters that prefer to swear fealty to her. She considers haggling beneath her station.

If the party agrees to her plea for assistance, the queen orders Danavan to inform the party of Gilead's final words. The high priest reveals that Moagim's clone is located within an abandoned shrine near a remote quarry. Danavan accurately describes the quarry's

location but knows little else. The queen offers to have the party teleported to the quarry, or gives the party a scroll of *greater teleport* at their request.

DUE DILIGENCE

Before the characters depart on their quest, they may wish to make Knowledge checks or use magic to learn more about the challenges that lie ahead. Spells such as *commune* or *contact other plane* may reveal some or all of the following information, depending upon the questions asked. Regardless, the Queen and her advisors are impatient to the point of rudeness; though they cease complaining if firmly told to do so, they grow more unruly with each passing minute that the party remains within Adrigal.

If the party does not leave for the quarry within 1 hour, Danavan frantically interrupts the characters and claims his *commune* revealed "the issue between Adrigal's Archmage and the Hornlord shall be decided within 4 hours!" This information can be verified by the party's own divinations, depending on your decision regarding the adventure's timeline (see the accompanying sidebar).

ADVENTURE TIMELINE

"Moagim's Clone" is designed to propel the party from encounter to encounter without delay. Allowing your high-level characters the opportunity to replenish their resources may significantly lessen the challenges faced within the adventure. The suggested time allotment for four 14th-level characters is 4 hours, beginning the moment Queen Aliz finishes her plea and ending with Moagim's soul's successful entrance into the prepared clone. Feel free to adjust the timeline based on the characters' average experience level and your own preference. Even if you do not plan to have Moagim enter his clone (or personally arrive), there's no need to inform your players of this fact.

KNOWLEDGE (ARCANA)

DC Result

- 30** Since Moagim required his minions to enter and exit his various abodes, he employed a common password to bypass most of the protective wards inscribed upon the doors. Adrigal's wizards learned of the password "hur-nagrim" from a captured enemy and used the knowledge to safely penetrate several of the Hornlord's hidden redoubts.
- 35** Moagim crafted a number of constructs to do his bidding. Of these soulless creatures, his favorite was a rare tombstone golem he had fashioned from the collected grave markers of Adrigal's heroes slain during the Hornlord Wars.

KNOWLEDGE (HISTORY) OR KNOWLEDGE (RELIGION)

DC Result

- 25** The quarry housing Moagim's clone was once an iron mine. The original miners unearthed a huge, horned figure within the bedrock at the base of their quarry. A religious order known as the Pronged Sect thereafter claimed the mine. The sect employed undead and construct labor to erect a shrine dedicated to the mysterious horned figure.
- 30** The Hornlord Moagim rose to prominence within the Pronged Sect and took his chosen title from the horned figure found within the quarry. When not in the field, Moagim commanded his hordes from the safety of the quarry's shrine.
- 35** The password "otts" allowed Pronged Sect members to safely bypass magical *glyphs* cast by members of their order.

KNOWLEDGE (THE PLANES)

DC Result

- 30** Moagim preferred devils to demons and often employed such creatures during his war against Adrigal. Rumors suggest that his greatest infernal champion was a devil ensnared via *greater planar binding*. The devil never appeared during the numerous battles of Moagim's failed conquest, and Adrigal's leaders believed it had been commanded to protect something of great importance to the Hornlord.
- 35** Moagim's strongest extraplanar ally was the horned devil Efizance, a cornugon whose position within the Hells was untenable. Efizance rode a great abyssal drake into battle against his Abyssal enemies, but neither rider nor mount have been seen on the Material Plane.

THE ABANDONED QUARRY

The quarry consists of three concentric tiers surrounding the flooded depression within the center of the open pit. The base of the flooded portion is roughly 120 feet below ground level, and each tier is marked by a successive 40-foot change in elevation. A gradual, sloping cart path winds downward along the southern and eastern walls of the quarry from the upper tier. Other than the forested section located upon the western half of the third tier, the terrain is bare and rocky. The near-vertical quarry walls can be scaled with a successful DC 25 Climb check.

Q1. Shipment House (EL 5)

Both double doors on this building are wide enough to allow small wagons to pass, and the doors' locks are rusted and nonfunctional. The east door leading to the cart path is ajar. The west door leading into this building is partially barricaded by a pile of refuse (successful DC 15 Strength check to push the door open). Read the following when the PCs enter this area.

This stone building appears to have once been a storehouse. A number of wooden shelves line the walls, each cluttered with picks, shovels, chisels, and other mining implements. Numerous crates and barrels are beneath the shelving, and many of them lie on their side.

This building served as the Pronged Sect's shipment house. Iron ore was carted to this location along the wagon path skirting the rim of the quarry, tallied, and then shipped to humanoid smiths to fashion into weapons for use in the Hornlord War. The mining tools are badly rusted and worthless. The containers are empty.

Creatures: A pair of dire wolves retreated to this building from the forest below (see area Q5). The two dire wolves were once animal companions of now-dead satyr druids. The dire bear belonging to Wodan (see areas Q5 and Q6), one of Moagim's remaining generals, killed and ate the others. While the encounter here isn't very challenging to the PCs, if they don't handle it quickly, it could serve to warn nearby NPCs, which could call for later encounters to be set up in a different manner (see each encounter for details).

This encounter begins when the PCs open the east door of the shipment house. Place the dire wolves at the door; they begin to attack immediately upon seeing at least one PC fully in the doorway. (DMs may wish to grant cover bonuses to PCs or the wolves depending on how the characters react; see PH 152.) Read the following when the wolves attack.

A savage snarling greets your ears -- flashing, sharp teeth snap, and yellow eyes glint from beyond the door.

2 DIRE WOLVES

CR 5

MM 65

hp 45 each (6 HD)

N Large animal

Init +2; **Senses** low-light vision, scent; **Listen** +7, **Spot** +7

Languages —

AC 14, **touch** 11, **flat-footed** 12
(-1 size, +2 Dex, +3 natural)

Fort +8, **Ref** +7, **Will** +6

Speed 50 ft. (10 squares)

Melee bite +11 (1d8+10)

Base Atk +4; **Grp** +15

Atk Options trip

Abilities Str 25, Dex 15, Con 17, Int 2, Wis 12, Cha 10

Feats Alertness, Run, Track^B, Weapon Focus (bite)

Skills Hide +0, Listen +7, Move Silently +4, Spot +15, Survival +2*

Trip (Ex) A dire wolf that hits with a bite attack can attempt to trip its opponent (+11 check modifier) as a free action without making a touch attack or provoking an attack of opportunity. If the attempt fails, the opponent cannot react to trip the dire wolf.

Skills A dire wolf has a +2 racial bonus on Hide, Listen, Move Silently, and Spot checks. *It also has a +4 racial bonus on Survival checks when tracking by scent.

Tactics: Both animals are agitated and angry, and neither wolf departs the building. If one of the animals is killed, there is a 50% chance each round that the surviving wolf emits a howl (a standard action). Allow the two southernmost satyrs at area 5 to make a DC 5 Listen check (with a -12 penalty due to the distance and the intervening stone wall). Success indicates the satyrs are alerted to the presence of intruders; one informs Wodan at area Q6 while the other approaches the shipment house to investigate via the makeshift ramp at area 2.

Development: If an investigating satyr does not return within 15 minutes, Wodan wild shapes into a hawk and cautiously circles the shipment house and the surrounding wood. The druid thereafter recalls his remaining satyrs and establishes a defensive position inside the overseer's house at area Q6. It is entirely possible the characters might bypass Wodan only to be later ambushed by the druid and his band at area Q8.



Q2. Makeshift Ramp

A jumbled pile of loose stone forms an uneven ramp leading downward to the quarry tier below.

To avoid the dead wraiths within area Q3, Wodan ordered his satyrs to build a crude 20-foot-high ramp at this location. A successful DC 15 Knowledge (dungeoneering) check confirms the ramp is not natural; it was built within the past month. A character attempting to run or charge along the rockslide must make a DC 15 Balance check. Failure by 4 or less means the character cannot run or charge but otherwise may act normally. Failure by 5 or more means the character falls prone.

Q3. Old Sentry Post (EL 12)

Read the following if the party approaches this area along the path from either direction.

The quarry wall leans outward over the cart path to form a wide archway that pierces the overhang. After a short journey into darkness, the path reappears beyond the outcrop.

Animals moving within 30 feet of the overhang sense the presence of the resident wraiths. They do not approach willingly, and they panic if forced to move closer. A successful DC 20 Knowledge (religion) check identifies the unnatural aura as that of a wraith or similar undead creature.

One dread wraith and three slain satyrs—now wraiths themselves—inhabit the guardhouse.

Tactical Encounter: Sentry Post (page 16).

Treasure: A number of items lay scattered throughout the room. The loot includes two +1 *shortbows*, a +1 *chain shirt*, a masterwork chain shirt, a mold-covered *robe of bones* (with all ten embroidered figures), and a leather sack containing 450 gp. The coins are worth double their value to a collector since they are of an ancient mint. A successful DC 25 Search check reveals a secret niche in the eastern wall that contains two *potions of fly* and twenty masterwork bolts, one of which is a *greater slaying arrow* (elementals).

Q4. Ruined Elevator

A wide, wooden platform rests atop four massive wooden pilings next to the quarry rim. An ingenious rope-and-pulley system extends from the platform to a winch located at the base of its supports. Evidently this apparatus was used as an elevator to raise and lower ore and supplies between the quarry's tiers.

Both elevators are comprised of rotted wood and frayed rope; neither is functional. Slaves once turned the winch by walking in circles adjacent to the elevator's base. A slight, circular depression upon the ground hints to this past drudgery. Ascending the elevator's pilings (Climb DC 5) is easier than scaling the quarry wall.

Q5. Satyr Wood (EL Varies)

A modest stand of hemlock and pine skirts the western rim of this tier. A perpetual twilight shrouds the area beneath their boughs. Underbrush is sparse and consists primarily of fern beds sprinkled atop a layer of pine needles.

The topsoil from the Prong Sect's quarry operations accumulated in large piles within this region, thereby allowing the trees to grow.

The grove holds the five satyrs commanded by the Pronged Sect general named Wodan (see area Q6). Between them, the satyrs maintain a constant *alarm* spell as indicated on the map by a dashed red line. No password exists, since Wodan and his minions remain outside of the spell's effect at all times. The satyrs feel most comfortable within the woods and are found here if not alerted to the presence of intruders earlier.

Of all the great and terrible Pronged Sect generals and champions under Moagim's banners during the Hornlord War, only one yet lives—the deep dwarf druid Wodan. Wodan has established his base within the abandoned quarry that once served as the secretive council location for the Hornlord and his most powerful minions. Wodan is unaware of events occurring outside the quarry's environs and therefore has no specific knowledge that his former master's return is imminent; Moagim did not contact Wodan with a *sending* as he did with his night hag harem.

Tactical Encounter: Pronged Sect General (page 18).

Q6. Old Overseer House (EL Varies)

This odd-shaped, single-story stone structure once housed the quarry's overseer and chief assistants. Ivy forms a thick web over the exterior of the building. The wooden partitions within the house were torn down long ago; their planking now covers a hole in the sagging stone roof. The door in the northeast corner is easily visible from the interior, but concealed by the ivy on the outside. A successful DC 15 Search check locates the door, and a successful DC 10 Strength check forces it open.

Inch-wide cracks in the walls and ceiling provide dim illumination (possibly granting concealment) during the day. Shingles and beams from the collapsed portion of the roof form a 5-foot barrier within the house's main chamber.

Wodan has claimed this house as his own. The deep dwarf druid has nearly finished his descent into madness. He spends his days with his dire bear pet Oduk Hul, sleeping and eating whatever game the satyrs deposit on the doorstep outside.

Tactical Encounter: Pronged Sect General (page 18).

Treasure: Wodan has gathered a number of relics and valuables found within the quarry over the past few years. These items are mixed with the debris of the rubble wall. They include 25 pp (worth double to a collector due to their ancient mint), an opal-encrusted horned miter (worth 1,500 gp), a diamond figurine in the shape of a gazelle (worth 750 gp), and a bar of cold iron (20 pounds, worth 150 gp).

Q7. Wooden Staircase (EL 1)

A rickety wooden staircase leads downward before disappearing beneath a pool of stagnant, algae-slicked water. The face of a massive stone building juts outward from the northern wall of the lowest tier. A pair of bas-relief horned statues flank a central door made of the same stone as the structure itself. A horrid smell of rot and filth wafts upward from the water.

Characters approaching this area or standing near the staircase may be seen by the satyr overlooking the lowest tier from area Q5. If the party is spotted, the satyr sentry gathers his fellows in 4 rounds before the fey return to line the wood's perimeter. They gleefully fire at characters in sight, especially those exposed upon the staircase or within the pool.

Trap: If more than 400 pounds are placed upon the stairs at any one time, the entire structure collapses. A successful DC 15 Knowledge (architecture) reveals the danger. Characters on the stairs may fall and take damage normally, though treat the distance fallen as 10 feet less due to the water at the base of the stairs. The top landing is 30 feet above the water's surface and the middle landing is 15 feet above the water's surface.

Collapsing Stairs: CR 1; mechanical device; location trigger; no reset; Reflex DC 20 avoids; variable depth (up to 20 feet; 1d6 to 2d6, fall); Search DC 20.

Q8. Flood Quarry (EL 7)

Bas-relief statues of two horned, giant-sized humanoids flank a massive stone door set within the face of the stone wall. The

creatures have the bodies of giants and the heads of antelope. Their muscular arms reach outward above the threshold, their fingers entwined to form an odd pattern.

Shortly after the original quarry miners unearthed the remains of a giant, horned humanoid, the Pronged Sect took over operations and commenced construction of the shrine within the northern wall. For a time, undead labor kept this tier from flooding. Now, however, the water level has climbed to its current depth of 10 feet. Navigating the water requires a DC 10 Swim check. The pool is riddled with offal from Wodan and his satyrs; all manner of refuse, bones, animal carcasses, and other such filth have been deposited here.

The stone door leading to the Pronged Sect's main temple is heavy and extremely difficult to open, especially with the water pressed against its face.

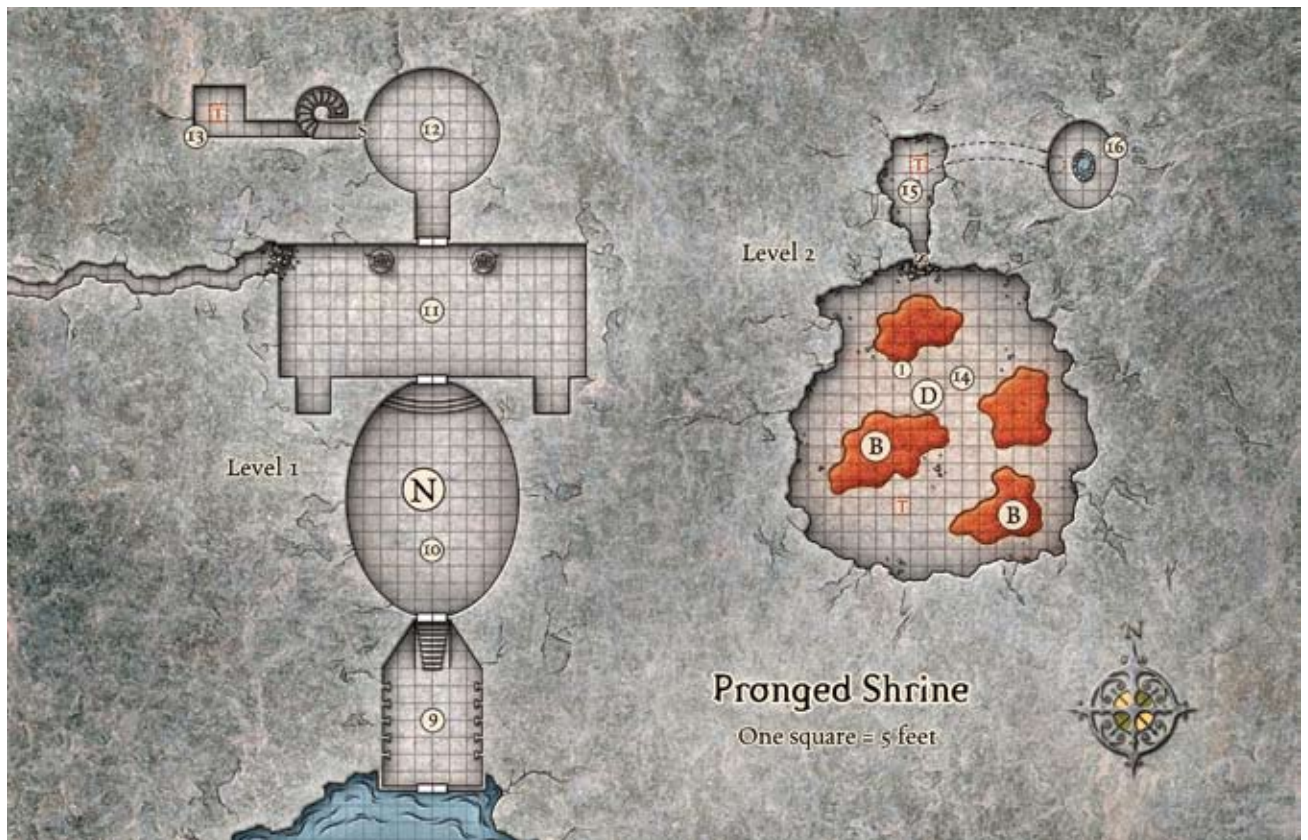
Trap: A successful DC 20 Decipher Script check discerns a single word formed by the statues' grasping fingers—*otts*. This is the password that allows the door to be opened without triggering the *greater glyph of warding* upon its face. The trap otherwise springs when the door is opened, and the sound of the blast automatically alerts the tombstone golem within area S9.

Greater Glyph of Warding (Blast): CR 7; magic device; spell trigger; no reset; multiple targets (all targets within 5 ft.); bypass password; spell effect (*greater glyph of warding* [blast], 16th-level cleric, 8d8 sonic, Reflex DC 23 half); Search DC 31; Disable Device DC 31.

THE SHRINE

Shortly after the original miners unearthed a horned figure buried in the bedrock (see area Q10), the Pronged Sect declared the quarry an unholy site and claimed it for their own purposes. Sect members carved this simple shrine into the north face of the lowest tier. Most of the complex is lit by numerous *everburning candles* (10 feet bright illumination, 20 feet shadowy illumination, magic negated when subjected to daylight, worth 5 gp). Characters without low-light or darkvision have normal bonuses and penalties due to concealment. The worked stone walls of the shrine are completely smooth and cannot be climbed without some means of magical assistance. The vaulted ceilings within most of the complex are 30 feet high. All doors within the shrine are closed, locked, and fashioned from stone unless otherwise noted in the room's description.

Stone Double Door: 4 inches thick; AC 6; hardness 8; hp 60; break DC 28; Open Lock DC 28.



S9. Antechamber (EL 13)

The wide corridor extends into the mountain's bedrock, passing beneath several stone archways set regularly along its length. The air is dry, still, and scentless.

A set of black enameled oxen horns serves as the handle for the northern door.

Treasure: A mosaic of a massive horned giant has been painstakingly arranged along the floor with silvery hematite stones. The giant's feet are nearest the entry door while his emaciated body stretches northward. Though it would take a day or more, particularly industrious characters can pry 8 pounds of semiprecious stones from the floor (worth 250 gp per pound). An uncut fiery corundum gemstone (worth 500 gp) marks each of the giant's eyes. If the party opened the door from area Q8 without draining the pool, the released water surges into this chamber before leveling at a depth of a few inches. The water conceals the mosaic for approximately 1 hour, but otherwise has no effect.

Tactical Encounter: Antechamber (page 20).

S10. Nightwing's Lair (EL 14)

Hundreds of burning candles illuminate this huge, oval-shaped chamber. Each of the brands flicker from recesses carved into the stone walls. The walls lean inward before meeting at a circular

apex high above the center of the room. A massive chain hangs from the apex. The inverted corpse of a giant, horned creature dangles from the end of the chain. Its arms stretch outward to form an upside-down T, the body slowly rotating in a macabre manner. Beyond the corpse a stone staircase sweeps upward to an open doorway set within the north wall. The smell of death and decay is palpable and sickening.

The Pronged Sect constructed this unholy shrine shortly after the original miners unearthed the horned corpse. The Sect's clerics brought the petrified remains to this location and suspended it from the chain within the center of the room. The domed ceiling is 60 feet above the stone floor at its apex. Several blackened, charred corpses are clustered around the base of the northern steps.

Two spells are active within the shrine:

Forbiddance (caster level 16th; chaotic evil; Will DC 20 half): Lawful or good characters entering the room take 6d6 points of damage; lawful good characters entering the room take 12d6 points of damage.

Gust of Wind (caster level 20th): Moagim cast *permanency* on *gust of wind*. The line of wind extends 20 feet above the center of the room, blowing east to west. The wind causes the suspended corpse to slowly revolve.

A nightwing is perched atop the feet of the corpse.

Treasure: Two hundred *everburning candles* flicker from niches within the leaning walls. Sewn within the chest cavity of the petrified giant corpse is a black velvet *bag of holding* (type I) containing an iron and ebony helm (worth 2,000 gp). The helm's visage resembles that of a snarling goat with curved horns twisting more than 2 feet above the crown.

Tactical Encounter: Nightwing's Lair (page 21).

S11. Statue Room (EL 10)

This rectangular room is lit dimly by several flickering candles set within niches in the east and west walls. The northwest corner of the room is hidden behind a large pile of crumbled masonry.

The pile of rubble marks the location of a tunnel you may use to expand this adventure, if you wish. Otherwise it represents a former mining tunnel that ends at a rock wall some 100 feet down its length.

Trap: The door leading to area S12 is trapped with a *symbol of insanity*, triggered whenever any creature other than Moagim attempts to open the door. A horrible goat's head image is chiseled into the door's surface, the magical rune clearly evident within its open mouth. The

password "hurnagrim" allows the door to be opened without triggering the *symbol*.

Symbol of Insanity: CR 9; magic device; touch trigger; no reset; multiple targets (all living creatures within 60 ft.); spell effect (*insanity*, 20th-level wizard, Will DC 22 negates); Search DC 33; Disable Device DC 33.

Treasure: Thirty *everburning candles* line the recesses in the walls.

Tactical Encounter: Statue Room (page 23).

S12. Moagim's Chamber

Four torches set within wall sconces light this circular room, which has dozens of colorful pillows strewn about the floor. Exquisite tapestries on the walls depict battles between raging humanoid creatures and cowering humans dressed in the colors of Adrigal. Above each of the woven images stands a larger-than-life robed figure wearing a horned helm. A white divan against the far wall is flanked by a stone writing desk and a large mahogany armoire. The smell of myrrh emanates from a brazier next to the divan.

This room once served as Moagim's personal chambers. A successful DC 25 Search check locates the secret door the Hornlord fashioned shortly after claiming the shrine as his abode. Beyond the door, a narrow flight



of stone stairs winds downward into the bowels of the mountain, descending nearly 100 feet before arriving at area S13.

Treasure: Four *everburning torches*. The tapestries are worth a sum of 2,000 gp, though finding a buyer in Adrigal will be difficult due to their depictions. The *myrrh brazier* (450 gp value) permanently emanates a pleasant aroma. A faint aura of abjuration magic covers the items in this room, indicating that some effect has preserved them from dust and the effects of passing years.

S13. Teleportation Room

The stairs finally end within a narrow, constricted room. A 5-foot-wide circle of amber-colored runes is inscribed on the natural stone floor. A chest, covered with a mantle of dust, rests within one corner of the room.

The circle is a *teleportation circle* that teleports any character standing upon it to the location marked within area S14.

Treasure: The unlocked, wooden chest holds unguents and bindings (worth 500 gp) required for the creation of a flesh golem. Intermixed with the gear are four *potions of resist energy* (10 fire), two *potions of cure serious wounds*, and a scroll of *quest*.

S14. Lava Grotto (EL 17)

This is the location of Moagim's greatest and final guardian, the horned devil Efizance. While eager as his brethren to join in combat, Efizance is not above trading a few verbal barbs with a party that uselessly seeks to negotiate. Since being bound by Moagim's *greater planar binding*, Efizance has passed the years abusing his abyssal mount (a trophy from an extraplanar war) and trading lies with his imp companion. Efizance's position in the Hells is untenable, and the devil has chosen boredom over annihilation. Needless to say, the party's arrival both surprises and intrigues him.

Efizance listens to characters for a few rounds, offering little other than promises of eternal damnation. The imp, for its part, giggles with malicious glee. Unless attacked, the devil does not commence combat until four characters arrive within his cavern or 10 rounds pass—whichever event occurs first. Especially brazen characters cause Efizance to casually mount his abyssal drake in preparation for the upcoming festivities.

Tactical Encounter: Lava Grotto (page 25).

S15. Treasure Room

The tunnel ends within a low-ceilinged, cramped room carved within the volcanic rock. A narrow fissure runs the width of the chamber, and the stream of lava contained within its course glimmers on four large, metallic chests against the far wall.

The fissure is only 6 inches wide and may be stepped across easily. The secret trapdoor leading to area S16 may be found with a successful DC 25 Search check.

Treasure: The party faced considerable challenges, and the rewards they find within this chamber reflect the difficulties they overcame. While all the iron chests are locked (DC 30 Open Lock), none are trapped. Moagim had little fear of would-be robbers penetrating this far within his hidden redoubt. Of course, many of his magical wards have expired since his imprisonment.

The first chest contains plundered loot from Moagim's wars: 86 pp, 1,973 gp, 87 gold teeth (worth 1 gp each), 36 gold wedding bands (worth 20 gp each), an obscene belt buckle depicting copulating demons fashioned of ruby and ebony (worth 500 gp), 6 odd-shaped dice carved from the crystalline bones of a gelugon (worth 500 gp as a set or 50 gp each), and a pegasus horn entwined with platinum filigree (worth 1,200 gp).

The second chest holds Moagim's valuable reserve spell components. These include 52 onyx gems of varying cuts (worth 25 gp each), 1,400 gp worth of gold dust, 5,000 gp worth of powdered diamonds, 4 vials of lead-based ink (worth 100 gp each), and 6 large opals (worth 500 gp each).

If you allow metamagic components within your campaign such as those found within *Unearthed Arcana*, you may opt to substitute some or all of the following components for the contents of the second chest: a corked decanter holding trapped banshee essence (extends and enlarges *wail of the banshee*, worth 8,600 gp), a trapped voidstone (empowers *disintegrate*, worth 3,100 gp), bottled smoke from the Elemental Plane of Air (heightened +2 *control winds*, worth 2,300 gp), and an emerald-studded adamantine collar (enlarges *dominate monster*, worth 1,850 gp). If running an EBERRON campaign, the chest could instead contain 16,000 gp worth of optional spell components (see ECS 91).

The third chest contains a folded *portable hole*. Within the hole is a diamond the size of a child's fist (worth 10,000 gp). At your discretion, the diamond might contain the soul of one of Moagim's powerful enemies, placed within the gem via a *trap the soul* spell.



The fourth chest holds many valuable magic items that held no special use for Moagim himself. These include *boots of the winterlands*, a *candle of invocation*, four vials of *silversheen*, a *brooch of shielding* (43 hit points remaining), and a scroll of *heal*.

S16. Room of the Clone

A stone sarcophagus inscribed with dozens of runes rests within the center of this domed room. A single, flickering candle sits atop the sarcophagus's lid. A number of odd metals and glass instruments and vials are cluttered in the corner of the room.

The sarcophagus holds Moagim's clone—an inert duplicate of the Hornlord himself—and is by far the greatest of the treasures found within the complex. Burning or beheading the body completely destroys it, though less extreme measures work just as well.

Treasure: The candle is, of course, one of the *everburning* varieties. The laboratory implements are worth 500 gp to an interested arcane caster or eccentric collector.

Ad Hoc Experience: If you imposed a strict time frame upon the party during this adventure, the difficulty of each subsequent encounter increases substantially. Award the PCs XP as if for a CR 16 encounter for destroying Moagim's clone before the Hornlord's soul has an opportunity to make its transfer.

CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

Nothing prevents Moagim from having an additional clone as security, should you wish for the epic-level wizard to return to the world. Moagim would not think too highly of characters that plundered one of his complexes and destroyed his primary clone. A vengeance-minded archmage is just the sort of threat to keep a high-level party on its toes.

Adrigal's queen is beside herself with relief once the party returns from its successful mission. Gilead's absence has left a void within her array of counselors, and Aliz happily accepts wise characters into her inner circle. The people of Adrigal transfer their hero-worship from Artymas Gilead to the party. The inhabitants of the country treat the characters with reverence during subsequent travels throughout the nation.

Now that the threat of Moagim has been removed from the Horned Shrine, a few secretive members of the exiled Pronged Sect may emerge onto the scene. Despite the characters' assistance in ridding their unholy site of Moagim's guardians, Sect members may take a personal interest in avenging the deaths of their fellows.

For better or for worse, the PCs may find themselves embroiled in the politics of Adrigal, the machinations of the revived Pronged Sect, and the schemes of the Hornlord Moagim.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

When not snagging his players with adventure hooks, Ryan Smalley enjoys catching fish of the regular kind. He lives in Pennsylvania with his wife Shannon and their brood of three fiendish sons. Ryan has previously written for *DUNGEON Magazine* and *Bad Axe Games*. He is the author of the *Valus* campaign setting.

HELL HATH NO FURY

Encounter Level 13

SETUP

This optional encounter can immediately draw your party into the action. While Gilead's last act of epic magic slowed Moagim's transfer into his clone, Moagim's soul is no longer bound by the *imprisonment* spell. As such, the Hornlord has used his own epic magic to contact old allies with a *sending*. Though Gilead's death effectively places him beyond the vengeful reach of the Hornlord, the archmage's faithful scribe and only friend Melentes Crato still lives. Five night hags, members of the Hornlord's harem, received orders from Moagim to locate and kill Melentes, then depart using their *ethereality* ability.

This encounter takes place on a crowded thoroughfare within the city of Adrigal. A narrow marble bridge crosses a channel of water in the center of the tactical map. Four night hags (H on the map) have used their change shape ability to appear as elderly commoners engaged in trade with merchants. A fifth night hag (E on the map) remains ethereal and acts as a spectator for the upcoming ambush; she is charged with surviving at all costs so that she can reply to any subsequent *sending* Moagim casts. Commoners (C on the map) are sprinkled throughout the area; trying to leave these poor folk unharmed could prove cumbersome for the PCs during the ambush. Melentes (M on the map) stands next to a stall nearest the bridge. Shortly after you read the opening text to the party, Melentes makes his way north across the bridge. When he is midway across, the night hags attack.

When you are ready to spring the night hags' ambush on your characters, read:

To either side of this cobbled road rise the marble residences of Adrigal's wealthier residents. Ahead of you a narrow bridge arches over an open culvert of rushing water. This being a market day within Adrigal, the avenue before you is thronged with the common folk of the city. Merchants' wagons, stuffed into shaded areas to serve as makeshift stalls, crowd patches of open ground along the thoroughfare. The pleasant scents of cooking fires and fresh produce hang within the air.

4 NIGHT HAGS

MM 193

hp 68 each (8 HD); DR 10/cold iron and magic

NE Medium outsider (evil, extraplanar)

CR 9

Init +1; Senses Listen +15, Spot +15

Languages Abyssal, Celestial, Common, Infernal

AC 22, touch 11, flat-footed 21

(+1 Dex, +11 natural)

Immune cold, charm, fear, fire, *sleep*

SR 25

Fort +12, Ref +9, Will +10

Speed 20 ft. (4 squares)

Melee bite +12 (2d6+6 plus disease)

Base Atk +8; Grp +12

Special Actions *change shape*, *dream haunting*, *ethereality*

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 16th):

At will—*detect chaos*, *detect evil*, *detect good*, *detect law*, *detect magic*, *magic missile*, *ray of enfeeblement* (+9 ranged touch), *sleep* (DC 12)

Abilities Str 19, Dex 12, Con 18, Int 11, Wis 15, Cha 12

Feats Alertness, Combat Casting, Mounted Combat

Skills Bluff +12, Concentration +15, Diplomacy +5, Disguise +1 (+3 acting), Intimidate +14, Listen +15, Ride +12, Sense Motive +13, Spellcraft +11, Spot +15

Possessions *heartstone* (see below)

Disease (Ex) Demon fever, Fortitude DC 18, incubation period 1 day, damage 1d6 Con. Each day after the first, on a failed save, an afflicted creature must immediately succeed on another DC 18 Fortitude save or take 1 point of Constitution drain. The save DC is Constitution based.

Change Shape (Su) A night hag can assume the form of any Small or Medium humanoid.

Dream Haunting (Su) Night hags can visit the dreams of chaotic or evil individuals by using a special periapt known as a *heartstone* to become ethereal, then hovering over the creature. Once a hag invades someone's dreams, it rides on the victim's back until dawn. The sleeper suffers from tormenting dreams and takes 1 point of Constitution drain upon awakening. Only another ethereal being can stop these nocturnal intrusions, by confronting and defeating the night hag.

Heartstone All night hags carry a periapt known as a *heartstone*, which instantly cures any disease contracted by the holder. In addition, a *heartstone* provides a +2 resistance bonus on all saving throws (this bonus is included in the statistics block). A night hag that loses this charm can no longer use *ethereality* until it can manufacture another (which takes one month). Creatures other than the hag can benefit from the *heartstone's* powers, but the periapt shatters after ten uses (any disease cured or saving throw affected counts as a use) and it does not bestow *ethereality* to a bearer that is not a night hag. If sold, an intact heartstone brings 1,800 gp.

TACTICS

The two hags north of the bridge remain disguised as elderly commoners, and they react with feigned panic once the assault begins. They show their true nature only if Melentes appears to be escaping. Otherwise, they wait to attack until the battle swings in the PCs' favor.

The two night hags south of the bridge initiate the ambush against Melentes. They are, of course, unconcerned with any collateral damage they may cause.

The hags fight while Melentes lives; they fear Moagim's wrath more than death. If Melentes is killed, the hags use *etherealness* to flee if brought below 10 hit points.

Round 1: A southern night hag casts *sleep* on Melentes, while a companion follows with a *ray of enfeeblement*.

Round 2: The southern hags *change shape* into their true form and move closer. Melentes flees north.

Round 3: The southern hags engage in melee with Melentes if they can, or target him with *magic missile*. One of the northern hags uses *change shape* to regain her natural form while the other targets Melentes with *magic missile*.

Round 4: The fourth hag assumes her natural form. If Melentes is not slain, the night hags focus on the PCs.

CONCLUSION

If the party saves the life of Melentes (or your designated ally), reward them as if they defeated a CR 9 creature.



Melentes offers the characters the opportunity to visit Gilead's personal study within the Citadel of Adrigal. Notes contained therein grant researching characters a +10 circumstance bonus on any Knowledge checks made to ascertain information about Moagim (see page 6). In addition, Queen Aliz hears of the party's involvement and sends them a plea to attend her at once.

MELENTES **CR 10**
hp 43 (11 HD)

NG Medium human expert 9/aristocrat 2

Init +5; **Senses** Listen +4, Spot +4

Languages Abyssal, Celestial, Common

AC 16, touch 14, flat-footed 15

(+1 Dex, +2 armor, +3 deflection)

Fort +3, **Ref** +6, **Will** +13

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares)

Melee mwk dagger+7 (1d6–1)

Base Atk +7; **Grp** +6

Abilities Str 8, Dex 12, Con 10, Int 15, Wis 14, Cha 13

Feats Alertness, Improved Initiative, Investigator, Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes

Skills Appraise +10, Craft +8, Decipher Script +8, Diplomacy +11, Gather Information +13, Knowledge (architecture) +10, Knowledge (history) +10, Knowledge (local) +10, Knowledge (nobility) +10, Listen +4, Search +4, Spot +4

Possessions *bracers of armor* +2, *ring of protection* +3, *masterwork dagger*

FEATURES OF THE AREA

The area has the following features.

Bridge: The stone bridge arches over the culvert and is only 3 feet higher than the flowing water at its apex.

Buildings: The two-story buildings to either side of the avenue are made of marble. Narrow windows (1-foot wide) pierce the marble along the upper floor's perimeter; there are no windows at street level. A DC 20 Climb check is required to scale the walls. The rooftops are flat. The doors on the map are locked (Open Lock DC 20) and fashioned of ornate wood (hardness 5, hp 15, break DC 18).

Stream: This culvert flows to the west. Though narrow, it is 15 feet deep. Characters in the stream must make a DC 15 Swim check to move normally; failure by 5 or more indicates the character is carried 60 feet downstream.

Stalls: These wooden carts (hardness 5, hp 10, break DC 15) serve as merchant stalls. Each weighs 200 pounds. Treat the carts as low walls for purposes of determining cover. A character atop a cart gains a +1 bonus on melee attacks due to higher ground.

SENTRY POST

Encounter Level 12

SETUP

At the height of the Hornlord War, Moagim summoned the half-fiend Cyprius de Casca, a Pronged Sect general, to this location. The unknowing general was murdered after attending a feast in his honor; Moagim feared Cyprius's growing power and customarily eliminated the threat before it grew. Despite this treacherous act, the Hornlord admired the general's bravery and "awarded" him with eternal unlife. Cyprius, now a dread wraith (marked as D on the tactical map) and his wraith spawn (formerly three all-too-curious satyrs, marked as W on the tactical map) stand an eternal vigil.

When Cyprius first appears to attack the PCs, read:

Without warning, a massive apparition springs outward from the crumbling wall, hands outstretched. Though draped in shadow, a pair of intertwined horns can be seen emblazoned upon the ghostlike figure's breastplate. Set deep within its helm, red eyes smolder with hatred.

CYPRIUS DE CASCA, DREAD WRAITH	CR 11
MM 258	
hp 104 (16 HD)	
LE Large undead	
Init +13, Senses darkvision 60ft., lifesense 60ft.; Listen +25, Spot +25	
Aura unnatural	
Languages Common, Infernal	
AC 25, touch 25, flat-footed 16	
Immune ability drain, cold, critical hits, death effects, disease, energy drain, mind-affecting, nonlethal damage, paralysis, poison, <i>sleep</i> , stunning	
Fort +5, Ref +14, Will +14	
Speed fly 60 ft. (good) (12 squares)	
Melee incorporeal touch +16 (2d6 plus 1d8 Constitution drain)	
Base Atk +8; Grp —	
Special Actions create spawn	
Weaknesses daylight powerlessness	
Abilities Str —, Dex 28, Con —, Int 17, Wis 18, Cha 24	
Feats Alertness ^B , Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Endure Sunlight*, Improved Initiative ^B , Improved Natural Attack (incorporeal touch), Mobility, Spring Attack	
Skills Diplomacy +9, Hide +24, Intimidate +26, Knowl-	

edge (religion) +22, Listen +25, Search +22, Sense Motive +23, Spot +25, Survival +4 (+6 following tracks)

Lifesense (Su) Cyprius notices and locates living creatures within 60 feet, just as if he possessed the blindsight ability. He also senses the strength of their life force automatically, as if he had cast *deathwatch*.

Unnatural Aura (Su) Animals, whether wild or domesticated, can sense the unnatural presence of a Cyprius at a distance of 30 feet. They will not willingly approach nearer than that and panic if forced to do so; they remain panicked as long as they are within that range.

Constitution Drain (Su) Living creatures hit by Cyprius' incorporeal touch attack must succeed on a DC 25 Fortitude save or take 1d8 points of Constitution drain. On each such successful attack, Cyprius gains 5 temporary hit points.

Create Spawn (Su) Any humanoid slain by Cyprius becomes a wraith in 1d4 rounds. Its body remains intact and inanimate, but its spirit is torn free from its corpse and transformed. Spawn are under the command of Cyprius and remain enslaved until his death. They do not possess any of the abilities they had in life.

Daylight Powerlessness (Ex) Cyprius is utterly powerless in natural sunlight (not merely a *daylight* spell) and flees from it.

***Endure Sunlight** Cyprius may function normally within sunlight for 7 consecutive rounds.

3 WRAITHS	CR 5
MM 257	
hp 32; 5 HD	
LE Medium undead	
Init +7, Senses darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +12, Spot +12	
Aura unnatural	
Languages Common, Infernal	
AC 15, touch 15, flat-footed 12; Dodge, Mobility	
Immune ability drain, cold, critical hits, death effects, disease, energy drain, mind-affecting, nonlethal damage, paralysis, poison, <i>sleep</i> , stunning	
Fort +1, Ref +4, Will +6	
Speed fly 60 ft. (good) (12 squares); Spring Attack	
Melee incorporeal touch +5 (1d4 plus 1d6 Constitution drain)	
Base Atk +2; Grp —	
Special Actions create spawn	
Weaknesses daylight powerlessness	
Abilities Str —, Dex 16, Con —, Int 14, Wis 14, Cha 15	

SQ +2 turn resistance

Feats Alertness^B, Blind-Fight, Combat Reflexes, Improved Initiative^B

Skills Diplomacy +6, Hide +11, Intimidate +10, Listen +12, Search +10, Sense Motive +8, Spot +12, Survival +2 (+4 following tracks)

Unnatural Aura (Su) Animals, whether wild or domesticated, can sense the unnatural presence of a wraith at a distance of 30 feet. They will not willingly approach nearer than that and panic if forced to do so; they remain panicked as long as they are within that range.

Constitution Drain (Su) Living creatures hit by a wraith's incorporeal touch attack must succeed on a DC 14 Fortitude save or take 1d6 points of Constitution drain. On each such successful attack, the wraith gains 5 temporary hit points.

Create Spawn (Su) Any humanoid slain by a wraith becomes a wraith in 1d4 rounds. Its body remains intact and inanimate, but its spirit is torn free from its corpse and transformed. Spawn are under the command of the wraith that created them and remain enslaved until its death. They do not possess any of the abilities they had in life.

Daylight Powerlessness (Ex) Wraiths are utterly powerless in natural sunlight (not merely a *daylight* spell) and flee from it.



TACTICS

Cyprius rests within the northern wall of the sentry outpost, confident his lifesense ability can alert him to any living creature foolish enough to approach this area. He cares nothing for his spawn and makes no efforts in combat to protect them. Cyprius uses his Spring Attack feat to strike enemies before disappearing into the bedrock, and he continues this tactic so long as the situation presents itself. He detests sunlight but pursues characters for up to 3 rounds before returning to his abode.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

The area has the following features.

Arrow Slit: This slit is 2-1/2 feet tall and 4 inches wide and commands a view of much of the valley below. A character standing behind one has nearly perfect cover against a creature on the other side, gaining a +8 bonus to Armor Class, a +4 bonus on Reflex saves, and the benefits of the improved evasion class feature against attacks originating from the other side.

Cliff: At this point along the descending trail the cliff is 90 feet high and offers many ready handholds (Climb DC 15)

PRONGED SECT GENERAL

Encounter Level 15

SETUP

The party may have a difficult time entering the complex without alerting Wodan and his satyrs. The wolves at area Q1, the wraiths at area Q3, and the general alertness of the satyrs are all obstacles for a party attempting a covert entrance. If ignorant to the presence of intruders, the satyrs remain in the woodlands surrounding the ruined building at area Q6 and Wodan remains inside.

If Wodan has recalled his minions to prepare a defense, he positions two satyrs north of the rubble wall (where they have cover) and two more in the east chamber. Wodan sits astride his bear at the base of the north wall. If more than four satyrs are present, Wodan orders them to exit via the concealed door in an attempt to flank the party.

If the party enters the temple without alerting Wodan, the druid becomes aware of them in 2 hours. Wodan and his satyrs prepare an ambush for any characters departing the complex. The satyrs spread along the rim of the flooded quarry to fire their bows at exiting characters, while Wodan sits astride his bear out of sight, just south of staircase at area Q7.

If Wodan charges into battle, read:

The sight before you defies description. A black-skinned dwarf charges in your direction atop a monstrous bear. Both mount and rider personify savagery. Burrs and thorns form snarls in the dwarf's beard, which covers his entire torso; his hair is formed into dozens of braids, each decorated with bits of bone and feathers. The bear roars a challenge, and the dwarf answers in kind with his own feral scream, raises a wicked scimitar above his head, and spurs the beast forward.

Wodan, a formidable Pronged Sect general, and his dire bear animal companion (respectively marked W and D on the tactical map) reside in the ruined building at area Q6. A band of five satyr guardians (each marked by an S on the tactical encounter map) maintain individual campsites within the woods around the structure.

WODAN, PRONGED SECT GENERAL

hp 98 (13 HD)

Male deep dwarf druid 13

NE Medium humanoid (dwarf)

Init +5, Senses darkvision 90 ft.; Listen +3, Spot +7

CR 13

Languages Druidic, Dwarven, Sylvan, Undercommon, empathic link

AC 20, touch 11, flat-footed 19

(+1 Dex, +6 armor, +3 shield)

Immune poison

Fort +11, **Ref** +5, **Will** +11; +3 against spells and spell-like abilities

Weakness light sensitivity

Speed 20 ft. (4 squares); Ride-By Attack

Melee +1 keen scimitar +12/+7 (1d6+3/15–20)

Base Atk +9; **Grp** +11

Atk Options +1 attack against orcs and goblinoids, spontaneous casting (*summon nature's ally*)

Special Actions *wild shape* (4/day, Tiny to Large, plant or animal)

Druid Spells Prepared (CL 13th):

7th—*fire storm* (DC 21)

6th—*antilife shell*, *greater dispel magic*

5th—*baleful polymorph* (DC 18), quickened *obscuring mist*, quickened *entangle* (DC 14)

4th—*flame strike* (DC 18), *freedom of movement*, *ice storm*, *spike stones* (DC 17)

3rd—*cure moderate wounds*, *greater magic fang**, *poison* (DC 16), *protection from energy*, *spike growth* (DC 16)

2nd—*barkskin*, *bear's endurance*, *bull's strength*, *soften earth and stone*, *spider climb*, *summon swarm*

1st—*cure light wounds*, *entangle* (DC 14), *longstrider*, *produce flame* (+10 ranged touch), *obscuring mist*, *speak with animals*

0—*cure minor wounds* (3), *guidance*, *resistance*, *virtue*

* cast on Oduk Hul

Abilities Str 14, Dex 12, Con 16, Int 8, Wis 16, Cha 9

SQ +4 dodge vs. giants, a thousand faces, animal companion, nature sense, resist nature's lure, stonecunning, trackless step, venom immunity, wild empathy +12, woodland stride

Feats Improved Initiative, Mounted Combat, Ride-By Attack, Quicken Spell, Spell Focus (evocation)

Skills Concentration +12, Decipher Script +1, Knowledge (dungeoneering) +2, Knowledge (nature) +5, Ride +16, Spot +7, Survival +9

Possessions +3 studded leather armor, +1 heavy wooden shield, +1 keen scimitar, ring of counterspells (*disintegrate*), *potion of fly*

ODUK HUL, ANIMAL COMPANION

hp 105 (20 HD)

N Large magical beast (dire bear)

Init +3, Senses low-light vision, scent; Listen +12, Spot +12

Languages empathic link

CR —

AC 30, touch 12, flat-footed 27
(-1 size, +3 Dex, +3 armor, +15 natural)
Fort +16, **Ref** +15, **Will** +7

Speed 40 ft. (8 squares); Run
Melee 2 claws +27 (2d4+12) and
bite +21 with *greater magic fang* (2d8+8)
Base Atk +15; **Grp** +31
Atk Options improved grapple

Abilities Str 35, Dex 17, Con 19, Int 2, Wis 12, Cha 10
SQ share spells, link, trick (combat riding)
Feats Alertness, Endurance, Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes, Run, Toughness, Weapon Focus (claw)
Skills Listen +12, Spot +12, Swim +17
Possessions studded leather barding

5 SATYR ARCHERS **CR 9**
hp 72 each (12 HD); **DR** 5/cold iron

Male or female satyr ranger 7
CN Medium fey
Init +3, **Senses** low-light vision; Listen +16, Spot +15
Languages Sylvan, Common

AC 21, touch 13, flat-footed 18; Dodge, Mobility
(+3 Dex, +4 armor, +4 natural)
Fort +8, **Ref** +12, **Will** +7

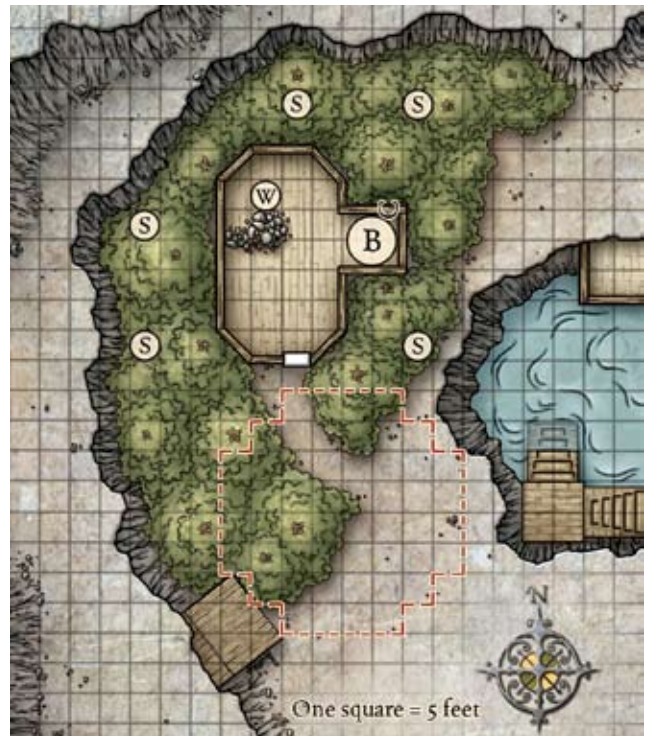
Speed 40 ft. (8 squares)
Melee +10/+5 dagger (1d4+1/19-20) and
head butt +5 (1d6+1)
Ranged +11/+11/+6 mwk shortbow with Rapid Shot
(1d6/×3) or
+9/+4 mwk shortbow with Manyshot (1d6/×3) or
+13/+8 mwk shortbow (1d6/×3)

Base Atk +9; **Grp** +10
Atk Options Point Blank Shot, Precise Shot, Rapid Shot,
favored enemy (humans +4, goblins +2)
Ranger Spells Prepared (CL 3rd):
1st—*alarm*, *resist energy*

Abilities Str 13, Dex 16, Con 14, Int 12, Wis 13, Cha 13
SQ animal companion, wild empathy +7, woodland stride
Feats Alertness, Dodge, Endurance^B, Manyshot^B, Mobility,
Point Blank Shot, Precise Shot, Rapid Shot^B, Track^B
Skills Balance +11, Bluff +9, Diplomacy +3, Hide +14,
Intimidate +3, Knowledge (nature) +12, Listen +16,
Move Silently +15, Spot +15, Survival +15, Tumble
+9, Use Rope +5
Possessions masterwork chain shirt, dagger, masterwork
shortbow, 40 arrows

TACTICS

If Wodan falls or is convinced to not attack the party (see Development below), the satyrs refrain from engaging the party unless in self-defense. If combat is joined, the satyrs prefer ranged to melee combat, and flee the moment Wodan is slain.



Wodan begins each day by casting *greater magic fang* on Oduk Hul. He begins battle by casting *fire storm* and quickened *obscuring mist*. Next he casts quickened *entangle* and shares *freedom of movement* with his animal companion. He rides Oduk Hul into melee if possible, but will resort to ranged spells if his hand is forced.

Wodan has no qualms with subjecting his satyr minions to ill spell effects, but refuses to harm his bear. The dwarf prefers to fight in his normal form; he wild shapes into a dire bat only if forced to flee. Under no circumstances does he leave the field if Oduk Hul remains alive.

DEVELOPMENT

Wodan is unaware that his master has been released, so PCs may convince him that it is not in his interest to fight. A DC 25 Diplomacy check convinces the dwarf that the better part of valor is remaining neutral to the party. If swayed, Woden and his satyrs exit the quarry. The dwarf maintains a watch on the complex. Should the party reappear looking weakened from previous encounters, he attacks.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

The area has the following features.

Stone Double Door: 2 in. thick; AC 6; hardness 8; hp 30 per 5-ft. section; break DC 32 (28, if water is drained).

South Door: 2 in. thick; hardness 5; hp 20; break DC 23 (28, if barred from the inside).

ANTECHAMBER

Encounter Level 13

SETUP

A tombstone golem has lingered in this chamber for centuries. Ordered to kill living visitors not wearing onyx-horn helms, the construct has waited for decades.

When the characters get a look at their foe, read:

A bulky humanoid creature composed of roughly cut stone moves forward in a measured gait, its feet sending dull reverberations across the floor of the hall. Hundreds of etched words decorate the slabs that comprise the creature's body.

TOMBSTONE GOLEM

CR 13

LM 105

hp 107 (14 HD); DR 10/adamantine

N Large construct

Init -1; Senses darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; Listen +0, Spot +0

Languages —

AC 26, touch 8, flat-footed 26

(-1 size, -1 Dex, +18 natural)

Immune ability drain, critical hits, death effects, disease, energy drain, magic, mind-affecting, nonlethal damage, paralysis, poison, *sleep*, stunning, any effect that requires a Fortitude saving throw

Fort +4, Ref +3, Will +4

Speed 20 ft. (4 squares)

Melee 2 slams +18 each (2d10+9)

Space 10 ft.; Reach 10 ft.

Base Atk +10; Grp +23

Atk Options *slay living*

Abilities Str 29, Dex 9, Con —, Int —, Wis 11, Cha 1

SQ construct traits

Skills Listen +0, Spot +0

Immune to Magic (Ex) Immune to any spell or spell-like ability that allows spell resistance. A *transmute rock to mud* spell slows a tombstone golem (as the *slow* spell) for 2d6 rounds (no save) while a *transmute mud to rock* heals all its lost hit points. A *stone to flesh* spell does not actually change the golem's structure but negates its damage reduction and immunity to magic for 1 full round.

Slay Living (Su) The golem can deliver a *slay living* effect, as the spell, in conjunction with a normal melee attack every 2 rounds. The effect slays those who fail a DC 17 Fortitude saving throw, or deals 3d6+14 points of damage on a successful save. The save DC is Constitution-based.

DEVELOPMENT

The golem pursues intruders throughout the complex but does not venture outside its walls. The undead guardians in area S10 are relative newcomers to the dungeon; they do not offer assistance to the golem, nor does the golem pay them any attention should their paths cross.

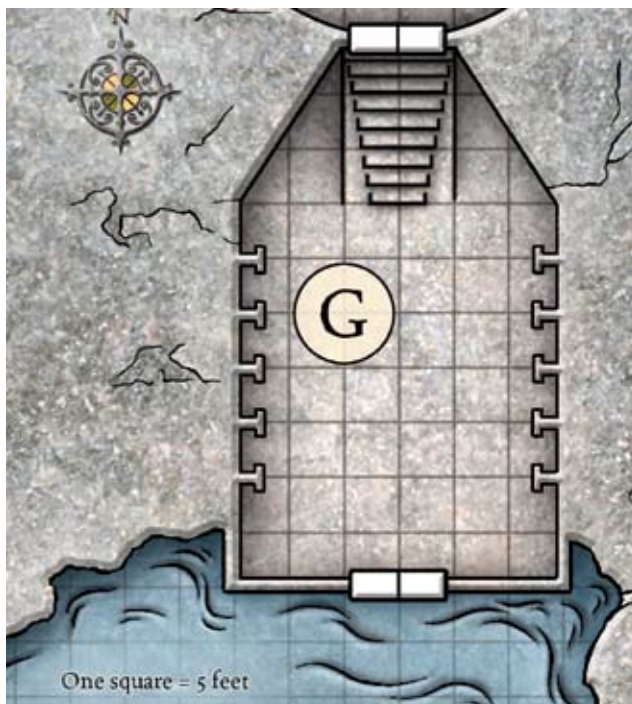
A DC 20 bardic knowledge check, or relevant Knowledge (local) or (history) check, reveals names on the gravestones comprising the golem. Many of the names belong to Adrigal soldiers that died during the Hornlord War. Returning the tombstones to the monastery where they were plundered (ten miles outside Adrigal) results in a reward of 8,000 gp from the ecstatic abbess.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

The room has the following features.

Barrel Vaults: Five sets of stone barrel vaults run up along the walls before meeting along the central spine of the ceiling 30 feet overhead. The construction of the chamber enables a character to scale the walls (Climb DC 20).

Ironbound Door: 2 inches thick; AC 6; hardness 5; hp 20; break DC 23; Open Lock DC 30; Listen DCs increase by 5 through a door.



NIGHTWING'S LAIR

Encounter Level 14

SETUP

While the slowly rotating petrified remains of the horned giant in the center of the room may command the characters' attention, the true threat within this room is perched upon the corpse's feet high overhead. A successful DC 29 Spot check allows characters to notice the nightwing (marked with an N on the tactical map) prior to its attack.

When the nightwing first swoops downward to attack, read:

A batlike creature seemingly formed entirely of shadow streaks toward you. The outline of its wingspan—easily 15 feet across—drinks in the darkness of the room, creating a void that hints to the absence of both light and hope. A palpable sense of evil washes outward from the abomination.

NIGHTWING

CR 14

MM 197

hp 144 (17 HD); DR 15/silver and magic

CE Huge undead (extraplanar)

Init +8; Senses darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +25, Spot +25

Aura desecrating

Languages telepathy 100 ft.

AC 30, touch 12, flat-footed 26
(–2 size, +4 Dex, +18 natural)

Immune ability drain, cold, critical hits, death effects, disease, energy drain, mind-affecting, nonlethal damage, paralysis, poison, *sleep*, stunning

SR 27

Fort +9, Ref +11, Will +17

Weakness aversion to daylight

Speed 20 ft. (4 squares), fly 60 ft. (good)

Melee bite +18 (2d6+17/19–20 plus magic drain)

Space 15 ft.; Reach 10 ft.

Base Atk +8; Grp +28

Atk Options magic drain, *summon undead*

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 17th):

At will—*contagion* (DC 18), *deeper darkness*, *detect magic*, *haste*, *see invisibility*, *unholy blight* (DC 18)

3/day—*confusion* (DC 18), *greater dispel magic*, *hold monster* (DC 19), *invisibility*

1/day—*cone of cold* (DC 19), *finger of death* (DC 21), *plane shift* (DC 21)

Abilities Str 31, Dex 18, Con —, Int 18, Wis 20, Cha 18

SQ desecrating aura, telepathy 100 ft., undead traits

Skills Concentration +24, Diplomacy +6, Hide +16*, Listen +25, Move Silently +24, Search +24, Sense Motive +25, Spellcraft +24, Spot +25, Survival +5 (+7 following tracks)

Feats Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Flyby Attack, Great Fortitude, Improved Critical (bite), Improved Initiative

Desecrating Aura (Su) A nightwing gives off a 20-foot radius emanation of utter desecration, imbuing its surroundings with negative energy. This ability works much like a *desecrate* spell, except the nightwing's evil is so great that it is treated as a shrine of evil power. All undead within 20 feet of the nightwing (including the nightwing itself) gain a +2 profane bonus on attack rolls, damage rolls, and saving throws, and +2 hit points per HD. The nightwing's statistics listed above include these profane bonuses. Charisma checks to turn undead within this area take a –6 penalty. A nightwing's desecrating aura cannot be dispelled except by a *dispel evil* spell or similar effect. If the effect is dispelled, the nightwing can resume it as a swift action.

Aversion to Daylight (Ex) If exposed to natural daylight (not merely a *daylight* spell), a nightwing takes a –4 penalty on all attack rolls, saving throws, and skill checks.

Magic Drain (Su) A nightwing can weaken magic armor, weapons, and shields by making a successful touch attack. The targeted item must succeed on a DC 22 Fortitude save or lose 1 point of its enhancement bonus. The save DC is Charisma-based. An item that loses its entire enhancement bonus becomes merely a masterwork item and loses any special abilities (such as flaming) as well. Casting *dispel evil* upon the item reverses the effect of the magic drain, provided this occurs within a number of days after the attack equal to the caster's level and the caster succeeds on a DC 29 caster level check.

Summon Undead (Sp) Once per night a nightwing can summon 5–12 shadows, 2–4 greater shadows, or 1 dread wraith. The undead arrive in 1d10 rounds and service for 1 hour or until released.

Skills A nightwing has a +8 racial bonus on Hide checks when hiding in a dark area or flying in a dark sky.

TACTICS

Unless the party *silenced* sounds of combat in area S9, the nightwing is aware that intruders have entered the complex. It prepares for combat by casting *see invisibility* and *haste*. The nightwing targets the first character to enter this chamber with a *finger of death* before swooping downward into melee. It casts *cone of cold* and *greater dispel magic* against particularly annoying ranged attackers or enemy spellcasters.

The nightwing is not aware of events outside the complex and believes Moagim yet lives (time has no meaning for the undead creature); it prefers to gather magic items as trophies for the Hornlord and therefore rarely, if ever, uses its magic draining attack. Similarly, the nightwing desires all glory for itself, so it refuses to *summon undead* to aid its cause.

If brought below 30 hit points, the nightwing retreats to its perch and casts *invisibility*; it will not further harass the party if they refrain from pressing the attack.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

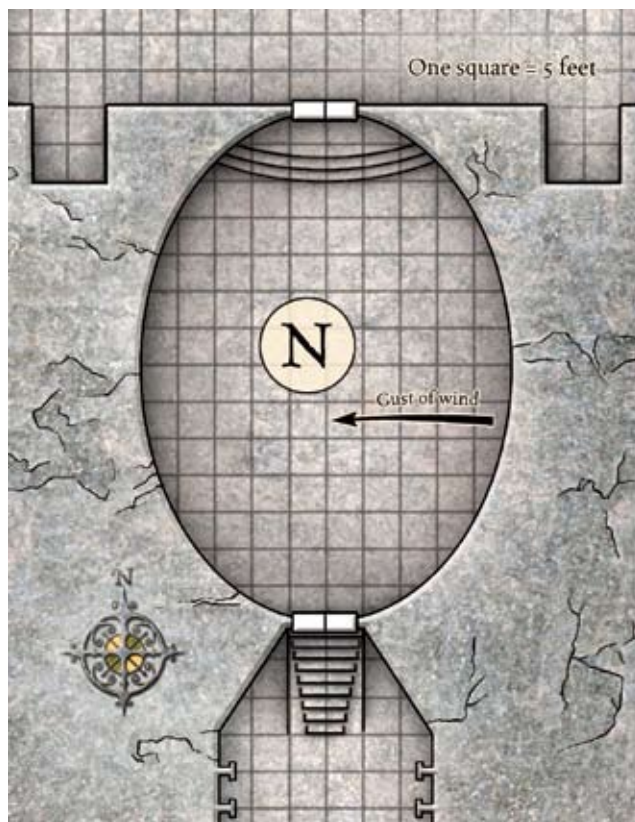
The room has the following features.

Black Staircase: To the north, a curved staircase of black marble sweeps 5 feet upward to the ironbound door leading to area S11.

Gust of Wind: With an eye toward grisly melodrama, Moagim cast *permanency* on a *gust of wind* spell (CL 20th) to ensure the inverted corpse suspended from the dome's ceiling continuously and slowly rotates. The *gust of wind* is positioned 20 feet above the center of the room, blowing east to west.

Ironbound Doors: 2 inches thick; AC 6; hardness 5; hp 20; break DC 23; Open Lock DC 30; Listen DCs increase by 5 through a door.

Suspended Corpse: The inverted, petrified corpse of a red-skinned giant dangles from a massive chain affixed to the dome's ceiling, its arms outstretched to either side. With a visage appearing both skeletal and demonic, the corpse is disconcerting if nothing else. The petrified figure is 20 feet tall, weighs 20,000 pounds, and should be treated as adamantine for purposes of hardness and hit points. The corpse's head is 20 feet above the floor of the room, and its feet dangle 20 feet below the dome. A character who can reach the corpse can scale it with a successful DC 10 Climb check.



STATUE ROOM

Encounter Level 10

SETUP

Moagim never fully trusted his Pronged Sect generals. If a particular general was too successful in the field, the Hornlord killed him before any threat to his own rule could materialize. Moagim commanded statues to be sculpted of two of his former favorites shortly after dispatching them. These black marble edifices now flank the northern door, a mute testament to the Hornlord's distressing lack of loyalty.

After describing the room, read:

Two black marble statues stand to either side of an ironbound door set in the center of the northern wall. Each 10-foot tall statue resembles an oversized human in full battle regalia. Both are draped head-to-toe in hauberks fashioned from hundreds of wickedly sharp, glistening red spikes. The left statue holds a great axe across its body, whereas the right statue wields two flails.

While the black marble statues are nothing more than they appear, the spiked armor sets draping their forms are a pair of shredstorm swarms. The shredstorms remain inert unless the statues or the doors are touched, in which case they begin combat by utilizing their *lightning bolt* spell-like ability. The swarms do not pursue characters from this room.

2 SHREDSTORMS

MM3 153

hp 77 (14 HD)

N Fine construct (swarm)

Init +6; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; Listen +0, Spot +0

Languages —

AC 24, touch 24, flat-footed 18 (+8 size, +6 Dex)

Immune ability damage, bull rush, critical hits, death effects, disease, electricity, energy drain, flanking, grapple, mind-affecting, nonlethal damage, paralysis, poison, *sleep*, stunning, targeted effects, trip, weapon damage, any effect that requires a Fortitude saving throw

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

Weakness swarm vulnerabilities

Speed fly 90 ft. (perfect) (18 squares)

Melee swarm (3d6 plus 2d6 electricity)

Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 0 ft.

Base Atk +10; **Grp** —

Atk Options distraction, lightning bolt

Abilities Str 6, Dex 22, Con —, Int —, Wis 11, Cha 10

SA distraction

SQ penetration, swarm traits

Skills Listen +0, Spot +0

Swarm Attack (Ex) A shredstorm deals automatic damage to any creature whose space it occupies at the end of its move. This attack is not subject to a miss chance for concealment.

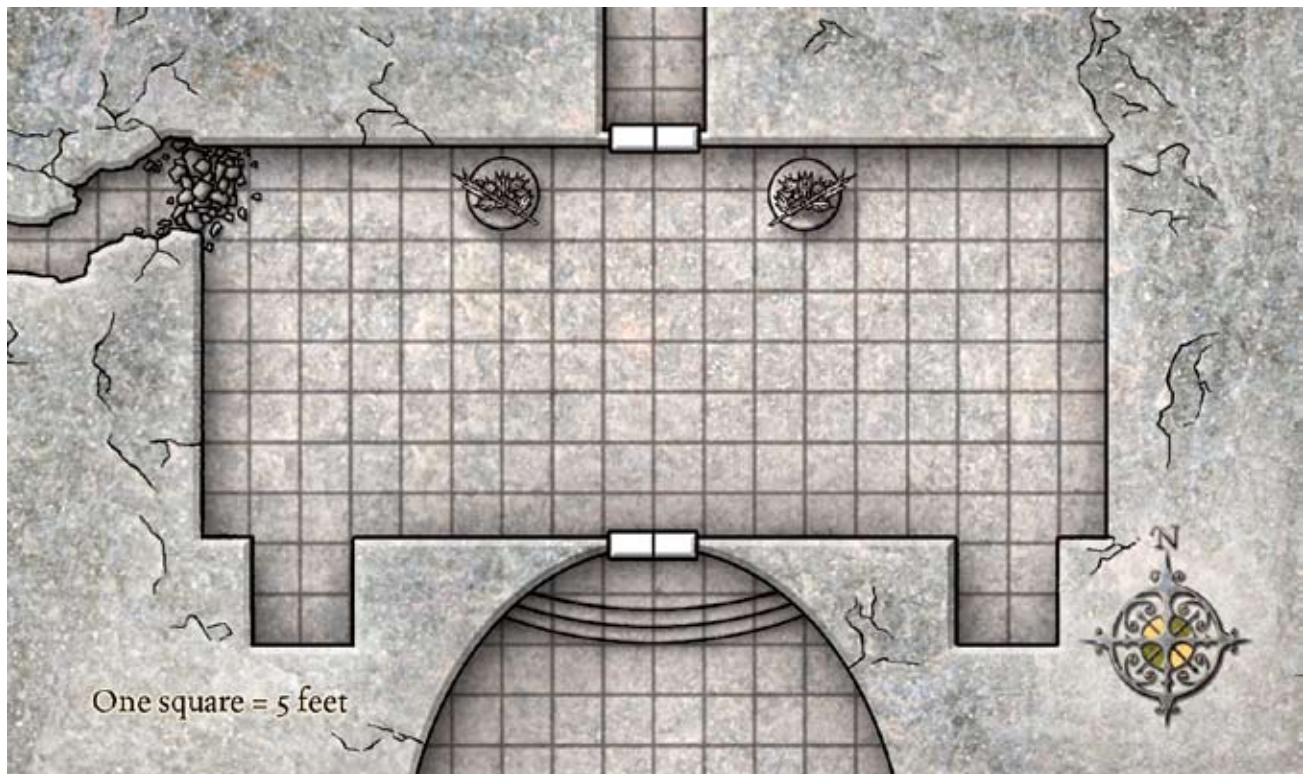
Distraction (Ex) Fortitude DC 20, nauseated 1 round. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Lightning Bolt (Su) A shredstorm can discharge part of its electrical aura in a blast of electricity that acts as a *lightning bolt* (CL 14th, Reflex DC 17 half, 10d6 electricity). A shredstorm requires 2d6 hours after each use of this ability to build its electrical levels back up to full strength; during this time, it deals only 1d6 points of electricity damage to those whose space it occupies.

Penetration (Ex) The swarm attack of a shredstorm is treated as an adamantine magic weapon for the purpose of overcoming damage reduction, and it strikes incorporeal creatures as a magic weapon does. When striking an object, a shredstorm ignores any hardness less than 20.

OF INTEREST

A character can attempt a DC 25 Knowledge (arcana) check. If successful, the character recognizes that the shredstorms were fashioned from adamantinelike material chipped from the petrified corpse in area S10. While the entire corpse is not composed of the same quality of minerals, enough may be gathered by industrious characters to satisfy the 15,000 gp requirement for crafting a shredstorm swarm, though all other requirements remain the same (see MM3 153).



FEATURES OF THE ROOM

The room has the following features.

Dense Rubble: It costs 2 squares of movement to enter these squares. The DC of Balance and Tumble checks increases by 5, and the DC of Move Silently checks increases by 2.

Ironbound Doors: 2 inches thick; AC 6; hardness 5; hp 20; break DC 23; Open Lock DC 30; Listen DCs increase by 5 through a door. The north door is trapped; see the text accompanying area S11 on page 11.

Statues: Each marble statue occupies 4 squares, and each statue provides cover to anyone behind it.

LAVA GROTTO

Encounter Level 17

SETUP

Most likely the characters arrived within this location individually from the teleportation circle at area S13. Characters cannot teleport if the destination circle is blocked by one of their fellows. Because of this, you may want to read the following to individual players according to their arrival sequence. If the party did not decide on a given order of teleportation, it may help to have all the PCs—regardless of their character's location—roll initiative.

An expansive subterranean cavern stretches outward in all directions. A layer of steam hides the ceiling, though a few stalactites poke through the belly of the cloud. Small pools of lava bubble and spit throughout the area, bathing the room an unholy blood-colored hue.

A scaled humanoid the size of an ogre stares at you from the far side of the slab of rock you are standing upon. Leathery bat wings stretch from its shoulders, and the barbed tip of its tail sways rhythmically over one of its shoulders. The lava's fiery glow is magnified within the creature's eyes. A spiked chain of mottled red-black metal hangs from one of its taloned hands. A much smaller creature, similar in appearance but not nearly as intimidating, hovers above the giant's shoulder. Beyond both creatures is a massive serpentine beast that resembles both a dragon and a demon.

This is the location of Moagim's greatest and final guardian, the horned devil Efizance (marked with a D on the tactical map). While eager as his brethren to join in combat, Efizance is not above trading a few verbal barbs with a party that uselessly seeks to negotiate. Since being bound by Moagim's *greater planar binding*, Efizance has passed the years abusing his abyssal mount (a trophy from an extraplanar war) and trading lies with his imp companion (marked respectively with an A and an I on the tactical map).

Efizance listens to characters for a few rounds, offering little else than promises of eternal damnation. The imp, for its part, giggles with malicious glee. Unless attacked, the devil does not commence combat until four characters arrive within his cavern or 10 rounds pass—whichever event occurs first.

EFIZANCE, HORNED DEVIL

CR 16

MM 55

hp 172 (15 HD); regeneration 5; DR 10/good and silver

LE Large outsider (evil, extraplanar, lawful)

Init +7; Senses darkvision 60 ft., see in darkness; Listen +22, Spot +22

Aura fear

Languages Celestial, Draconic, Infernal, telepathy 100 ft.

AC 35, touch 16, flat-footed 28
(-1 size, +7 Dex, +19 natural)

Immune fire, poison

Resist acid 10, cold 10; SR 28

Fort +16, Ref +16, Will +15

Speed 20 ft. (4 squares), fly 50 ft. (average); Ride-By Attack

Melee +1 spiked chain of brutal surge +26/+21/+16 (2d6+16 plus stun) and bite +22 (2d8+5) and tail +22 (2d6+5 plus infernal wound) or

Melee 2 claws +24 each (2d6+10) and bite +22 (2d8+5) and tail +22 (2d6+5 plus infernal wound)

Space 10 ft.; Reach 10 ft. (20 ft. with spiked chain)

Base Atk +15; Grp +29

Atk Options Spirited Charge, brutal surge (with spiked chain), infernal wound, stun (with spiked chain)

Special Actions *summon baatezu*

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 15th):

At will—*dispel chaos* (DC 21), *dispel good* (DC 21), *magic circle against good*, *greater teleport* (self plus 50 pounds of objects only), *persistent image* (DC 21) 3/day—*fireball* (DC 19), *lightning bolt* (DC 19)

Abilities Str 31, Dex 25, Con 25, Int 14, Wis 18, Cha 22

Feats Iron Will, Multiattack, Mounted Combat, Ride-By Attack, Spirited Charge, Weapon Focus (spiked chain)

Skills Bluff +24, Climb +28, Concentration +24, Diplomacy +10, Disguise +6 (+8 acting), Hide +21, Intimidate +26, Listen +22, Move Silently +23, Search +20, Sense Motive +22, Spot +22, Survival +4 (+6 following tracks)

Possessions +1 spiked chain of brutal surge

Regeneration (Ex) A horned devil takes normal damage from good-aligned silvered weapons, and from spells or effects with the good descriptor.

Fear Aura (Su) A horned devil can radiate a 5-foot-radius fear aura as a swift action. A creature in the area

must succeed on a DC 23 Will save or be affected as though by a *fear* spell (caster level 15th). A creature that successfully saves cannot be affected again by the same horned devil's aura for 24 hours. Other devils are immune to the aura.

Brutal Surge This ability is a function of Efizance's spiked chain as described on page 30 of the *Magic Item Compendium*. After a successful melee attack with his spiked chain, Efizance can command the weapon to initiate a bull rush attempt (+16 modifier, +18 if charging) against the target of the attack in addition to dealing its normal damage. This attempt does not provoke attacks of opportunity. If successful, the bull rush pushes the affected creature back the greatest possible distance allowed by the result of the opposed check, but Efizance does not move along with the target. Movement caused by this bull rush attempt provokes attacks of opportunity from other creatures normally, but Efizance cannot make an attack of opportunity against the affected creature. Efizance can use this ability 7 times per day; once activated, it cannot be used by another creature until the following day.

Stun (Su) Whenever a horned devil hits with a spiked chain attack, the opponent must succeed on a DC 27 Fortitude save or be stunned for 1d4 rounds. This ability is a function of the horned devil, not of the spiked chain.

Infernal Wound (Su) The damage a horned devil deals with its tail attack causes a persistent wound. An injured creature loses 2 additional hit points each round. The wound does not heal naturally and resists healing spells. The continuing hit point loss can be stopped by a DC 24 Heal check, a *cure* spell, or a *heal* spell. However, a character attempting to cast a *cure* spell or a *heal* spell on a creature damaged by a horned devil's tail must succeed on a DC 24 caster level check, or the spell has no effect on the injured character. A successful Heal check automatically stops the continuing hit point loss as well as restoring hit points.

Summon Baatezu (Sp) Once per day a horned devil can attempt to summon 2d10 lemures or 1d6 bearded devils with a 50% chance of success, 1d6 barbed devils with a 35% chance of success, or another horned devil with a 20% chance of success. This ability is the equivalent of a 6th-level spell.

DRY'VAG, ABYSSAL DRAKE

CR 9

Dr 145

hp 95 (HD 10)

CE Huge outsider (evil, extraplanar, chaotic, fire)

Init +1; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; Listen +17, Spot +17

Languages Abyssal, Common

AC 21, touch 9, flat-footed 20
(-2 size, +1 Dex, +12 natural)

Immune fire, paralysis, *sleep*

Resist acid 20, cold 20, electricity 20

Weakness vulnerable to cold

Fort +12, **Ref** +8, **Will** +9

Speed 40 ft. (8 squares), fly 150 ft. (poor); Flyby Attack

Melee sting +19 (1d6+9 plus poison) and

bite +14 (2d6+4) and

2 claws +19 (2d4+9)

Space 15 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.

Base Atk +10; **Grp** +18

Atk Options breath weapon, frightful presence, poison, rend

Abilities Str 29, Dex 12, Con 20, Int 6, Wis 15, Cha 15

Feats Alertness, Flyby Attack, Power Attack, Power Dive*

Skills Bluff +15, Diplomacy +5, Hide +12, Intimidate +5, Listen +17, Move Silently +14, Search +11, Spot +17

Breath Weapon 60-foot cone, every 1d4 rounds, 10d6 damage (half fire, half unholy), Reflex DC 20 for half damage

Frightful Presence (Ex) 120-foot radius, 11 HD or fewer, Will DC 17 negates.

Rend An abyssal drake that hits with both claws attacks latches onto the opponent's body and tears the flesh. This attack automatically deals an extra 4d4+13 points of damage.

Poison Injury, Fort DC 20, 2d6 Con/2d6 Con.

***Power Dive** When Dryv'ag is flying, this feat allows it to take a standard action to land on a Large or smaller-sized creature and deal additional damage. Treat this as an overrun attack that cannot be avoided. If Dryv'ag knocks down the target, it makes an additional attack (Atk +19, 2d6+9) with the normal +4 bonus against a prone opponent. If the overrun fails, Dryv'ag instead falls prone and takes the indicated damage. For full details on this feat, see *Dr* 72.

TAKRIT, IMP

CR 2

MM 56

hp 13 (3 HD); fast healing 2; **DR** 5/good and silver

LE Tiny outsider (evil, extraplanar, lawful)

Init +3; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +7, Spot +7

Languages Celestial, Draconic, Infernal

AC 20, touch 15, flat-footed 17
(+2 size, +3 Dex, +5 natural)

Immune poison

Resist fire 5

Fort +3, **Ref** +6, **Will** +4

Speed 20 ft. (4 squares), fly 50 ft. (perfect)

Melee sting +8 (1d4 plus poison)

Space 2-1/2 ft.; **Reach** 0 ft.

Base Atk +3; **Grp** -5

Atk Options poison

Special Actions alternate form

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 6th):

At will—*detect good*, *detect magic*, *invisibility* (self only)

1/day—*suggestion* (DC 15)

1/week—*commune* (6 questions, CL 12th)

Abilities Str 10, Dex 17, Con 10, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 14

Feats Dodge, Weapon Finesse

Skills Diplomacy +8, Hide +17, Knowledge (arcana) +6, Listen +7, Move Silently +9, Search +6, Spellcraft +8, Spot +7, Survival +1 (+3 following tracks)

Poison (Ex) Injury, Fortitude DC 13, 1d4 Dex/2d4 Dex.

Alternate Form (Su) Takrit can assume the form of a monstrous spider or a raven as a standard action.

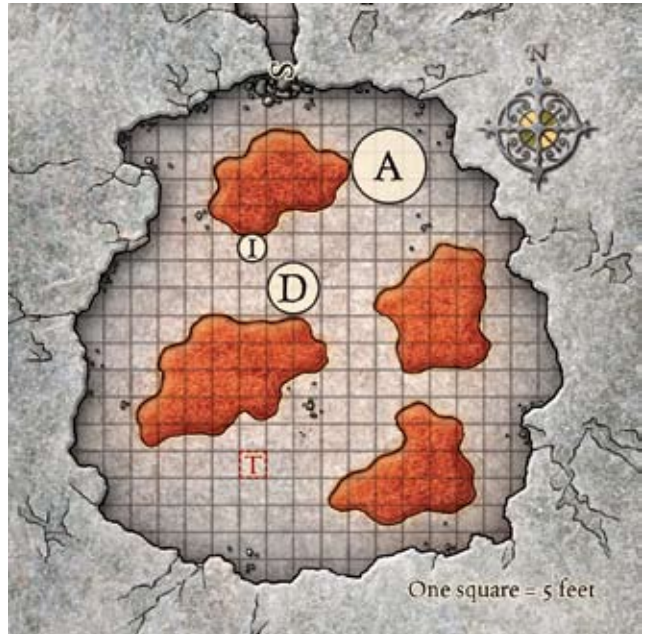
TACTICS

Efizance always radiates his fear aura. Though he may cast *fireball* or *lightning bolt* against particularly annoying ranged attackers, the devil prefers melee combat—especially if mounted atop his abyssal drake. The cornugon thoroughly enjoys using the brutal strike capability of his spiked chains to push opponents into nearby lava pools, and positions himself to do just that. Once the front rank of his opponents has been beaten, the devil greater teleports to place obvious spellcasters—especially clerics—within reach. If badly wounded, Efizance is not above submerging himself in one of the lava pools while he regenerates. The devil refuses to *summon baatezu*; he prefers banishment from the Material Plane rather than to display such weakness.

The imp Takrit goes invisible at the first sign of trouble. It casts *suggestion* at an obvious melee fighter (“Move to the rear! This does not concern you!”). Takrit otherwise darts in to sting PCs stunned by Efizance’s spiked chain.

The abyssal drake fights half-heartedly if not mounted by Efizance; it has little love for the abusive devil. Generally, it attacks nearby characters or any characters that target it, but otherwise does not pursue opponents around the room. If Efizance is slain, it settles onto its haunches and quietly observes the party, not attacking unless forced to do so in self-defense.

Efizance, when brought below 30 hit points, attempts to parley for his life. He knows the location of Moagim’s clone and, if satisfied by the characters that destruction of the clone can prevent Moagim’s return (thereby freeing him from his contract), allows the characters to freely pass. He uses *greater teleport* to leave the room the moment he realizes the threat of Moagim’s return is ended.



FEATURES OF THE AREA

The area has the following features.

Lava Pools: Each pool of lava is 15 feet deep. Unprotected creatures within 5 feet of a pool take 2d6 points of damage per round. Total immersion deals 20d6 points of damage per round. Damage continues for 1d3 rounds after exposure, but at only half the amount of the original (in other words, 1d6 or 10d6). Creatures are susceptible to drowning while submerged. See *DMG* 304 for information on lava effects and drowning.

Rough Terrain: The broken ground makes running or charging somewhat difficult (Balance DC 10, failure by 4 or less means the character cannot run or charge but may otherwise act normally).

Cavern Ceiling: The cavern’s stalactite-riddled ceiling is 80 feet above the floor. Due to the numerous irregular rock formations, a DC 20 Climb check allows a character to move across the ceiling.

Steam: The stationary layer of steam begins 50 feet above the ground and extends to the cavern roof. The vapor obscures all sight, including darkvision, beyond 5 feet. A creature 5 feet away has concealment (attacks have a 20% miss chance). Creatures farther away have total concealment (50% miss chance, and the attacker cannot use sight to locate the target).

Northern Tunnel: The exit tunnel set within the northern wall is hidden behind a large boulder of volcanic rock. It may be located with a DC 20 Search check and rolled aside with a DC 25 Strength check.



The Last Breaths of Ashenport

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It stands a lonely vigil atop a remote northern shore, hunkered down against the terrible ocean storms. For most of the year, it sits alone, for trade in the region has almost died. If this were any other town, it would long since have been forgotten, or perhaps even abandoned.

But this is no other village. This is Ashenport. Here, the fish are plentiful. Here, the crops grow and thrive despite the rocky soil. Here, the ocean offers up its riches willingly, like a bashful lover.

And here, now, as the storms roll in and the tide drops to its lowest ebb, the time has come once again for Ashenport to repay that favor. They offer their prayers. They offer their veneration. And they offer the blood and the flesh and the souls of those whom they have lured to their isolated town. For their patron is none other than Father Dagon, Abyssal Prince of the Deep, and in payment for his beneficence, he accepts nothing less.

“The Last Breaths of Ashenport” is an adventure of survival and alien horrors for 6th-level PCs. The adventure is self-contained and can be placed in any setting. “The Last Breaths of Ashenport” draws inspiration from *Fiendish Codex I: Hordes of the Abyss* and “The Demonicon of Iggwilv: Dagon.” It makes use of material from these sources, as well as *Cityscape (CS)*, *Lords of Madness (LoM)*, *Monster Manual II (MM2)*, *Monster Manual V (MM5)*, and *Stormwrack (SW)*. However, none of these books are required for play, and all necessary information is presented herein.

The adventure is also heavily influenced by the writings of H.P. Lovecraft.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Ashenport should have died almost a generation ago, as did the other towns along this rocky coast. When the local priests could offer the townsfolk no hope, they turned to a darker patron, guided by several of their eldest citizens who remembered older, bloodier ways.

Ever since, the people of Ashenport have dwelt, if not in luxury, then at least in comfort. Fishing, hunting, and farming are easy. Sunken treasures appear regularly in shallow waters. A trade route long fallen into obscurity has begun once again to show traces of life.

But the Prince of the Depths gives nothing for free. Every autumn, at the lowest tide, the dark waters beyond Ashenport sing a terrible song. The sea resounds with Dagon's Call, a mystical summons that compels all who

hear it—save for Dagon’s own worshipers—to march into the sea and allow themselves to drown. The souls of the lost go to feed Dagon’s ravenous hunger, while their bodies are infused with his essence, mutating into ichthyic horrors.

That time has come again. Travelers, few though they are, converge on the town, attracted by any number of rumors and announcements. The storms move in, ensuring that those on the road must take shelter at Ashenport, and those already present cannot leave. Nothing now remains but for Dagon’s cultists to let the sea claim its due.

Nothing, of course, except the presence of a few strangers for whom the townsfolk are unprepared . . .

ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

The PCs arrive in the midst of a truly horrific storm. After taking shelter in the local inn, they experience Dagon’s Call during their first night. Afterward, the town appears to have been abandoned overnight, despite the fact that there’s no way to leave. Closer inspection reveals a populace huddled in their homes, hiding a

ALIEN HORRORS AND FAMILIAR FACES

One of the conceits of “The Last Breaths of Ashenport” is that the various creatures the PCs face are truly alien in form. They are fish-men formed from sacrifices to Dagon; slithering horrors from the deepest seas of the Abyss; and ancient creatures the likes of which no living mortal has seen.

Of course, the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game has more than enough strange and twisted monsters to fit the bill, but if you’re to truly capture the intended feel of the adventure, it’s important to play up the appearance and alien natures of these creatures, rather than to focus on the mechanics. For instance, the fish-men of Dagon are mechanically represented by kuo-toa with the pseudo-natural template applied. When describing them, however, don’t use either of those terms. In context of the adventure, they’re not “pseudonatural kuo-toa”; they’re fish-men of Dagon.

It may sound like a minor point, but the proper use—and, just as important, the careful avoidance—of particular terms can go a long way toward making the PCs, and indeed the players, feel like they’re truly facing the unknown.

Along similar lines, the use of some metagame techniques can greatly enhance the feel of horror adventures in general, and of an “alien-horror/Lovecraftian” adventure in particular. The easiest element to change for the

OUT OF ORDER

The events of “The Last Breaths of Ashenport” are divided up into four periods across two days. This represents the most likely order in which the events occur, but the intent is not to “railroad” the players. As you already know if you’ve run the game before, the average party can circumvent the best-laid plans of DMs and game designers in 60 seconds flat. Don’t hesitate to run these events out of order or in a shorter time period than allotted. This requires a bit of on-the-fly alteration, but it shouldn’t prove difficult. Where necessary, we’ve provided additional sidebars of advice, offering guidance on how to alter a scene or encounter based on when the PCs reach it.

terrible secret, while their leaders have vanished to prepare for some great rite.

When the Call sounds again, in a day made night by the overhanging clouds, the sea reaches out for the PCs directly, in the form of Dagon’s fish-men.

Eventually, by questioning or following the remaining townsfolk, the PCs discover the shrine of Dagon, concealed beneath Ashenport’s church. Within, they have the opportunity to confront the human leader

session is one of lighting. Don’t dim the lights to the point where it’s difficult to read the sheet in front of you or anything that drastic; just try not to play in a room that’s too brightly lit.

More than that, though, this sort of horror is about unfamiliarity as much as it is more visceral fears. Something as mundane as changing up the setup of the furniture, or the order in which the players sit around the table—minor as they might seem—can add a bit to the sense of strangeness.

And of course, music is a popular choice for setting the mood for many games. While spooky or creepy music seems a no-brainer for a horror game, again remember that you’re looking for “alien” and “uncomfortable” as much as “scary.” Try to pick pieces that are somewhat discordant, perhaps even slightly unpleasant (though not to the point of making it hard to concentrate on the game). I personally have had a great deal of luck with some of the pieces from the soundtrack of *Ravenous*. While many of the pieces are too obviously steeped in the early years of Americana, some of the others are both spooky and truly disturbing in their use of dissonance.

All this said, of course, remember that no amount of metagame tools are as effective at setting the mood as a DM who’s into what he’s doing. These suggestions are provided to help enhance your efforts at atmosphere, but they’re minor aids at best; they won’t do the job for you.

of the cult, but this is not the end of their travails in Ashenport.

Only at the moment of lowest tide, either guided by cultists or warned by fellow travelers, can the party locate the complex of caves at the rocky shore, wherein the inhuman Voice of Dagon dwells. Only by defeating this alien threat, the true architect of the horrors of Ashenport, can the heroes save themselves and end the threat of Dagon's cult.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

Obviously, the adventure requires that the PCs find their way to Ashenport at more or less the right time. Presented below are several ways you can accomplish this.

Random Chance: Perhaps the easiest way is simply to have the PCs on the road that passes through Ashenport when the terrible storms roll in, forcing them to seek shelter.

Trade Fair: As the time for the sacrifice nears, Ashenport sends word to various communities and merchant guilds, inviting a few travelers to a festival where they will trade fish, local crafts, and treasures salvaged from the sea in exchange for various goods difficult to come

by so far from civilization. The PCs might choose to attend on their own volition or, more likely, be asked to attend on behalf of an NPC patron.

Investigation: While the town is quite isolated and the road lightly traveled, it's possible that someone has noticed the pattern of annual disappearances in the area around Ashenport. The PCs may be here specifically to investigate what's been happening.

APPROACHING ASHENPORT

As the PCs approach the town, read or paraphrase the following:

Between the heavy clouds and the endless rain, you might as well be blind. In the occasional flash of lightning, however, as the rain is forced aside by a gust of howling wind, you can just barely make out the road ahead. A veritable river of mud twists and winds through a copse of gnarled trees and along a rocky coastline battered by white-capped swells.

And beyond, visible only by the brightest thunderbolts, stands a town. From what you can see, the buildings are old and patched, and the roofs are shingled peaks. Just another village, it seems, but something about it sets your teeth on edge



and your skin to crawling. But then, perhaps it is just the cold and the rain . . .

ASHENPORT CONDITIONS

The roads leading to and within Ashenport are so sodden that they've all become mud, reducing movement to one-half speed. Once the first night in Ashenport falls, the weather grows even worse, as Dagon's power works to ensure the sacrifices cannot escape. It continues to rain within Ashenport, and the weather beyond the town grows into a terrible thunderstorm.

After characters spend at least 24 hours in town, a DC 15 Knowledge (nature) check reveals that the weather patterns are not natural.

Rain (within Ashenport): Rain reduces visibility ranges by half, resulting in a -4 penalty on Spot and Search checks. The rain automatically extinguishes any unprotected flames, and it has a 50% chance of extinguishing protected flames (such as lanterns). Ranged weapon attacks are at a -4 penalty.

Thunderstorms (outside Ashenport): The combined effects of precipitation and wind reduce visibility ranges by three quarters, imposing a -8 penalty on Spot, Search, and Listen checks. Storms make ranged weapon attacks impossible, except for those using siege weapons, which have a -4 penalty on attack rolls. They automatically extinguish candles, torches, and similar unprotected flames. They cause protected flames, such as those of lanterns, to dance wildly and have a 50% chance to extinguish these lights. Assume one lightning bolt per minute. Each bolt causes electricity damage equal to 1d10 eight-sided dice. The severe winds check any movement by Medium creatures and threaten to knock Small creatures back (DMG 95). These effects don't come into play during the adventure itself, but they should encourage the PCs not to abandon Ashenport early.

Illumination: Due to the storm, night and day aren't much different. The PCs will have to provide their own light sources.

A SHROUD OF EVIL

Due to the effects of Dagon's two altars (see areas S10 and C6), all the citizens of Ashenport register as neutral, rather than chaotic evil, to divination spells. (Without such effects, an entire community of demon-worshippers could hardly hope to remain hidden for a generation or more, even isolated as Ashenport is.) This doesn't mean, however, that paladins shouldn't be rewarded for caution, or clerics for preparing the proper spells.

Anyone who casts *detect evil* or *detect chaos* receives an unusual result. They can sense the presence of evil or chaos in the spell's area, but no matter how much they concentrate, they cannot pinpoint it. While this isn't enough to give away the townsfolk's deception, it should serve as more than adequate warning that something in Ashenport is not as it should be.

Any character who experiences this effect, and then later sees one of the altars, instantly recognizes the altar as the source of the evil (or chaos) she previously sensed, even if she is not detecting evil at the time.

ASHENPORT OVERVIEW

When the PCs arrive, read or paraphrase the following:

Although still rendered gray and miserable by the constant downpour, the town of Ashenport actually looks better up close than it did from a distance. You can now see that many of the buildings are sturdier than they appeared; a few are even made of quarried stone, rather than wood. Even in the inclement weather, several shops bustle with activity, and the light that gleams through many a window is bright and cheerful. Sporadic people trudge their way along the muddy roads, shoulders hunched against the rain, going about this business or that.

The salty tang of the sea, and the lingering odor of a hundred years of fishing, insinuate themselves around your mouth and nose. Even the torrential rains and winds cannot completely strip the powerful stench from the air.

Anyone whom the PCs approach can tell them that the town still plans to hold its trade fair, but that Alderman Ritter has decided to wait for the weather to clear up. The townsfolk are only too happy to point the PCs toward the Smooth Sailing Inn and Tavern (area 1). "Ain't just the only place in town for a hot meal and a warm bed," the PCs are told, "but the only place in a dozen leagues. Might meet you there later to hoist a tankard or two; gods know I'll not be doing much else 'til the sky stops weepin'."

In fact, every citizen of Ashenport is a member of Dagon's cult, and each citizen is automatically hostile to the PCs and other strangers. However, they put on an act of friendliness, trying to keep the strangers off guard until the sea claims them. Unless stated otherwise, assume that a citizen of Ashenport has a Bluff check of +4. A successful Sense Motive check is enough to tell a suspicious PC that the people here aren't as friendly as they're making themselves out to be, though the check won't tell the PC *why*.



1. THE SMOOTH SAILING INN AND TAVERN

Smooth Sailing is Ashenport's largest tavern, and the town's only inn. Any of the townsfolk can direct the party here, and if the PCs want a roof over their heads, this is the only place to find it. The building marked 1A represents the stables, located behind the Smooth Sailing but not technically part of the same structure.

Different styles of architecture suggest the building before you was once two or three separate shops, before someone sealed up the spaces between and knocked down the intervening walls. It now forms the largest structure on the block. Smoke rises from several chimneys, only to vanish into the falling rain. Firelight gleams through several windows, and the sound of conversation—nearly inaudible in the storm—leaks from the doorway. A sign above that door, portraying a ship at full sail on a waveless sea, flaps violently in the wind.

The impression of three buildings joined into one continues once the PCs enter.

Three different patterns of wooden floor, at three slightly different levels, make up the common room. Beyond this single quirk, however, this might as well be any other tavern: a bar stands on one side of the vast chamber, a staircase on the other, with a smattering of chairs and tables scattered throughout. Two fireplaces radiate a comforting warmth throughout the room, and several serving staff whirl about with tankards of ale and plates of smoked fish.

The PCs can get very basic drinks and foodstuffs here for 110% of the prices listed in the *Player's Handbook*.

The Smooth Sailing is bustling, at least in a relative sense, with activity, and contains several people with whom the PCs might interact.

Pioter (CE human expert 2): Pioter is the owner and proprietor of the Smooth Sailing Inn and Tavern. He's a sour-looking fellow, with gaunt, unshaven cheeks and salt-and-pepper hair. Unlike his serving staff, he makes no effort to appear friendly, instead standing gruffly behind the bar and directing any efforts at conversation toward one of his staff.

Sannuel, Relina, and Manelda (CE male, female, and female human commoner 2): The staff of the Smooth Sailing is far friendlier than their boss, or at least they act that way. They're quick to respond to orders and happy to answer questions about the history of the town—minus any reference to Dagon, of course. Sannuel is a dashing rake of a man, and Relina fits the stereotypical image of the buxom blonde barmaid to a T. Manelda is somewhat older, and she gives the impression of having seen it all before.

Guests: Currently, the Smooth Sailing is playing host to almost two dozen guests (plus the PCs), and is full nearly to capacity. These guests include the following:

- Terza (LG female half-elf aristocrat 2), an emissary for the Goldleaf Trading Consortium in the city of Four Winds. Terza is a dark-haired, graceful woman. She'd be a perfect beauty if her left eye wasn't an ugly white, obscured by a cataract. She boasts a tattoo of a gold leaf on her left shoulder. The Goldleaf Consortium has no interest in trading for Ashenport's fish or lumber, but they are interested in an exclusive deal to sell the treasures scrounged from the sea.
- Goldleaf guards (LN male and female human warrior 2). They, too, have gold leaf tattoos.
- Matthias Creel (N male human aristocrat 2), an emissary from Surrrens, Creel, and Blackwell, based in

the Free City of Greyhawk. He seeks the same goal as Terza, and any interaction between them is coldly polite at best.

- Surrens, Creel, and Blackwell guards (LN and N male and female human warrior 2).
- Jandal Phen (NG male human expert 2). Jandal is a jeweler and sculptor, hoping to sell his services to the folks of Ashenport to restore, reshape, and create duplicates of their various treasures. He's friendly, but somewhat intimidated by his fellow guests, and he is worried that their presence will make his own efforts harder.
- 2 hired bodyguards (N male human warrior 2).

2. THE BOUNTIFUL TIDE GENERAL STORE

If the PCs need to acquire supplies or tools while in Ashenport, the Bountiful Tide is the place to go.

There's little to differentiate this building from the other surrounding shops, save that the walls are meticulously whitewashed (or at least they were meticulous before the heavy rains). Above the door hangs a painting of a beautiful shoreline, with the words "A Bountiful Tide" etched above it in gold paint.

Inside the shop are numerous aisles, with goods divided (very roughly) into categories. For instance, ropes and pitons can be found in the aisle marked "exploring," while rations and salt can be found in "foodstuffs." Everything here costs 110% of the prices listed in the PH. The shop sells no weapons or armor.

Lena (CE female human commoner 2): Lena is an old woman, with iron-gray hair and a pronounced limp. She approaches customers with a huge smile, constantly calling them "dear" and "sweetie" and similar terms. If her attitude is improved to indifferent or better, she'll drop her prices to match those in the *Player's Handbook*.

3. BLACKSMITH

If the PCs intended to commission any work from the town blacksmith, they're out of luck.

The anvil, the wall of hammers and tongs, and the heavy furnace clearly mark this shop as that of a blacksmith. You see nobody inside, however, nor any tools or weapons hanging on racks for sale.

In point of fact, Ashenport's blacksmith has spent several weeks in preparation for this time of year, ensuring that the cultists have weapons for dealing with anyone who proves resistant to Dagon's Call. When the PCs arrive, he is out amongst the populace, delivering weapons to those equipped to use them. He has no intention of returning to work until after the low tide.

Any PCs with the appropriate skills (and the willingness to trespass) can make use of his forge.

4. ASH GROVE

Here, in the center of town, a densely thick copse of trees grows, and all of the trees seem to be drooping and weeping in the heavy rains. A full 75 feet across, the grove is far too healthy and far too well tended to be mere chance. Clearly, this grove is something the people of Ashenport take very seriously.

Indeed, if the PCs ask any of the natives about the grove, they learn that it has stood as long as Ashenport itself. The trees almost died a while back, but since then have recovered and thrive as fully as Ashenport itself.

Any PCs who decides to push through to the rough center of the grove may make a DC 22 Search check. If the check succeeds, the character discovers a small sculpture of Ehlonna, now overgrown and defaced with edged weapons.

Any native of Ashenport who can be made at least friendly acknowledges the presence of the sculpture, but claims "It's been almost completely forgotten. I think the damage was done a generation or more back, when the town was suffering and the people needed to vent their frustrations."

The damage was actually done as part of the town's shift to the worship of Dagon, of course, but nobody's going to admit that.

The PCs' first combat in Ashenport occurs here, on the morning after Dagon's first Call. See Part Two: Confusion.

5. THE TOWN HALL

This is the center of government—such as it is—in Ashenport.

This large stone building, one of the tallest in Ashenport, can only be the seat of government. Most of its windows are dark, but lantern light shines through a few, forming peeping eyes in the building's façade and suggests that business continues even in this weather.

While large for Ashenport, this certainly isn't the monolithic governing body that might be found in larger communities. It boasts three stories and several dozen offices, but most are either unused or are occupied by simple clerks recording things like the day's catch as reported by the town's fisherfolk.

If the PCs can talk their way past the clerks to see either the alderman or the sheriff on the first evening, they find Ritter polite but distant, and Kaern rude and belligerent. Both request that, unless the PCs have some sort of emergency, they wait a few days for the rains to cease and the trade fair to start before speaking with the town's officials. If the PCs insist on speaking to Ritter about past disappearances, his voice grows quiet, and he whispers "Yes, we've had problems in our town, but I cannot speak about them here and now. I'll send someone to fetch you tomorrow, and we'll speak more openly." This is a ruse to get the PCs out; Ritter assumes they won't be any problem after they hear Dagon's Call. A DC 14 Sense Motive check reveals that he's not being entirely truthful, but he'll say no more here and now.

Alderman Ritter (NE male human adept 3): Ritter is Ashenport's alderman (essentially the mayor). He is a jovial-seeming man, slightly overweight, with immaculately coifed blond hair.

Sheriff Kaern (NE male human warrior 3): Kaern is the perfect stereotype of the power-hungry small-town sheriff. He's a bully who enjoys throwing his weight around and trying to intimidate outsiders. He stands almost six-and-a-half feet tall, and his bristly brown hair and beard make him look quite bearlike.

Clerks (NE, CN, and CE male and female human expert 2).

6. HOLDING CELLS

This squat building is made of a dull, filthy stone. Only a single heavy door provides ingress, and all the windows boast rusty iron bars. Although it has largely faded, blurred by many years and the overpowering scents of ocean, rain, and fish, the tang of human misery still clings to the small structure.

There's not much crime in Ashenport, particularly since the entire town converted to a single faith, but these cells remain from the days where things were not so peaceful.

This building is nothing more than a single open "office," behind which runs a hall with half a dozen cells. One guard is on duty here at all times, increased to four when any of the cells are occupied.

1 or 4 prison guards (CE male and female human warrior 3).

There's little chance the PCs will bother with this area, but if they happen to discover it any time after the first dawn, they find it abandoned, and the keys are still in the desk. If they choose to use it as such, it makes a good place to leave any enemies they take alive.

7. THE DOCKS

In better weather, this is the heart and soul of Ashenport's economy.

In the white-capped waves whipped up by the stormy winds, it's almost impossible to make out the sequence of small wooden jetties. Over half a dozen of them stretch out along the coast. Several small fishing boats are tied tightly to them, rising and rocking with the waves like drunken winos, threatening to tip completely over.

Other than the occasional fisherman running out to double-check the status of his boat, the docks remain empty.

The coastline slopes upward toward the north, becoming a low cliff-face rather than a beachfront by the time it reaches area 12.

8. TANNERY

As might be imagined, this is where Ashenport's citizens bring hides and skins to be tanned and worked into leather goods.

Even in the heavy rains and winds, the stench of tanning chemicals and dyes lingers heavy on the air, causing stomachs to turn and eyes to water.

As with many other shops, the tannery is shut down for the duration of the storm (and the sacrifice). However, once the PCs determine the nature of the shop, allow DC 15 Knowledge (nature) or Survival checks. Those who succeed realize that, when it's not storming and the winds are weaker, the stench of the tannery almost certainly encompasses the Smooth Sailing Inn and Tavern. That makes the positioning of the inn a poor business choice, as it would drive business away during other times of the year.

The truth is that when they're not busy sacrificing passersby to Dagon, the folk of Ashenport don't want strangers lingering about.



9. THE MILL

While the grain mill is shut down due to the weather, it's not entirely abandoned.

This old wooden building contains little more than a heavy and ponderous grindstone and other milling equipment. Although you cannot initially see what power turns the stone, you can eventually hear the running of a small underground stream, barely audible over the rain.

Not all the cultists of Dagon are as patient as others. A small band has gathered together, prepared to take direct action against anyone who escapes the first Call. This group consists of two thuggish cultists and two mystic cultists. These NPCs attack the PCs on day two (see Part Two: Confusion, page 12, and the encounter “Ambush in Ashenport” on page 22).

When the PCs arrive in town, the four cultists are holed up here, discussing strategy and preparing weapons. If for some reason the PCs explore the mill this early, the cultists scatter, but if the PCs prove hostile or unwilling to let them leave, they attack. If this happens, run “Ambush in Ashenport,” but place the combat in a large room with an obstacle (grindstone) in the middle, rather than around Ash Grove.

If the PCs explore the mill any time after the first dawn, it's empty save for a few sleeping bags and bits of refuse.

10. HOME OF ALDERMAN RITTER

The finest house in all Ashenport is, unsurprisingly, inhabited by its highest citizen.

A structure nearly as tall as the town hall, though not nearly so broad, boasts several peaked roofs and a number of gleaming windows. The entire property is surrounded by a wrought-iron fence.

Alderman Ritter lives here, along with his wife, a butler, and several full-time guards.

Alderman Ritter (NE male human adept 3): See area 5: The Town Hall.

The Lady Ritter (CE female human aristocrat 2): Lady Ritter is a middle-aged woman with golden blonde hair. She is a perfect hostess, but prefers to let her husband do the talking.

Ronguel (NE male human expert 2): Ronguel is the Ritter family butler, and he has been since before the current head of household was born.

4 household guards (NE, CN, or CE male or female warrior 3).

11. GLEAMING DAWN CHURCH

The ancestral center of worship for Ashenport is still serving the community, but its focus has changed dramatically. The building marked 11A is the home of the church's official high priest—currently Mother Sharallan—while 11B is the Ashenport cemetery. A DC 25 Search check reveals that the cemetery hasn't been used in many years. This is because all of Ashenport's dead are now given to the sea, and thus to Dagon.

Atop a high, rocky hill on the northwest side of town stands what is obviously a church. Constructed of heavy wood, it appears to have once been coated in a bright whitewash that has since largely peeled away. The great holy symbol atop the short steeple seems almost to be bleeding as it sheds the rain.

FLEEING ASHENPORT

As written, the hazards and difficulties of the storm should be enough to keep everyone around—including the PCs—until the adventure is concluded, one way or the other. (And one would also hope that most players would prefer to have their characters get to the bottom of things, since running away from adventure doesn't tend to make for an interesting session of D&D.)

Nevertheless, some players may be determined to make every effort to escape the town, despite the storm. This might be pure selfishness, or they might be convinced by an NPC (likely Matthias) that it's worth the risk. If so, and if you don't mind being somewhat heavy-handed as a DM, feel free to have them encounter things in the wild, creatures of Dagon at least as deadly as those they must face in Ashenport. The encounter "Out in the Wild" (page 43) is provided for just this purpose.

The hill is steep, requiring a DC 8 Climb check to traverse. The stairs carved into the stone, of course, make this much easier.

The interior of the church is fairly typical.

You find yourselves within a long chamber, its vaulted ceilings making it appear far more cavernous than it truly is. On the far end, a raised dais boasts a heavy altar, draped in cloth embroidered with a smattering of holy icons, and supporting several chalices, incense burners, and candelabras. Rows of wooden pews, made rough and rickety by years of use, face the altar. Several stained glass windows—probably worth more than the rest of the building combined—sit high in the walls. The occasional flash of lightning sends multi-hued patterns dancing and wriggling obscenely across the floor.

The symbols on the cloth include the signs of Pelor and Ehlonna.

A DC 15 Knowledge (religion) check suggests that something is just a bit off. All the proper trappings, tools, and symbols are present, but they don't appear to have been used recently.

One of the pews in the right rear of the church is counterbalanced to swing up, revealing a staircase leading down into the shrine (see Part Three: Veneration). It normally requires a DC 25 Search check to find this hidden passage.

Mother Sharallan (CE female human adept 6; see "The Pool" on page 28): Sharallan is a tall woman, so gaunt as to appear almost starving. She has thinning brown hair and a perpetual frown. She seems to view

everyone, friend and stranger, as a nuisance to be tolerated, but her voice is kinder than her expression.

If the PCs visit the church on their first evening in town, Sharallan appears. Her initial reaction is to ask them to leave, as she's preparing for an important rite "beseeching the gods' grace on our town and the coming gathering." She's willing to let them stay to pray if they want, but she insists on keeping an eye on them. If the PCs ask why the religious paraphernalia seems ill-used, she claims that few of Ashenport's citizens have been to church lately, due to the weather and preparations for the trade fair. A DC 15 Sense Motive check reveals the falsehood, but if she is accused of lying, she insists the PCs leave immediately. If they refuse, she calls for her helpers—see the encounter "The Pool," replacing Ritter with another mystic cultist. Run that encounter here, but replace that map with a room filled with pews and a raised dais on one side. The PCs may find it odd (if they battle Sharallan on the first night) that nobody attempts to arrest them. This is because the cultists still hope the Call will take them.

After the first dawn, the church seems abandoned until the events of Part Three: Veneration.

12. THE COASTAL CAVES

Until the lowest tide, this is simply a short (roughly 25-foot) cliff-face down to the ocean. See Part Four: Confrontation for what happens when the caves are exposed.

PART ONE: ARRIVAL

(Afternoon through Late Night)

The storm is pounding and the roads have turned to mud. With the possible exception of a stray townsperon, nobody braves the elements to greet the PCs. While they might explore the town a bit, they almost certainly wind up at the Smooth Sailing Inn and Tavern eventually.

Once there, the staff greets them jovially enough, and the PCs (and players) can spend a few moments in conversation with Terza, Matthias, Jandal, and the others. While the weather is miserable, nothing *obviously* untoward occurs until after midnight.

DAGON'S CALL, FIRST NIGHT

Roughly 2 hours before dawn, regardless of whether the PCs are awake or asleep, read or paraphrase the following.

Slowly, gradually, a new sound penetrates the pounding of the rain and the howling of the winds. Barely audible at first, it resolves itself into an alien, high-pitched keening. It resounds with loss, with sadness—the lament of a mother who has lost her children or of the sailor stranded far from home. It echoes from over the waves and grows ever louder until the storm has receded into the background. It fills your ears, insinuates itself through your mind and your soul, until you can think and dream of almost nothing else.

It is not beautiful. It is not comforting. And yet you find yourself overcome with an almost irresistible urge to follow.

At this point, everyone in Ashenport who is not a worshiper of Dagon must attempt a DC 13 Will save. Those who fail are compelled to move toward the sea immediately by the most direct route. They move at a standard walking pace, but do not deviate, and they can overcome obstacles in their way (such as doors). They do not fight to defend themselves, but simply attempt to move around any foes to reach the ocean. Once there, they walk into the thrashing tide and allow themselves to drown. (Assume that, between rising from their bed,



leaving their rooms, and finding their way through the streets at a steady pace, it takes 1d4+4 minutes for any given individual to travel from the Smooth Sailing to a watery death.)

Anyone who takes damage is entitled to a new save to throw off Dagon's Call and defend themselves. The Call ends 10 minutes after it begins, fading as gradually as it appeared. Once someone successfully saves, she is immune to that Call, but not future ones. (Dagon's Call is a mind-affecting compulsion.)

Obviously, the players roll their own saving throws, but what of the NPCs? You can roll all nineteen saves, but this can be time-consuming. If you'd rather go with a more narrative-based approach, simply assume that, on this first night, half of the warriors succumb to Dagon's Call, but that Matthias, Terza, and Jandal successfully save.

Precisely what happens next depends on the actions of the PCs. Thankfully, the Call wakes even those who successfully save, so they are in a position to stop others from drowning themselves. Presumably, the PCs first focus on saving any of their fellow party members who succumbed, but they're (hopefully) decent enough to also stop some of the guards, even though it's unlikely they can save all of them. PCs have several options for stopping those intent on drowning themselves, from holding them in place (via grappling or spells such as *hold person* or *entangle*), to incapacitating them (via non-lethal damage or spells such as *sleep*), to simply hitting them until they snap out of it. Terza and Jandal, and those guards who did not succumb, take similar steps to save their own companions, but Matthias remains hidden in his room.

If you don't wish to roll the fate of each and every guard who has succumbed to the Call, assume that half of those who succumbed, and whom the PCs did not themselves save, succeed in drowning themselves, while the others are stopped.

Once the Call ceases, the surviving visitors to Ashenport are in a panic and may turn to the PCs for guidance.

Troubleshooting: Although unlikely, it's just possible that all the PCs fail their saves. If this happens, Terza or one of her guards attempts to stop them from leaving the inn, hopefully snapping one or more of them out of it in time to save the others.

Ad Hoc Experience: For each NPC the PCs actively save from drowning, award experience as though they'd overcome a CR 1 encounter.

PART TWO: CONFUSION

(Pre-Dawn through Afternoon)

As the sun rises on day two, read or paraphrase the following.

Behind the constant rains and stone-thick clouds, the lightening of the sky is all but imperceptible. Still, dawn has come, and Ashenport should be rising as well.

It is not. Even as the first few moments of morning creep past, the town remains utterly still. No doors slam, no shopkeepers huddle against the rain as they rush to start the new day's business. Other than yourselves and your fellow outsiders, not a soul stirs. The only signs of life are a few large gulls, undaunted by the rains, that perch among the town's roofs, like flies converging on a bloating corpse.

Despite the fact that there should be no way of leaving, due to the storm, the town appears empty. Nobody walks the streets, none of the tavern staff are present, and nobody answers the doors at town hall.

The other guests of the Smooth Sailing are only too happy to tell the PCs exactly what they experienced. They're frightened and are looking for anyone and everything to protect them. Terza offers the PCs 1,500 gp if they will ensure her safety and that of her people, plus find out what's going on. Jandal throws in 500 gp of his own. Matthias insists that the PCs protect him as well, but offers no coin.

A CLOSER LOOK

If the PCs spend at least an hour searching the town, allow each a DC 25 Search or Spot check. Those who succeed realize that Ashenport is not so abandoned as it appears. While the official structures and shops are indeed empty, most of the private homes show traces of life: a brief flicker of candlelight behind a waving curtain, moving shadows through the slats in the shutters, that sort of thing.

Should the PCs confront any of these folks, the citizens claim that the strange sound of the previous night has happened before, and they are hiding themselves away until they're sure it's safe. A successful DC 12 Sense Motive check reveals that the speaker is being deceptive. If the PCs can intimidate them successfully, or magically compel them to cooperate, they can gain further information.

Attitude

Hostile or Unfriendly

Response

The locals refuse outright to speak to the PCs any further.

Indifferent

The locals admit that their leaders have likely gone to prepare for some religious rite that the townsfolk practice once a year. They claim that this rite is meant to protect them from the call of the sea. As "indifferent," but the local also admits that there's to be a gathering at the church this coming evening as part of the rite.

Friendly

Helpful

As friendly. Additionally, with this level of success, the individual admits that the rite is dedicated to none other than Father Dagon. They also admit that the actual ceremony is in a hidden shrine under the church.

If you like, you can have several of the citizens fight rather than cooperate (as zealots are wont to do). Use the stats for thuggish cultists, as presented in the encounter "Ambush in Ashenport" (page 22).

AMBUSH AT THE GROVE (EL 6)

The first time the PCs pass near Ash Grove (area 4) on this first morning, they are attacked by a small cadre of fanatical cultists too impatient to wait and see if the strangers will succumb to the next Call.

Tactical Encounter: Ambush in Ashenport (page 22).

The PCs might question the cultists (or, using magic, their bodies). If they can be intimidated or magically compelled into cooperating, the cultists can provide the same information as the citizens, presented above. In addition, if made friendly or helpful, they admit that they sought to kill the PCs because they not only withstood Dagon's Call, but also (presumably) stopped others from sacrificing themselves.

DAGON'S CALL, FIRST DAY (EL 7)

Dagon's Call sounds again roughly 2 hours after a noon that remains as dark as night. The Call has the same mechanics, and the same results, as the first night.

If you again do not wish to roll for each of the NPCs in the Smooth Sailing, assume that half the remaining guards, and one of the others—either Terza, Matthias, or Jandal—succumbs.

This time, however, Dagon's followers aren't content to leave things to chance. The PCs are making a nuisance of themselves. Even as the Call sounds and the PCs go about trying to save any of their companions (or anyone

else) who succumbed, the sea reaches out for them in the form of several truly horrific, shambling creatures.

Tactical Encounter: The Sea's Long Reach (page 24).

Most of the NPCs simply retreat in fear, but if you'd like, you can have Terza's and Matthias's guards participate in the battle. Just add in another few fish-men to make up for it.

WHO'S THAT CREEPING 'ROUND MY DOOR?

If and when the PCs return to the Smooth Sailing after Dagon's second Call, grant each of them a DC 15 Listen or Spot check (but remember to account for the penalties due to the rain). Those who succeed notice that the rear door to the tavern is open, or hear activity in the kitchen. While this could be any of the guests rooting around for a snack, that seems unlikely immediately after Dagon's Call, and those who make the Listen check recognize the sound of someone trying to be stealthy.

If the PCs enter the kitchen, they find Pioter dosing the food and drink with a foul, ichorlike liquid. Pioter flees if possible, but if cornered or captured, drops to his knees and begs for his life.

From Pioter, the PCs can gain the same information as provided by the townsfolk, above. In addition, if made at least friendly, Pioter admits that he was trying

OUT OF ORDER: YOU'RE GOING WHERE?

So what happens if the PCs don't go back to the inn right after Dagon's second Call? It's assumed that they do, if only to return any of the NPCs they've saved, but they could certainly have other ideas.

If so, you have two options. One, move Pioter's poisoning attempt to later in the day, when the PCs are present. This is the simplest solution, but it may strain credibility a bit. After all, if he were going to break in, why wouldn't he do it when everyone else was distracted by the Call?

Two, you can have the PCs discover some of the NPCs acting unusual, and let them determine (via magic or skills such as Heal) that they're drugged. Once this is done, they can track the poisoner from the back door of the tavern to Pioter's house. (The rains are heavy and the day overcast, but the tracks are still relatively fresh, and the mud soft, so the DC is only 10, +1 for every additional hour that has passed.)

And if worse comes to worst: So the PCs don't get to question Pioter. They have plenty of other opportunities to learn what they need to know.

to drug the food to make the outsiders more susceptible to Dagon's Call. Because he runs the inn, the rest of the cult sees the guests as his responsibility, and he's frightened by the fact that so many have resisted the Call. (The drug is a unique poison that works only via ingestion, DC 15, 1d4 Wis/1d4 Wis. It goes bad within 6 hours if not used.) In addition, Pioter identifies both Alderman Ritter and Mother Sharallan as high-ranking members of the cult.

PART THREE: VENERATION

(Late Afternoon through Pre-Dawn)

The PCs have had several opportunities to learn of the gathering to be held that evening in the Gleaming Dawn Church. If the PCs have failed to discover this, however, grant them DC 15 Spot checks come evening, as long as they are outside. Success indicates that, through the downpour, they spot a small group of people converging from various streets at the base of the hill and mounting the steps toward the church.

And should even that fail, have Terza or one of the guards tell the PCs that they've seen people converging on the church. If you have to do this, though, it means the PCs have missed every opportunity to discover the importance of the church on their own. (What have they been *doing*, anyway?)

If the PCs figure out for themselves that they need to go to the church, rather than having Terza or one of her guards point the way, award them a story award as though they'd overcome a CR 2 encounter.

Oddly enough, once the PCs brave the wind and the slick steps up the hillside (feel free to call for a few DC 10 Balance checks if you're really feeling mean), they find the church empty. The candelabra on the altar is burning, so someone was here, but where are they now?

As described in the area description for 11: The Gleaming Dawn Church, a secret door beneath a pivoting pew provides access to the underground shrine. This normally requires a DC 25 Search check to find, but grant the PCs the following circumstance modifiers. (Unlike most circumstance modifiers, these stack.)

- If the PCs already know the secret door exists, perhaps from interrogating townsfolk, they gain a +2 on their check.
- If the PCs followed someone here, the pew hasn't quite clicked back into position yet. They gain another +2 on their check.

OUT OF ORDER: AN EARLY ARRIVAL

Don't panic if the PCs find the hidden secret door beneath the pew earlier than they're supposed to. You can still run the shrine almost entirely as written. Simply ignore any references to groups of worshipers (they haven't arrived yet). You might also consider locating Althanis and his fish-men attendants (see areas S9 and S10) in the high priest's quarters (area S7) instead. You can still run the combat mostly as presented just by altering the environmental hazards.

When the pew slides aside, it reveals a spiral staircase leading down to area S1.

DAGON'S HIDDEN SHRINE

The hidden shrine to Dagon is small, but dangerous. The following features are common throughout the shrine unless stated otherwise.

Ceilings: Between 8 and 10 feet high. Ceilings, walls, and floors are worked stone.

Door, Strong Wooden: 2 inches thick; AC 6; hardness 5; hp 20; break DC 25 (locked). Doors are unlocked unless noted otherwise; those that are locked require a DC 20 Open Lock.

Door, Secret (Stone): 4 inches thick; AC 8; hardness 8; hp 60; DC 26 (locked); Search DC 20. All secret doors require a DC 23 Open Lock or a DC 20 Disable Device to open, unless noted otherwise.

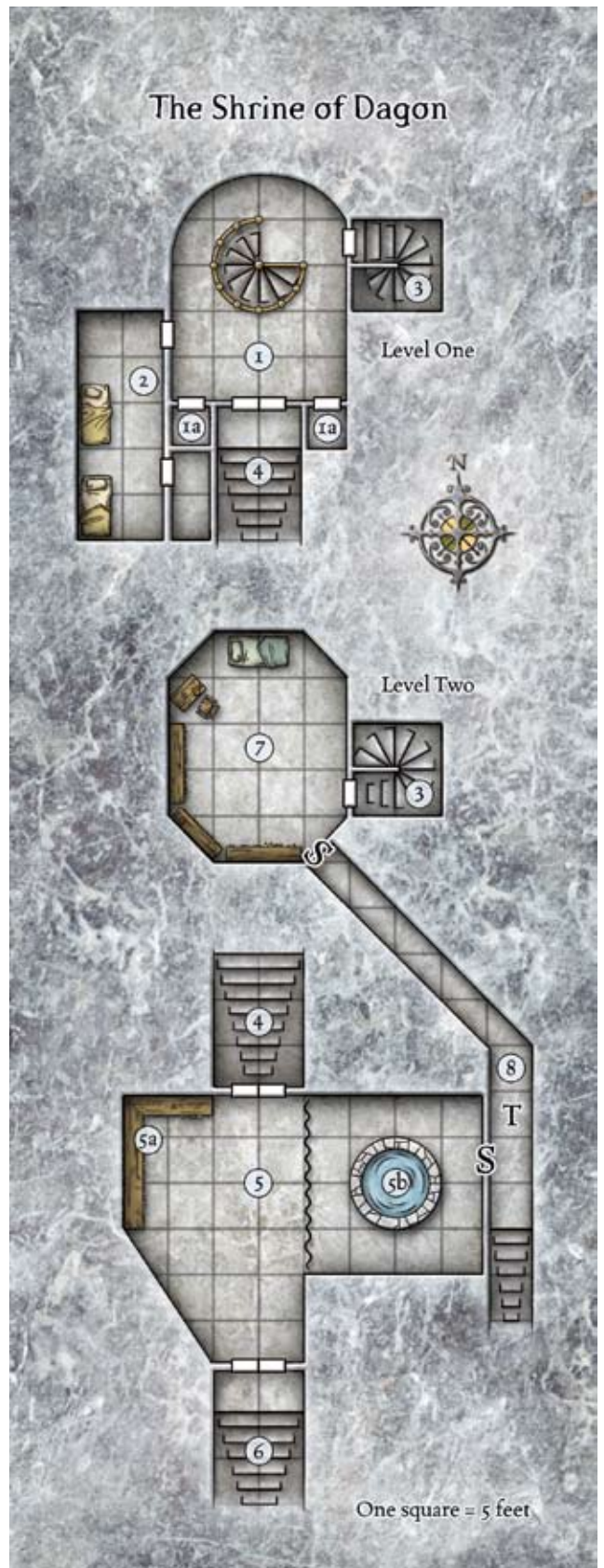
Illumination: Characters (and worshipers) must provide their own illumination.

S1. The Entry Hall

The stairs creak and shift beneath your feet, almost as though they were grunting in pain. The chamber into which the stairs descend is rounded on one side. Two doors provide egress to your right and left. Ahead of you, a large double door stands between two much smaller ones.

All of the walls are etched with images of horrific creatures of the deep, from mighty serpents to great krakens. Their eyes seem to glare at you in hatred.

The door to area 3 is locked; the others are not. The two rooms labeled 1A are cloakrooms, where worshipers don ceremonial garb. Unfortunately, though several remain, these simple cloaks fail to cover either the face or much of the body, and thus they are useless as disguises.



S2. Bedroom

This chamber is empty but for a pair of unmade bunks, each with a small footlocker beneath it. The sheets are yellowed from long use, and acrid with the sweat of sleeping men with evil dreams.

When preparing for rites, some of the cult's adepts sleep here, rather than returning to their homes each night. The footlockers hold only changes of clothes. The room off to the right is a closet full of blankets, pillows, spare cloaks, and a shelf with various unholy treatises on Dagon, worth about 200 gp to a collector or religious scholar.

S3. The Spiral Stair

Whereas the stair from the church was iron, this spiral was carved from the living rock itself. It leads down into the depths, to the gods know where, and your footsteps seem to echo into infinity.

The door leading to area 7 is locked.

S4. Downward (EL 5)

If the PCs listen at the door, those who succeed on a DC 20 Listen check recognize that someone or something lurks beyond. Otherwise, they are surprised when the encounter begins.

The great double door creaks open, revealing a long straight stair.

If the PCs have at least 45 feet of illumination, add the following.

You think you can just make out another double door, almost identical to the one you've just opened, at the base of the stair.

As soon as one door is fully open (perhaps before you've even read the above description), the fish-men attack.

Tactical Encounter: Beyond the Door (page 26).

If a fish-man successfully flees to area 5, the door at the base of the stairs is locked. Otherwise it is not.

S5. The Pool

You can see only half of the chamber, due to a heavy black curtain that hangs across the room, waving slightly despite the lack of any breeze. To your right, a pair of bookcases creak beneath the weight of ancient tomes of cracked leather and yellowing pages.



Once the PCs can see the other half of the room, read or paraphrase the following.

The chamber's hidden half is an almost perfect square, with a large stone pool precisely in the center. The rim of the font is carved with repeating images of sea serpents devouring whole ships, and the water—despite the fact that it cannot be but a few feet deep—is an impenetrable black.

The water in the pool is normal (albeit somewhat stagnant and stale). It appears black because the inside of the pool is painted in that color.

The two cultists attack immediately, since they do not recognize the PCs as fellow worshippers.

Tactical Encounter: The Pool (page 28).

If the PCs have met Alderman Ritter before, they certainly recognize him during or after the battle. This doubtless goes a long way to prove that the cult of Dagon is prevalent throughout Ashenport.

The PCs may wish to question any survivors (or their corpses). If they do so, they can learn that the entire town belongs to the cult, and that all the citizens are members. They can also learn, if they can intimidate Ritter or Sharallan into a friendly or helpful attitude, or magically compel cooperation, about the caves located

at area 12 on the Ashenport map, and that they're only accessible for a few hours around the lowest tide.

Treasure: While the books are mildly informative, particularly on the topic of demons, the entire collection is, despite its age, worth only about 100 gp. Shoved between two of the books is a divine scroll containing the spells *contagion*, *quench*, and *water breathing*.

S6. Even Farther Downward

These stairs are identical to S4, but without the lurking fish-men.

S7. The Abode of Evil

Something is subtly off-putting about this chamber. Perhaps it is the contents: a bed, a writing desk, and a trio of bookcases. The books smell uncomfortably of mold and old parchment, the sheets of the bed are stained with a yellow-gray slick of slime, and the chair by the desk has the mark of claws or spines in the armrests.

Perhaps it is the shape of the room itself: octagonal, yet somehow uneven, as though it was carved without care or measurement.

And perhaps it is none of these things, but instead it is the faint aura of depravity that clings to the chamber like a morning mist.

These are the living quarters of Althanis, high priest of Dagon's cult in Ashenport, servant of the Voice of Dagon (see area C6).

Unless the PCs have breached the shrine earlier than anticipated and you've decided that Althanis is here rather than at the altar, no encounter takes place in this room.

Treasure: A DC 15 Appraise or Knowledge (the planes) check reveals that several of the old books on the bookcases are truly ancient treatises on demons and demonology. These include *Daemons and Their Ilk* by Ardan Fein, Baloquist's *Abyssal Numerology and Symbolism as Applied to Mortal Conjurations*, and even an abridged translation of Iggwilv's *Demonomicon*. These three books are worth roughly 500 gp each in the right market.

S8. Behind the Walls

The corridor stretches before you, leading to yet another staircase. Footsteps, speech, and even breathing echoes strangely in this passage, returning to you twisted and distorted.

Perhaps the warping of the echoes is due to the intricate carvings? Walls, ceiling, and floor are covered with more images of marine creatures. Immense claws snap humans



in half, while tentacles the size of redwoods wrap themselves about shattered galleons. Winding through the center of it all, along the floor, is a series of impossibly long serpents, with heads on both ends, each biting the throat of the next. So real are many of the images, you can practically smell the salty tang of the sea.

From this side, the secret doors are not hidden and require no roll to find, but they still require the relevant rolls to open.

This hidden passage is both a means for the high priest to access the altar from his own chambers, and an escape route for the faithful should something go wrong. (In fact, depending on when the PCs discover this passage, it might currently be used for just that purpose. See area S9.)

At a point along the hall (marked T on the map), the passage is trapped. The worshipers all know how to avoid the trap by paying close attention to the carvings on the floor.

Poisoned Blade Trap: CR 6; mechanical; timed trigger; automatic reset; hidden lock bypass (Search DC 25, Open Lock DC 30); Atk +10 melee (1d4+4/19–20 plus poison, dagger); poison (purple worm poison, DC 24 Fortitude save resists, 1d6 Str/2d6 Str); multiple targets

(one target in each of three preselected 5-foot squares); Search DC 20; Disable Device DC 20.

Everyone in the marked square, and in both adjacent squares, is targeted by the trap. The various sea creatures on the walls appear to suddenly flick their tongues at the PCs; it is these that form the blades of the trap.

In addition to the effects listed above, the trap causes an immensely loud bell to sound, warning that someone is in the hidden passage.

S9. The Inner Sanctuary (EL 8)

You have entered a perfectly square chamber, which is empty save for several rows of kneeling cloths on which are embroidered huge, gaping, ichthyic maws. The ceiling rises nearly 30 feet above you. On the opposite side of the room, a narrow stair leads to a higher platform. You cannot see much of what's up there, save for two statues that appear to represent masses of intertwined tentacles and eel-like visages, and a huge altar of black stone from which rises a sculpted serpent, glaring toward the left. You think, but cannot be certain, that someone may be moving about behind that altar.

The description assumes that Althanis has evacuated the worshipers through the secret door into area 8. The sounds of combat in area 5 (and possibly a fish-man fleeing from area 4) have alerted Althanis to the presence of intruders. If, however, the PCs did not allow the fish-man in area 4 to escape, and if they've magically silenced the combat in area 5, they might catch the worshipers by surprise. If so, chamber 9 contains roughly a dozen kneeling worshipers, some of whom the PCs might recognize from town. (This includes Lena from the Bountiful Tide General Store, and any remaining staff from the Smooth Sailing.) These worshipers are not combatants (assume a combination of 1st- and 2nd-level commoners and experts), and if the PCs burst in, they attempt to flee, either moving around the party or up the stairs toward the secret door. The PCs may try to stop them, or not, as they choose.

If the PCs did not silence the fight in area 5, but enter area 9 within 3 minutes of the start of combat in that room, they catch the worshipers on their way through the secret door. Thus, they need not search to find it later.

Finally, if the PCs enter via the secret door, the congregants flee (or have already fled, if the PCs triggered the trap) via the main door instead. In any case, if any worshipers are present, assume that it takes them 2d4 rounds to flee if the PCs do not try to stop them.

A PC who succeeds on a DC 22 Spot check (made so difficult due to both cover and the height difference between chambers) spots Althanis behind the altar. Four rounds after they enter, as soon as they set foot upon the stairs, or as soon as it becomes clear he has been spotted, Althanis speaks to them from above.

"My friends, please." The voice is that of an old man, old yet firm. It comes from above, from beyond the altar. Now that your attention has been drawn to him, you can indeed see an elder fellow, his gray hair long and stringy, standing by the basalt block. "There is no need for further violence. Join us. Pledge yourself to the Father of the Deep, and be greatly rewarded. Gold, jewels, and great magics can all be yours, as can forgiveness for those of the flock you have already slain. For Father Dagon is ever accepting."

The adventure assumes that the PCs refuse this "generous" offer, but they may attempt to bluff Althanis, pretending to acquiesce. However, if the PCs accept his offer, he demands that they shed their weapons and abase themselves before the altar of Dagon, so at best, a good bluff may get them close to him before combat erupts.

COMBAT AND WATER

This fight, and several encounters within the caverns, is waged partly on land, and partly in the water. For convenience, the most relevant rules are presented here.

Attacks from Land: Characters swimming, floating, or treading water on the surface, or wading in water at least chest deep, have improved cover (+8 bonus to AC, +4 bonus on Reflex saves) from opponents on land. Landbound opponents who have freedom of movement effects ignore this cover when making melee attacks against targets in the water. A completely submerged creature has total cover against opponents on land unless those opponents have freedom of movement effects. Magical effects are unaffected except for those that require attack rolls (which are treated like any other effects) and fire effects.

Fire: Nonmagical fire (including alchemist's fire) does not burn underwater. Spells or spell-like effects with the fire descriptor are ineffective underwater unless the caster makes a Spellcraft check (DC 20 + spell level). If the check succeeds, the spell creates a bubble of steam instead of its usual fiery effect, but otherwise the spell works as described. A supernatural fire effect is ineffective underwater unless its description states otherwise. The surface of a body of water blocks line of effect for any fire spell. If the caster has made a Spellcraft check to make the fire spell usable underwater, the surface still blocks the spell's line of effect.

If the PCs attempt to mount the steps without agreeing to Althanis's proposal, combat begins.

Tactical Encounter: The Altar of Dagon (page 30).

Questioning Althanis, or his corpse, can reveal the same information as questioning Sharallan in area 5.

S10. The Altar of Dagon (EL 8)

As you near the upper level, the contents of the room become clearer. The statues of tendrils seem to writhe of their own accord, though this may be the result of the continual flames that flicker near them. The altar is an enormous chunk of blackness, as though carved from the night sky, and the serpent that rises from it is primordial, vicious, and angry. At the rear of the room, a pool of brackish water suggests bottomless depths.

Unless they've bluffed their way up or entered via the secret door, combat has almost certainly begun by the time the PCs reach this point.

The pool, labeled 10A, leads to an underground network of water-filled caves that eventually opens into the ocean at the base of the hill. It also leads to the pool at 11A.

The altar radiates overwhelming illusion magic. Any worshiper of Dagon who prays over the altar for 1 full hour gains benefits similar to those of the *misdirection* spell. They detect to all forms of magic as neutral, rather than chaotic evil. They also detect as nonmagical, making it difficult for others to determine that their alignments have been concealed. This effect lasts for six days.

Tactical Encounter: The Altar of Dagon (page 30).

When the combat is complete, allow the PCs to make a DC 12 Spot check. Success indicates that they have discovered something truly horrific: One of the fish-men bears a tattoo of a gold leaf, scarcely visible beneath its scales. This horrendous abomination was once one of the Goldleaf guards who so recently sacrificed himself to the ocean! (If the PCs stopped all the guards from drowning themselves to date, omit this detail.)

S11. Meditation Chamber

Like the hallway outside, this chamber is covered on all surfaces with etchings of sea monsters. Here, however, the scent of the ocean is not imaginary, for a pool of brackish water stands in the far side of the room.

Althanis uses this chamber to meditate and to commune with Dagon's aquatic servants in a more private setting than the altar chamber. The pool at 11A connects to 10A, and (eventually) to the ocean.

(Pre-Dawn Onward)

Even as you emerge from the shrine, any feelings of victory and triumph you may have are cut woefully short. From across the sea, that horrific call sounds yet again. Whatever is happening in this cursed town called Ashenport, it's not over yet.

DAGON'S CALL, SECOND NIGHT

Again, run Dagon's Call as described above. If you don't wish to roll for those at the Smooth Sailing, assume that half the remaining warriors, and all but one of the others (Terza, Matthias, Jandal) succumb. Allow the PCs to deal with them, and any of their own, as they prefer.

The PCs almost certainly need to rest and regain spells. The Smooth Sailing Inn is the most logical place to do so, but if they take reasonable precautions, they may find other safe spots. If they rest much past noon, they may have to deal with yet another Call.

Whatever the case, their only hope of ending this for good is to enter the caves and destroy the true leader of the cult—the alien Voice of Dagon. They might have learned of these caves through questioning the



priests in the shrine. If not, there are two further possibilities.

- If the PCs are out and about any time between morning and noon, a DC 15 Spot check reveals a few of the townsfolk coming from the coast near area 12. If confronted and properly intimidated (friendly attitude or better), they admit that this is the spot from which the fish-men most frequently come, and that they were going to seek guidance.
- If the PCs fail to find it themselves, one of the surviving visitors at the Smooth Sailing may report having seen the townsfolk there, as above.

DOWN THE CLIFFS

Regardless of how they learn of them, the PCs must approach the caves.

Some 25 feet below, the wrathful sea pounds against unyielding stone. Between the two, the territory over which they battle, is a tiny stretch of rocky beach. Every few moments, it vanishes briefly beneath the waves, only to reappear.

Climbing down the cliff-face requires a DC 22 Climb check. Once the party is most of the way down, they are attacked by one of Dagon's most horrible servants.

Tactical Encounter: The Wrath of Dagon (page 33).

THE COASTAL CAVERNS

These caves, filled with water and completely hidden except during this lowest tide, are the true heart of Dagon's cult. The walls are unworked stone, the ceilings anywhere from 8 to 20 feet high. While several caverns are covered in deep water (and are marked as such on the map), the entire cavern is covered in water to a depth of a few inches. This has no mechanical impact (except where noted), but should remind the PCs that this is an alien environment. The PCs must provide their own illumination.

C1. The Earthen Gullet (EL varies)

Seawater flows in a shallow stream down the earthen floor of this cave, leading into the darkened maw of the earth.

The fish-men of Dagon have trapped the entrance to the caverns, as marked on the map. The trap is an early warning system that also pins intruders in place, using an adhesive distilled from various sea creatures.

Adhesive Trap: CR 5; mechanical; location trigger; manual reset; Atk +15 melee (adhesive); multiple targets (can strike all characters in two adjacent specified squares); Search DC 20; Disable Device DC 25.

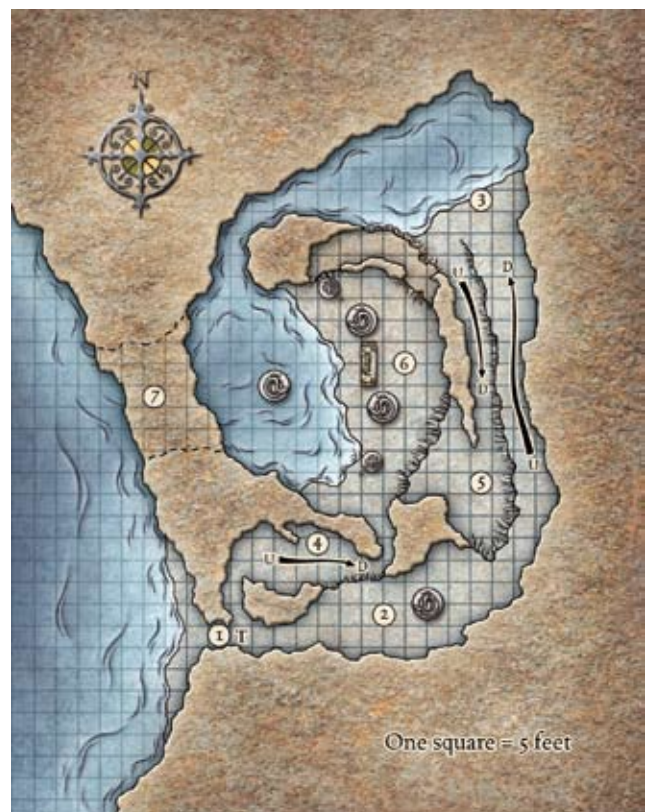
The trap targets the square marked T, as well as the square immediately to the west. Anyone struck is considered entangled, and stuck in place. As a full-round action, anyone stuck in place can attempt a DC 22 Strength or Escape Artist check to break free. The character can then move, but is still considered entangled for 1d4 rounds.

In addition to these effects, the trap causes a loud crash, alerting the inhabitants of C2 and C4 to the PCs' presence. They then converge, as described in the tactical encounter.

Tactical Encounter: The Killing Caves (page 35).

C2. Resting Cave (EL varies)

This cavernous chamber has blackened walls, suggesting in the dim light that it goes on forever. What at first appears to be some great beast rearing from the darkness, a serpent of sharp angles and hideous spines, swiftly reveals itself to be a large idol standing near the far side of the cave.





Depending on how the PCs dealt with the trap, they may face only a pair of fish-men here, or they may have faced them, and the mouther from C4, already.

Tactical Encounter: The Killing Caves (page 35).

The passageway leading to C3 slopes gradually but consistently downward.

C3. Deep Water (EL 6)

The water rushing past your feet begins to pool ever deeper as the passage winds onward. Finally, the claustrophobic corridor opens into an enormous flooded cavern. It's going to require a bit of fancy footwork to work your way through without plunging into the dark and icy depths.

This cavern is covered in water (dozens of feet deep where water is marked on the map, only 2 feet deep where it is not). The tendrils attack as soon as anyone comes within reach.

Tactical Encounter: Deep Water (page 39).

C4. Madness Made Manifest (EL varies)

The walls, the floor, and the ceiling of this cave are coated in a reflective sheen, as though some great slug had left a trail across them. Even stranger is the stone itself. While every other surface in these caverns appears to be water-carved stone, these surfaces boast strange patterns, unusually marred features, and even twisted curves and protrusions. It less resembles stone,

and more a hollow in a large lump of clay, formed into random patterns by a child's fingers.

The patterns in the stone are the result of the gibbering mouther using its acid and ground manipulation abilities to reshape the cave to its liking. The floor in the center slopes steeply downward.

As with the fish-men in C2, the mouther may be encountered here alone, or at C1, depending on circumstances, as described in the tactical encounter.

Tactical Encounter: The Killing Caves (page 35).

C5. The Overlook (EL 10)

This asymmetrical cavern overlooks another, much larger chamber below. In that distant chamber, you can see a sequence of monstrous idols, a great

basalt altar much like that beneath the church, and a shallow lagoon, roughly 2 feet deep, that runs beneath the distant wall. A moderate slope leads down from your level to the grotto below.

From here, you can see an older woman, clad in black robes, moving around behind the altar.

Much of what the PCs see is actually illusion. In addition to the illusory wall marked on the C6 map, there are others that may cause great harm to the PCs.

- The "slope" leading to the lower level (C6) is actually a sheer drop of about 10 feet. Anyone trying to traverse the slope falls.
- The "shallow" lagoon is actually many dozens of feet deep. Anyone walking into the waters immediately sinks, and may be attacked by the Voice (see the tactical encounter).
- The "priestess" is a *programmed illusion*. If the PCs attack, call out, or take any action she could reasonably "notice," she appears to wade out into the lagoon and take cover behind the statue emerging from the water. The Voice hopes this will lure one or more of the PCs out into the deep water.

Tactical Encounter: The Call of the Deep (page 41).

C6. The Lair of the Beast (EL 10)

This chamber of horrors becomes much clearer as you progress inward. The two smaller idols are statues of the fish-men you've encountered, and their dark stone forms drip with a thin sheen of oily water. The three larger images are great serpents, emerging from the earth or the water, and foul ichor oozes from their needlelike teeth. The basalt idol, slightly larger than that beneath the church, boasts a rising serpent as well, turned toward the right. It radiates intense cold. The entire chamber smells of rotting fish.

Again, bear in mind the illusory wall and the fact that the water is much deeper than it appears. If the image of the woman hasn't yet retreated behind the statue, she does so now.

The altar radiates overwhelming illusion, necromancy, and transmutation to *detect magic*. It has the same alignment-concealing abilities as the altar at area S10. Furthermore, if a recently drowned corpse is placed upon it, and a worshiper of Dagon then chants an hour's worth of prayers, the body returns to life as one of Dagon's fish-men. Thankfully, it requires only 25 points of damage (beyond hardness) to snap the serpent from the top, and this destroys the altar's magical abilities.

Combat begins when the PCs have spent 1d4 rounds in area 6, or when one enters the deep water.

Tactical Encounter: The Call of the Deep (page 41).

Treasure: The portion of the cult's wealth that has not yet been distributed or traded for more useful items is stored in the alcove hidden behind the illusion. It consists of a *quiver of Ehlonna*, *horseshoes of speed*, an ivory dolphin statuette worth 500 gp, and 300 gp in various coins.

Ad Hoc Experience: If the PCs destroy the altar, grant them XP as though they'd overcome a CR 2 encounter.

C7. The Waterway

This broad underground passage leads from deep within the lagoon in C6, under the rear wall, and out to sea.

CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

The moment the Voice of Dagon is slain, or 2d4 rounds after it escapes, read or paraphrase the following.

From within the water, from beyond the cavern walls, seemingly from beyond the borders of reality itself, you hear it. A hideous shriek, much like the unearthly call you've heard so often since your arrival at Ashenport, but somehow changed. Somehow even worse . . .

It is a cry of rage, of fury unabated. Without pause, without breath, it continues, rises, until you can scarcely hear your own thoughts. On it goes, and on, for minutes on end, until you fear your very sanity must crumble beneath its weight.

And then, just like that, it is gone.

This more vicious sound does not entice the PCs in any way, and it requires them to make no saves. Rather, this last Call was directed, not at the outsiders, but at Dagon's cultists himself. The Prince of the Deep does not take kindly to failure, and his wrath is lethal. The PCs have successfully broken the back of Dagon's cult, but even they may be shocked at the extent of their victory. By the time they return to the surface, there's nobody left in Ashenport at all, except for any remaining survivors among the guests at the Smooth Sailing.

When the PCs return to the shore, read or paraphrase the following:

As though it, too, were a tool of the Prince of the Depths—and perhaps it was—the storm abates even as you watch. The pounding of the rain dies into a fine mist, and the clouds shatter like glass, allowing streams of sunlight to pour between them. And that light illuminates a town truly, finally dead. No sign of life remains at all, no trace of any of the town's demon-enthralled citizens. Nothing except a hundred lines of footprints in the muddy beach, footprints that finally disappear into the tides of the wrathful, raging sea . . .

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ari Marmell has been writing RPGs and fiction for many years now, and has over a dozen credits for *Wizards of the Coast*. He's recently been reading far more H.P. Lovecraft than is probably good for him. Any similarities between Ashenport and a small New England city known as Innsmouth are not even remotely coincidental.

AMBUSH IN ASHENPORT

Encounter Level 6

SETUP

If the PCs pass through the eastern or southern edges of the square, place the two mystic cultists at the spots marked with a red **M**, and the two thuggish cultists at the spots marked with a red **T**. If the PCs pass to the north or west, use the spots marked green **M** and green **T**, instead. Allow the PCs a DC 10 Spot check. Those who succeed may act in the surprise round.

If any of the PCs succeed in their Spot check, read:

Through the steady downpour, you suddenly spot the shadow of movement around several of the nearby corners!

When the cultists attack, read:

Two men with wild eyes and swords clutched in their fists charge from around corners and out of the mists. Lurking behind them, barely visible, stand two others, unarmored, chanting and gesturing.

2 MYSTIC CULTISTS CR 2

Male or female human adept 3
CE Medium outsider (human)
Init +1; **Senses** Listen +4, Spot +4
Languages Common

AC 12, touch 11, flat-footed 11
(+1 Dex, +1 armor)
Fort +2, **Ref** +2, **Will** +5

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares)
Melee morningstar +0 (1d8-1)
Ranged mwk light crossbow +3 (1d8/19-20)
Base Atk +1; **Grp** +0

Adept Spells Prepared (CL 3rd):
1st—*burning hands* (DC 13), *cause fear* (DC 13), *protection from good*
0—*detect magic*, *ghost sound* (DC 12), *touch of fatigue* (+0 touch, DC 12)

Abilities Str 8, Dex 12, Con 13, Int 10, Wis 15, Cha 14
SQ familiar
Feats Alertness, Improved Initiative, Sudden Silent (*Complete Arcane*; as Silent Spell, but can be applied spontaneously without increasing spell slot, 1/day)
Skills Bluff +4, Concentration +7, Knowledge (religion) +3, Knowledge (the planes) +3, Listen +4, Spellcraft

+2, Spot +4

Possessions morningstar, masterwork light crossbow, *bracers of armor* +1, 20 bolts, holy symbol of Dagon

2 THUGGISH CULTISTS CR 2

Male or female human warrior 3
CE Medium humanoid
Init +1; **Senses** Listen -1, Spot -1
Languages Common

AC 16, touch 11, flat-footed 15
(+1 Dex, +4 armor, +1 shield)
Fort +5, **Ref** +2, **Will** +0

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares)
Melee mwk cutlass +7 (1d6+2/18-20) or
Melee mwk dagger +6 (1d4+2/19-20)
Ranged mwk light crossbow +5 (1d8/19-20)
Base Atk +3; **Grp** +5
Atk Options Blind-Fight, Power Attack

Abilities Str 15, Dex 13, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 8, Cha 12
Feats Blind-Fight, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (cutlass)
Skills Bluff +4, Climb +2, Handle Animal +2, Intimidate +4, Jump +3, Knowledge (religion) +1, Ride +2, Swim +0

Possessions masterwork cutlass (treat as scimitar), masterwork dagger, masterwork light crossbow, masterwork light steel shield, masterwork chain shirt, 20 bolts

TACTICS

The thuggish cultists charge and start hacking. The adepts cast *protection from good* on themselves in the first round, unless a PC closes to within 20 feet, at which point they attempt to drive their attackers off with *cause fear*. Once protected with *protection from good*, the mystics move in behind their thuggish brethren and assist with what offensive spells they have.

CONCLUSION

Once two of the cultists are slain and the other two injured, or once three are slain, the survivors attempt to flee or surrender.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

The area has the following features.

Ambient Noise, Rain: -4 on all Listen checks.

Mud: Due to the constant rains, the roads of Ashenport are all mud. It costs 2 squares of movement to enter a square of mud.

Tree, Small: 1 foot thick; AC 4; hardness 5; hp 150; break DC 25; Climb DC 15. The grove is packed with small trees. A creature standing in the same square as a small tree gains a $+2$ bonus to Armor Class and a $+1$ bonus on Reflex saves (these bonuses don't stack with bonuses for cover that derive from other sources). The presence of a tree doesn't otherwise affect a creature's fighting space, because it's assumed that the creature is using the tree to its advantage when it can.

Visibility: Rain reduces visibility ranges by half, resulting in a -4 penalty on Spot and Search checks. The rain automatically extinguishes any unprotected flames, and it has a 50% chance of extinguishing protected flames (such as lanterns). Ranged weapon attacks are at a -4 penalty.



THE SEA'S LONG REACH

Encounter Level 7

SETUP

Place the fish-men at either all four spots marked with a red **F**, or all four spots marked with a green **F**, whichever is more tactically advantageous based on the PCs' starting positions. PCs who succeed at a DC 14 Spot check or a DC 17 Listen check (remember the rain-based penalties) may act in the surprise round.

When the PCs spot the fish-men, read:

Shambling toward you come nightmares vomited from the sea itself. Roughly humanoid, they are covered in viscous slime, shifting scales, and fishbelly-white flesh. Their huge eyes never blink; their mouths gape and flex, but no sound emerges as they approach.

4 FISH-MEN OF DAGON

CR 3

MM 163, LoM 161

hp 16 each (3 HD)

Male or female pseudonatural modified kuo-toa rogue
1

Always CE Medium outsider (aquatic, augmented monstrous humanoid)

Init +0; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., keen sight; Listen +7, Spot +11

Languages Abyssal, Common, Fish-Man

AC 18, touch 10, flat-footed 18
(+2 shield, +6 natural)

Immune poison, paralysis

Resist acid 5, electricity 10; **SR** 13

Fort +3, **Ref** +5 **Will** +5

Weakness light blindness

Speed 20 ft. (8 squares), swim 50 ft.

Melee mwk rapier +4 (1d6+1/18–20)

Base Atk +2; **Grp** +3

Atk Options sneak attack +1d6

Special Actions true strike

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

SA sneak attack

SQ amphibious, horrid form, sickening ichor, slippery, trapfinding

Feats Ability Focus (sickening ichor)^B, Alertness^B, Great Fortitude, Stealthy

Skills Escape Artist +7, Hide +4, Jump –6, Knowledge (the planes) +5, Listen +7, Move Silently +6, Search +8, Spot +11, Swim +7, Tumble +1

Advancement by character class; **Favored Class** rogue
Possessions masterwork rapier, masterwork heavy steel shield

Keen Sight (Ex) Fish-men can spot a moving object or creature even if it is invisible or ethereal. Only by remaining perfectly still can such objects or creatures avoid their notice.

Light Blindness (Ex) Abrupt exposure to bright light (such as sunlight or a *daylight* spell) blinds fish-men for 1 round. On subsequent rounds, they are dazzled while operating in bright light.

True Strike (Su) Once per day, a fish-man can gain a +20 insight bonus on a single attack roll. In addition, it suffers no miss chance against a target that has concealment or total concealment when making this attack.

Horrid Form (Su) Fish-men of Dagon are blatantly unnatural, with fishbelly-white and squamous flesh merged with humanoid skin. Other creatures receive a –1 morale penalty on their attack rolls against a fish-man.

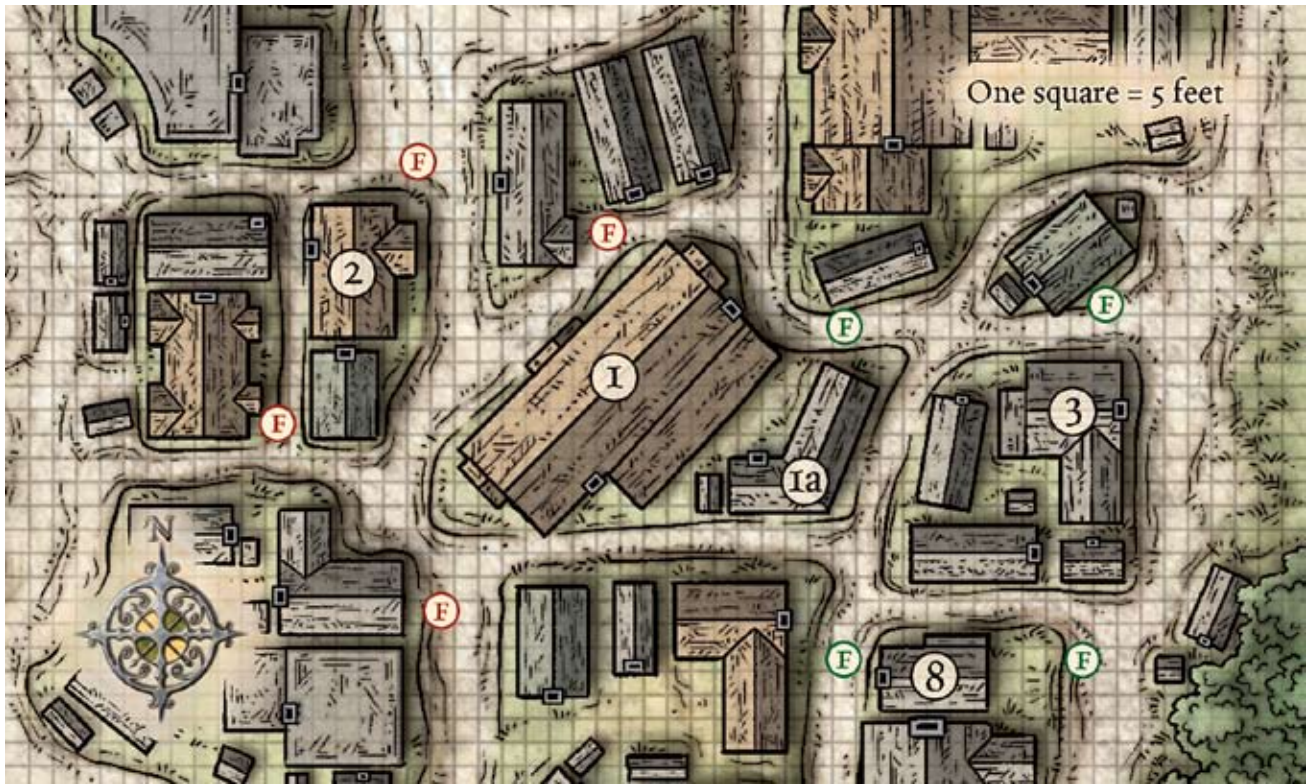
Sickening Ichor (Ex) Anyone who deals piercing or slashing damage to a fish-man with a melee attack receives either a whiff or a splash of the creature's blood. The subject must succeed on a DC 14 Fortitude save or be sickened for 1d4 rounds. (Additional exposure can lengthen the period of sickened, but does not stack with itself to become a more debilitating condition.) A successful save renders the individual immune to that particular fish-man's ichor for 24 hours. The save DC is Constitution based.

Slippery (Ex) All fish-men of Dagon secrete an oily film that makes them difficult to grapple or snare. Webs, magical or otherwise, don't affect them, and they can usually wriggle free from most other forms of confinement.

Skills Fish-men of Dagon have a +8 racial bonus on Escape Artist checks and a +4 racial bonus on Spot and Search checks. A fish-man has a +8 racial bonus on any Swim check to perform some special action or avoid a hazard. It can always choose to take 10 on a Swim check, even if distracted or endangered. It can use the run action while swimming, provided it swims in a straight line.

TACTICS

The fish-men attempt to sneak attack anyone they can reach in the surprise round. After that, they work in



pairs, each of which attempts to flank a foe and focus their sneak attacks until they drop a PC, before moving on to the next.

CONCLUSION

The fish-men fight to the death, even going so far as to commit suicide (treat as a coup de grace) if it seems the only way to avoid capture.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

The area has the following features.

Ambient Noise, Rain: -4 on all Listen checks.

Mud: Due to the constant rains, the roads of Ashenport are all mud. It costs 2 squares of movement to enter a square of mud. The fish-men do not suffer this penalty, due to their wide, flipperlike feet.

Visibility: Rain reduces visibility ranges by half, resulting in a -4 penalty on Spot and Search checks. The rain automatically extinguishes any unprotected flames, and it has a 50% chance of extinguishing protected flames (such as lanterns). Ranged weapon attacks are at a -4 penalty.

PSEUDO-PSEUDONATURAL

The fish-men (and several other creatures throughout the adventure) differ, in a few minor details, from their entries in the various *Monster Manuals*, and from the pseudonatural template as presented in *Lords of Madness*. Their “horrid form” ability replaces the pseudonatural “alternate form.” It has the same mechanical effects, but the creatures cannot change out of said form, as other pseudonatural entities can. In addition, the fish-men do not have the kuo-toa’s standard adhesive. (Remember that while the fish-men are mechanically kuo-toa, they aren’t actually the same species.) Their “sickening ichor” ability replaces the adhesive.

BEYOND THE DOOR

Encounter Level 5

SETUP

Two of Dagon's fish-men lurk here, allowing worshipers to pass but ambushing outsiders. Place the fish-men at the spots marked **F**. If the PCs specifically listen at the door, allow them a DC 20 Listen check to recognize that someone waits beyond. Otherwise, they cannot act in the surprise round.

When the PCs open the door, read:

Two horrific, squamous fish creatures leap through the opened door, blades raised high! They emit a hideous, gargling shriek as they attack.

2 FISH-MEN OF DAGON

CR 3

MM 163, LoM 161

hp 16 each (3 HD)

Male or female pseudonatural modified kuo-toa rogue
1

Always CE Medium outsider (aquatic, augmented monstrous humanoid)

Init +0; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., keen sight; Listen +7, Spot +11

Languages Abyssal, Common, Fish-Man

AC 18, touch 10, flat-footed 18
(+2 shield, +6 natural)

Immune poison, paralysis

Resist acid 5, electricity 10; **SR** 13

Fort +3, **Ref** +5 **Will** +5

Weakness light blindness

Speed 20 ft. (8 squares), swim 50 ft.

Melee mwk rapier +4 (1d6+1/18–20)

Base Atk +2; Grp +3

Atk Options sneak attack +1d6

Special Actions true strike

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

SA sneak attack

SQ amphibious, horrid form, sickening ichor, slippery, trapfinding

Feats Ability Focus (sickening ichor)^B, Alertness^B, Great Fortitude, Stealthy

Skills Escape Artist +7, Hide +4, Jump –6, Knowledge (the planes) +5, Listen +7, Move Silently +6, Search +8, Spot +11, Swim +7, Tumble +1

Advancement by character class; **Favored Class** rogue

Possessions masterwork rapier, masterwork heavy steel shield

Keen Sight (Ex) Fish-men can spot a moving object or creature even if it is invisible or ethereal. Only by remaining perfectly still can such objects or creatures avoid their notice.

Light Blindness (Ex) Abrupt exposure to bright light (such as sunlight or a *daylight* spell) blinds fish-men for 1 round. On subsequent rounds, they are dazzled while operating in bright light.

True Strike (Su) Once per day, a fish-man can gain a +20 insight bonus on a single attack roll. In addition, it suffers no miss chance against a target that has concealment or total concealment when making this attack.

Horrid Form (Su) Fish-men of Dagon are blatantly unnatural, with fishbelly-white and squamous flesh merged with humanoid skin. Other creatures receive a –1 morale penalty on their attack rolls against a fish-man.

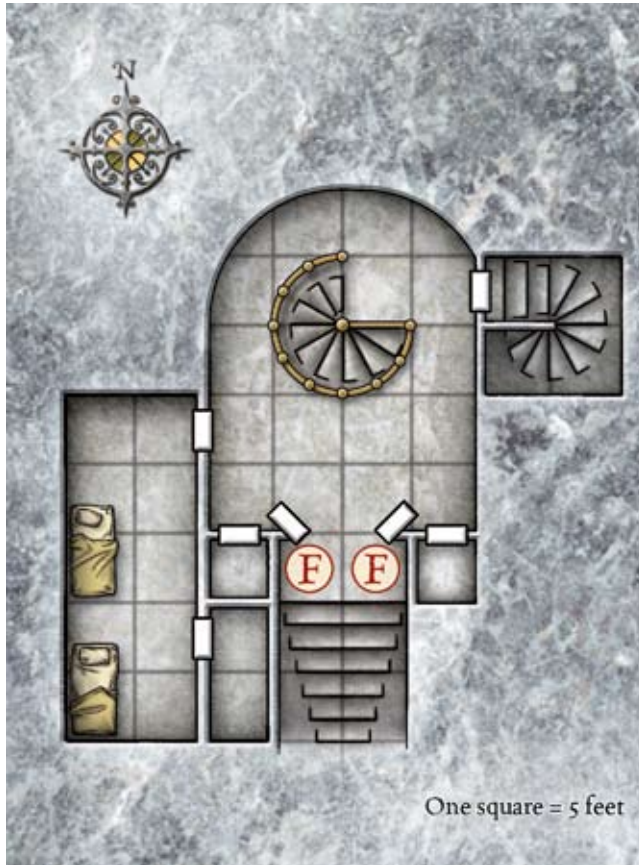
Sickening Ichor (Ex) Anyone who deals piercing or slashing damage to a fish-man with a melee attack receives either a whiff or a splash of the creature's blood. The subject must succeed on a DC 14 Fortitude save or be sickened for 1d4 rounds. (Additional exposure can lengthen the period of sickened, but does not stack with itself to become a more debilitating condition.) A successful save renders the individual immune to that particular fish-man's ichor for 24 hours. The save DC is Constitution based.

Slippery (Ex) All fish-men of Dagon secrete an oily film that makes them difficult to grapple or snare. Webs, magical or otherwise, don't affect them, and they can usually wriggle free from most other forms of confinement.

Skills Fish-men of Dagon have a +8 racial bonus on Escape Artist checks and a +4 racial bonus on Spot and Search checks. A fish-man has a +8 racial bonus on any Swim check to perform some special action or avoid a hazard. It can always choose to take 10 on a Swim check, even if distracted or endangered. It can use the run action while swimming, provided it swims in a straight line.

TACTICS

The fish-men attack the instant the doors open, attempting to catch the character who opened them by surprise and deliver their sneak attacks. They are not, however, foolish enough to stand against the party in a drawn-out combat. After the first round, one attempts to tumble past and flee through the door to area S3,



while the other tries to flee through the double doors into area S5.

CONCLUSION

If the fish-man fleeing to area S3 escapes, the PCs face him again in area S10. The one fleeing to area S5 faces them again in that room. Unless the PCs magically silence the combat, the sound of battle and the fish-men's warning call alerts the other inhabitants of the shrine to coming trouble. Because retreat is part of their plan, as opposed to a sign of defeat, award the PCs only half the normal experience for a fish-man who escapes.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

The room has the following features.

Doors: If they can position themselves properly, characters can fight from behind the doors, and thus gain cover.

Stairs, Spiral: Characters gain cover against foes below them on spiral stairs because they can easily duck around the staircase's central support. They also gain a +1 on attack rolls due to their higher ground.

Stairs, Steep: Characters moving up steep stairs must spend 2 squares of movement to enter each square of stairs. Characters running or charging down steep stairs must succeed on a DC 10 Balance check upon entering the first steep stairs square. Mounted characters make a DC 10 Ride check instead. Characters who fail stumble and must end their movement 1d2×5 feet later. Characters who fail by 5 or more take 1d6 points of damage and fall prone in the square where they end their movement. Steep stairs increase the DC of Tumble checks by 5.

THE POOL

Encounter Level 7 (or 8 if a fish-man from area S4 joins the battle)

SETUP

Place the two warriors on the spots marked **T**, Alderman Ritter (a cult mystic) on **M**, and Sharallan, the cult's mightiest adept, on **S**.

If the PCs enter via the secret door, they catch the inhabitants of the room by surprise. Adjust your description accordingly.

When the warriors move to attack, read:

Two more of the cult's warriors, their eyes burning with zealotry, move to attack.

When the casters take action, read:

The curtain bisecting the room ripples, and you see a pair of faces appear around its edges. One is male, one female, and both move their lips in a sonorous, disturbing chant.

SHARALLAN, CULT OF DAGON PRIESTESS **CR 5**

hp 29 (6 HD)

Female human adept 6
CE Medium humanoid
Init +5; **Senses** Listen +5, Spot +5
Languages Common

AC 12, touch 11, flat-footed 11
(+1 Dex, +1 armor)

Fort +3, **Ref** +3, **Will** +8

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares)
Melee mwk morningstar +3 (1d8–1)
Ranged mwk light crossbow +5 (1d8/19–20)
Base Atk +3; **Grp** +2
Adept Spells Prepared (CL 6th):

2nd—*invisibility*, *scorching ray* (+5 ranged touch)
1st—*burning hands* (DC 14), *cause fear* (DC 14), *protection from good*
0—*detect magic*, *ghost sound* (DC 13), *touch of fatigue* (+2 touch, DC 13)

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

Feats Alertness, Improved Initiative, Sudden Silent (*Complete Arcane*; as Silent Spell, but can be applied spontaneously without increasing spell slot, 1/day), Sudden Still (*Complete Arcane*; as Still Spell, but can be applied spontaneously without increasing spell slot, 1/day)

Skills Bluff +5, Concentration +10, Knowledge (religion) +4, Knowledge (the planes) +4, Listen +5, Spellcraft +5, Spot +5

Possessions masterwork morningstar, masterwork light crossbow, *bracers of armor* +1, *pearl of power* (1st), 20 bolts, holy symbol of Dagon

ALDERMAN RITTER **CR 2**

hp 16 (3 HD)

Male human adept 3
CE Medium outsider (human)
Init +1; **Senses** Listen +4, Spot +4
Languages Common

AC 12, touch 11, flat-footed 11
(+1 Dex, +1 armor)

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

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares)
Melee morningstar +0 (1d8–1)
Ranged mwk light crossbow +3 (1d8/19–20)
Base Atk +1; **Grp** +0

Adept Spells Prepared (CL 3rd):

1st—*burning hands* (DC 13), *cause fear* (DC 13), *protection from good*
0—*detect magic*, *ghost sound* (DC 12), *touch of fatigue* (+0 touch, DC 12)

Abilities Str 8, Dex 12, Con 13, Int 10, Wis 15, Cha 14
SQ familiar

Feats Alertness, Improved Initiative, Sudden Silent (*Complete Arcane*; as Silent Spell, but can be applied spontaneously without increasing spell slot, 1/day)

Skills Bluff +4, Concentration +7, Knowledge (religion) +3, Knowledge (the planes) +3, Listen +4, Spellcraft +2, Spot +4

Possessions morningstar, masterwork light crossbow, *bracers of armor* +1, *pearl of power* (1st), 20 bolts, holy symbol of Dagon, 200 gp in various coins

2 THUGGISH CULTISTS **CR 2**

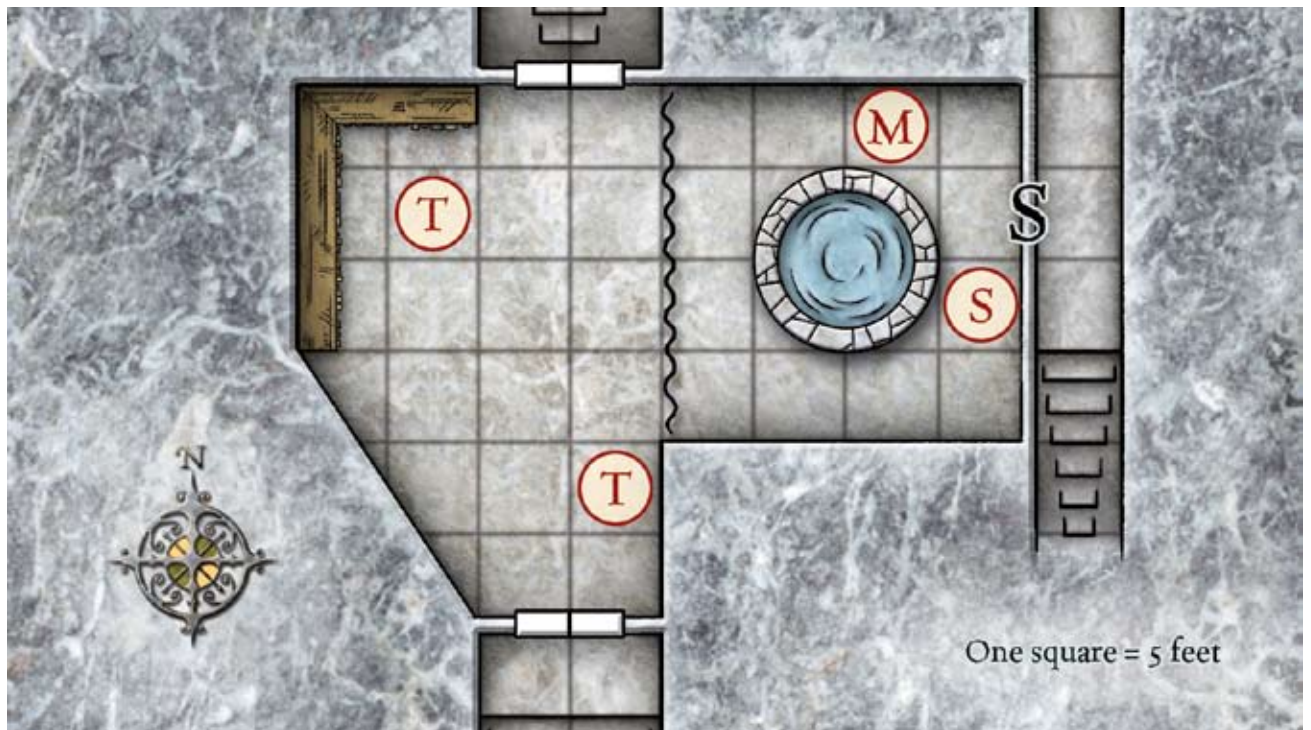
hp 20 each (3 HD)

Male or female human warrior 3
CE Medium humanoid
Init +1; **Senses** Listen –1, Spot –1
Languages Common

AC 16, touch 11, flat-footed 15
(+1 Dex, +4 armor, +1 shield)

Fort +5, **Ref** +2, **Will** +0

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares)
Melee mwk cutlass +7 (1d6+2/18–20) or



Melee mwk dagger +6 (1d4+2/19–20)
Ranged mwk light crossbow +5 (1d8/19–20)
Base Atk +3; **Grp** +5
Atk Options Blind-Fight, Power Attack

Abilities Str 15, Dex 13, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 8, Cha 12
Feats Blind-Fight, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (cutlass)
Skills Bluff +4, Climb +2, Handle Animal +2, Intimidate +4, Jump +3, Knowledge (religion) +1, Ride +2, Swim +0
Possessions masterwork cutlass (treat as scimitar), masterwork dagger, masterwork light crossbow, masterwork light steel shield, masterwork chain shirt, 20 bolts

TACTICS

The warriors may attempt to flank a single foe but otherwise fight in a very straightforward manner. Unless the PCs immediately move around the curtain, the two casters take a round to cast *protection from good* on themselves. Ritter then moves to the curtain's south side, Sharallan to the north. From there they cast spells at the PCs. If the PCs move to come after them, Sharallan retreats out of sight, or takes cover behind the fountain, and casts *invisibility* on herself.

CONCLUSION

The three cultists fight to the death. Sharallan fights until reduced to 10 hit points, and then attempts to escape (perhaps using *invisibility*). She does not, however, make use of the secret door; she knows that it's more than her life is worth to lead the PCs to the hidden passage and the fleeing parishioners.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

The area has the following features.

Bookcases: The bookcases can be climbed with a DC 5 Climb check. A bookcase can be pushed over with a DC 12 Strength check, causing 2d6 points of damage to creatures in the squares that it falls in (Reflex DC 15 half). A pushed-over case fills the squares it falls in with light debris (wood and books).

Curtain: Less than 1 inch thick; AC 10; hardness 0; hp 1; break DC 16. The curtain does not block sound. It takes a DC 15 Climb check to climb this surface (or DC 10 if a wall is within reach). The hit points and break DC listed are for a 5-foot section. The curtain provides total concealment to characters behind it.

Pool, Shallow: It costs 2 squares of movement to move into a square with a shallow pool, and the DC of Tumble checks in such squares increases by 2. Shallow pools impose a –2 circumstance penalty on Move Silently checks.

THE ALTAR OF DAGON

Encounter Level 8

SETUP

Althanis and his fish-men guards stand ready to smite those who dare profane their “holy” shrine. Place the fish-men at the spots marked **F**, and Althanis at spot **A**. Unless the PCs succeed at a DC 20 Spot check, they do not see the fish-men initially.

If the PCs enter by the secret door and avoid the trap at area 8, they catch the inhabitants of the room by surprise. They can see the fish-men clearly, since they are not hiding, and Althanis has not cast the spells currently marked as “already cast” in his stat block.

When combat erupts, read:

The old man behind the altar suddenly expands, as though something within struggled to escape. Flesh twist and splits as his entire body forms a mass of writhing, skin-covered tentacles.

ALTHANIS, CULT OF DAGON LEADER CR 8

LoM 61

hp 42 (7 HD); DR 5/magic

Male pseudonatural human cleric 7

CE Medium outsider (augmented humanoid)

Init +1; Senses darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +3, Spot +3

Languages Common

AC 19, touch 11, flat-footed 18

(+1 Dex, +7 armor, +1 shield, 2 deflection against good only [*protection from good*]))

Miss Chance 20% (ranged only) entropic shield

Immune mind-affecting (good only, protection from good)

Resist acid 5, electricity 5, fire 10 (resist energy); SR 16

Fort +6, Ref +3, Will +8; +2 against good (*protection from good*)

Speed 20 ft. in breastplate (4 squares), base speed 30 ft.

Melee mwk morningstar +5 (1d8–1)

Ranged mwk light crossbow +7 (1d8/19–20)

Base Atk +5; Grp +4

Atk Options rebuke water creatures/turn fire creatures 5/day (+2, 2d6+9, 7th), rebuke undead 5/day (+2, 2d6+9, 7th)

Special Actions alternate form, spontaneous inflict spells, true strike

Cleric Spells Prepared (CL 7th, 8th for evil spells):

4th—*poison* (+7 melee touch, DC 16), *unholy*

blight^D (DC 17)

3rd—*bestow curse* (DC 16), *cure serious wounds*, *magic circle against good*^D, *wind wall*

2nd—*fog cloud*^D, *hold person* (DC 15), *resist energy*[†], *silence* (DC 15), *spiritual weapon* (+7 melee touch)

1st—*bless*, *command* (DC 14), *doom* (DC 14), *entropic shield*[†], *protection from good*^D[†], *sanctuary* (DC 14)

0—*detect magic*, *guidance*, *light*, *resistance* (2), *virtue*

D: Domain spell. Deity: Dagon. Domains: Evil, Water.

[†]Already cast

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

SA rebuke water creatures, rebuke undead, turn fire creatures, true strike

SQ aura of chaos, aura of evil

Feats Alertness, Improved Initiative, Sudden Still (*Complete Arcane*; as Still Spell, but can be applied spontaneously without increasing spell slot, 1/day), Swift Horror (unique feat; allows Althanis to adopt his alternate form as a move action)

Skills Bluff +5, Concentration +11, Knowledge (religion) +4, Knowledge (the planes) +5, Listen +3, Spellcraft +5, Spot +3

Possessions masterwork morningstar, masterwork light crossbow, masterwork light steel shield, +1 *breastplate*, *pearl of power* (1st), 20 bolts, holy symbol of Dagon

Alternate Form (Su) As a move action, Althanis can take the form of a grotesque mass of rubbery, squidlike flesh with numerous writhing tendrils. Despite the alien appearance, his abilities remain unchanged. Other creatures receive a –1 morale penalty on their attack rolls against Althanis when he is in this alternate form.

True Strike (Su) Once per day, Althanis can gain a +20 insight bonus on a single attack roll. In addition, he suffers no miss chance against a target that has concealment or total concealment when making this attack.

2 FISH-MEN OF DAGON CR 3

MM 163, LoM 161

hp 16 each (3 HD)

Male or female pseudonatural modified kuo-toa rogue 1

Always CE Medium outsider (aquatic, augmented monstrous humanoid)

Init +0; Senses darkvision 60 ft., keen sight; Listen +7, Spot +11

Languages Abyssal, Common, Fish-Man

AC 18, touch 10, flat-footed 18
(+2 shield, +6 natural)

Immune poison, paralysis

Resist acid 5, electricity 10; **SR** 13

Fort +3, **Ref** +5 **Will** +5

Weakness light blindness

Speed 20 ft. (8 squares), swim 50 ft.

Melee mwk rapier +4 (1d6+1/18–20)

Base Atk +2; **Grp** +3

Atk Options sneak attack +1d6

Special Actions true strike

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

SA sneak attack

SQ amphibious, horrid form, sickening ichor, slippery, trapfinding

Feats Ability Focus (sickening ichor)^B, Alertness^B, Great Fortitude, Stealthy

Skills Escape Artist +7, Hide +4, Jump –6, Knowledge (the planes) +5, Listen +7, Move Silently +6, Search +8, Spot +11, Swim +7, Tumble +1

Advancement by character class; **Favored Class** rogue

Possessions masterwork rapier, masterwork heavy steel shield

Keen Sight (Ex) Fish-men can spot a moving object or creature even if it is invisible or ethereal. Only by remaining perfectly still can such objects or creatures avoid their notice.

Light Blindness (Ex) Abrupt exposure to bright light (such as sunlight or a *daylight* spell) blinds fish-men for 1 round. On subsequent rounds, they are dazzled while operating in bright light.

True Strike (Su) Once per day, a fish-man can gain a +20 insight bonus on a single attack roll. In addition, it suffers no miss chance against a target that has concealment or total concealment when making this attack.

Horrid Form (Su) Fish-men of Dagon are blatantly unnatural, with fishbelly-white and squamous flesh merged with humanoid skin. Other creatures receive a –1 morale penalty on their attack rolls against a fish-man.

Sickening Ichor (Ex) Anyone who deals piercing or slashing damage to a fish-man with a melee attack receives either a whiff or a splash of the creature's blood. The subject must succeed on a DC 14 Fortitude save or be sickened for 1d4 rounds. (Additional exposure can lengthen the period of sickened, but does not stack with itself to become a more debilitating condition.) A successful save renders the individual immune to that particular fish-man's ichor for 24 hours. The save DC is Constitution based.

Slippery (Ex) All fish-men of Dagon secrete an oily film that makes them difficult to grapple or snare. Webs, magical or otherwise, don't affect them, and they can usually wriggle free from most other forms of confinement.

Skills Fish-men of Dagon have a +8 racial bonus on Escape Artist checks and a +4 racial bonus on Spot and Search checks. A fish-man has a +8 racial bonus on any Swim check to perform some special action or avoid a hazard. It can always choose to take 10 on a Swim check, even if distracted or endangered. It can use the run action while swimming, provided it swims in a straight line.

TACTICS

Althanis uses his first move action to assume his horrid form. He then casts *wind wall* along the ledge, blocking most ranged attacks from area 9, unless the PCs are already in area 10. The fish-men hope to sneak attack anyone who climbs the stairs, but they move to attack heroes below if it becomes obvious that the party is not coming up. Althanis never descends to the lower level, but casts spells from a distance. If the PCs prove too effective with ranged attacks even through the *wind wall* Althanis ducks behind the altar (granting himself complete cover from the lower level, due to the height discrepancy), hoping to lure the PCs up.

CONCLUSION

The fish-men fight to the death. If Althanis is reduced to 10 hit points, he casts *sanctuary* and attempts to flee. His true objective is not escape, however; he hopes to ambush the PCs on their way out, after having collected any other surviving inhabitants of the shrine. Feel free to stage this combat anywhere in the shrine you feel appropriate. This time, Althanis fights to the death.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

The area has the following features.

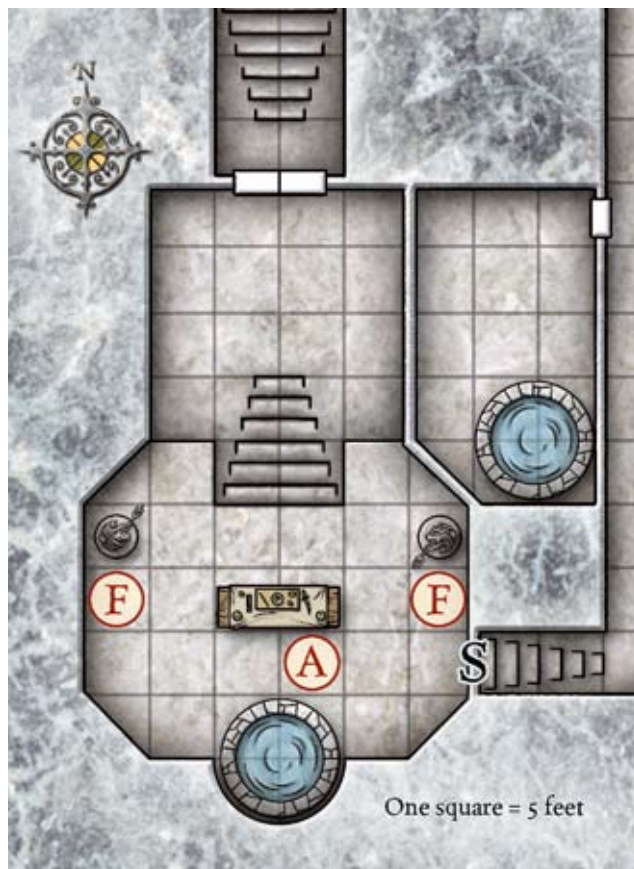
Altar, Stone: 3 feet thick; hardness 8; hp 540; break DC 40. An altar provides cover. If an altar is broken, the squares it occupies become heavy debris. It costs 1 extra square of movement to cross an altar. A creature can make a DC 10 Jump check to cross an altar without impeding movement. This altar has additional mystical abilities; see the room description. It requires only 25 points of damage to break the carved serpent from the altar, defiling it.

Ledge: The drop from area 10 to area 9 is roughly 12 feet. Climbing the wall requires a DC 20 Climb check.

Pool: Swimming in this pool requires a DC 10 Swim check. Characters need a way to breathe if they're underwater; failing that, they risk drowning (see Drowning, *DMG* 304). When underwater, characters can move in any direction as if they were flying with perfect maneuverability. An invisible creature displaces water and leaves a visible, body-shaped "bubble" where the water was displaced. The creature still has concealment (20% miss chance), but not total concealment (50% miss chance).

Stairs, Steep: Characters moving up steep stairs must spend 2 squares of movement to enter each square of stairs. Characters running or charging down steep stairs must succeed on a DC 10 Balance check upon entering the first steep stairs square. Characters who fail stumble and must end their movement 1d2×5 feet later. Characters who fail by 5 or more take 1d6 points of damage and fall prone in the square where they end their movement. Steep stairs increase the DC of Tumble checks by 5.

Statues, Fragile: 5 feet thick; AC 3; hardness 8; hp 150; break DC 35; Climb DC 20. A statue provides cover. It can be pushed over with a Strength check that



exceeds its break DC, causing 10d6 points of damage to creatures in the squares that it falls in (Reflex DC 15 half). A pushed-over statue fills the squares it falls in with heavy debris. A DC 10 Search check reveals the fragile nature of the statue. Due to stonemasonry, a dwarf may make this check automatically if within 10 feet.

THE WRATH OF DAGON

Encounter Level 8

SETUP

Allow the PCs to place themselves as appropriate for their chosen method of descending the cliffs. The Wrath emerges either at the spot marked **W**, or from one square to either side, depending on what is most advantageous based on the PCs' positions. It requires a DC 28 Spot check or a DC 24 Listen check (don't forget rain and surf penalties, and the Wrath's disorienting aura) to detect the Wrath before it attacks; only those who succeed may act in the surprise round.

When the Wrath of Dagon attacks, read:

An abominable conglomeration of multiple species explodes from the surf, sending saltwater spraying in all directions. Clacking claws, writhing legs, wriggling antennae—if the grotesque offspring of lobster and beetle learned to walk upright like a man, it might resemble what you see before you.

WRATH OF DAGON

CR 8

SW 135, CS 131, MM2 213
hp 100 (8 HD); fast healing 5

Amphibious ripper of legend
CE Medium outsider (augmented aberration, native)
Init +9; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +6, Spot +12
Aura disorientation 60 ft.
Languages Abyssal, understands Common

AC 27, touch 15, flat-footed 22
(+5 Dex, +12 natural)

Immune poison

SR 14

Fort +13, **Ref** +10, **Will** +13

Weakness light sensitivity

Speed 40 ft. (8 squares), climb 20 ft., swim 20 ft.

Melee 2 claws +14 each (1d6+7 plus sedative)

Base Atk +6; **Grp** +13

Atk Options sedative (1d6 nonlethal)

Special Actions breath weapon, pheromone burst

Abilities Str 24, Dex 20, Con 26, Int 14, Wis 18, Cha 19

SA breath weapon, disorienting aura, pheromone burst

SQ amphibious, chameleon, light sensitivity

Feats Alertness, Improved Initiative, Multiattack^B,
Weapon Focus (claw)

Skills Climb +24, Hide +18, Jump +12, Knowledge (re-

ligion) +6, Knowledge (the planes) +8, Listen +6, Move Silently +14, Spot +12, Survival +4 (+6 on other planes), Swim +15

Advancement 9–24 HD (Medium)

Disorienting Aura (Ex) The Wrath of Dagon emits a pheromone in a 60-foot radius that causes severe disorientation. Anyone who fails a DC 18 Will save takes a –4 penalty to Wisdom. This aura is a constant effect, which the Wrath cannot suppress. A creature that successfully saves cannot be affected again by the disorienting aura for 24 hours, but is still susceptible to the Wrath's other pheromones. This is a mind-affecting effect. The save DC is Charisma-based. Because this effect is pheromonal, it is unimpeded by spell resistance or antimagic fields, but creatures immune to poisons or gases are immune to this as well.

Sedative (Ex) Successful claw attacks also deal 1d6 points of nonlethal damage. Creatures immune to poison are immune to this additional damage.

Breath Weapon (Su) 15-ft. cone, once every 1d4 rounds, 3d6 cold, Reflex DC 22 half.

Pheromone Burst (Ex) Once every 1d4 rounds, the Wrath can release a burst of pheromones as a standard action. Anyone in range must succeed on a DC 18 Will save to negate the effect. A creature that successfully saves cannot be affected again by that precise pheromone for 24 hours, but is still susceptible to the Wrath's other pheromones. The DC is Charisma-based. These are all mind-affecting effects. Like the disorienting aura, they are pheromonal, not magical.

Fear: 60-foot burst, otherwise as the *fear* spell.

Sleep: 30-foot burst, otherwise as *deep slumber*.

Wrath: 60-foot burst, otherwise as the "attack nearest creature" result of confusion.

Chameleon (Ex) The Wrath can blend into its environment or appear more human than it truly is. This ability grants it a +4 racial bonus on Hide checks, and on Disguise checks to appear human.

Light Sensitivity (Ex) The Wrath is dazzled in bright sunlight or within the radius of a *daylight* spell.

Skills The Wrath of Dagon has a +8 racial bonus on any Swim check to perform some special action or avoid a hazard. It can always choose to take 10 on a Swim check, even if distracted or endangered. It can use the run action while swimming, provided it swims in a straight line.

TACTICS

The Wrath tries to strike while some of the PCs are still climbing down the cliff. It initiates combat with its wrath pheromone burst, hoping to turn some PCs against one another. It then alternates between its breath weapon and other pheromones, while tearing into those who close with its claws. The Wrath remains in the water, or else climbs the cliff walls, using its swim and climb speeds to its advantage. If it is taking too much damage in melee, it moves farther out into the water, coming just near enough to shore to use its breath weapons and pheromones.

CONCLUSION

The Wrath of Dagon exists only to destroy the demon lord's enemies. It fights to the death.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

The area has the following features.

Ambient Noise, Rain and Surf: -4 on all Listen checks.

Ledge: The drop from the top of the cliff to the beach is roughly 25 feet. Climbing the wall requires a DC 22 Climb check.

Mud: The coastal sands are essentially mud. It costs 2 squares of movement to enter a square of mud.

Tide: Every 1d6 rounds, a wave washes over the small section of beach. All creatures on the ground must make a DC 12 Reflex save or be knocked prone.

Visibility: Rain reduces visibility ranges by half, resulting in a -4 penalty on Spot and Search checks. The rain automatically extinguishes any unprotected flames, and it has a 50% chance of extinguishing protected flames (such as lanterns). Ranged weapon attacks are at a -4 penalty.



CLIMBING AND FIGHTING

You need both hands free to climb, but you may cling to a wall with one hand while you cast a spell or take some other action that requires only one hand. While climbing, you can't move to avoid a blow, so you lose your Dexterity bonus to AC (if any). You also can't use a shield while climbing.

Any time you take damage while climbing, make a Climb check against the DC of the slope or wall. Failure means you fall from your current height and sustain the appropriate falling damage.

THE KILLING CAVES

Encounter Level 5, 6, 7, and/or 8; see text

SETUP

If the PCs succeed in disarming the trap, allow the fish-men and the gibbering moulder DC 10 Listen checks (remember the surf penalty). Creatures that hear the PCs begin on the spots marked in red; **F** for the fish-men, **G** for the gibbering moulder. If the PCs trigger the trap, assume the monsters hear them automatically. Monsters that do not hear the PCs begin on the spots marked with a green **F** or **G**. (Note that, in either case, the moulder begins on the ceiling, rather than the floor.)

If the fish-men are aware of the PCs, they attempt stealth. PCs must make a DC 14 Spot check and a DC 17 Listen check to detect them. If they are not aware of the PCs, they are not hiding, and the PCs can detect them automatically.

When the PCs spot the fish-men, read:

From the darkness of the cave emerges a pair of the grotesque ichthyian humanoids. Their eyes and mouths gape as they shuffle through the ankle-deep water.

When the gibbering moulder draws near (or the PCs near it), read:

A terrible, high-pitched cackling rises from the depths, all but drowning out the crashing tide. Slithering and flopping across the cavern's ceiling appears a repulsive mass of bulging flesh, wide and red-veined eyes, and gaping mouths.

2 FISH-MEN OF DAGON CR 3

MM 163, LoM 161

hp 16 each (3 HD)

Male or female pseudonatural modified kuo-toa rogue
1

Always CE Medium outsider (aquatic, augmented monstrous humanoid)

Init +0; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., keen sight; Listen +7, Spot +11

Languages Abyssal, Common, Fish-Man

AC 18, touch 10, flat-footed 18
(+2 shield, +6 natural)

Immune poison, paralysis

Resist acid 5, electricity 10; **SR** 13

Fort +3, **Ref** +5 **Will** +5

Weakness light blindness

Speed 20 ft. (8 squares), swim 50 ft.

Melee mwk rapier +4 (1d6+1/18–20)

Base Atk +2; **Grp** +3

Atk Options sneak attack +1d6

Special Actions true strike

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

SA sneak attack

SQ amphibious, horrid form, sickening ichor, slippery, trapfinding

Feats Ability Focus (sickening ichor)^B, Alertness^B, Great Fortitude, Stealthy

Skills Escape Artist +7, Hide +4, Jump –6, Knowledge (the planes) +5, Listen +7, Move Silently +6, Search +8, Spot +11, Swim +7, Tumble +1

Advancement by character class; **Favored Class** rogue
Possessions masterwork rapier, masterwork heavy steel shield

Keen Sight (Ex) Fish-men can spot a moving object or creature even if it is invisible or ethereal. Only by remaining perfectly still can such objects or creatures avoid their notice.

Light Blindness (Ex) Abrupt exposure to bright light (such as sunlight or a *daylight* spell) blinds fish-men for 1 round. On subsequent rounds, they are dazzled while operating in bright light.

True Strike (Su) Once per day, a fish-man can gain a +20 insight bonus on a single attack roll. In addition, it suffers no miss chance against a target that has concealment or total concealment when making this attack.

Horrid Form (Su) Fish-men of Dagon are blatantly unnatural, with fishbelly-white and squamous flesh merged with humanoid skin. Other creatures receive a –1 morale penalty on their attack rolls against a fish-man.

Sickening Ichor (Ex) Anyone who deals piercing or slashing damage to a fish-man with a melee attack receives either a whiff or a splash of the creature's blood. The subject must succeed on a DC 14 Fortitude save or be sickened for 1d4 rounds. (Additional exposure can lengthen the period of sickened, but does not stack with itself to become a more debilitating condition.) A successful save renders the individual immune to that particular fish-man's ichor for 24 hours. The save DC is Constitution based.

Slippery (Ex) All fish-men of Dagon secrete an oily film that makes them difficult to grapple or snare. Webs, magical or otherwise, don't affect them, and they can usually wriggle free from most other forms of confinement.

Skills Fish-men of Dagon have a +8 racial bonus on

Escape Artist checks and a +4 racial bonus on Spot and Search checks. A fish-man has a +8 racial bonus on any Swim check to perform some special action or avoid a hazard. It can always choose to take 10 on a Swim check, even if distracted or endangered. It can use the run action while swimming, provided it swims in a straight line.

TOOTH OF DAGON

CR 5

MM 163, LoM 161, CAr 5
hp 24 (5 HD); DR 1/cold iron

Male pseudonatural modified kuo-toa warlock 3
CE Medium outsider (aquatic, augmented monstrous humanoid)

Init +0; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., keen sight; Listen +4, Spot +8

Languages Abyssal, Common, Fish-Man

AC 19, touch 10, flat-footed 19
(+3 armor, +6 natural)

Immune poison, paralysis

Resist acid 5, electricity 10; **SR** 15

Fort +4, **Ref** +4 **Will** +5

Weakness light blindness

Speed 20 ft. (8 squares), swim 50 ft.

Melee mwk light mace +6 (1d6+1) or

Ranged *eldritch blast* +5 (2d6 plus sickening)

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

Atk Options sickening blast

Special Actions true strike

Invocations Known (CL 3rd):

Least—*eldritch spear* (*eldritch blast* gains 250-ft. range), sickening blast (creatures struck by *eldritch blast* must make DC 14 Fortitude save or be sickened for 1 minute)

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 3rd):

At will—*detect magic*

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

SA *eldritch blast*

SQ amphibious, horrid form, sickening ichor, slippery

Feats Ability Focus (sickening ichor)^B, Alertness^B, Great Fortitude, Weapon Focus (ray)

Skills Escape Artist +8, Knowledge (arcana) +4, Knowledge (the planes) +7, Listen +4, Move Silently +2, Search +8, Spellcraft +3, Spot +8, Survival –1(+1 on other planes)

Advancement by character class; **Favored Class** rogue

Possessions masterwork light mace, masterwork studded leather armor

Keen Sight (Ex) Fish-men can spot a moving object or creature even if it is invisible or ethereal. Only by remaining perfectly still can such objects or creatures avoid their notice.

Light Blindness (Ex) Abrupt exposure to bright light (such as sunlight or a *daylight* spell) blinds fish-men for 1 round. On subsequent rounds, they are dazzled

while operating in bright light.

True Strike (Su) Once per day, a fish-man can gain a +20 insight bonus on a single attack roll. In addition, it suffers no miss chance against a target that has concealment or total concealment when making this attack.

Horrid Form (Su) Fish-men of Dagon are blatantly unnatural, with fishbelly-white and squamous flesh merged with humanoid skin. Other creatures receive a –1 morale penalty on their attack rolls against a fish-man.

Sickening Ichor (Ex) Anyone who deals piercing or slashing damage to a fish-man with a melee attack receives either a whiff or a splash of the creature's blood. The subject must succeed on a DC 14 Fortitude save or be sickened for 1d4 rounds. (Additional exposure can lengthen the period of sickened, but does not stack with itself to become a more debilitating condition.) A successful save renders the individual immune to that particular fish-man's ichor for 24 hours. The save DC is Constitution based.

Slippery (Ex) All fish-men of Dagon secrete an oily film that makes them difficult to grapple or snare. Webs, magical or otherwise, don't affect them, and they can usually wriggle free from most other forms of confinement.

Skills Fish-men of Dagon have a +8 racial bonus on Escape Artist checks and a +4 racial bonus on Spot and Search checks. A fish-man has a +8 racial bonus on any Swim check to perform some special action or avoid a hazard. It can always choose to take 10 on a Swim check, even if distracted or endangered. It can use the run action while swimming, provided it swims in a straight line.

GIBBERING MOUTHER (MODIFIED)

CR 5

MM 126
hp 42 (4 HD); DR 5/bludgeoning

CE Medium aberration

Init +1; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +4, Spot +9

Languages Common

AC 19, touch 11, flat-footed 18
(+1 Dex, +8 natural)

Immune extra damage from critical hits, flanking

Fort +7, **Ref** +4 **Will** +5

Speed 10 ft. (2 squares), climb 10 ft., swim 20 ft.

Melee 6 bites +4 each (1) and

Ranged spittle +4 touch (1d4 acid plus blindness)

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

Atk Options blindness, improved grab

Special Actions blood drain, gibbering, ground manipulation, swallow whole

Abilities Str 10, Dex 13, Con 22, Int 4, Wis 13, Cha 13

SA blood drain, gibbering, ground manipulation, improved grab, spittle, swallow whole

SQ amorphous

Feats Lightning Reflexes, Weapon Finesse

Skills Climb* +9, Listen +4, Spot +9, Swim +8

Advancement 5–12 HD (Large)

Spittle (Ex) As a free action every round, a gibbering moulder can fire a stream of spittle at one opponent within 30 feet. The moulder makes a ranged touch attack; if it hits, it deals 1d4 points of acid damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 18 Fortitude save or be blinded for 1d4 rounds. Eyeless creatures are immune to the blinding, but are still subject to the acid damage. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Improved Grab (Ex) If a gibbering moulder hits a Medium or smaller creature with a bite attack, it can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking attacks of opportunity.

Blood Drain (Ex) A swallowed opponent automatically takes 1d4 points of Constitution damage each round.

Gibbering (Su) As soon as a moulder spots something edible, it begins a constant gibbering as a free action. All creatures (other than mothers and the fish-men of Dagon) within a 60-foot spread must succeed on a DC 13 Will save or be affected as though by a *confusion* spell for 1d2 rounds. This is a sonic mind-affecting compulsion effect. A creature that successfully saves cannot be affected by the same gibbering moulder's gibbering for 24 hours. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Ground Manipulation (Su) As a standard action, a gibbering moulder can cause stone and earth in all adjacent squares to become a morass akin to quicksand. Softening earth, sand, or the like takes 1 round, while stone takes 2 rounds. Anyone other than the moulder in that area must take a move action to avoid becoming mired (treat as being pinned).

Spider Climb* (Su) This modified gibbering moulder is constantly under a partial spider climb effect. It need not make Climb checks to traverse a vertical or horizontal surface (even upside down). It retains its Dexterity bonus to Armor Class while climbing, and opponents get no special bonus to their attacks against it. It cannot, however, use the run action while climbing. If this effect is dispelled or suppressed, the moulder can raise it again as a free action.

Swallow Whole (Ex) The gibbering moulder can attempt to swallow (or, more accurately, engulf) a grappled opponent of Medium or smaller size by making a successful grapple check. Once the victim is inside, the moulder uses its blood drain ability. A swallowed creature can cut its way out by dealing 5 points of damage to the gibbering moulder (AC 19). Once the creature exits, muscular action closes the hole; another swallowed opponent must cut its own way out. The gibbering moulder's body can hold 1 Medium, 2 Small, 8 Tiny, 32 Diminutive, or 128 Fine creatures.

Skills Gibbering moulthers have a +4 racial bonus on

Spot checks. A gibbering moulder has a +8 racial bonus on any Swim check to perform some special action or avoid a hazard. It always can choose to take 10 on a Swim check, even if distracted or endangered. It can use the run action while swimming, provided it swims in a straight line. This modified moulder has +8 racial bonus on Climb checks. It can always choose to take 10 on Climb checks, even if rushed or threatened. It may use either its Strength or Dexterity modifier on Climb checks.

TACTICS

The fish-men's tactics depend heavily on circumstance. If any PCs are trapped in the adhesive, they try to sneak in and finish off other PCs, saving the trapped ones for later (or for the moulder). If the PCs are entering the larger cave (C2), they sneak attack from hiding. Beyond this, they simply flank and sneak attack as often as possible, taking cover behind bends in the cave, or the statue, against ranged attacks.

The gibbering moulder moves toward the PCs while on the ceiling, keeping just out of range of melee attacks, and spits. Once it has taken more than 15 points of damage, it grows angry and drops/climbs to the floor, where it can bring all its attacks and special abilities to bear. Once it's this angry, it does not know enough to avoid trapping the fish-men in its ground manipulation ability, so it may wind up harming them as much as the PCs. (The fish-men are, however, immune to the moulder's gibbering, due to their unnatural physiology.)

DEVELOPMENT

Whether this is one large combat or a sequence of smaller ones depends on circumstance. If the PCs trigger the trap and then remain in its vicinity for at least 2 rounds, both the fish-men and the moulder converge on them. If the PCs trigger the trap and then move into C2, they face the fish-men for 1d4+1 rounds before the moulder enters the fray. If they move into C2 without triggering the trap, the moulder remains unaware of them until they enter C4. If the PCs enter C4 after triggering the trap, they face the moulder immediately, and the fish-men in 1d4+1 rounds. If they move into C4 without triggering the trap, they face the moulder for 2d4+1 rounds before the fish-men arrive.

CONCLUSION

The fish-men are too fanatical, and the moulder too stupidly predatory, to retreat. They all fight to the death.



FEATURES OF THE AREA

The area has the following features.

Ambient Noise, Surf: -4 on all Listen checks.

Slope, Steep: Characters moving uphill (to an adjacent square of higher elevation) must spend 2 squares of movement to enter each square of steep slope. Characters running or charging downhill (moving to an adjacent square of lower elevation) must succeed on a DC 10 Balance check upon entering the first steep slope square. Characters who fail this check stumble and must end their movement 1d2×5 feet later. Characters who fail by

5 or more fall prone in the square where they end their movement. A steep slope increases the DC of Tumble checks by 2.

Statue, Large: 10 feet thick; AC 3; hardness 8; hp 1,800; break DC 55; Climb DC 20. A large statue provides cover. It can be pushed over with a Strength check that exceeds its break DC, causing 10d6 points of damage to creatures in the squares that it falls in (Reflex DC 15 half). A pushed-over pillar fills the squares it falls in with heavy debris.

DEEP WATER

Encounter Level 6

SETUP

The tendrils of Dagon attack from the points marked **T**, but do not place them until combat starts, since they are difficult to see beneath the water. Only PCs who succeed on a DC 15 Spot check may act in the surprise round.

When the PCs come within 10 feet of the tendrils, read:

A writhing mass of tentacles, far too numerous to belong to any natural creature of a sane and rational world, breaks the surface of the water.

2 TENDRILS OF DAGON

CR 3

MM 281, LoM 161

hp 33 each (6 HD); DR 5/magic

Pseudonatural modified advanced squid

CE Medium outsider (aquatic, augmented animal)

Init +7; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; Listen +8, Spot +7

Languages understands Abyssal

AC 16, touch 13, flat-footed 13

(+3 Dex, +3 natural)

Resist acid 5, electricity 5; **SR** 16

Fort +6, **Ref** +8 **Will** +3

Speed swim 60 ft. (12 squares)

Melee arms +6 (0) and bite +1 (1d6+1)

Space 5 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.

Base Atk +4; **Grp** +10*

Atk Options improved grab

Special Actions ink cloud, jet

Abilities Str 14, Dex 17, Con 12, Int 3, Wis 12, Cha 2

SA improved grab, ink cloud

SQ horrid form

Feats Alertness, Endurance, Improved Initiative

Skills Listen +8, Spot +7, Swim +10

Advancement 7–11 HD (Large)

Improved Grab (Ex) If a tendril must hit an opponent with its arms attack, it can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking attacks of opportunity. If it wins the grapple check, it establishes a hold and automatically deals bite damage. *A tendril has a +4 racial bonus on grapple checks.

Ink Cloud (Ex) A tendril of Dagon can emit a cloud of jet-black ink 10 feet high by 10 feet wide by 10 feet long once per minute as a free action. The cloud provides total concealment. All vision within the cloud is obscured.

Jet (Ex) A tendril of Dagon can jet backward once per round as a full-round action, at a speed of 240 feet. It must move in a straight line, but does not provoke attacks of opportunity while jetting.

Horrid Form (Su) Tendrils of Dagon are blatantly unnatural, with bulging flesh and far too many writhing tentacles. Other creatures receive a –1 morale penalty on their attack rolls against a tendril of Dagon. This also grants them additional reach on their tentacles.

Skills A tendril of Dagon has a +8 racial bonus on any Swim check to perform some special action or avoid a hazard. It can always choose to take 10 on a Swim check, even if distracted or endangered. It can use the run action while swimming, provided it swims in a straight line.

TACTICS

The tendrils remain in the deep water, attempting to use their reach to drag PCs toward them. They stay beneath the surface where possible, for added protection against ranged attacks.

CONCLUSION

A tendril attempts to jet away, hidden by an ink cloud, if reduced to 5 hit points.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

The area has the following features.

Slope, Gradual: Characters fighting on a slope gain a +1 bonus on attack rolls against foes downhill.

Water, Deep: This water, made somewhat rough by the tides, requires a DC 15 Swim check to traverse. Characters need a way to breathe if they're underwater; failing that, they risk drowning (see *Drowning*, *DMG* 304). When underwater, characters can move in any direction as if they were flying with perfect maneuverability. An invisible creature displaces water and leaves a visible, body-shaped "bubble" where the water was displaced. The creature still has concealment (20% miss chance), but not total concealment (50% miss chance).

Water, Shallow: It costs 2 squares of movement to move into a square with shallow water, and the DC of Tumble checks in such squares increases by 2. Shallow water imposes a -2 circumstance penalty on Move Silently checks. Note that, because of the depth here, Small and smaller characters are more seriously hindered. It costs them 4 squares of movement to move into a square with shallow water, or they can swim if they wish. Small and smaller characters cannot Tumble here.



ENCOUNTER LEVEL

The squids' increased reach synergizes well with the water and the difficulties of movement, increasing the EL of the encounter from 5 to 6.

THE CALL OF THE DEEP

Encounter Level 10

SETUP

The Voice *seems* to appear at the spot marked with a red **V**. This is actually the *projected image*; the true Voice sits much deeper, at the spot marked with a green **V**. Any PC with line of sight to the true Voice's position may attempt a DC 25 Spot check to detect it lurking beneath the surface.

If a PC falls through the illusion, read:

The ground you expected to find beneath your feet simply isn't there. You feel yourself sinking, and what looked to be relatively shallow water is already well above your head.

When the projected image surfaces to attack, read:

A nightmare of horrendous proportions rises from the rippling surface—a reflection of the ancient, primal evil of Dagon himself! Tendrils lash outward in all directions as though seeking prey of their own volition. Behind them, six inhuman eyes gleam red in the gloom, and enormous gills pulse in time to the beating of some inhuman heart. From the beast, a slick of slime spreads out across the water.

VOICE OF DAGON

CR 9

MM 8, LoM 151

hp 100 (8 HD); DR 5/magic

Half-farspawn aboleth

CE Huge outsider (aquatic, augmented aberration, native)

Init +2; Senses blindsight 60 ft., darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +18, Spot +18

Languages Abyssal, Aquan, Common, Undercommon

AC 20, touch 10, flat-footed 18
(–2 size, +2 Dex, +10 natural)

Miss Chance 20% blur

Immune critical hits, flanking, poison

Resist acid 10, electricity 10; SR 18

Fort +10, Ref +4 Will +13

Speed 10 ft. (2 squares), swim 60 ft.

Melee 4 tentacles +13 each (1d6+9 plus slime) and
4 longer tentacles +8 each (1d8+4 plus slime) or

Melee 4 longer tentacles +13 each (1d8+9 plus slime)

Space 15 ft.; Reach 10 ft. (15 ft. with longer tentacles)

Base Atk +6; Grp +23

Atk Options slime

Special Actions enslave, true strike

Psionics (ML 16th):

At will—*hypnotic pattern* (DC 16), *illusory wall* (DC 18), *mirage arcana* (DC 19), *persistent image* (DC 19), *programmed image* (DC 20), *project image*† (DC 21), *veil* (DC 20)

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 8th):

3/day—*blink*, *blur*†

1/day—*stinking cloud* (DC 17), *touch of idiocy* (+13 melee touch)

†Already used

Abilities Str 28, Dex 14, Con 26, Int 15, Wis 21, Cha 19

SA enslave, slime, true strike

SQ horrid form, mucus cloud

Feats Alertness, Combat Casting, Iron Will

Skills Concentration +19 (+23 casting defensively), Knowledge (arcana) +13, Knowledge (dungeoneering) +13, Knowledge (history) +13, Knowledge (nature) +13, Knowledge (religion) +13, Knowledge (the planes) +13, Listen +18, Spot +18, Survival +5, Swim +28

Slime (Ex) A creature hit by one of the Voice's tentacles must succeed on a DC 22 Fortitude save or begin to transform over the next 1d4+1 minutes, its skin gradually becoming a clear, slimy membrane. An afflicted creature must remain moistened with fresh water or take 1d12 points of damage every 10 minutes. The slime reduces the creature's natural armor bonus by 1 (but not to less than 0). A *remove disease* spell cast before the transformation is complete restores an afflicted creature to normal. Afterward, only a *heal* or *mass heal* spell can reverse the affliction.

Enslave (Su) Three times per day, the Voice can attempt to enslave one living creature within 30 feet. The target must succeed on a DC 18 Will save or be affected as though by a *dominate person* spell (caster level 16th). An enslaved creature obeys the Voice's telepathic commands until freed by *remove curse*, and can attempt a new Will save every 24 hours to break free. The control is also broken if the Voice dies or travels more than 1 mile from its slave.

True Strike (Su) Once per day, the Voice can gain a +20 insight bonus on a single attack roll. In addition, it suffers no miss chance against a target that has concealment or total concealment when making this attack.

Horrid Form (Su) The Voice is a true terror, consisting of gleaming eyes, writhing tentacles, and pulsing gills. Creatures of the Material Plane receive a –1 morale penalty on their attack rolls against the Voice.

Mucus Cloud (Ex) When underwater, the Voice surrounds itself with a viscous cloud of mucus roughly 1 foot thick. Any creature coming into contact with

and inhaling this substance must succeed on a DC 22 Fortitude save or lose the ability to breathe air for the next 3 hours. An affected creature suffocates in 2d6 minutes if removed from the water. Renewed contact with the mucus cloud and failing another Fortitude save continues the effect for another 3 hours.

Skills The Voice has a +8 racial bonus on any Swim check to perform some special action or avoid a hazard. It can always choose to take 10 on a Swim check, even if distracted or endangered. It can use the run action while swimming, provided it swims in a straight line.

TACTICS

The Voice prefers to manipulate the PCs into doing its job for them. It already has several permanent or long-term illusions in place, and it fights from its *projected image*, hoping to trick the PCs into wasting their best spells before they discover the ruse. It tries to enslave one of the party's melee combatants, and then follows up with *veil*, making each of the PCs look like a fish-man. It hopes that the characters' inability to tell each other apart, combined with the fact that one of them has truly become an enemy, will cause them to harm each other. It then follows with other powers, entering melee only when it feels that doing so is worth the risk of exposing its true form (or when the PCs recognize the image for what it is). Even then, it stays at a distance, using its reach to deliver attacks and touch effects.

CONCLUSION

When reduced to 40 hit points, the Voice fakes a retreat, using its remaining illusory abilities, only to resume the attack 1d3 rounds later. When reduced to 10 hit points, it genuinely tries to flee, retreating to the deep ocean and abandoning Ashenport to its fate.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

The area has the following features.

Altar, Stone: 3 feet thick; hardness 8; hp 540; break DC 40. The altar provides cover. If it is broken, the squares it occupies become heavy debris. It costs 1 extra square of movement to cross the altar. A creature can make a DC 10 Jump check to cross it without impeding movement. This altar has additional mystical abilities; see page 18. It takes 25 points of damage to break the carved serpent from the altar, defiling it.

Ledge: The drop from area 5 to area 6 is roughly 10 feet. Climbing the wall requires a DC 20 Climb check.

Statues, Fragile: 5 feet thick; AC 3; hardness 8; hp 150; break DC 35; Climb DC 20. A statue provides



cover. It can be pushed over with a Strength check that exceeds its break DC, causing 10d6 points of damage to creatures in the squares that it falls in (Reflex DC 15 half). A pushed-over statue fills the squares it falls in with heavy debris. A DC 10 Search check reveals the fragile nature of the statue. Due to stonemasonry, a dwarf may make this check automatically if within 10 feet.

Statues, Large: 10 feet thick; AC 3; hardness 8; hp 1,800; break DC 55; Climb DC 20. A large statue provides cover. It can be pushed over with a Strength check that exceeds its break DC, causing 10d6 points of damage to creatures in the squares that it falls in (Reflex DC 15 half). A pushed-over pillar fills the squares it falls in with heavy debris.

Water, Deep: This water, made somewhat rough by the tides, requires a DC 15 Swim check to traverse. Characters need a way to breathe if they're underwater; failing that, they risk drowning (see Drowning, *DMG* 304). When underwater, characters can move in any direction as if they were flying with perfect maneuverability. An invisible creature displaces water and leaves a visible, body-shaped "bubble" where the water was displaced. The creature still has concealment (20% miss chance), but not total concealment (50% miss chance).

ENCOUNTER LEVEL

The Voice's preparations for combat, and the synergy with its abilities and the watery environment, make this an EL 10 encounter despite the creature's CR of 9.

OUT IN THE WILD

Encounter Level 8

SETUP

Place the PCs as appropriate along the path. The horrid timber appears at the spot marked M. Only PCs who succeed on a DC 17 Spot check or a DC 21 Listen check (remember the rain- and wind-based penalties) may act in the surprise round.

When the horrid timber attacks, read:

The branches and leaves of the surrounding foliage whip about violently in the heavy winds and crushing rains. Only at the last second does it become apparent that some of the plants are thrusting forward, against the wind! From out of the trees comes a terrible mass of writhing vines and vicious thorns that gnash together like grinding teeth. An ichor that glistens even through the rain drips from the vines.

HORRID TIMBER

CR 7

MM5 30, LoM 51
hp 73 (7 HD); DR 5/magic

Half-farspawn demonthorn mandrake
Always NE Large outsider (augmented plant, extraplanar)

Init +5; **Senses** blindsight 60 ft., darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision, tremorsense 40 ft.; **Listen** +13, **Spot** +13

Languages —

AC 21, **touch** 10, **flat-footed** 20
(–1 size, +1 Dex, +11 natural)

Miss Chance 20% blur

Immune plant immunities, poison

Resist acid 10, electricity 10, fire 10; **SR** 17

Fort +11, **Ref** +3 **Will** +3

Speed 20 ft. (4 squares)

Melee 2 slams +9 (2d6+5) and
2 tentacles +4 (1d6+2)

Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.

Base Atk +5; **Grp** +14

Atk Options Power Attack

Special Actions change shape, spore pod, tangle root, true strike

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 7th):

3/day—*blink*, *blur*†

1/day—*stinking cloud* (DC 15), *touch of idiocy* (+10 melee touch)

†Already used

Abilities Str 20, Dex 13, Con 22, Int 7, Wis 13, Cha 14

SA spore pod, tangle root, true strike

SQ plant traits

Feats Alertness, Improved Initiative, Power Attack

Skills Climb +18, Hide +7 Listen +13, Move Silently +11, Search +8, Spot +13, Survival +1 (+3 following tracks)

Advancement 8–12 HD (Large); 13–21 HD (Huge)

Change Shape (Su) As a standard action, the horrid timber can take the form of a grotesque, tentacled mass of writhing vines and briars apparently made up of flesh and bone, rather than plant-matter. This functions as the standard change shape ability (MM 306), except as follows:

- Its movement modes do not change.
- It retains its tentacle attacks, and gains two additional tentacle attacks when making a full attack.
- It becomes amorphous. It cannot be flanked and is not subject to extra damage from critical hits.
- Creatures native to the Material Plane receive a –1 morale penalty on attack rolls against the horrid timber when it is in this form.

Spore Pod (Ex) As a standard action, the horrid timber can spit a spore pod to a range of 30 feet. The pod then explodes in a 10-foot-radius burst. All living creatures in the area take 1d8 points of damage as thorny growths burst from their faces. At the start of each of the horrid timber's turns, these thorns continue to grow, dealing 5 points of damage.

Each affected opponent is allowed a DC 19 Fortitude save each round. If that save is successful, the thorns become brittle and fall off the creature's face. The thorns can also be pulled from a creature as a full-round action that deals 1d8 points of damage. Applying a vial of holy water to the thorns causes them to shrivel and die. The save DC is Constitution-based.

If a creature is already infested with spore pod thorns, it is immune to the damage and effects of further spore pod attacks.

If a Medium or larger creature is killed by damage from a horrid timber's thorns, a fully grown horrid timber emerges from the corpse in 1d4 hours.

Tangle Root (Ex) The horrid timber can extend its roots to a radius of 30 feet as a standard action. At the start of the horrid timber's turn, opponents in the area must make a DC 19 Reflex save or be entangled. A horrid timber can't move when its roots are extended, but can retract the roots as a free action. The save DC is Constitution-based.

True Strike (Su) Once per day, the horrid timber can gain a +20 insight bonus on a single attack roll. In addi-

tion, it suffers no miss chance against a target that has concealment or total concealment when making this attack.

TACTICS

The horrid timber has an incredible advantage in this fight, due to its longer reach and the fact that it is not checked by the wind. In the surprise round, it uses its tangle root ability, trying to entangle at least some PCs exactly 10 feet from it. It then proceeds to make use of its standard attacks. Once it suffers an attack by a spellcaster, it attempts to use *touch of idiocy* on that caster.

CONCLUSION

The horrid timber is an alien predator, with no real sense of self-preservation. It fights to the death.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

The area has the following features.

Ambient Noise, Rain and Wind: –8 on all Listen checks.

Mud: Due to the constant rains, the roads of Ashenport are all mud. It costs 2 squares of movement to enter a square of mud.

Tree, Small: 1 foot thick; AC 4; hardness 5; hp 150; break DC 25; Climb DC 15. The grove is packed with small trees. A creature standing in the same square as a small tree gains a +2 bonus to Armor Class and a +1 bonus on Reflex saves (these bonuses don't stack with bonuses for cover that derive from other sources). The presence of a tree doesn't otherwise affect a creature's fighting space, because it's assumed that the creature is using the tree to its advantage when it can.

Undergrowth, Heavy: Heavy undergrowth costs 4 squares of movement to move into and provides concealment with a 30% miss chance (instead of the usual 20%). It increases the DC of Tumble and Move Silently checks by 5. Heavy undergrowth is easy to hide in, granting a +5 circumstance bonus on Hide checks. Running and charging are impossible. A creature with a slashing weapon can clear a square of heavy undergrowth with 4 full-round actions. (Note that the undergrowth here would normally qualify as light, but the presence of the mud beneath it renders it heavy for all practical purposes.)

Visibility: The wind and rain reduce visibility ranges by three-quarters, resulting in a –8 penalty on Spot and Search checks. The rain automatically extinguishes any unprotected flames, and it has a 50% chance of extinguishing protected flames (such as lanterns).



Wind: Ranged attacks are impossible. The severe winds check any movement by Medium creatures, and it threatens to knock Small creatures back (*DMG* 95).

ENCOUNTER LEVEL

While the horrid timber is normally a CR 7 opponent, the terrain and weather conditions—which impede the PCs more than the monster—increase the EL of the encounter.

The Plague Tree

Many are the monolithic boulders and chunks of rocky debris that tumble in orbit among the floating castles of the Tomb of the Thaalud, but not all are as they seem. For one of these careening islands of stone is actually the Plague Tree, the home of a marauding band of undead harpies and their master.

“The Plague Tree” is a DUNGEONS & DRAGONS adventure suitable for four 15th-level characters. This adventure works with the Forgotten Realms adventure *Anauroch: The Sundering of the World* and can be used after tactical encounter T4 when used in conjunction with that adventure. Dungeon Masters can also use this side adventure in their existing campaigns after tailoring it for them.

Within this adventure, superscripts are used to denote game elements and abbreviations indicate materials that appear in other supplements. Those supplements and their abbreviations are as follows: *Book of Vile Darkness* (BV), *Complete Warrior* (CW), *Dungeon Master's Guide* (DMG), *Magic of Faerûn* (Mag), *Monster Manual* (MM), *Monster Manual II* (MM2), *Monster Manual III* (MM3), *Player's Handbook* (PH).

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The Plague Tree came into being from the petrified remains of an arakhor—an extraplanar, elder treant of great power—summoned by the elves of Aryvandaar into their sylvan realm in a bygone age. The few arakhors called to the Realms served as powerful guardians and wise sages to their elven summoners, and this particular arakhor fell victim to the corruption that eventually overcame Aryvandaar, becoming a potent force against the other elven kingdoms. During the Fifth

Crown War, high mages of the Elven Court overcame the arakhor and magically petrified it, leaving its stony corpse where it stood among the forests of old Thearnytaar.

Long afterward, the archwizard that became the Keeper of the Thaal stumbled upon this petrified forest-giant in a primeval woodland. A tribe of harpies



had hollowed its interior into chambers and occupied it as their aerie-fortress. When years later he used his powerful magic to steal myriad castles to place within the Tomb of the Thaalud to serve as his treasure vaults, he remembered the petrified arakhor. Slaying all of the harpies, he uprooted the tree and set it to float within his new demiplane. He animated the harpies as undead creatures to serve as guardians for the treasures of the Thaalud and placed them under the direction of a powerful necronaut that he transplanted within the base of the tree.

All proceeded as intended by the Keeper as the centuries passed, and the hollowed tree served its purpose as a treasure storehouse within the Tomb of the Thaalud. The harpies maintained their vigil while the necronaut grew too large to leave its lair in the bowels of the tree. As the dim-witted necronaut became increasingly irrelevant to day-to-day guard duty, the most powerful of the undead harpies installed itself as their tribal chief while the necronaut remained below, where it contentedly destroyed anything—harpy or intruder—that dared to breach the petrified tree's treasure chamber.

Recently, however, an intruder arrived unnoticed in the demiplane. This planar traveler, called a marrash, discovered the tree and its undead harpy inhabitants. The marrash brought the harpies under its sway by killing their tribal leader and did so without alerting the necronaut. Kizhaam the marrash recognized the value of the magic treasure that the necronaut guarded but chose to leave it alone and focus on his own plans rather than risk the powerful undead abomination's ire.

Firmly ensconced in his new floating fortress, Kizhaam has trained the undead harpies to raid the rare traveler who enters the Tomb of the Thaalud. In addition, by having the undead harpies perch upon the tree's limbs and beat their wings in unison, the marrash

USING MARAUDERS OF THE PLAGUE TREE

"The Plague Tree" can be used as a supplemental encounter area with the FORGOTTEN REALMS adventure *Anauroch: The Sundering of the World*. This encounter takes place as the PCs explore the Tomb of the Thaalud in Chapter 4 of the adventure and occurs immediately following the recovery of the *Chalice of Amaunator* in tactical encounter T4. The PCs are still in Askilion's Tower when the initial encounter occurs. Feel free to allow a few moments for the party to rest and recover hit points before proceeding with the encounter, but do not allow them to actually leave the ruined fortress of Askilion's Tower before springing the arrival of the Plague Tree on them.

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can guide the tree in its floating course through the air of the tomb. His goal when doing this is to plunder the smaller floating fortresses that are not so-well guarded. The harpies continue to follow him both due to his martial prowess and the fact that he has never tried to steal the treasure they guard or asked them to violate the Keeper's original. Though it is bound to happen soon, the Keeper of the Thaal has not yet noticed these minor depredations within his realm.

In the course of his activities in the tomb, Kizhaam also captured a mindless undead creature called a plague spewer and trapped it in the lower areas of the petrified tree. The disease-breeding marrash hit upon an idea with the plague spewer under his control. The marrash now has the plague spewer fermenting a new strain of the marrash filth disease combined with the creature's own inherent plague and is arming his harpy-wight servitors with plague-ridden arrows. He plans, when the time is right, to have the harpies maneuver the floating tree out through one of the Keeper's many spontaneous *gates*. Once free, he wants to set up his own band of plague-spreading raiders to prey upon Faerûnian caravan, using the petrified tree as his base of operations. He knows he'll eventually have to figure out some way to deal with the unknowing necronaut, but for now he just leaves it alone, trapped as it is in the bowels of the tree.

ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

In "The Plague Tree," the party finds itself attacked by unusual undead harpies. After they defeat the initial group, they can enter the Plague Tree, the source of the attack, and deal with its denizens. If they persist, they eventually face the marrash Kizhaam, a plague spewer, and possibly even the necronaut.

COMING OF THE PLAGUE TREE (EL 16)

As mentioned above, this encounter occurs while the PCs are still in Askilion's Tower after having recovered the *Chalice of Amaunator*. The undead harpy scouts of Kizhaam spotted the PCs as they entered the Tomb of the Thaalud and entered Askilion's Tower. At his direction, they have manned their perches on the tree's petrified limbs and flapped their wings to guide the Plague Tree over to Askilion's Tower. The marauders of the Plague Tree have arrived, and the PCs are their next victims.

When the PCs are ready leave the area after getting the chalice, read the following:

The magic chalice firmly in hand, you prepare to leave the crumbling edifice that once sheltered it. However, the grayish light that suffuses the massive vault is suddenly dimmed by a shadow. In this murky twilight a strange sound comes to you—the sound of discordant drumming, like a heavy rain falling on the pile of tumbled stones outside. After this, the softer pattering of thousands of tiny feet and a growing, barely audible squealing comes to your ears. A noxious odor of filth and death suddenly permeates the entire tower.

While the PCs were in Askilion's Tower, the plague harpies positioned the Plague Tree directly above it, with its lower roots only 20 feet above the topmost turret of the tower. After leaving the tree floating in place, Kizhaam's group of marauders swoops in to attack.

Tactical Encounter: Coming of the Plague Tree (page 8).

Development: After ordering the Plague Tree into position above Askilion's Tower, Kizhaam returned to his forge to continue his work, assuming his harpy marauders would have an easy time of destroying any survivors in the tower. As a result, the Plague Tree floats in place next to the tower for 10 minutes before Kizhaam realizes something is amiss and emerges to investigate. This gives the PCs plenty of time to destroy the initial wave of harpy marauders and enter the Plague Tree for a little raid of their own.

STRUCTURE OF THE PLAGUE TREE

As mentioned, the Plague Tree was created from the petrified body of a type of elder treant called an arakhor. Before being slain and reanimated by the Keeper of the Thaal, the harpies had discovered the tree and hollowed out much of its interior to create chambers and six different levels. Now in the Tomb of the Thaalud, the tree floats freely in a nearly vertical position—only about 3 degrees off vertical (not enough to create higher ground combat bonuses for creatures on the higher side).

The thick base of the tree is capped by a mass of stony roots that extend downward 80 feet and stretch outward a total of 160 feet in diameter from where the tree was torn from the ground whole. The tree itself stands 160 feet high from its base to the top where its trunk has broken off in a ragged stump. Limbs protrude from the trunk at intervals where shown on the map, and numerous broken stumps exist where other limbs have broken off over the years, creating a rough surface conducive to climbing.

Walls, Floors, Ceilings: The trunk, inner walls, floors, and ceilings of the Plague Tree are all made from

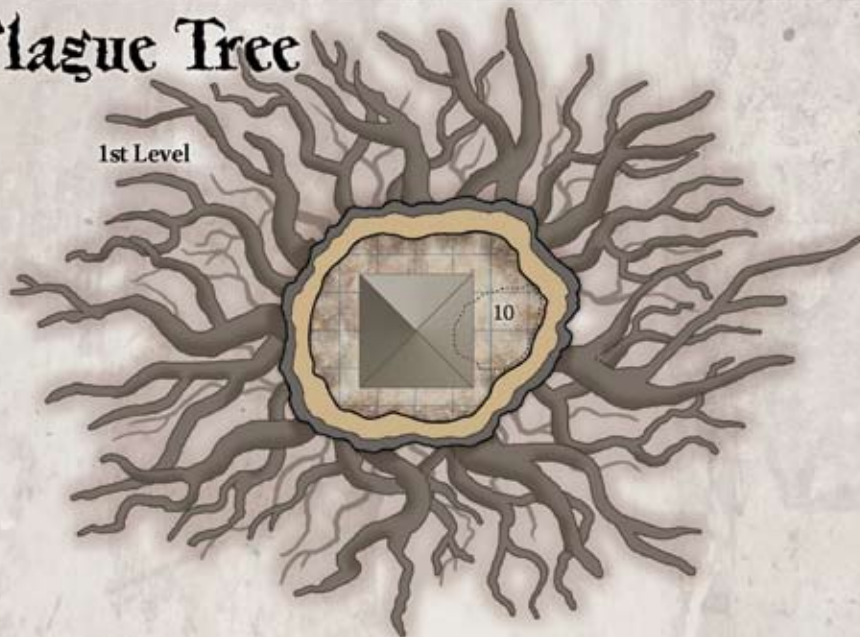
Plague Tree

North



□ : 10 feet

1st Level



2nd Level



3rd Level



4th Level



5th Level



6th Level



stone carved directly from the arakhor's petrified body. The exterior of the trunk ranges from 2 to 15 feet thick. Interior walls and floors are 2 feet thick. The different levels of the tree are connected by holes that have been smashed through the flooring to create easy access for winged creatures such as the harpies.

Walls, Floors, and Ceilings: 2–15 feet thick; AC 6; hardness 8; hp 180 per foot of thickness; break DC 50 per 3 feet of thickness; Climb DC 22 (interior) or DC 15 (exterior).

Ceiling Height: Ceilings are typically 20 feet high unless otherwise mentioned.

Doors: The doors within the Plague Tree are crudely constructed from ancient wood that has dried and hardened to an almost stony texture. They are 8 feet tall and are 3 feet wide. They do not have locks or bars.

Walls, Floors, and Ceilings: 2 feet thick; AC 6; hardness 5; hp 20; break DC 23.

Illumination: Unless otherwise noted, there are no light sources within the Plague Tree.

P1. Harpy Aerie

The top of this great petrified tree ends at a jagged stump where the upper reaches broke away long ago. Revealed by this break is a hollow 20 feet deep and floored in stone carved from the tree's petrified heartwood. A pair of stone columns rise 15 feet from this floor, each set with a number of stone-carved perches. In addition, a number of ledges and perches have been hewn into the walls of this hollow. Several articles composed of sticks and twine hang from these perches. Everything in this area is covered in dark stains and broken, half-decayed feathers.

The hollow top of the Plague Tree served as the primary nesting area for the harpies and continues to serve as the abode of the plague harpies. The hanging articles are constructed of feathers and small sticks, and they are tied with bits of twine and gut. These tribal fetishes of the harpies have no value to the PCs.

There is no access to the interior of the Plague Tree from this area.

P2. Guarded Entrance (EL 14)

The interior of this room is covered in old filth and the rotten remains of ancient, molted feathers. Three 10-foot-high openings look out from the sides of the chamber. A semicircular hole pierces the center of the chamber's floor and leads deeper into the tree. It is surrounded by a low stone railing.

This chamber provides an entrance to the tree's interior. The harpies always maintain a guard here. Anyone

entering this area can make a DC 30 Listen check to see if she hears the faint ring of metal on metal coming from area P7.

Tactical Encounter: Guarded Entrance (page 10).

P3. Guardroom

This chamber once served as the guardroom to the harpy leader's lair. It is empty except for the decomposing corpses of two plague harpies, both riddled by arrows. These were the leader and one of her guards—Kizhaam killed them when he arrived at the Plague Tree. Nothing else is of interest here.

P4. Leader's Quarters

This room serves as the quarters for Kizhaam, though he is rarely found here. The only signs of habitation in this chamber are a worn bedroll and a small wooden plate and cup where Kizhaam takes his meals.

Treasure: Hidden beneath the bedroll is a leather pouch that holds some of the marrash's treasure. It contains 45 pp and three moonbars (pearly, opaque gemstones) stolen from a Tarig trader in the desert of Anauroch. They are worth 1,000 gp each.

P5. Fletching Storage

An opening has been cut through the ceiling of this chamber. A door exits through one wall. In the center of the room are two burlap sacks.

The sacks hold colorful feathers taken from the arrowhawks in area P6. Kizhaam uses the feathers to create the fletching for his plague arrows.

A successful DC 25 Listen check while in this room allows PCs to hear Kizhaam working in area P7.

P6. Rookery

Opening the door to this chamber releases a cacophony of sound and the pungent stench of guano. The source of both is readily apparent from the crude wooden cages that hang from hooks in the walls and hold small, colorfully feathered creatures. A hole opens in the chamber's floor.

Held captive in three bird cages are four arrowhawk chicks that were captured by Kizhaam a few months ago. These Tiny creatures have only 2 hit points and no attacks, having not yet developed into their juvenile forms—the marrash intends to destroy them once they become dangerous. Currently, Kizhaam plucks feathers

from them to use in his fletching. If released, these harmless creatures flap away as quickly as possible.

A successful DC 20 Listen check while in this room allows PCs to hear Kizhaam working in area P7.

P7. Plague Forge (EL 18)

Hot air fills this chamber, and a large hearth hewn into the stone of the tree glows red with coals. Before it stands an anvil, beside which are placed a pair of buckets. Beyond the buckets is a coal-filled stone bin partially carved out of the floor.

Kizhaam converted this chamber into a smithy, where he crafts infectious arrows.

Tactical Encounter: Plague Forge (page 12).

P8. Plague Incubator

The stench of corruption and death fills this chamber. Slumped against one wall is the bound and bloated corpse of an ogre, its skin stretched taut and blackened with decomposition. Protruding from its flank are numerous small wooden shafts, like pins in a pin cushion. A door stands open in one wall, and a hole gapes in the ceiling.

Kizhaam captured this ogre and infected it with the virulent plague he has been engineering. The ogre died in due time, and its corpse has since become a breeding ground for the new disease. Kizhaam pierces it with his newly completed arrows, which are then left for a tenday in order to become thoroughly saturated with the virulent plague. Twelve infected arrows currently protrude from its flank. These are safe to handle unless

they cause injury, but touching the corpse itself causes exposure to the plague.

A successful DC 10 Listen check while in this room allows PCs to hear Kizhaam working in area P7.

Virulent Plague: Supernatural disease—contact or injury, Fortitude DC 23, incubation period 1d3 rounds; damage 2d4 Dex and 2d4 Con. Each day that the disease lasts, the infected creature must also succeed at a second DC 23 Fortitude save, or 1 point each of that day's Dexterity and Constitution damage becomes drain instead.

P9. Contagion's Source (EL 14)

This chamber is simply a hollow in the tree with a hole in the floor and a hole in the ceiling. Other than the stench of corruption and sickness, it is empty of all save its monstrous occupants.


Tactical Encounter: Contagion's Source (page 14).

P10. Guardian of the Tree (EL 16)

This dark chamber appears to occupy the entire base of this petrified tree in a vast area 60 feet high. The hole in the ceiling provides its only entrance. A strange, titanic pyramid constructed of some substance that is difficult to discern in the dim light dominates the center of the chamber. Less identifiable are a number of glyphs and sigils that appear to have been carved into the walls of the chamber.

This chamber holds the original master of the Plague Tree when the Keeper of the Thaal first transplanted it into the Tomb of the Thaalud. The chamber is





now avoided due to the danger of its inhabitant, who otherwise remains obviously unaware if left alone. The sigils on the walls were made by the Keeper of the Thaal and are identifiable with a successful DC 20 Knowledge (arcana) check as various symbols used in the necromantic arts. They were involved in the creation of the necronaut but hold no further power.

Tactical Encounter: Guardian of the Tree (page 16).

CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

Once the PCs have dealt with the initial incursion of plague harpy raiders and either retreated or explored the depths of the Plague Tree, they are free to leave the Tomb of the Thaalud as described on page 105 of *Anauroch: The Sundering of the World*, possibly with a powerful new magic item in tow. The encounter with the Plague Tree serves as nothing more than a side trek during the course of the greater adventure. However, several plot seeds and unanswered questions have been revealed in “The Plague Tree” that you can expand upon for use in your own campaign if you wish. Perhaps Kizhaam is merely a single part of a greater planar plot to spread

disease in an effort to weaken the defenses of Faerûn for a planar invasion. Maybe Talona is behind his actions, seeking to strengthen her Material Plane church with some extraplanar help. It could even be somehow tied in with Shar’s overarching plot for mastery of Faerûn and its magic. How you choose to incorporate this side trek into your greater campaign, if at all, is entirely up to you.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Greg A. Vaughan's previous works include Anauroch: The Sundering of the World, Drow of the Underdark, and several adventures for DUNGEON Magazine and Paizo's Pathfinder and GameMastery lines. He lives in Oklahoma.

COMING OF THE PLAGUE TREE

Encounter Level 16

SETUP

Seven plague harpies and three plague rat swarms participate in this raid. The harpies carry the rat swarms in large fishing nets held between two harpies apiece. They first dropped them on Askilion's Tower (killing some of the rats but not an appreciable number), which freed the rats from the nets to surge into the tower to attack the PCs. (This is what made the sounds initially heard by the PCs.) Then the harpies start attacking.

This battle does not include its own tactical encounter map. Instead use tactical encounter T4 from page 110 of *Anauroch: Sundering of the World*, placing the creatures as indicated below. When the swarm first enters Askilion's Tower, read:

The source of the sound becomes apparent as putrid swarms of diseased rodents come pouring in through the entrance of the tower and down through the arrow slits. Flying in behind them are flapping caricatures of once-living creatures, their eyes now glowing with feral hate.

7 PLAGUE HARPIES

CR 10

MM 150, BV 185
hp 67 each (12 HD)

Harpy corpse creature^{BV} ranger 5
LE Medium undead
Init +2; **Senses** Listen +12, Spot +8
Languages Common

AC 13, touch 12, flat-footed 13; Dodge (+2 Dex, +1 armor, +2 natural)

Immune ability damage (Str, Dex, Con), ability drain, critical hits, death effects, disease, energy drain, exhaustion, fatigue, mind-affecting effects, nonlethal damage, paralysis, poison, sleep, stunning, any effect that requires a Fortitude save (unless the effect also works on objects or is harmless), death from massive damage

Fort +7, **Ref** +11, **Will** +7

Speed 20 ft. (4 squares), fly 80 ft. (clumsy); Flyby Attack

Melee slam +14 (1d6+2) or
2 claws +14 (1d3+1) or

Ranged +1 *composite longbow* (Str +2) +16/+11/+6 (1d8+3/×3 plus virulent plague) or
+1 *composite longbow* (Str +2) +14/+14/+9/+4

(1d8+3/×3 plus virulent plague) with Rapid Shot

Base Atk +12; **Grp** +14

Atk Options Blind-Fight, favored enemy humans +4, favored enemy elves +2, virulent plague

Combat Gear 10 arrows infected with virulent plague
Ranger Spells Prepared (CL 2nd):

1st—*magic fang*

Abilities Str 14, Dex 15, Con —, Int 7, Wis 12, Cha 17
SQ undead traits

Feats Blind-Fight, Dodge, Endurance^B, Flyby Attack, Persuasive, Rapid Shot^B, Track^B, Weapon Focus (composite longbow)

Skills Bluff +11, Hide +7, Intimidate +7, Listen +12, Move Silently +7, Perform (oratory) +5, Spot +8

Possessions +1 *composite longbow* (+2 Str), *bracers of armor* +1, large net

Virulent Plague (Su) The arrows of the harpy have been created by Kizhaam and are contaminated with the special plague strain he has engineered. Supernatural disease—injury, Fortitude DC 23, incubation period 1d3 rounds; damage 2d4 Dex and 2d4 Con. Each day that the disease lasts, the infected creature must also succeed on a second DC 23 Fortitude save, or 1 point each of that day's Dexterity and Constitution damage becomes drain instead.

3 PLAGUE RAT SWARMS

CR 3

MM 239
hp 13 each (4 HD)

NE Tiny animal (swarm)

Init +2; **Senses** low-light vision, scent; Listen +6, Spot +7

Languages —

AC 14, touch 14, flat-footed 12 (+2 size, +2 Dex)

Immune critical hits, flanking, targeted spells

Resist half damage from slashing and piercing

Fort +4, **Ref** +6, **Will** +2

Weakness vulnerability to area spells

Speed 15 ft. (3 squares), climb 15 ft.

Melee swarm (1d6 plus virulent plague)

Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 0 ft.

Base Atk +3; **Grp** —

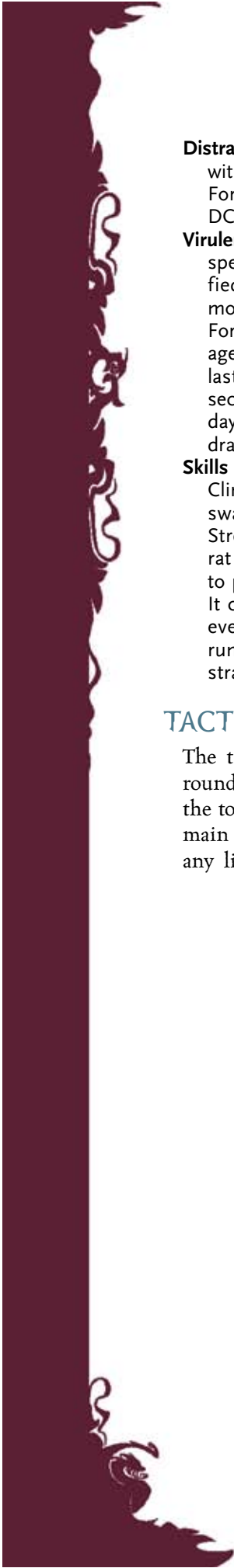
Atk Options distraction, virulent plague

Abilities Str 2, Dex 15, Con 10, Int 2, Wis 12, Cha 2

SQ swarm traits

Feats Alertness, Weapon Finesse

Skills Balance +10, Climb +10, Hide +14, Listen +6, Move Silently +6, Spot +7, Swim +10



Distraction (Ex) Any living creature that begins its turn with a swarm in its square must succeed on a DC 12 Fortitude save or be nauseated for 1 round. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Virulent Plague (Su) The natural plague of the plague spewer that created the plague rats has been modified due to the tampering of Kizhaam, creating a more virulent strain. Supernatural disease—injury, Fortitude DC 23, incubation period 1d3 rounds; damage 2d4 Dex and 2d4 Con. Each day that the disease lasts, the infected creature must also succeed on a second DC 23 Fortitude save, or 1 point each of that day's Dexterity and Constitution damage becomes drain instead.

Skills A rat swarm can always choose to take 10 on all Climb checks, even if rushed or threatened. A rat swarm uses its Dexterity modifier instead of its Strength modifier for Climb and Swim checks. A rat swarm has a +8 racial bonus on any Swim check to perform some special action or avoid a hazard. It can always choose to take 10 on a Swim check, even if distracted or endangered. It can use the run action while swimming, provided it swims in a straight line.

TACTICS

The three rat swarms are dumped in the surprise round and charge into the tower, one swarm through the tower's arrow slits and the other two through its main entrance in the next round. They seek to attack any living creatures and tear them apart, ignoring

undead creatures such as the harpies (even if a harpy is in a square occupied by the swarm). The harpies cast *magic fang* on their slam attacks, and five plague harpies follow the swarms, swooping in 1 round behind them and attempting to take up perches on the stairs and balconies out of the PCs' immediate reach. They use their plague-infected arrows as much as possible, and they resort to their slam attacks only if cornered or attacked by flying characters. The last two harpies remain on guard outside Askilion's Tower where they attack fleeing or victorious PCs from a distance. Neither the plague harpies nor the plague rat swarms flee from battle.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

The area has the following features.

Niches: About 4 feet above the floor are several openings in the walls. These form niches 5 feet high and 5 feet deep. Climbing into a niche requires a move action or a DC 16 Climb check. Anyone inside a niche has cover from those outside (+4 bonus to AC and +2 bonus on Reflex saves) and receives a +1 bonus on melee attack rolls due to higher ground. Creatures larger than Medium must squeeze to enter a niche.

GUARDED ENTRANCE

Encounter Level 14

SETUP

Place the plague harpies on the map as indicated only when they are in sight of the PCs. For instance, if the PCs approach from the south, the plague harpy on the tree limb would be visible while the others may not. When the PCs first see a plague harpy, read:

The creature's sallow skin is gray and slack in death, and the ruined tatters of rotten feathers cling to her wings. Her face is a hideous mockery of femininity—her eyes gleam with a burning malevolence over a mouth of jagged, broken fangs. Her skill with a bow seems undiminished with death as she nocks an arrow to the string with practiced ease.

TACTICS

These harpies were left behind on guard duty while the others participated in the raid. The one on the tree limb is the only one being particularly watchful. The others wait within, only occasionally glancing out through the holes in the trunk. If intruders are spotted, they flap up to engage them at a distance with their bows. If forced into melee combat, they retreat to the stone railing around the entrance to area P5 to both guard the entrance into the tower and gain the benefits of fighting from higher ground.

4 PLAGUE HARPIES

MM 150, BV 185
hp 67 each (12 HD)

Harpy corpse creature[BV] ranger 5
LE Medium undead
Init +2; **Senses** Listen +12, Spot +8
Languages Common

AC 13, touch 12, flat-footed 13; Dodge
(+2 Dex, +1 armor, +2 natural)

CR 10

Immune ability damage (Str, Dex, Con), ability drain, critical hits, death effects, disease, energy drain, exhaustion, fatigue, mind-affecting effects, nonlethal damage, paralysis, poison, sleep, stunning, any effect that requires a Fortitude save (unless the effect also works on objects or is harmless), death from massive damage

Fort +7, **Ref** +11, **Will** +7

Speed 20 ft. (4 squares), fly 80 ft. (clumsy); Flyby Attack

Melee slam +14 (1d6+2) or
2 claws +14 (1d3+1) or

Ranged +1 composite longbow (Str +2) +16/+11/+6
(1d8+3/×3 plus virulent plague) or
+1 composite longbow (Str +2) +14/+14/+9/+4
(1d8+3/×3 plus virulent plague) with Rapid Shot

Base Atk +12; **Grp** +14

Atk Options Blind-Fight, favored enemy humans +4, favored enemy elves +2, virulent plague

Combat Gear 10 arrows infected with virulent plague

Ranger Spells Prepared (CL 2nd):

1st—*magic fang*

Abilities Str 14, Dex 15, Con —, Int 7, Wis 12, Cha 17

SQ undead traits

Feats Blind-Fight, Dodge, Endurance^B, Flyby Attack, Persuasive, Rapid Shot^B, Track^B, Weapon Focus (composite longbow)

Skills Bluff +11, Hide +7, Intimidate +7, Listen +12, Move Silently +7, Perform (oratory) +5, Spot +8

Possessions +1 composite longbow (+2 Str), bracers of armor +1, large net

Virulent Plague (Su) The arrows of the harpy have been created by Kizhaam and are contaminated with the special plague strain he has engineered. Supernatural disease—injury, Fortitude DC 23, incubation period 1d3 rounds; damage 2d4 Dex and 2d4 Con. Each day that the disease lasts, the infected creature must also succeed on a second DC 23 Fortitude save, or 1 point each of that day's Dexterity and Constitution damage becomes drain instead.

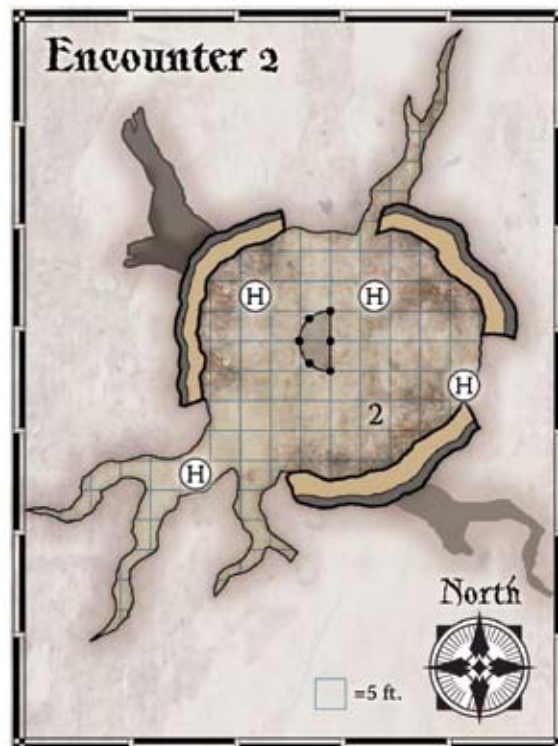
FEATURES OF THE AREA

The area has the following features.

Hole in Floor: A semicircular hole has been cut through the floor of this chamber. It is 20 feet to the floor of area P5 below.

Stone Railing: A 4-foot-high stone banister surrounds the hole in the floor. It is 6 inches wide, and a creature can hop up on it with a DC 10 Jump check, though doing so counts as 10 feet of movement. Anyone standing on the rail gains the benefits of +1 on melee attack rolls for higher ground but must make a DC 15 Balance check to keep from falling unless he has talons or claws with which to grip it (such as the plague harpies). It provides no cover.

Petrified Limbs: Tree limbs protrude from the side of the petrified tree's trunk, providing purchase and room to stand, though standing requires a DC 5 Balance check due to the rough and irregular surface unless one has claws or talons with which to grip them. A creature cannot charge or run on the surface of these branches.



PLAGUE FORGE

Encounter Level 18

SETUP

Place the marrash on the map as indicated. When the PCs first catch sight of Kizhaam, read:

Standing before the anvil with hammer and tongs in hand is strange creature, almost harpylike in appearance. It has a head that resembles a hyena, two wings, and taloned feet like a great raptor. A massive bow is slung over one of its shoulders.

KIZHAAM

CR 18

MM2 145, CW 68
hp 109 (20 HD)

Male marrash cleric (Talona) 3/order of the bow initiate 10
LE Medium outsider (evil, extraplanar, lawful)

Init +4, **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., scent; Listen +11,
Spot +11

Languages Common, Infernal

AC 29, touch 17, flat-footed 25; Dodge, Mobility
(+4 Dex, +6 armor, +3 deflection, +6 natural)

Fort +12, **Ref** +17, **Will** +16

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares), fly 70 ft. (good); Shot on the Run

Melee 2 claws +20 (1d4+1) and
bite +15 (1d6)

Ranged +3 *human bane composite longbow*
+25/+20/+15/+10 (1d8+2/×3 plus virulent plague) or
+3 *human bane composite longbow* +23/+23/+18/+13/+8
(1d8+2/×3 plus virulent plague) with Rapid Shot

Base Atk +19; **Grp** +20

Atk Options Point Blank Shot, Precise Shot, Sharp-
Shooting^{CW}, Shot on the Run, close combat shot,
double bowfire, extended precision, ranged preci-
sion +5d8, smite 1/day (+4 attack/+3 damage)

Special Actions rebuke undead 5/day (+2, 2d6+5, 3rd),
pain touch 1/day, spontaneous casting (*inflict* spells),
taklif arrow, virulent plague

Combat Gear *ring of blinking*, 39 arrows infected with
virulent plague, taklif arrow, 2 *potions of cure light*
wounds

Cleric Spells Prepared (CL 3rd):

2nd—*bear's endurance*^D, *curse of ill fortune*^{MAG} (DC
13)

1st—*bane*^D (DC 12), *cure light wounds*, *divine favor*,
shield of faith

0—*create water*, *detect magic*, *purify food and drink*,
virtue

D: Domain spell. Deity: Talona. *Domains*: Destruction,
Suffering

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 10th):

At will—*protection from arrows*

Abilities Str 13, Dex 18, Con 13, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 14
SQ outsider traits

Feats Dodge, Greater Weapon Focus (composite
longbow)^B, Mobility, Point Blank Shot, Precise Shot,
Rapid Shot, Sharp-Shooting^{B, CW}, Shot on the Run,
Weapon Focus (composite longbow)

Skills Balance +15, Craft (bowmaking) +11, Craft (weap-
onsmithing) +10, Intimidate +2, Jump +12, Knowledge
(religion) +3, Knowledge (the planes) +3, Listen +11,
Move Silently +14, Search +10, Spot +11, Survival +1
(+3 following tracks, on other planes), Tumble +15

Possessions +2 *chain shirt of improved silent moves*, +3
human bane composite longbow (+1 Str), 2 quivers,
ring of protection +3

Close Combat Shot (Ex) Kizhaam can attack with a
ranged weapon while in a threatened square and not
provoke an attack of opportunity.

Double Bowfire (Ex) In battle, a flying marrash grips its
composite longbow with its taloned feet and draws
the string with both hands. This unusual technique
allows it to fire two arrows simultaneously at highest
attack bonus along with its secondary shots as part
of a full attack action.

Extended Precision (Su) Kizhaam's sense and feel for
"the shot" is so attuned that he may make ranged
precision attacks at a range of up to 60 feet.

Ranged Precision (Ex) As a standard action, Kizhaam
may make a single precisely aimed attack with his
composite longbow, dealing an extra 5d8 points of
damage if the attack hits. When making a ranged pre-
cision attack, Kizhaam must be within 30 feet of his
target. This attack works only against living creatures
with a discernable anatomy. Any creature that is im-
mune to critical hits (including undead, constructs,
oozes, plants, and incorporeal creatures) is not vul-
nerable to a ranged precision attack, and any item or
ability that protects a creature from critical hits also
protects a creature from the extra damage. Unlike a
rogue's sneak attack, Kizhaam's target does not have
to be flat-footed or denied its Dexterity bonus. Treat
the ranged precision attack as a sneak attack in all
other ways.

Pain Touch (Sp) Once per day Kizhaam, as a cleric
with the Suffering domain, can deliver a *pain touch*
on a successful melee touch attack against a living
creature. On a hit, his touch bestows a -2 penalty
to Strength and Dexterity to the target for 1 minute.
Creatures that are immune to critical hits are also
immune to this effect.

Taklif Arrow (Su) Any creature hit by Kizhaam's taklif arrow must succeed on a DC 23 Fortitude save or contract virulent plague like with his normal arrows. However, a creature that fails any saving throw after its initial infection dies instantly and cannot be raised or resurrected just as if it had the outsider type. The corpse rises as a new marrash 1d6 days later.

Virulent Plague (Su) Kizhaam's arrows have been contaminated with a special plague strain he has engineered by combining his extraplanar filth fever with the plague of the plague spewer. Supernatural disease—injury, Fortitude DC 23, incubation period 1d3 rounds; damage 2d4 Dex and 2d4 Con. Each day that the disease lasts, the infected creature must also succeed at a second DC 23 Fortitude save, or 1 point each of that day's Dexterity and Constitution damage becomes drain instead.

TACTICS

Kizhaam is working at the forge crafting more infected arrows for his undead minions. When the PCs enter, he immediately drops his hammer. He activates his *ring of blinking* and steps through the nearest wall (careful to avoid walking through the fire of the forge). Once outside the Plague Tree, he immediately flies up to the top edge of area P1 and keeps watch below while casting *bear's endurance*, *shield of faith*, and *divine favor* on himself in that order. Then he rallies any surviving plague harpies that may still be outside. Once that is done, he then ends his *blinking* and readies an action to fire a precision shot with his taklif arrow at the first PC to emerge into view. When engaged in combat, he flies to remain out of melee range and uses Shot on the Run in order to be within 60 feet to make precision shots against likely targets. He does not pursue PCs into the tower, preferring to let them deal with the undead within and picking them off when they emerge.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

The area has the following features.

Forge Hearth: A hearth has been carved into the stone of the wall with a crevice at the back serving as its exhaust

SHARP-SHOOTING [GENERAL]

Your skill with ranged weapons lets you score hits others miss due to an opponent's cover.

Prerequisites: Point Blank Shot, Precise Shot, base attack bonus +3

Benefit: Your targets receive only a +2 bonus to Armor Class due to cover. This feat has no effect against foes with no cover or total cover.

Normal: Cover normally gives a +4 bonus to AC.

Special: A fighter may select Sharp-Shooting as one of his fighter bonus feats.

port. A smokeless fire of glowing coals burns in the hearth with three bars of pig iron being heated within it. Anyone touching the coals in the forge takes 3d6 points of fire damage per round. Anyone falling into the forge itself takes 10d6 points of fire damage per round. The pig iron bars are equal in size to a crowbar and are red hot at the tips. They can be wielded as clubs that inflict an additional 1d6 points of fire damage on a hit or melee touch, but the wielder takes 1 point of fire damage each round while holding one unless wearing gloves or gauntlets.

Anvil: This anvil stands before the forge hearth and is bolted to the floor. Consider the anvil a "low obstacle" during the combat. A low obstacle provides cover (+4 bonus to AC, +2 bonus on attack rolls), but only to creatures within 30 feet (6 squares) of it. The attacker can ignore the cover if he's closer to the obstacle than his target.

Rough Walls: Portions of the walls are rough hewn and form columns (DC 10 Climb check).

Hole in Floor: A hole has been cut through the floor of this chamber. It is 20 feet to the floor of area P9 below.

Buckets and Bin: Two buckets hold water for cooling the metal being worked at the forge. A stone bin holds coal for firing the forge. Squares containing these objects are considered difficult terrain, increasing the DC on Balance and Tumble checks by 2.



CONTAGION'S SOURCE

Encounter Level 14

SETUP

Place the advanced plague spewer and rat swarms on the map as shown.

When the PCs first see the plague spewer, read:

The creature is a huge abomination. It stands 22 feet tall and is covered in contorted, quivering lumps. Its gnarled features and pustulant flesh boldly proclaim the disease-ridden pestilence it bears. The stumps of a few broken arrow shafts protrude from its hide.

ADVANCED PLAGUE SPEWER

CR 14

MM3 125

hp 208 (32 HD); DR 10/slashing

NE Huge undead

Init +1, Senses darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +1, Spot +1

Languages —

AC 25, touch 9, flat-footed 24

(-2 size, +1 Dex, +16 natural)

Immune ability damage (Str, Dex, Con), ability drain, critical hits, death effects, disease, energy drain, exhaustion, fatigue, mind-affecting effects, nonlethal damage, paralysis, poison, sleep, stunning, any effect that requires a Fortitude save (unless the effect also works on objects or is harmless), death from massive damage

Fort +10, Ref +11, Will +19

Speed 40 ft. (8 squares)

Melee 2 slams +24 (1d8+10 plus virulent plague)

Space 15 ft.; Reach 15 ft.

Base Atk +16; Grp +34

Special Actions virulent plague, vomit plague rat swarm

Abilities Str 31, Dex 13, Con —, Int —, Wis 12, Cha 16

SQ undead traits

Feats —

Skills Listen +1, Spot +1

Virulent Plague (Su) The natural plague of the plague spewer has been modified due to the tampering of Kizhaam. Supernatural disease—slam, Fortitude DC 29, incubation period 1d3 rounds; damage 2d4 Dex and 2d4 Con. Each day that the disease lasts, the infected creature must also succeed at a second DC 29 Fortitude save, or 1 point each of that day's Dexterity and Constitution damage becomes drain instead.

Vomit Plague Rat Swarm (Su) As a full-round action,

the plague spewer can spew forth a swarm of plague rats. It can do this four times per day.

2 PLAGUE RAT SWARMS

CR 3

MM 239

hp 13 each (4 HD)

NE Tiny animal (swarm)

Init +2; Senses low-light vision, scent; Listen +6, Spot +7

Languages —

AC 14, touch 14, flat-footed 12

(+2 size, +2 Dex)

Immune critical hits, flanking, targeted spells

Resist half damage from slashing and piercing

Fort +4, Ref +6, Will +2

Weakness vulnerability to area spells

Speed 15 ft. (3 squares), climb 15 ft.

Melee swarm (1d6 plus virulent plague)

Space 10 ft.; Reach 0 ft.

Base Atk +3; Grp —

Atk Options distraction, virulent plague

Abilities Str 2, Dex 15, Con 10, Int 2, Wis 12, Cha 2

SQ swarm traits

Feats Alertness, Weapon Finesse

Skills Balance +10, Climb +10, Hide +14, Listen +6,

Move Silently +6, Spot +7, Swim +10

Distraction (Ex) Any living creature that begins its turn with a swarm in its square must succeed on a DC 12 Fortitude save or be nauseated for 1 round. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Virulent Plague (Su) The natural plague of the plague spewer that created the plague rats has been modified due to the tampering of Kizhaam, creating a more virulent strain. Supernatural disease—injury, Fortitude DC 23, incubation period 1d3 rounds; damage 2d4 Dex and 2d4 Con. Each day that the disease lasts, the infected creature must also succeed on a second DC 23 Fortitude save, or 1 point each of that day's Dexterity and Constitution damage becomes drain instead.

Skills A rat swarm can always choose to take 10 on all Climb checks, even if rushed or threatened. A rat swarm uses its Dexterity modifier instead of its Strength modifier for Climb and Swim checks. A rat swarm has a +8 racial bonus on any Swim check to perform some special action or avoid a hazard. It can always choose to take 10 on a Swim check, even if distracted or endangered. It can use the run action while swimming, provided it swims in a straight line.

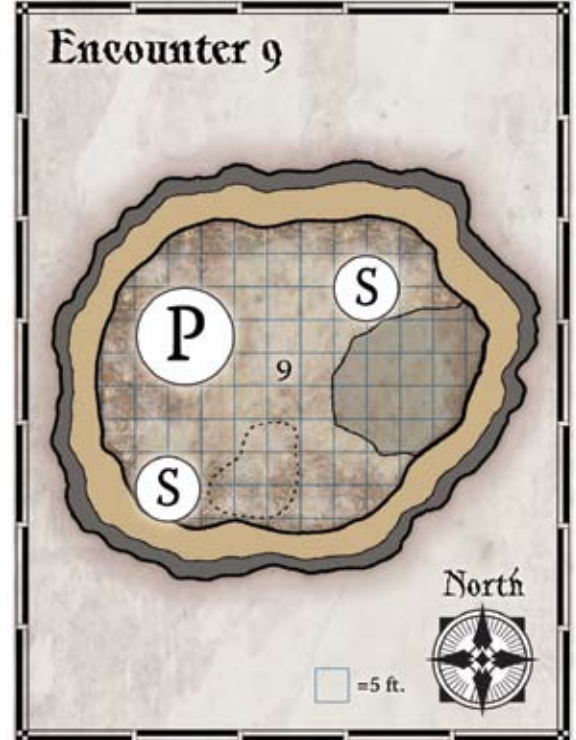
TACTICS

The plague spewer is a mindless killer that barely tolerates the presence of Kizhaam and the harpies, though it makes no overt attacks when they lower their nets to harvest its rat swarms. It has created only two rat swarms today (the two swarms that are present), and upon sighting the PCs it vomits forth a third. It attacks with abandon and attempts to bull rush anyone that stands between it and the hole in the floor into the embrace of the necronaut below. The rat swarms attack all targets equally, even pursuing through the hole if anyone should fall through, but they ignore the plague spewer itself. If the PCs cluster into a single area, the swarms can overlap each other, each causing damage and distraction normally to anyone within its area. If the swarms are destroyed or the plague spewer is badly injured, it vomits forth its final rat swarm for the day and retreats behind it, using its reach to attack the PCs from beyond the swarm.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

The area has the following features.

Hole in Floor: A hole has been cut through the floor of this chamber. It is 60 feet to the floor of area P10 below.



GUARDIAN OF THE TREE

Encounter Level 16

SETUP

Place the necronaut on the map as shown. When the characters get a good look at the necronaut, read:

The center of this high-ceilinged chamber is occupied by a massive pile of bones and corpses over 20 feet high. The outer layer of this pile seems to be composed primarily of the tiny bones and skulls of thousands of rats or other small animals. Partially protruding from this mound of carnage is a sword hilt set with moonstones.

ADVANCED NECRONAUT

CR 16

MM3 108

hp 420 (40 HD); **DR** 15/lawful or magic

CE Gargantuan undead (chaotic, evil, extraplanar)

Init +3; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +41, Spot +41

Languages Infernal

AC 25, touch 5, flat-footed 25
(-4 size, -1 Dex, +20 natural)

Immune ability damage (Str, Dex, Con), ability drain, critical hits, death effects, disease, energy drain, exhaustion, fatigue, mind-affecting effects, nonlethal damage, paralysis, poison, sleep, stunning, any effect that requires a Fortitude save (unless the effect also works on objects or is harmless), death from massive damage

SR 25

Fort +15, **Ref** +12, **Will** +24

Weakness necromantic effects

Speed 50 ft. (10 squares)

Melee* 4 slams +26 (4d6+20/19-20)

*Includes 5-point Power Attack

Space 20 ft.; **Reach** 20 ft.

Base Atk +20; **Grp** +47

Atk Options Awesome Blow, Blind-Fight, Cleave, Combat Reflexes, Great Cleave, Improved Bull Rush, Improved Overrun, Improved Sunder, Power Attack, trample 4d6+22

Special Actions assimilate corpse

Abilities Str 41, Dex 8, Con —, Int 7, Wis 14, Cha 18

SQ undead traits, unholy toughness

Feats Alertness, Awesome Blow, Blind-Fight, Cleave, Combat Reflexes, Great Cleave, Great Fortitude, Improved Bull Rush, Improved Critical (slam), Improved Initiative, Improved Natural Weapon (slam), Improved Overrun, Improved Sunder, Power Attack

Skills Knowledge (the planes) +10, Listen +41, Spot +41, Survival +2 (+4 on other planes)

Necromantic Effects (Su) Necronauts are affected differently by some spells. Because each one is composed of bones and corpses, spells that create undead deal 1d4 points of damage per caster level to a necronaut, up to the maximum given here for each spell: *animate dead*, 10d4; *create undead*, 15d4; *create greater undead*, 20d4.

Trample (Ex) Reflex half DC 45. The save DC is Strength-based.

Assimilate Corpse (Su) A necronaut can, as a move action, add the corpse of an opponent to its body. Once the corpse is added, the necronaut begins assimilating it. This process takes 1 round to run its course and heals some damage to the necronaut, based on the size of the assimilated creature: Small or smaller, 10 points healed; Medium, 30 points; Large, 60 points; Huge, 100 points; Gargantuan, 150 points; or Colossal, 210 points. Once a creature is fully assimilated, it cannot be raised from the dead. Before a creature is fully assimilated, an ally can pull it free with a DC 24 Strength check.

Unholy Toughness (Ex) A necronaut gains a bonus to its hit points equal to its Charisma modifier × its Hit Dice.

TACTICS

The necronaut stands quiescent in this chamber until someone dares to enter or tries to recover the sword it possesses (see Treasure sidebar below). It hides its arms in an attempt to appear as nothing more than a massive pile of bones and corpses (Bluff +9 opposed to a Spot check to determine the truth). If anyone descends to the floor of the chamber, it attempts to trample them with surprise. Otherwise it attacks with surprise as soon as anyone enters its 20-foot reach. It maneuvers underneath the hole in the ceiling to try to prevent any escape attempts or reinforcements once PCs have entered the room. When battle begins, it absorbs the sword back into the interior of its bulk to protect it.

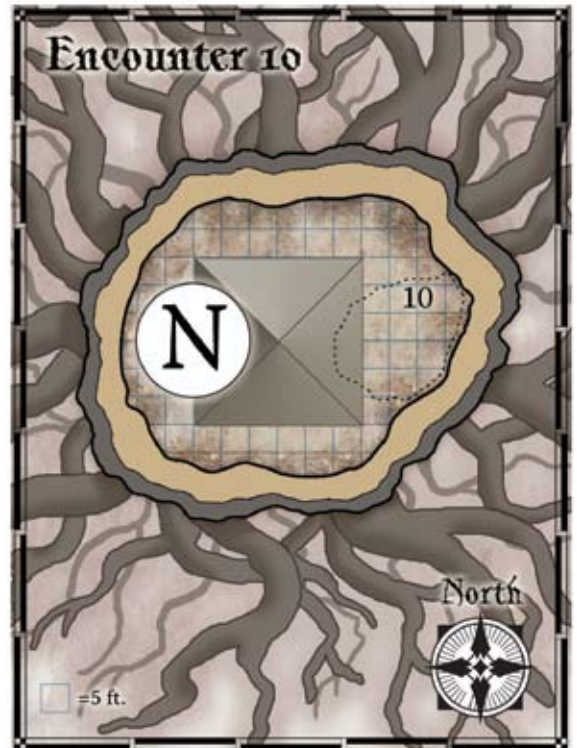
TREASURE

The treasures of the thaalud are stored in the many floating castles around the vault and in the central enclave. The primary treasure of the Plague Tree is the mithral +3 *holy drow bane longsword* known as *One Thousand Broken Dreams* (from *Magic of Faerûn*). It is hidden within the bulk of the necronaut itself and can be found with a DC 20 Search check when the creature is slain and its component parts fall to pieces. If you do not have access to that source, replace the sword with a *holy avenger*.

FEATURES OF THE ROOM

The room has the following features.

Rough Floor: The floor here at the base of the Plague Tree's interior is extremely roughly hewn from the petrified wood. A DC 10 Balance check is required to run or charge across the surface. Failure means the individual can't move in this round. Due to the necronaut's great size and unique body structure, the floor does not impede its movement.



The Best Adventure I Never Wrote...

When we announced online *Dungeon Magazine* earlier this year, we met with many of our freelancers at Gen Con to inform them of our plans and to discuss the future. As part of this conversation, we also proposed a little contest we were interested in hosting, as *Dungeon* makes the transition from 3.5 to 4th Edition—involving the best adventures our freelancers have always wanted to write for 3rd Edition, but never had the chance.

And so here we've come to the best adventures our freelancers never actually wrote... until (potentially) now.

They propose the adventures. We develop the most popular proposal, as voted by the player community, into a complete *Dungeon* adventure.

We want your opinion on which of these adventures you'd most like to see in *Dungeon Magazine*. Following are their brief synopsis and general level range. Each week, we'll ask for your vote on a given set of adventures, with the winner from each set moving ahead in the competition.

Final Results

The votes are in, the final results are here! The ultimate winner in the Best Adventure I Never Wrote contest: *Cross City Race*!

Congratulations to the winner, and we look forward to bringing this adventure to the future pages of *Dungeon Magazine*!

***Cross City Race*: 40.6%**

Moving Day: 30.4%

The Fane of Last Light: 29.0%

Low-Level

Final Winner: *Cross City Race*

The city is alive with talk about a special race: to deliver a letter from one side of the city to the other as quickly as possible. While it started out as a simple competition between message carriers to settle a dispute, it is now open to anyone; a glorious free-for-all of sneakiness, athleticism and brute force, all to claim the prize: a sizeable money pot and a magical item donated by the city treasury to encourage the competition. Low-level.

The Feast

The valiant never taste of death but once. The characters are invited to the tower-like townhouse of the decadent merchant Lord Delius Thad... where an uninvited undead has begun preying on the guests. Low-level.

The Salvagers

The characters are hired to don primitive breathing respirators and descend into the toxic gas filled ruins of Old Gilflode, a lost dwarven city. There, they must track down and capture Gartok and his band of dwarven rebels, before the dwarf launches a revolution that would ultimately expose his small city to the more powerful kingdoms of the sunlit lands. Low-level.

Mid-Level

Week 2 Winner: *Bodyswap*

An ambitious orcish shaman has uncovered a peculiar artifact; one whose crystal allows the exchange of minds from body to body, used by an ancient wizard to prolong his life by stealing bodies. The shaman has a more prosaic but equally greedy use for the staff and decides to set a trap in order to use it for maximum effect. A few choice raids have worked the local people up enough of a frenzy to be willing to hire the characters to protect them. Mid-level.

Dragon Turtle City

The adventure begins in a coastal village whose fish stocks have been mysteriously disappearing, and now boats as well, lost in a mysterious fog. Without their livelihood, the village is starving and impoverished. What they do have, they're willing to offer to brave adventurers to discover and prevent whatever it is that is ruining them. Mid-level.

Hell Farm

Some weeks ago, a stranger came to the Cosdel farm, seeking a meal and a place to stay. He was hard up, or so he seemed, and willing to work to earn his keep, so Cosdel took him in. Now something dreadful indeed has happened to the Cosdel farm, and the locals need a few brave adventurers to find out what. Mid-level.

Week 3 & Week 5 Winner: Moving Day

As long as any of them can remember, the inhabitants of Rhycan's Field have dwelt in the shadow of Talthaeran's Tower; the wizard Talthaeran is long dead, his tower little more than a monument to days long gone. Now, another wizard by the name of Lethara has come forward to claim the tower. She just needs someone to clear Talthaeran's years of accumulated junk out of the tower... and that's where the PCs come in. Mid-level.

Siege of the Heavens

As fate would have it, the characters are traveling to the Tower of Heavens (from *UK4: When a Star Falls*), seeking the wisdom of the sages. Fate, it seems, has conspired to place them in the tower on the night of sudden attack. Mid-level.

Treasure!

This time, it's simple: cash and loot. There's no princess to save or land to rid of evildoers. There's a legendary treasure out there for the taking, and you're just the group of adventuring freebooter treasure hunters to finally track it down. You even have a treasure map to the Vault of Aavros, famous for its splendor, size and danger. Mid-level.

Mid to High-Level

Week 4 Winner: The Fane of Last Light

The characters search for the mysterious Fane of Last Light, a mysterious artifact slowly fracturing the fabric of reality in its immediate area, guarded by the Laoirin, custodians of an ancient and deadly secret... one that leaves the characters holding the fate of a world in their hands. High-level.

Week 4 Winner: Forest of the Green God

There are some places man was not meant to go. Some places he should not even know about. The characters must brave a terrible haunted forest to rescue a girl who has gone missing into its depths. Mid to high-level.

Mechanus Unwound

Entropy's scion has arrived. Nehbirkinzihir, a powerful dust mephit and self-styled scion of entropy seeks to undermine all reality. Recently, his monstrous cult, the Order of Chaos, have discovered what he believes to be the 'weak point' in all of creation, found in Mechanus. High-level.

Cross City Race

The Best Adventure I Never Wrote...

Cross City Race

The adventure begins upon the adventurer's arrival within a sizeable city or metropolis. The city is alive with talk about a special race across the city; one held every year or two, to deliver a letter from one side of the city to the other as quickly as possible. While it started out as a simple competition between message carriers to settle a dispute, it is now open to anyone to enter; though no magical transportation or killing is allowed, the race is otherwise a glorious free-for-all of sneakiness, athleticism and brute force, all to claim the prize: a sizeable money pot and magical item donated by the city treasury to encourage the competition.

Adventure in a Nutshell: The adventure itself is the race, made up of an interlinked series of encounters along the route: including sabotage, traps, ambushes and other underhanded and sneaky obstacles, as well as the terrain and daily life of the city itself getting in the way. The intended theme would almost be that of a car chase in a modern cop show, complete with exploding melons, cardboard boxes and chicken cages getting devastated en route. The adventurers may spring their own traps and obstacles for the other racers, and the various Skill and Ability checks—as well as the conditions and the route taken—add or subtract to the time taken to try and claim the prize.

The various encounters interlock with each other in a similar fashion to the old [Choose Your Own Adventure](#) books and could, conceivably, be run through by a single player. Failing to jump a roof-gap in one encounter, for example, might drop you down into an encounter on a ground route.

The final goal of the competition is the guardhouse atop the gate on the opposite side of the city, but the door is locked and the climax is a death-defying climb to deliver the letter and claim the prize. A failure in this could lead to a nasty fall, especially with other competitors trying to push you off, pouring oil over the stones, or otherwise doing things to get in the way.

The city treasury may have put up the prize for a reason. A proven, capable and ruthless messenger may be just what they need to take a letter or item securely, safely and swiftly from their city to another. What the package is may not be clear, but it may well be important enough for other people to pursue. With that as a hook, this adventure may act as a springboard to other adventures and a way to get the adventurers in the good graces of the ruling powers in several cities.

The Feast

The Best Adventure I Never Wrote...

The Feast

The Feast takes its inspiration from *The Masque of the Red Death* by Edgar Allan Poe, and contemporary zombie movies like *Dawn of the Dead*.

Adventure in a Nutshell: The characters are invited to the tower-like townhouse of the decadent merchant Lord Delius Thad (CE half-elf aristocrat/rogue). Thad is involved in all sorts of unsavory side ventures, including slavery and drug smuggling. The characters are invited because the bored noble likes to be seen with rich, powerful or popular people—a smattering of all have of which have been invited to the party.

While the town's rich and famous enjoy themselves, the rest of the poor harbor town is being menaced by a zombie infestation... the cause of which can be indirectly attributed to the character's host. Thad has found an untapped source of the herbs used to make mordayn vapor (dreammist, *Book of Vile Darkness*). The island is also home to a small population of rot reavers (*Monster Manual III*), one of which stowed away on board one of his ships and arrived in town within the last month. If the news were to get out, it could lead to some awkward questions by those few township authorities this decadent noble hasn't paid off.

Thad has one other problem, however—the creature is in his townhouse when the party begins. It stalks through the galleries and climbs along the outside preying on party guests and converting them in to his undead minions. The zombies created by this rot reaver are slightly more powerful than normal. Perhaps it is a reaction between the mordayn herb and the monster's necromantic powers but, the zombies are *bloodthirsty*, *fast* and almost *unkillable* (*Libris Mortis*)!

The Salvagers

The Best Adventure I Never Wrote...

The Salvagers

In an ancient era, there once lay a great subterranean kingdom of deep dwarves called Gilflode, that grew fat upon immense wealth garnered from mining the regions rich ore deposits and weapon manufacturing. During the orc wars, demand for their high quality weapons forced a drastic increase in production. Pit bosses threw caution aside in favor of speed, and in their haste unlucky miners struck a pocket of dense toxic gas. Thick gouts plumed into the city, engulfing everything and poisoning those inhabitants unable to flee. The gas settled, covering all but the city's highest rooftops, trapping refugees against the high ceilings and stalactites of the massive cavern.

Adventure in a Nutshell: Over two centuries have passed since the demise of the fabled dwarven city of Gilflode, its relevance faded and forgotten by the short-lived races of the region. During this time, the city's refugees built a new and peaceful life in relative seclusion. Living above the gas in the upper cave crags and upon the roofs of their former kingdom, the deep dwarves guarded their ancestral home. Soon, they developed strange "diving" apparatus, permitting them to descend into the gases and salvage ancestral artifacts.

But all has changed since the recent passing of their headman, Nalvor the Stern. The contested rule fell to his paternal twins, brother Gartok Nalvorson and sister Haetig Nalvorsdottir. Gartok's extreme ambition is bent on resurrecting New Gilflode to its former glory, while his sister wishes to maintain the peaceful and independent status quo. Unable to come to an acceptable conclusion, Gartok threatened to take the city by force and lead it against the inhabitants of the surrounding lands (an impossible task equivalent to a death wish for his city). When last seen, he and his supporters stole 'diving' equipment and plunged deep into the lower gas-filled chambers of Old Gilflode in hopes of finding ancient weapons to launch his revolution.

Unable to war directly on her brother and his supporters, Haetig's growing desperations have prompted her to break the city's longtime isolation and seek help from the outside world. She desperately needs outsiders who can solve her dilemma discreetly without exposing the existence of her city. But neither Haetig nor Gartok realize Old Gilflode is no longer a lifeless ruin. Deep within the gas-filled depths grows a kaorti cyst whose twisted alien physiologies find the environment perfectly suited to their needs.

The PCs don primitive breathing respirators (air tubes, masks, and goggles) and descend into the toxic gas filled ruins of Old Gilflode. They must try to track down and capture Gartok and his band of rebels before the dwarf launches a revolution that would ultimately expose his small city to the more powerful kingdoms of the sunlit lands. To accomplish this, they also deal with kaorti, currently salvaging Old Gilflode for arcane treasures and hunting any creatures they come across. In the gas-filled ruins, the PCs encounter hostile dwarves, kaorti (a violent and evil race of outsiders from the far realm) and their aberrant creations including dwarves hideously transformed into kaorti thralls. Also lurking in the depths stalk a few undead and constructs, remnants of the city's previous inhabitants.

Bodyswap

The Best Adventure I Never Wrote...

Bodyswap

An ambitious orcish shaman has uncovered a peculiar artifact and divined its purpose. The crystal allows the exchange of minds from body to body, and was once used by an ancient evil wizard to prolong his life by stealing bodies. The shaman has a more prosaic but equally greedy use for the staff, and decides to set a trap in order to use it for maximum effect. A few choice raids have worked the local people up into a frenzy, enough of a frenzy to be willing to hire disreputable outsiders to protect them... that would be the adventurers.

Adventure in a Nutshell: When the adventurers confront the shaman and his warband and engage in battle, the band takes up a defensive stance, protecting themselves and each other as much as possible until the shaman activates the staff and strikes the earth. There is a thunderclap and everyone is knocked to the ground and blacks out. When the adventurers come around they find themselves in the bodies of the goblinoids that were the warband, while their own bodies are missing—taken over by the shaman who intends to use their good name and human appearance to wicked purposes.

The characters would retain their Skills, Feats, Intelligence, Wisdom and Charisma (perhaps the last one modified a little), but would have the physical Abilities of their new 'hosts' along with their equipment.

The only way to get their original bodies and equipment back is to track down those who have stolen them, and the staff, and to repeat the magic to swap themselves back into their own bodies. This is, needless to say, going to be difficult, as they will have to track their bodies across the wilderness and then infiltrate a town, village or inn in order to defeat their bodies, without killing them, and make the change.

Traveling through the wilderness they may run into a few encounters with 'other' goblinoids or nonhuman races, and rather than attacking or being attacked may have to try and fit in. Not to mention, they might run into wandering bands of adventurers or a human merchant caravan which could place them into a very sticky situation and let them see how the other half lives.

The adventure would come to a climax in confrontation with their old bodies, having to restrain themselves from killing either their old bodies or the watch who may come to the aid of the ones they think are really the heroes.

There's no telling what mischief the shaman and his warband got up to while occupying the adventurers' bodies. While there was only a day or two involved, they may find in the months to come that they are less welcome in the area and that the actions of their 'doubles' may come back to haunt them in the form of criminal charges, vengeful merchants... or even children they didn't know they had!

Dragon Turtle City

The Best Adventure I Never Wrote...

Dragon Turtle City

The adventure begins in a coastal town or village whose fish stocks have been mysteriously disappearing, now boats as well, lost in a mysterious fog. Without their livelihood and afraid to go to sea, the villagers are starving and impoverished. What they do have—kept in the village temple—they're willing to offer to brave adventurers to discover and prevent whatever it is that's ruining them.

Adventure in a Nutshell: One fisherman is willing to take the heroes out in his boat, braving the sea and the fog one last time for the sake of his village, but once out in the fog the boat is spotted, and then followed by sea dwelling creatures; the fog begins to rise until with a great 'snap,' massive jaws rise up out of the sea and swallow the boat whole.

The adventurers and their fishing guide awake, stripped of their equipment and dressed in fishy smelling rags, closed into bone cages along with other captured fishermen and sailors, deep within some sort of flesh-and-shell chamber and guarded by a mixture of sea-themed evil humanoids. Soon the opportunity for escape arises and, with the aid of the other escaped slaves, they must fight to reclaim their equipment and take control of the dragon turtle that forms the home of these creatures—the only thing that can take them home.

The inside of the dragon turtle forms the battleground, twisting tunnels of flesh and shell, ruined ships and a unique ecology that has risen within the beast's interior: cramped tunnel fighting with vicious and nightmarish sea creatures who know their home forward and backwards and thus have the home field advantage.

The adventure reaches its climax in a confrontation with the renegade aboleth that has claimed the dragon turtle as its personal fiefdom. The death of the aboleth will release the turtle from its mental control and allow the gigantic beast to beach itself and die with dignity.

The turtle floats to shore, giving its last breath in beaching itself, steam rising from its shell. The slaves are free, returned to land—but the gigantic body is a treasure trove itself, beyond even the materials and loot that the inhabitants gathered for themselves over the course of their reign of terror. The dragon turtle's body may become a prize for pirates, kingdoms, other villages, bandits and even necromancers...

Hell Farm

The Best Adventure I Never Wrote...

Hell Farm

Ee-I-Ee-I-Oh, crap!

Old Man Cosdel and his family are known far and wide, for theirs is the largest farming property in the region. No mere father-and-son operation, this, but a plantation with over a dozen employees, numerous buildings, and over a hundred acres on which to grow crops and graze livestock. Cosdel, while hardly wealthy, is better off than most folk of his social class, and his farm is the primary source of supplies for numerous villages along the road.

Cosdel's always been a humble man, remembering whence he came, ever ready to help others in need. And now, that kindness has cost him.

Adventure in a Nutshell: Some weeks ago, a stranger came to the Cosdel farm, seeking a meal and a place to stay. He was hard up, or so he seemed, and willing to work to earn his keep, so Cosdel took him in.

That was the last anyone's heard from the Cosdel farm. Curious villagefolk, come to investigate, find themselves turned aside by strange creatures lurking near the road and by rows of corn and wheat grown razor-sharp, capable of shredding a man to the bone if he tries to pass through. In the night, terrible cries, the baying of horrific hounds, rise toward the moon from the farm. And nobody in the nearby villages knows what they'll do when their supplies start to run low. Even worse, though few of the villagers have noticed it yet, the effect is spreading—slowly, just a few feet each night, but inexorably.

Something dreadful indeed has happened to the Cosdel farm, and the locals need a few brave adventurers to find out what.

Summary of Contents

The Cosdel farm has, in fact, been overwhelmed with Abyssal energies from a relic the stranger carried, and been terribly transformed. In addition to the transformation of the crops as mentioned above, every one of the farm animals has become a monster of similar physical form (see below). Many of the Cosdel family have been sacrificed, but others were either transformed as well, or are currently hiding from the beasts that now stalk their property. The PCs will have to rescue the survivors, learn what has occurred here, and find a way to put a stop to it.

The adventure takes a fairly mundane and even potentially silly setting—a standard, albeit large, farmstead—and transforms it into a nest of horrors.

Combat Encounters

As mentioned above, most of the creatures here were once farm animals, and still very much resemble the beasts they used to be. Some of these include the following.

- Cockatrices (formerly chickens).
- Catoblepas and gorgons (formerly cows and bulls).
- Hell hounds (formerly dogs).
- Nightmares (formerly plow horses).

Non-Combat Encounters

Not all the challenges here take the form of mutated creatures. Some of these include the following.

- The PCs making their way through barriers such as the “razor crops” mentioned earlier.
- Locating the survivors, learning what they know, and getting them to safety.
- Locating the stranger and using the relic he carries to undo the effects. (In fact, the stranger is currently one of the statues, having fallen victim to the cockatrices he created.)
- Navigating some of the structures that have been warped/weakened by the effects of the relic. (These would be written up as encounter traps.)

Rewards

This would be a relatively low-treasure adventure (possibly made up for with powerful magic items on the stranger himself and a large reward gathered from the neighboring towns), due to the nature of the monsters as former farm animals.

Moving Day

The Best Adventure I Never Wrote...

Moving Day

As long as any of them can remember, the inhabitants of Rhycan's Field have dwelt in the shadow of Talthaeran's Tower, a lofty spire in the center of the city. The great stone monolith, and the wizard after whom it is named, are a source of great curiosity to the populace—curiosity, but no fear, for Talthaeran is long dead, his tower little more than a monument to days long gone, and the source of many an outlandish tale.

Of course, none of the cityfolk has actually ever tried to *enter* Talthaeran's Tower. They're not *stupid*, after all.

Now, however, another wizard by the name of Lethara has come forward. To the governing council of Rhycan's Field, she has presented proof of descent from Talthaeran, and has paid all the back-due property taxes on the tower. It no longer belongs to Talthaeran, but to Lethara.

She just needs someone to clear Talthaeran's years of accumulated junk out of the tower, and that's where the PCs come in....

Adventure in a Nutshell: *Moving Day* is meant to be a relatively light-hearted, yet still quite challenging and potentially deadly, adventure. The PCs are literally hired to remove the furniture and junk from the tower—and, in the process, to ensure it is safe, and deal with any guardians, traps, and dangers left behind.

The intent of the module is to provide the PCs a series of challenges that are thematically linked, but do not require the presence of a "big bad."

Combat Encounters

Some of the combat encounters of *Moving Day* include the following opponents.

- Animated objects (such as some of the furniture the PCs are trying to move out of the tower).
- Old animal "friends" of Talthaeran's familiar, kept in stasis all this time.
- Living spells.
- Minor summoned fiends and elementals, released by the collapse of Talthaeran's spells.
- Construct guardians/servitors.
- Various beasts native to the "foreign environments" (see below).
- A "squatter"; that is a magical being that has moved in, taking the tower as a place it can rest undisturbed. This would likely be a genie of some sort, though I might pull one from a source other than the first *Monster Manual*.

Non-Combat Encounters

Not all challenges in *Moving Day* are combat oriented. Some of these include the following.

- The need to chase down some of the animated furniture, and physically wrestle it out the door.
- One or two "encounter traps," as detailed in *Dungeonscape*. While these are not necessarily magical traps, they would be designed around magic themes. (Possibilities include a trap based around a sculpture of a beholder with different types of attacks, or one based around the schools of magic.)
- Simple logistical problems, such as how to move large and fragile objects through a trap or combat situation without them being destroyed.
- Puzzle locks/challenges, designed as tests for Talthaeran's apprentices. These might be attached to doors that lead to different rooms, depending on what answer is given, or prove the only means of accessing certain portions of the tower.
- "Rooms" that actually contain foreign environments (such as a stretch of desert or a jungle), through a combination of pocket dimensions and illusion.

Rewards

Because few of the adversaries are of the sort to possess their own magic items, and a wizard's tower is an excellent repository of mystic goods, this adventure is a good opportunity to grant the PCs access to more esoteric and interesting magic items (such as, for instance, *decanter of endless water* and *figurines of wondrous power*).

Of course, the PCs will also earn they payment offered by Lethara for their services. Depending on how well the PCs negotiate at the start of the adventure, they might be required to turn over some of what they find inside to her. (For the most part, she wishes the opportunity to look over everything they retrieve—it's technically hers, after all—but she will allow the PCs to keep some or all of the smaller items they procure.)

Siege of the Heavens

The Best Adventure I Never Wrote...

Siege of the Heavens

This adventure takes place in the Tower of the Heavens, detailed in the old 1st edition *UK4: When a Star Falls* adventure.

Adventure in a Nutshell: The Tower of Heavens and the learned sages therein have long been revered for their amazing ability to predict the future. Ostensibly, they gain this knowledge from observing the passage of the stars across the heavens, but in reality they hold the legendary *Books of Prophecy*: tomes of knowledge crammed with cryptic references to the fates of the great and famous. Several attempts have been made to steal the books, but all have failed; only the Elder Sage has the ability to actually read the books and so without him, their possession is useless.

The last to try and gain the books was the treacherous Piyarz, himself a Pupil-Sage of the tower. His coup failed and he was slain by adventurers aiding Shalfey, the tower's Elder Sage. Almost two decades later, Shalfey's nears the end of his long life, but the matter of his successor is still undecided. Thus, the remaining Pupil-Sages jockey for position and favor, for they all wish to gain the *Books of Prophecy* for themselves.

Although the secret of the books is well-kept, rumors have slipped from the tower into the world. One such conduit of forbidden lore was Piyarz's imp familiar that survived its master's death to flee back to the Nine Hells. There, it was captured by a powerful erinyes sorcerer, Darrathmaugh, who sought a few moments' entertainment in the death throes of the imp. In an attempt to gain its life, the imp told of the *Books of Prophecy* and Darrathmaugh instantly lusted after their power.

Darrathmaugh has a problem, however. Much of the Tower of Heavens is protected by *forbiddance* spells, meaning that she cannot use *teleport without error* to steal the books. The sage's ever-vigilant monk bodyguards and loyal gnome mercenaries also make a straightforward theft difficult. Thus, Darrathmaugh has seduced a nearby tribe of hobgoblins, their manticores, and hill giant allies with tales of riches beyond imagining within the tower. As the adventure opens, her army is marching to war.

As fate would have it, a small party of adventurers is also traveling to the tower; seeking the wisdom of the sages on some matter. Fate has conspired to place them in the tower on the night of attack.

The adventure opens as the PCs reach the Tower of Heavens to speak with the sages. It is late—the sages have retired—and as the PCs rest in the guest quarters, another group of swordsmen arrive escorting a cowled wizard. (In reality, this group is allied with Darrathmaugh, and seeks to surprise the tower's defenders and open the gates for the rest of the army). In the dead of night, the rest of Darrathmaugh's minions strike, trying to overwhelm the gnomes keeping watch over the gate while other elements of her army try to stealthily cross the river.

When dawn breaks, the extent of the problem is revealed. Hundreds of hobgoblins and several hill giants line both banks of the river. Darrathmaugh uses the assault as cover to steal the *Books of Prophecy*. If the PCs notice this subterfuge, they have a chance to stop her, although to reach the Greater Library they must win past some of the tower's formidable mystic defenses including a labyrinth choked with deadly illusions.

Slaying Darrathmaugh, or forcing her to flee, effectively ends the adventure; the hobgoblins have no stomach for continued attacks against such a formidable fortress. If Shalfey survives, he rewards the adventurers. If he does not, the PCs must help settle the matter of his successor.

Treasure!

The Best Adventure I Never Wrote...

Treasure!

“Treasure, huh? What if I told you I know where we can find a sword that would make you a dragonslayer? No? Not your style? Okay, how about a suit of armor so strong that only the mightiest swordsmen or toughest creature could even scratch its surface? Or maybe you would rather choose from an impossibly vast selection of wands and staffs, just waiting for the right wizard? Still not quite what you’re after? You are a tough one to please. What do you wish for? I can make that come true for you. You want a ring of three wishes, and I know where to find one.

“Of course, it won’t be easy to get. The ring lies within the legendary Vault of Aavros, along with all those other fantastic things I listed off, and more. Or so they say. Yes, there are guardians from who-knows-where, along with magical traps and wards, just waiting for a few foolish freebooters like yourselves. Of course, if you’d rather have more mundane things, I’m sure there will be plenty of cash as well. Secret location? No problem. You see, I have this map...”

This time, it’s simple: cash and loot. There’s no princess to save, no land to rid of evildoers. There’s a legendary treasure out there for the taking, and you’re just the group of freebooter treasure hunters to finally track it down. You even have a map. A treasure map, of course.

Adventure in a Nutshell: Through chance, luck or skill, the player characters have acquired the most sought after map in the land. It purports to show the location of the Vault of Aavros, famous for its splendor, size and danger. Some call it cursed. Many have set out for it, most have never returned. Stories abound as to what the vault holds, and what guards it. As to which are true and which are old bards’ tales, there is only one way to know for sure: find it.

Not only does the treasure exist, but the map is genuine. It provides generous, if dated, clues as to the vault’s entry point, as well as a partial layout. It isn’t detailed, but it is enticing. The vault lies within the top of a broken peak, tucked away in a vast mountain range.

Finding the location is only the beginning, however. Soon, the adventurers discover that the vault is spread across multiple mountains, and they must learn how to operate a magical system of gates and other fantastic transport to move from one area to the next.

The guardians are also varied. Some are physical traps or creatures, but some are psychological. Starting with the frightening Hall of Warning, the characters are often reminded just how unwelcome they are in the vault. For example, the Hall presents panels of bas relief sculptures capturing the final death mask of previously unsuccessful treasure hunters, and many empty panels stand ready to display new victims—such as the player characters.

Creatures within the vault range from actual guardians, such as living statues, to more mundane monsters and humanoids. Some areas of the vaults have been entered, some are damaged, and some have a few new inhabitants taking advantage of a ready-made lair.

How Aavros amassed such a fortune is uncertain, but the characters will eventually piece together that he was a successful adventurer. They will also come to realize that some of his enemies are still around and likely to try to retrieve their property, by force if needed. The characters may decide that some items aren’t worth the risk, and those that are will likely lead to new adventures. The vault itself contains an array of rare and fantastic items, as well as a good deal of cash. As always, the Dungeon Master may substitute his own treasure, but the listed items contain some of the more fantastic weapons, armor and items in the *Dungeon Master’s Guide* and other sources.

The Fane of Last Light

The Best Adventure I Never Wrote...

The Fane of Last Light

Way back in my college days, I ran my gaming group through the second-last stage in a campaign arc that had unfolded over the previous three years. This penultimate adventure involved the party locating a mythical ruined temple and taking on a cult that had arisen there. Overthrowing the cult represented almost three months' worth of gaming, costing the life of one PC and pushing the rest to their limits, but this was only the first half of what I'd intended as an epic end to the campaign.

The finale was meant to spin off from the revelation that the temple cultists were, in fact, an unwitting front for the Laoirin — an apocalyptic elven sect tapping into the primal forces that had created the world. Uncovering the darkest mysteries of a mythical Lost Age, the Laoirin had discovered a way to directly tap into the elemental powers of magic and life itself—the primal godhead that the gods themselves secretly worshiped and were created from. The final stage of the party's journey was to be an epic struggle of good and evil, of challenges both physical and psychological, of moral dilemma and Lovecraftian horror...

...and it never happened. Shortly after the destruction of the temple, the gaming group that had been together since high school split up for all the usual reasons that accompany impending adulthood and the need to work for a living. The cultist adventure was a high point in and of itself, and provided enough closure that my plans for the real endgame were quietly abandoned, no one noticing. But I'd always wondered how it might have turned out.

Adventure in a Nutshell: As old as the world itself, the Fane of the Last Light was raised from the living stone of the peak of Mount Canthra, a tumbled mass of towers and walls shrouded by eternal mist. Gaining entrance to the outer court of the fane requires a harrowing ascent and the disposal of the usual fearsome guardians—in this case, a host of pseudonatural creatures tainted by the dark forces at play on the mountaintop.

Once atop the peak, the party must navigate the Madwarrens—the lair of a feral clan of Laoirin exiles. When members of their sect fall victim to the insanity engendered by the Fane, the Laoirin cast them to their deaths off the mountain. However, over long centuries, a number of these victims have survived—clawing their way back to the ruined outer tiers of the Fane, where they defend the site in their own debased way.

Beyond the Madwarrens lie the Gates of Light—three massive archways that lead to the Fane itself. Each gate appears freely accessible, but passage through the arches sends the PCs on a customized journey back into their own lives. Each gate is a separate challenge meant to be played as a side trek-style adventure of the DM's own choosing—adventures drawn from previous campaign materials. That is, the DM will take the players through a selection of the most climactic moments of their adventuring careers, adjusted for the increase in level and reworked with overtones of the dark madness that infects the Fane. As they relive their greatest triumphs or their darkest failures, players have the potential to reverse old outcomes as they seek the three Soul Ciphers—spiritual keys that come only from the process of reliving the past and its lessons.

Once all three keys have been collected, the party can pass through into the Fane. There, they discover that by tapping into the energy of creation itself, the Fane is slowly fracturing the fabric of reality in its immediate area. Destructive shadow magic, pseudonatural and spellwarped creatures, and the constant pressure of madness play out amidst a chaotic series of combat and psychological challenges. The closer the PCs press to the heart of the Fane, the more its power is felt.

The journey culminates in a showdown in the Barren Arena. There, with their weapons and powers stripped away from them, the PCs must rely on courage alone as they face off against a cadre of mystical warriors known as the Black Choir. Beyond them lies the Court of Chaos. This central lair of the Laoirin is an extradimensional rift through which the energy of creation pours like molten lava. However, once there, the PCs discover that the Laoirin are the custodians of an ancient and deadly secret—one that leaves the characters holding the fate of a world in their hands.

Forest of the Green God

The Best Adventure I Never Wrote...

Forest of the Green God

The characters must brave a terrible haunted forest to rescue a girl who has gone missing into its depths. The adventure is set on the outskirts of an isolated lumber town, near an ancient old growth forest and an ancient shrine dedicated to Malgarius.

Adventure in a Nutshell: There are some places man was not meant to go. Some places he should not even know about. The ancient old growth forest of Geis Sheiling is one of them. The oldest and most untouched of forests is now the target for woodsmen in search of fresh lumber. Geis Sheiling is home to the ancient green dragon Einarthogrim and a host of dangerous fey creatures and ghosts. The object of the adventure is not to slay the dragon, but rather to find the missing girl... and then survive long enough to escape.

The adventure begins in winter, when the characters are asked to help search for Aileen Vasilisk, the daughter of a landed noble. At the town meeting convened to organize the hunt, the PCs run into some local bravos lead by Triskin Verberg (fighter) who are spoiling for a fistfight with "outsiders." These stout lads will be encountered again in the woods during the course of the search (the first-time in an effort to sabotage the PCs, the second time as ravenous undead ghastrs having succumbed to the dangers of the forest).

The journey through Geis Sheiling leads the characters to several hazards, including a murderous kelpie who tries to lure the characters onto thin ice; malicious (advanced) dire creatures (some with the spirit template from *Frostburn*); specters; a cannibalistic fomorian giant who is being plagued by a small horde of jermlaine (like a large dog with flees); a mob of feral ibixians (thought to be satyrs by the townsfolk) who give chase to the characters until they enter areas they know to be part of the *primeval scar* or inhabited by the "Daughters of Green God" (green dragon kith dryad barbarians).

Much of Geis Sheiling is a (magnitude 10) *primeval scar* (*Dragon* 336), an effect that encompasses most of the forest, with one exception: Ol' Temp Hill, so named for the standing stones that ring it. Ol' Temp Hill is a recently reactivated bad place (magnitude 9) and site of an ancient druidic sacrificial site. Hidden deep in the hill is a small set of catacombs filled with the restless victims and a shrine dedicated to Malgarius (*Root of Evil*) the shrine's guardians are a trio of advanced blackroot marauders (*Dragon Compendium, Vol 1*). It is in this temple that the characters find Aileen (a direct descendant of the druid's priestess) now reduced to a murderous puppet by the power of the bad place. The characters discover that the awakened bad place and the increased human activity have in turn awakened the hostile forest spirits.

Characters who end the threat posed by the reawakened shrine ensure for now that the capricious green dragon does not destroy the town... yet.

Mechanus Unwound

The Best Adventure I Never Wrote...

Mechanus Unwound

Adventure in a Nutshell: Nehbirkezihzr, a powerful dust mephit (favored soul/entropomancer with a *sphere of annihilation*), and self-styled scion of entropy, seeks to undermine all reality. Recently he and his monstrous cult, the Order of Chaos, have discovered what he believes to be the 'weak point' in creation.

According to legend there is a place in Mechanus called Harmony, a great convergence of rotating gears, cogs and coiled springs near the center of the plane that sets the pace for the rest of the plane. In the very heart of Harmony is a control room of sorts for guiding the speed at which the cogs move. Were someone to tamper with it, the effects would ripple throughout the whole plane and beyond.

Nehbirkezihzr plans on raiding Mechanus with his cult and sabotaging Harmony. It is his hope that this will precipitate the dissolution of the plane and weaken the Great Wheel.

The characters become involved in the plot when chaos tainted inevitables start running amok in the Material Plane. The planar constructs originate from a set of ruins that house a gate the insane mephit is using to access Mechanus. After dealing with the gate's guardians, a set of advanced ruin elementals (*Monster Manual V*), the characters discover the threat the Order of Chaos poses to the cosmos and follows them through the portal. On the other side the characters must deal with the cult (a strange band of chaotic and entropic aligned monsters), as well as the plane's authorities (formians, modrons, inevitables, and petitioners)—who incorrectly peg them as the cause of the inevitables' instability—as well as a logic problem that must be solved to gain admittance to Harmony's Heart.

If Mechanus is saved, the characters likely gain some friends on the plane. Perhaps the inevitables look the other way when the PCs whip out their next few *time stop* and *wish* spells. This benefit is only temporary, however, as one must always remember on Mechanus: rules are rules.

Blood Road

Roll vs Role

by Bruce R. Cordell and Chris Sims

A caravanserai is an elaborate roadside inn that caters more to trade caravans than lone travelers. Such an establishment is typically a square structure with a wide entrance that permits the passage of wagons and beasts of burden into a large central courtyard. Within the walls are permanent rooms containing accommodations, a common room, food stores, and other comforts of the road. Caravanserais thus help support the flow of commerce, information, and people.

What would the ramifications be if a group of vampire lords secretly controlled such a place? How might entangled adventurers deal with the situation, with words or weapons?

For the DM....

Delyth Caravanserai

Delyth Caravanserai's faded walls have greeted travelers for more than a century with flickering lanterns lit just after nightfall, snippets of exotic song, and the scent of the inn's famous baths. Like typical caravanserais, Delyth is great walled square, and travelers must pay a fee based on party size to enter. The courtyard is open to the elements, and the inner wall is riddled with doors to stables, rooms for sleeping, and vaults for safeguarding valuable merchandise.

The most prominent area of that wall is Road Spirits, the caravanserai's common taproom. It is here that travelers find bedchambers for rent, hearty meals and refreshing drinks, and trips to the caravanserai's baths.

Otherwise, the courtyard encloses various merchant booths and a central well. Delyth merchants own many of the stalls and sell mainly travel supplies. Other booths come and go throughout the seasons.

Adventure Hooks

Characters can become entwined with the caravanserai in a variety of ways.

1. Traveling PCs chance to meet up with a caravan heading the same direction on the road. Merchants in the caravan offer the characters food and shelter in exchange for companionship and a few extra eyes to keep watch. After making some friends, the PCs arrive with the caravan at Delyth Caravanserai. Soon after, one of their new pals goes missing.
2. Mazh Frenkler, a wealthy cloth merchant, has a problem. His son, normally a responsible man, refuses to leave the Delyth Caravanserai. Now he seems to be "living like a wastrel," asking his father for money and for a few servants to be sent to the caravanserai. Mazh instead sends the characters to investigate and bring back his son.
3. A slaving ring has long vexed the PCs' patron. The patron learns of disappearances at the Delyth Caravanserai and sends the characters to carefully scrutinize the possibility that slavers operate there.
4. One of the PCs has an adventurous relative who takes rough jobs, such as caravan guard duty and the like. That relative is missing after traveling with a caravan that stopped over at the Delyth Caravanserai.

Investigation

PCs that have History might know about the caravanserai, and those with Streetwise can do a little legwork to find out similar information.

DC 10: Reveals the basic information provided under Delyth Caravanserai.

DC 15: Reveals names of important people working in the caravanserai. It also reveals that the caravanserai's owners live under the place in a played-out opal mine.

DC 20: Reveals names of important people known to be currently staying in the caravanserai. It also reveals that the owner has been known as "Savasti" for more than a hundred years.

Stories circulate about how people staying at the caravanserai go missing, though most are roustabouts hired to work with or guard a caravan en-route. No one finds this particularly ominous—people go missing all the time. Hired hands have a way of drifting without notice from one job to another.

DC 25: Rumors do circulate that the supernatural is involved, perhaps in the form of ghouls, ghosts, or even vampires.

Vampires?

A successful Religion check can tell PCs more about vampires, as detailed in the Vampire entry of the *Monster Manual*.

Important People

Once characters have exhausted their information resources, the only way they can find out more is to explore the caravanserai and meet with its principle inhabitants.

Vernor Grimbold

Anyone who walks into Road Spirits meets the dwarf billeteer and barkeep, Vernor Grimbold. He's talkative, sometimes annoyingly so, and sleeps only about 6 hours a night. Vernor isn't a vampire, and he has no deep knowledge of what's going on in the caravanserai.

Social Encounter: Vernor responds favorably to Diplomacy, but he doesn't take kindly to Intimidation. Those who successfully engage Vernor in a social encounter get an earful, including the fact that Blasius the Steward coordinates most day-to-day business of the caravanserai, and Vernor reports to him. Vernor also pokes fun at Jezlar Frenkler, a merchant's son who has paid in advance for a room for the next several months. Jezlar seems to have become good friends with Bryn Delyth.

To particularly charming PCs, the dwarf volunteers the fact that Savasti Delyth is the descendant of the original founder of the caravanserai. Vernor mentions that he only rarely sees Savasti emerge from her home, which has one entrance in the Road Spirits and another in the caravanserai courtyard. He knows Savasti is a magician of some sort, and he attributes her lack of aging to whatever magical talents she possesses.

Vernor is quite proud that criminals and rowdies rarely stay long in the caravanserai. He claims that Savasti's rules are strict, and that she sees to it that those who disturb the peace never come back again.

Blasius the Steward

Blasius is the senior servant of the caravanserai, in charge of supplies, the readiness of guest rooms, the quality of the baths, and every other element required to keep the caravanserai in business. He sees customers only by appointment, relying on others to take care of mundane dealings. Characters can get an audience with the busy butler if they're clever enough to make their problems or requirements seem dire, or if they offer monetary inducement.

Blasius is a refined, elderly human who is unfailingly polite. He isn't a vampire, but he knows Savasti and her son are. He loves Savasti, and he hopes to become a vampire himself before death comes for him.

Social Encounter: Blasius responds to Diplomacy and Intimidate. He won't reveal the complete truth unless a sharp user of the Insight skill catches his half-truths and misleading statements. He knows the problems Savasti is having with her "son," and he works to play the PCs against Bryn Delyth while securing his mistress's safety and perhaps his own immortality.

If the PCs ask the right questions or threaten Blasius with serious injury, the steward reveals that Bryn is a vampire. He gives up another half truth—that Savasti wishes to be rid of Bryn but can't bring herself to slay her "son," whether or not he is a monster.



The steward has keys to all the caravanserai's doors, and he's willing to give the PCs those required to get into Bryn's section of Savasti's underground house. Explaining that Bryn gets up to some "unpleasantness" down there, he says the PCs should perhaps only descend by day. He also gives the PCs directions to Bryn's burial chamber.

Blasius would rather die than give up Savasti to the swords of so-called heroes. However, he is willing to admit she's a warlock and that she has a policy of being judge, jury, and executioner when it comes to criminals in the caravanserai.

Jezlar Frenkler

Jezlar is the key to a plot to wrest control of the caravanserai from Savasti and place it squarely in Bryn's decadent hands. He has, in fact, asked his father to send servants and money, but he intends to convert those servants to his aims. He and Bryn are also plotting how Jezlar can take control of his father's business. Jezlar hopes also to become a vampire lord.

A whip of a man, Jezlar is richly dressed and well armed. He's a fair hand with a sword, but he's not willing to die for anyone.

Social Encounter: Jezlar knows that Bryn and Savasti are vampires. He also knows Blasius is loyal to Savasti and that the steward has control of keys that could get anyone into the old opal mine where Savasti and Bryn lair. The truth is, Jezlar knows too much for such a weak link, but Bryn didn't expect outside influence or interference.

Jezlar lies and demurs when confronted, and he tries to be clever in evading direct questions. Claiming he's here trying to cement a business deal with Bryn (true enough), he staunchly refuses to leave. He's quite savvy in negotiations and bluffing, but Intimidate can persuade him to give up information and possibly go back to his home, especially if he is threatened with bodily harm.

If the PCs convince Jezlar to go home, Bryn and his spawn attack the PCs to keep Jezlar at the caravanserai.



Bryn Delyth

Most caravanserai employees think Bryn is Savasti Delyth's oldest son. He doesn't actually do much but take advantage of the baths, the liquor, and the company at the caravanserai. Most nights Bryn can be found in Road Spirits.

Bryn is a vampire lord and a skilled rogue—Savasti turned him fifty years ago for companionship. Always a rake, Bryn chafes under his "mother's" authority. He feeds on those he wants, keeps others as pets, and has, in Savasti's eyes, become reckless.

Despite Bryn's apparent lack of morals and loyalty, for now he does plan to give Jezlar the gift of immortality. He feels he can handle any future treachery from the cloth merchant.

Social Encounter: If the PCs confront Bryn, he laughs off their suggestions, offers to buy them drinks, and acts particularly friendly. However, if the characters make pointed accusations or ask informed questions, especially if they can show that Blasius or Savasti want him eliminated, Bryn willingly bargains.

He reveals his "mother's" nature and tries to convince the PCs to free him from her control. He might even expose the whereabouts of Savasti's resting place, as well as how to steal Blasius's keys from the steward's chambers. If it comes to it, Bryn can even be intimidated into breaking ties with Jezlar Frenkler, or at least feigning his intent to do so.



If the PCs attack Bryn inside Road Spirits, he calls for help—Jezlar, Vernor, and a few other bar patrons defend the vampire. Bryn then retreats, gathering his spawn to later murder the characters. Unlike Savasti, though, Bryn has no intention of honoring a peaceful arrangement. Even if the PCs slay Savasti and her loyalists, Bryn later attacks them to keep his plans with Jezlar alive and to protect the secret of the caravanserai.

Savasti Delyth

To most, Savasti is a descendent of the original founder of the caravanserai, operating it with her only son, Bryn. The truth is that Savasti Delyth is a vampire lord and a warlock of some power. She is the original founder of the caravanserai, so she is also a businesswoman.

In fact, she is an entrepreneur first and bloodsucker second. Her policy of taking only the wicked to feed upon has kept the caravanserai free of thugs and criminals for many years. Bryn's foolishness has changed all that. He no longer feeds only on the corrupt. Savasti believes that soon his actions will negatively impact business.

It's impossible to get a meeting with Savasti unless the PCs work through Blasius and suggest they know more than they should. Savasti has a regal air, and she is circumspect but polite. She seldom smiles.

Social Encounter: If the characters manage to arrange a meeting with Delyth Caravanserai's mysterious owner, they find a woman who's ready to deal. If they break into her home, Savasti appears almost immediately to confront the interlopers, a few vampire spawn lurking behind her. If she's attacked, she flees deeper into her mine-turned-mansion, and the PCs have to fight through her servants. They have to face Bryn as well, if he hasn't already been eliminated.



Savasti knows about Bryn's exploits, but her lingering attachment to him has prevented her from acting until now. To her, the PCs' inquiry is proof that Bryn's actions are drawing attention. If the characters are successful in a social encounter with Savasti, she promises to "deal permanently" with Bryn, as well as to send Jezlar home if the characters care about that. The PCs needn't do the deed, but she will allow them to if they wish. She and Blasius give the characters keys and directions to Bryn's resting place. If this final deal is made and the bargain kept, the threat to innocent people presented by Delyth Caravanserai is resolved peaceably.

Roleplaying Vampire Lords

The transformation into a vampire lord doesn't eliminate the goals and desires a creature had while living. Some aspirations are turned to darker purposes, while other wants are amplified into animalistic cravings. This means that in addition to an appetite for living blood, a vampire lord can be motivated by anything that moves a living creature of its kind. It merely has an eternity to bring its goals to fruition, though it might have no more patience than any living creature.

When creating or running a vampire lord as a villain or NPC, the creature's desires should form the basis for its behavior in the game. Bryn, for instance, is self-indulgent and greedy, and he is willing to eliminate Savasti so he can have his way. Savasti, on the other hand, is a calculating monster who wishes to simply continue her immortal existence hidden from the world. Bryn is expendable when compared with that goal, but Savasti's soft spot for him prevents her from murdering him outright. That is until proof that Bryn has brought danger to their home shows up in the form of the PCs. These complications make several story outcomes possible.

Such complications make vampire lords gripping villains, but they also make great monsters. The vampire lord the PCs mistakenly awaken deep within a dungeon doesn't need much motivation beyond slaking its inhuman thirst. However, with a little planning, even this sort of vampire lord can be more fun and enduring as a threat. As you would for a more detailed vampire lord villain, plan escape routes, hidden allies, and even traps the vampire knows about. It might have additional burial sites it can retreat to if seriously wounded. From such an area it can plot its revenge or simply show up again to plague the living. Maybe someone even knows that the PCs are at fault for letting the vampire loose in the first place.

As with any intelligent foe in the **D&D** game, vampire lords are more entertaining if they seem motivated in ways that make sense. If they have getaway plans, at the very least a thrilling chase can

ensue. A little thought given to the actions of your vampire lord, whether mere monster or detailed NPC, can go a long way toward increasing everyone's fun.

For the PCs....

vs. Vampires

When dealing with vampire lords, planning is essential. Vampire lords are often entrenched among mortals, using society's mores to cover their bloody habits. The clever among them leave few overt signs of their true nature, but a little work can uncover their dark secrets.

Look to the Past

Vampires live long, so rely on History to garner information. Give heed to legends where the same name frequently shows up. Look for relatives that seem to have similar looks, and pay attention to unusual deaths and disappearances. Suspect convenient heirs and generous patrons. If you don't already know it, learn your enemy's name so you can further your investigations using it.

Examine the Present

What you can't discover from a library's books and folktales, you might learn on the streets by asking the right people. If you know your quarry's home, seek out those familiar with what goes on there. Ply old timers for stories surrounding the names you've discerned and share a drink with experts who are acquainted with your enemy's businesses.

Streetwise helps with all these tasks.

Seek Spiritual Guidance

Religion teaches about life, death, and the undead. If none in your party is educated about such matters, find a sage who is. Learn the difference between a vampire lord and its spawn. Use the knowledge you gain to select tactics, weapons, and defenses.

Learn the Layout

If at all possible, learn the layout of your enemy's abode. The most important place to locate beforehand, if you can, is where the vampire lord reposes during the day.

Find out Who's Who

Vampire lords often establish themselves among other humanoid creatures, so it's important to figure out who the bad guys are. It's likely that many of the people surrounding the vampire are innocents who don't know of the creature's true nature. A little time and talk might even gain you an ally or two in your fight. At the very least, you could uncover a bit of information that gives you a strategic edge.

Put Word before Sword

Vampire lords are terrible foes, and sometimes it's better to just cut one down rather than give the creature a chance to gain the upper hand. But if the monster seems willing or eager to talk, indulging in conversation might grant you the benefit of the creature's knowledge. After all, immortality gives one the opportunity to learn a great deal.

Expect the Unexpected

Vampire lords are elite creatures that often have powers similar to those of a heroic individual. Although it's possible a vampire lord is merely a foppish merchant prince, it's likely that he's instead a warlock or rogue.

Focus Fire

When you're facing a vampire lord, focus your attacks on the vampire, no matter what other sinister distractions or lesser creatures might arise. The creature most likely to bring you an untimely end is the vampire. Once the vampire lord is down, many of its effects and powers will end, and you can then mop up its lackeys without much trouble.

About the Authors

Chris Sims started out working for small d20 companies in 2003, then landed a freelance editor gig for Wizards RPG R&D. Wizards finally got annoyed enough by his constant applications to hire him as the *Duel Masters* editor in 2005. From there, Chris wheedled his way into RPG R&D as an editor, and finally became a story designer after masterminding a few choice assassinations. His credits include *Monster Manual V*, *Secrets of Sarlona*, *Rules Compendium*, and the *Eberron Survival Guide* (thanks, Logan!).

Bruce Cordell is a **D&D** designer, but during his twelve years in the game industry, he has dabbled in miniatures, board games, collectible card games, d20 games, and more. Bruce has over a sixty listed credits to his name, including the *Expanded Psionics Handbook*, *Libris Mortis*, and *Expedition to Castle Ravenloft*. His body of work also includes three published *Forgotten Realms* novels (*Lady of Poison*, *Darkvision*, and *Stardeep*), with more on the way.

Cruel Shadows

Roll vs Role

by Bruce R. Cordell and Chris Sims

For the DM . . .

Shadar-kai lurk in the gloom, maddened by pain, driven by desire, and linked perversely to death and nothingness. As a people, they aren't evil, but their morals lack a stripe of humanity more decent folk of the world might expect from one another. Within the shadar-kai culture, a sometimes-cruel meritocracy, contests of wit, skill, and combat prowess abound. The shadar-kai play these games among their own kind and with other mortal creatures, seeking peak experience above all other goals.

What if two competing factions of shadar-kai held power in differing sections of an adventure site? What if each side held goals in common with the PCs? Further, suppose each bloc had reasons for working with or against the PCs, as well as for not utterly destroying the competing party? Imagine still further that the goal held by both sides might be objectionable to good-hearted characters. How do the heroes come through the darkness on top, using all available options?

Tomb of Sahyeh

The Tomb of Sahyeh is rumored to lie undiscovered within the Gloomdeeps, a cavern complex connected to the Shadowfell and now inhabited by hostile humanoids. Sahyeh herself was a shadar-kai master of shadow magic and illusion. Her legend speaks of her passage into the service of the Raven Queen at the time of her death, perhaps even becoming one of the mighty sorrowsworn. Before her demise, she built a tomb -- a place that exists simultaneously in the worlds of mortals and of shadow -- to house her worldly remains. She left her greatest treasures within: a tome of her knowledge and the shadowy orb she carried to aid her dark workings. Whispers suggest that Sahyeh's skull also holds knowledge and power accessible to those loyal to the goddess of death and fate.



Adventure Hooks

A variety of reasons can lead the PCs toward the Tomb of Sahyeh.

1. Troglodytes have been raiding outlying farms and engaging in villainy along remote roadways from their home caverns in a region known as Gloomdeeps. Innocent folk have been killed, or they have been taken for slaves or sacrifices by the pitiless trogs. Recently, a captured troglodyte revealed that its tribe has been driven from ancestral tunnels by the nearby Bloodspear orc tribe. According to the trog, orcs and troglodytes largely ignored one another until the arrival of what the troglodyte calls "shadow people."

2. Gunnar, the reeve of the small village of Vaester, notified Lady Vaester, the local noble, that "two groups of strange folk have been seen abroad." The reeve describes these folk as pale humans dressed in dark clothing. They had many tattoos, scars, and piercings, as well as vicious-looking weapons and dark beasts. Natural shadows seemed to bend around them. They harmed no one, but they headed into the nearby hills, which are known to be home to the mysterious Gloomdeeps, which is a location that orcs and troglodytes frequent. Lady Vaester, a practical and proactive woman, wants these strangers tracked and their purpose uncovered. She wants no one stirring up the savages of the hills and Gloomdeeps.

3. During an earlier expedition, the PCs locate lore about Sahyeh and her tomb. Further investigation leads them to Vaester and the Gloomdeeps in the wilderness north of the town. Legwork within Vaester might uncover one or more other hooks.

Investigation

PCs can make Dungeoneering or History checks to learn more about the Gloomdeeps. Those who have Streetwise can canvas the locals for similar information.

DC 10: The Gloomdeeps are far enough away from Vaester that they're mostly fodder for scary stories told by

the locals. Sure, the Bloodspear orcs of the nearby hills have been known to raid the roads north of the village, but the problem has always been sporadic. Fallen watchtowers from the old empire dot the hills near the road, and the Bloodspears use these and shallow caverns for shelter.

DC 15: Troglodytes live in a portion of the Gloomdeeps. They're seen in civilized territory even less often than the orcs. Recently, however, something has made them more aggressive and more likely to be seen on the surface.

DC 20: The Gloomdeeps get their name from the fact that the caverns are darker than should be natural, even near the surface. According to old tales, strange creatures have emerged from those caverns -- creatures of shadow and worse.

DC 25: Some believe the Gloomdeeps connect to the Shadowfell, and that the darkness of the Shadowfell, rather than water, carved the caverns. That belief is likely to be at least partially true, because Sahyeh, a shadar-kai sorceress with great shadow powers, built her tomb in the caverns long ago. There she interred her treasures with her body.

Shadar-Kai

A successful Arcana check can tell PCs more about shadar-kai, as detailed in the shadar-kai entry of the *Monster Manual*.

Gloomdeeps Encounters

When the PCs finally decide to go to the Gloomdeeps, they're likely to meet orcs, troglodytes, or other creatures before meeting shadar-kai. They might even meet shadar-kai fighting troglodytes or among themselves, divided along factional lines (see below).



Shadar-Kai

Shadar-kai within the Gloomdeeps fall into two factions -- one serving a shade witch named Yalda and another serving a shadow adept named Hutahn. These two factions are geographically separated in the caverns. They're competing to find connections to the Shadowfell within the Gloomdeeps, the Tomb of Sahyeh, and Sahyeh's skull and tome. The winner of the contest will receive promotion to a leadership position and other rewards in Telnnya, a distant shadar-kai town in the Shadowfell.

When constructing encounters, have the PCs meet Yalda loyalists before meeting Hutahn loyalists if you want to make it harder on the players. Yalda's followers are likely to give the characters a bad taste about shadar-kai that could have ramifications across the entire adventure. If you'd rather ensure some social encounters with shadar-kai, Hutahn's faction is the best first contact.

The factions have come to blows, especially through orc lackeys. That said, neither faction wants to eliminate the other shadar-kai, and neither leader wants to slay the other. They want to defeat one another at the task at hand, among other goals (see Important Characters).

Hutahn's Faction: Hutahn's shadar-kai are losing ground in the contest to find Sahyeh's tomb. Yalda has numerous orcs

at her command, and Hutahn has only his loyal followers, a few dark creepers, and a pack of shadow hounds. At first, Hutahn's shadar-kai are indifferent to the PCs and wise enough to realize that they could use a few allies. Diplomacy is likely to make them more than willing to lead the characters to meet Hutahn.

Yalda's Faction: Yalda's shadar-kai are likely to be leaders among small squads of orcs. As part of the currently ascendant faction, they have little reason to negotiate with interlopers. They're unfriendly but willing to talk at least long enough to give the PCs a chance to leave. In response to Diplomacy or Intimidate, they might even reveal that they're part of a shadar-kai expedition searching this place. Exceptionally charming or menacing PCs, or characters that defeat an orc squad without slaying its shadar-kai leaders, can gain audience with Yalda herself. A beaten shadar-kai gladly trades the opportunity for an audience, or information about such a possibility, for his life. He won't reveal other information, except under duress, saying that Yalda can explain everything.



Orcs

Bloodspear orcs within the caverns have no interest in peaceable relations with the PCs. Only a shadar-kai among them or a token that proves an allegiance with Yalda is likely to prevent them from attacking intruders in the caverns. Defeated orcs respond best to Intimidate, and a particularly successful intimidator gets them to reveal Yalda is looking for something called the Tomb of Sahyeh.

Troglodytes

The troglodytes of the Gloomdeeps are universally hostile. Capture at their hands means one is bound for sacrifice.

Others

Creatures native to the Shadowfell have found their way into the Gloomdeeps. This includes creatures such as shadow hounds, spectral panthers, and shadow bats, as well as wraiths and a few other undead. A few aberrant creatures also live in the deeps, perhaps as an outgrowth of the connection to the Shadowfell or the depravity of the troglodytes.

Important Characters

The leaders of the shadar-kai factions are the most prominent characters in this scenario.

Hutahn

Hutahn is a matter-of-fact soldier who has seen a lot of battle in his life. He's competing with Yalda more for the excitement and to make the witch really earn her reward, rather than to gain anything for himself. He decided to oppose her on the spur of the moment, so he had less time to prepare and gain a footing in the Gloomdeeps.

With regard to the situation, Hutahn has a gamut of feelings. When it comes to monstrous creatures such as orcs, he's a cold killer. He has no qualms about killing orcs and troglodytes, but he prefers to merely wound Yalda's shadar-kai followers. Hutahn is Yalda's brother, and he doesn't want her killed, but he's willing to accept her death, if it occurs, as fate's hand in this affair. PCs who kill Yalda in fair combat needn't worry about Hutahn's retribution (unless you decide they should).

Social Encounters: Hutahn is friendly when the PCs come to him, unless the characters have killed his followers -- then he's unfriendly. Diplomacy is the best bet when dealing with him. He is frank, revealing most of the situation and answering most questions. The only facts he's coy about are his relationship to Yalda and why he's here to oppose her. He knows "sentimentality" might hinder good-hearted folk from seeing the "fun" in the little game he and Yalda are playing. He paints her as a cold woman who would abuse any power she acquires. Certainly, she can't be trusted to keep any bargains she makes with non-shadar-kai.



Friendly PCs receive an offer of alliance. If they report to Hutahn any information they gain about the tomb and the relics therein, as well as connections to the Shadowfell they find in the Gloomdeeps, Hutahn can focus on thwarting Yalda and her minions. He's willing to pay for Sahyeh's skull and tome if the PCs find them before he does. Hutahn doesn't know about Sahyeh's orb, but he might suggest new terms if the characters reveal they have it. A contest of skill or a duel might be in order. Only if the PCs break their word does Hutahn attack them after a bargain has been struck. He even allows them to keep Sahyeh's orb if they refuse to part with it through contest or payment.

If the PCs instead ally with Yalda, Hutahn's shadar-kai show them the same mercy they'd show Yalda's orcs. Only if the characters leave the Gloomdeeps with Sahyeh's relics does Hutahn seek to recover what should belong to the shadar-kai of Telnnya. He'll even rejoin his sister's side if necessary. Otherwise, a victory gained by Yalda through her use of the PCs is merely another instance of fate's hand in the matter.

Combat Encounters: If the PCs fail to impress Hutahn or if they otherwise trigger an armed conflict with him or his followers, it may seem that the shadows themselves draw their blades against the characters.

Patrollers (Level 6; 1,250 XP): Hutahn's faction contains two or more separate groups charged with patrolling the portion of the Gloomdeeps under their putative control. PCs might well meet a group of patrollers before they meet Hutahn.

- 2 shadar-kai chainfighters (level 6 skirmisher)
- 1 shadar-kai gloomblade (level 6 lurker)
- 2 shadow hounds (level 6 skirmisher)

Shadow hounds attack first, trying their fearful baying attacks as a minor action, then flashing into melee to attempt a *shadow ambush*, each against the same PC. After the shadow hounds have acted, the chainfighters move in with their *dance of death* ability to shift up to 6 squares and make 3 spiked chain attacks as they move. While their enemies are distracted, the gloomblade strikes from concealment granted by its *veil of shadows*, and potentially blinds a target (using its *gloomblade* power). It continues to attack its blinded prey, hoping to sustain the blindness round after round.

These shadow creatures all have some limited ability to teleport short distances. While they can't get far or even appear in a noncontiguous space, they could take advantage of cavernous terrain. For instance, one fight with Hutahn's patrollers should occur within a wide hall or passage that contains a parallel balcony or passage 15 feet above the cavern floor. This is low enough to allow the shadar-kai to *shadow jaunt* to it; the shadow hounds could reach a shelf 35 feet above the floor. Such balconies or shelves could provide convenient escape routes should a fight with PCs go poorly.

Hutahn's Cadre (Level 9; 1,900 XP): The other group of Hutahn's faction PCs can meet is the group that contains and protects Hutahn himself. The shadar-kai warrior's personal bodyguard thinks little of sacrificing themselves to protect their leader.

- Hutahn, shadar-kai warrior (level 8 elite soldier) 700 xp
- 2 shadar-kai warriors (level 8 soldier) 350 xp each (700)
- 1 dark one dark stalker (level 10 lurker)

Hutahn is elite, which provides him with +2 AC, +2 Defenses, and 100% more hit points than a regular shadar-kai warrior. He also can make three katar attacks with one standard melee attack instead of two.

During any encounter that PCs have with Hutahn, whether social or combat, Hutahn's dark stalker ally initially attempts to keep its presence hidden through a combination of Stealth and *invisibility*. If hostilities break out, the dark stalker uses its *dark step* to appear in the middle of a group of PCs, then releases its *dark fog* to plunge characters into darkness. It spends future rounds attempting to kill PCs that it can keep in the dark, or those it can attack from invisibility.

Hutahn and his two warriors wait for the dark stalker to act first so they can take advantage of the darkness created by its *dark fog*. While they can't see in total darkness either, they can attack any PCs caught outside the fog. If one restrains a target with its *cage of gloom* attack, the others attempt to focus their attacks on that target, assuming they do not have to risk opening themselves to free attacks from their adversaries.

A fight with Hutahn's cadre likely occurs in a cavernous chamber that he has controlled long enough to prepare features that provide tactical advantages to his cadre. Of those features, two are concealed 10-foot by 10-foot by 30-foot-deep pit traps on either end of the chamber. If pressed, or if convenient to do so, Hutahn's warriors may attack an adversary then *shadow jaunt* to the opposite side of one of these pits, hoping to lure characters to an unexpected fall.

Hutahn does not use his encounter *shadow jaunt* to lure PCs across a trap. Instead, if the situation seems dire for him, he begins his round with *shadow jaunt* to move to a prepared wall of the chamber and become insubstantial. He uses his standard action to move through a section of the stone wall (specially treated to allow an insubstantial creature to pass through as if it had phasing 1/day), which leads to a tunnel blocked off from the

main chamber. This tunnel leads to other portions of Gloomdeeps and perhaps safety for Hutahn.

Yalda

A privileged witch among the shadar-kai, Yalda is used to getting her way. Despite a sense of entitlement, she's a capable and resourceful leader. She came to the Gloomdeeps of her own accord to fulfill the wishes of a more powerful shadar-kai in Telnysda. If her interfering brother hadn't chosen to make this quest hard on her, she believes she'd already be out of the Gloomdeeps with her prizes. Her biggest flaws lie in such conceit.

She believes she has the situation in hand. The Bloodspear orcs work for her after she defeated one of their prominent warchiefs, and they now hope to share in the spoils of this venture. To Yalda, they're simply meat shields. Yalda allows her own followers to do as they wish with regards to Hutahn's minions -- injury and death is the cost of their misplaced loyalty. She believes herself indifferent to Hutahn's doom as well, although she does nothing actively to bring him serious harm. The truth is that Yalda's rage and thirst for vengeance at the death of her older brother Hutahn would know no bounds, as PCs could discover.



Social Encounters: Yalda's arrogance leads her to believe she needs no help from worldly mortals in accomplishing her tasks. However, if the PCs are sharp enough to gain an audience with her, she's willing to use them to get what she wants. She is unfriendly when the characters first meet her, but she responds to Diplomacy.

An amiable interaction might lead her to offer an alliance to the PCs, but she lies about the whole situation if she can get away with it. Yalda paints Hutahn as a villain of the lowest order, indicating her pact with the Bloodspear orcs is one of mutual protection that has helped the tribe and will continue to elevate them above the "bestial" state typical to orcs. She creates terms much like those Hutahn offers, giving the PCs a token to get them past orc patrols, but she ultimately has no intention of keeping her word. She's even willing to use any attraction for her tattooed, pierced flesh displayed by PCs against them.

If allied PCs return to her with information, she pays but acts disappointed that the characters haven't accomplished more. In the case of Sahyeh's relics, Yalda reveals her true intentions, ordering a group of her orcs and shadar-kai to take the items from the heroes. Only a timely and extremely successful use of Intimidation can prevent such a battle. PCs can also use Intimidation if they defeat the first wave of Yalda's footsoldiers. The shade witch has no intention of dying in the Gloomdeeps, and she's willing to bargain if she thinks it might cost her life to further betray or reject the characters. This doesn't mean she's above tracking the PCs and attacking them later, and she may even attempt to get Hutahn's help.

Combat Encounter: Even if player characters initially placate Yalda and strike a bargain, it could prove ultimately impossible to avoid coming into conflict with the vengeful woman.

Yalda's Court (Level 8; 1,815 XP): Yalda commands perhaps a full hundred orcs. Of these, Yalda keeps most occupied searching for the items she seeks from Sahyeh's tomb, with each team led by one of her loyal shadar-kai. So far, they've failed her.

For her own protection, Yalda always keeps a "court" of orcs who've proved their loyalty to her by allowing themselves to be pierced and tattooed according to shadar-kai custom.

- Yalda, shadar-kai witch (level 7 controller)
- 2 orc bloodragers (level 7 elite brute)
- 5 orc warriors (level 6 minion)

Even during a social encounter, Yalda's court never lets PCs get closer than 10 feet from their mistress. When combat begins, the orc bloodragers charge the PCs and spend their extra action points to make an extra attack each at the end of their charges. Each bloodrager does not yield ground and fights to the bloody end.

While her court keeps PCs occupied during the first round of combat, Yalda surrounds herself in *deep shadow* to gain concealment (and continues to sustain the effect every round with a minor action). She prefers to attack PCs at range to begin with, using her *beshadowed mind* power to shut down the ability of PCs with ranged powers of their own to effectively target the powers. If forced into melee, PCs find her ability to deal *blackfire touches* something to avoid.

Yalda's Court, Wave Two (Level 5; 1,100 XP): The thing about Yalda is that she is devious, and being devious, she expects a double cross. She always keeps a small force of loyal shadar-kai nearby that can respond within 2

rounds to any attack on her person.

- 2 shadar-kai chainfighters (level 6 skirmisher)
- 1 shadar-kai gloomblade (level 6 lurker)
- 1 shadar-kai warrior (level 8 soldier)

Wave two *shadow jaunts* into the space from upper balconies if all other entrances are blocked.

Like Hutahn, Yalda's audience chamber has been under her control long enough for her to prepare the room's features to her court's tactical advantage. The main feature is a shrine to the Raven Queen Yalda has installed in the chamber, and Yalda stands as close to it as possible. The shrine has a terrain effect: It turns all bright light dim and dim light to darkness in a radius of 5 squares. In that same radius, all creatures not tattooed and pierced according to shadar-kai custom (and truth be told, secret ritual), take 1 point of necrotic damage each round.

Yalda attempts to bargain for her life, and failing that, flee using her *shadow jaunt* power to insubstantially escape to a subcave below her audience chamber.

Customization

The tomb and surrounding Gloomdeeps are mere hooks for you, the DM, to use. The shadar-kai factions, tomb, and treasures briefly mentioned here can be fleshed out and easily dropped into a dungeon of your own design. They can also be changed to your liking. The whole scenario is assumed to be for 6th-level characters.

Orcs and troglodytes of the Gloomdeeps are left vague so as to be less important than the shadar-kai. That fact also makes them easy to modify. Maybe the orcs have a displaced chieftain or shaman, creating a fourth faction in the Gloomdeeps. And what if the troglodytes are the only ones who know the way into Sahyeh's tomb? Maybe they unknowingly bear the only key. In any case, such a twist adds to the prominence of these otherwise background monsters.

3rd Edition

Although different from those in 4th Edition, shadar-kai appear in the 3rd Edition *Fiend Folio* on page 150. This scenario assumes the shadar-kai leaders are 5th- or 6th-level NPCs (Yalda is a sorcerer or shadowcaster (*Tome of Magic* 111), Hutahn is a rogue) in an adventure designed for 4th-level characters.

About the Authors

Chris Sims started out working for small d20 companies in 2003, then landed a freelance editor gig for Wizards RPG R&D. Wizards finally got annoyed enough by his constant applications to hire him as the *Duel Masters* editor in 2005. From there, Chris wheedled his way into RPG R&D as an editor, and finally became a story designer after masterminding a few choice assassinations. His credits include *Monster Manual V*, *Secrets of Sarlona*, *Rules Compendium*, and the *Eberron Survival Guide* (thanks, Logan!).

Bruce Cordell is a D&D designer, but during his twelve years in the game industry, he has dabbled in miniatures, board games, collectible card games, d20 games, and more. Bruce has over a sixty listed credits to his name, including the *Expanded Psionics Handbook*, *Libris Mortis*, and *Expedition to Castle Ravenloft*. His body of work also includes three published *Forgotten Realms* novels (*Lady of Poison*, *Darkvision*, and *Stardeep*), with more on the way.

Marking Marked and Other 4E-isms

Save My Game

by Stephen Radney-MacFarland

[Last month](#) I featured good advice sent in by you on table management. I just want to thank everyone who sent me suggestions. Even if I didn't feature your particular nugget of game-table wisdom, I enjoyed reading every single response.

As promised, this month, we'll talk about tracking table conditions and all the little modifiers, conditions, and other bundles of joy that occur in the heat of the battle grid shuffle, but rather than using 3rd Edition **Dungeon & Dragons** for our examples, we'll explore some upcoming 4E-isms.

Let me start off by saying, like many DMs, I'm a sucker for little DM table tools. Every convention I attend, I scour the dealer's hall looking for interesting little knickknacks that promise to help me run my game faster or help me convey information to my players with ease. Some have fulfilled that promise and have found a place on my game table week after week. Others collect dust in this storage bin or the other, discarded after one session of use.

Yet, there's nothing like a new edition to make me rethink past assumptions and to help me find new uses for old tools. And throughout the 4th Edition **Dungeons & Dragons** development and playtest process, I found myself going through those bins and finding ways to use those nifty little tools that have been lying fallow during the last edition's play.



Cards, skull beads, magnetic base markers, minis, terrain features, and the obligatory fist-full of dice are just a few of the tools that help me keep my game pace fast and furious.

Bloodied

You're in the middle of a tense battle. The wicked mind flayer and its grimlock minions have backed your group into a corner, and it is going to take pure grit and the best tactics to get out alive. It's the rogue's turn. Her player, Lisa, scans the battle grid. She knows that some of the grimlocks have been hit, but she can't remember which have been hit most often. "Which one looks the most hurt," she asks, knowing she should strike there to make an opening in anticipation of taking out their formidable leader.

I absolutely love the bloodied condition. Not only does it give designers an interesting trigger to put on truly debilitating and heroic effects, but it's also a fantastic tool of communicating the general state of the battle quickly. (If you haven't heard about the bloodied condition, check it out in the current **D&D Miniatures rules**. Because a number of interesting powers on both the PC and monster side rely on their players knowing when a foe is bloodied, when you start playing 4th Edition **D&D**, get into the early habit of calling out when your character or the monsters you control are bloodied. On the PC side, it lets the DM know that he can unleash some interesting monster powers and it lets your clerics and warlords know that you may want some hit point relief and soon. On

the DM side, it lets players know how they are doing in the battle and gives them crucial information that will inform power and action point choice later in the encounter.

Depending on the size of your group, it may be pretty easy to have your players call out when their characters are bloodied. I'm one of those DMs who doesn't mind metagame chatter, so my players are free to talk about the particulars of their hit points and conditions, but I know that many DMs frown on this. Whatever your take on metagaming, have your players call out when they are bloodied when they become so. Bloodied should be no secret. If you are dealing with a particularly large gaming group, or, as DM, you're afraid that you're going to miss out on monster powers that trigger when an enemy is bloodied, give each player a little table-tent with the word "bloodied" on it. With a glance you can see the state of the PCs and progress the action quickly.

As far as letting the PCs know when monsters are bloodied, lately I've become a fan of actually marking the miniatures in some way. I've been taking my **D&D Miniatures** and sticking a pin in the top. I can then drop beads for different conditions. I have some white skull beads (picked up during a **Gen Con So Cal**) that I've been using for the bloodied condition.

Marked



The human fighter (on the left and using the purple disks) marks the left-hand ghost, while the dwarf paladin uses his *divine challenge* to mark (with the light blue disks) the right-hand ghost from afar.

Marked is a new condition that defenders and some soldier monsters can apply to their enemies. By itself, it gives a penalty to your target if it attacks anyone *but you*, which helps defenders and soldiers fulfill their role on the battle grid. Often, though, there are other effects that serve as riders on the marked condition. For instance the paladin's *divine challenge* -- that class's signature marking ability -- does some amount of radiant damage once a turn when the target of *divine challenge* attacks someone other than the paladin who marked him. Of course, the fighter (the other *Player's Handbook* defender) features a different effect, dissuading her mark from taking the battle elsewhere. Oh, and this is really important to remember -- a creature can be marked by only one opponent at a time and new marks supersede old marks.

So like the combat advantage granted by flanking, marked is relational in nature, but unlike flanking, it can't be apprehended purely by looking at the battle grid. In simple battles with one defender or soldier, you won't have any trouble at all -- just have the defender's player keep track of it -- but when you have two defenders in a group (like I do in my *Castle Greyhawk* paragon-tier game) or a group of mark-using soldiers in the encounter, keeping track of the condition can be a tad tricky, and you'll probably want to use a rigorous method for tracking the condition throughout the rounds.

The method I've been using lately is marking the bases with magnetic, colored counters called [Alea Tools](#). Each character or monster that can mark in an encounter is given his or her own color, and when a target is marked, that color is placed under the base. Alea Tools also offers a tool to create 1-inch magnetized pads that you can put on the bottom of the base to make sure that when you move the mini, the marker comes with it. Last time I was at my local game store, I also noticed that [Gale Force 9](#) offers a magnetized miniature base kit. You could also use beads, like I do for the bloodied condition.



Ignoring the paladin (and taking a healthy dose of radiant damage), the formerly right-hand ghost moves adjacent to the fighter. The fighter retorts with a *thicket of blades* attack, marking both of the ghosts. When the dwarf paladin's turn in the initiative comes up, he'll no doubt challenge the same ghosts with a minor action. It's doubtful the ghost can afford to ignore his challenge 2 rounds in a row.

Combat Advantage

While the combat advantage granted by flanking can be apprehended by looking at the field of battle, 4th Edition features many other ways that a creature can grant combat advantage. Various conditions, such as blinded, dazed, and stunned, also grant combat advantage, and since the rogue's sneak attack is contingent on the condition and not just the act of flanking (or catching someone flat-footed), you'll want to find ways in which to communicate this particular combat occurrence to rogues at the very least. Like bloodied, I use those handy skull beads to mark a figure that grants combat advantage to all enemies, and allow the rogue player to keep track of the occasional enemy that grants combat advantage only to her character (using the magnetic markers in complicated battles if she desires).



With one glance, all the players can see a variety of things going on all over the battle grid. They know the left-most azer is marked by the dwarf paladin (blue base marker), the top right two are marked by the human fighter (purple base markers), two of the azers are bloodied (white skull bead), and the azer next to the rogue (who's dressed in traditional black just behind the azer marked by the paladin) is granting combat advantage (black skull bead).

Cards and More Cards

I really love using cards in my **D&D** games. Cards are portable and flexible information devices. They fit easily in the hand, and you can put a bunch of information on them. Right now, I am fitting entire 4th Edition **D&D** stat blocks on my 3x5 initiative cards with relative ease -- including my current monstrous bad guy, an adult red dragon named Nemisalat (and she's a solo creature to boot!). But I've lauded the virtues of initiative cards in this column before -- no need stomping old ground to death. For my 4th Edition games I've also been using condition,

power, and magic item cards.

Condition cards are nothing new. There have been a number of publishers who've created condition cards, and many DMs use them. The reason that I think they'll be especially important in your 4th Edition **D&D** games is because there will be a period of time when everyone in the group is learning the rules, and the more you can avoid page flipping, the faster your first few sessions will run. While developing the new **D&D** edition, we made sure that the new conditions were simple, talked to one another, and were bullet-pointed so you don't have to wade through paragraphs to find the one clause you seek. This format lends itself to simple cards that convey information quickly. I hand players cards when their characters are afflicted with a condition, and they hand it back when the condition ends.

Power cards aren't entirely new either . . . other classes have had them in the past (mostly spell- or psionic-using classes, but weapon-users got their first taste of their use in *Tome of Battle*), but they are very helpful especially when you start playing 4th Edition. Like the casters of past editions, everyone in 4E has a healthy dose of interesting options they can employ in combat, and their use and reuse is determined by their rates of usage. While this greatly enhances choice and fun in game play, if you've never used a power-heavy class in past editions of **D&D**, this can seem a little daunting at first. Even relative veterans of the system (like my home playtest group) can find being thrown into a higher level of play daunting at first without some mnemonic tools. Writing even the most basic description of what a power does and on what page it appears only expedites game play. I know that some of you will scoff at using cards in a roleplaying game, but my sincere advice is to get over your hang-ups. Cards are tools, not the destroyer of roleplaying.

Many times the right card can enhance the roleplaying experience. I've been using the [Paizo GameMastery item cards](#) since their release and they're just as useful in 4E. They're relatively inexpensive, and they feature great art and basic descriptions, plus they offer enough room for you or your players to write what the item is or does on the back. They are especially handy to give out when the PCs have found an item, but aren't sure what its purpose (or true purpose) is yet. They are also very handy in that they allow your players to keep track of inventory and have a handy way of trading items . . . just pass the card along. There are, of course, other companies that produce similar products, and using index cards is probably the cheapest way of pulling off this particular time-saving trick.

Finding Your Own Way

Of course my tools are exactly that: my tools. While I hope some of you have found some inspiration and helpful advice (especially those of you who will be running the first public 4th Edition **D&D** games at [Dungeons & Dragons Experience](#)) my tools are based on what I have at hand, my love of experimenting, and the quirks of my own peculiar predilections. There is no doubt that the particulars of my tools will change the more I play 4th Edition, and there is also no doubt that you will find ways that work better for you. The general wisdom that I hope you'll take away from these words of advice is that it is helpful and important to communicate what's going on in the game (and the story) to your players, and the more you can do that with at-a-glance tools, the more time it frees up to use your words, gestures, and general brain power on telling a good story and presenting memorable challenges. After all, if you've done your job right, your players are going to tell the stories of those things for years to come long after the memory of the game mechanics that brought them to life fades into dead neurons.

Delving into the Mailbag

Wow, the proactive part of the column is really long this month, but I hope it helps you when you start running your 4th Edition **D&D** game. But now it's time to dip into the mail bag and find more specific problems you might be having with your game. And this month they have nothing to do with crunch!

Finding My Voice

*I know this sounds a little, well, dumb, but I really want to use a funny voice while playing my **D&D** character. The problem is, I'm really bad at it. I float from a bad Italian accent to a worse French one and then on to a truly horrid Spanish one in single sentence . . . and not on purpose either. How can I get better at talking funny during my **D&D** game?*

-- Aaron of the Many Bad Accents

Well, Aaron, it sounds like you've nailed talking funny, just not the talking funny you want. I've had characters with *outrageous* accents. I've played with people who use them. There's a player in my home game (also named Aaron, by the way) who uses accents to help define his characters. Here's the secret behind the funny accent -- they don't need to be good, they just need to be distinctive. Accents are great to get you in the mindset of your character, for others to know when you are talking in character, and to give others the impression that your character is somehow special (or maybe a little touched), but they are also very silly. Sometimes it is just fine to embrace the silly. You're playing in a fantasy world after all, and a mixed-up accent can make your character seem more fantastic. You're not trying to emulate an Italian, French, or Spanish accent . . . it's Sembian!

Rationalization of bad accents aside, if you want to become better at accents, some instruction and practice is your best bet. Professional and amateur actors learn new accents all the time . . . why can't you? There are a surprising number of books with CD and DVD instruction on the subject. You also may want to check out local

community theatres or community colleges -- sometimes they offer a variety of workshops for aspiring actors, and I hear (though I can't confirm) that accent training is a rather popular course of study.

Roleplaying N00b

I have been playing since the early 90s and have always been a very hack-'n'-slash-style player and DM. When I moved and started a new gaming group with complete n00bs, this trend continued. But recently I started playing with a new DM who emphasized roleplaying, and I had a blast. I have been trying to add in some roleplaying into my games, and I have been falling flat on my face. I try to get my players to interact and get into the world I have created, but they try for about ten minutes and then revert to talking in third person and out of character. I am not trying to turn a hack-'n'-slash into a nothing but roleplaying but just trying to find a happy medium. Any advice?

-- Flat on My Face Dustin

Well, now that's an entire subject, Dustin. When you first catch the immersive roleplaying bug, it's very easy to take it too far or try to inundate your group with it too quickly. Immersive roleplaying may seem strange to the more gamist groups and can make some players feel self-conscious and silly. The trick is to take things slow and steady. Next month we'll explore four ways in which you can infuse more immersive roleplaying into any group -- even those die hard hack-'n'-slashers -- some of them use very gamist tools!

About the Author

Born on a stormy Christmas day, in our nation's capital, during the Nixon administration, the stars were definitely wrong when **Stephen Radney-MacFarland** came screaming into the world. Spending most of his impressionable years as a vagabond and ne're-do-well, Stephen eventually settled in the Northwest to waste his life on roleplaying games.

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The Fine Art of Table Management

Save My Game

by Stephen Radney-MacFarland

Wow, is my mailbox full! In case you're new to the column or you missed it last month, I ended the column with a reader's question about how to speed up play around the **Dungeons & Dragons** game table, and a call out to all of you to share some of your great ideas on the subject. An overwhelming number of you stepped up to the plate and sent me a pile of great ideas.

It is very important to consider and try out a variety of ideas on how to speed up your game. You would think there is one, sure-fire answer, but there isn't.

Dungeons & Dragons players tend to be extremely individualistic (myself included). There's just something about the game that attracts stubborn and creative types. While we're all keen on escaping into the world of **D&D** for a few hours each week, we rarely agree on the particulars of how that escape should be conducted. Heck, sometimes we're lucky if we can agree on the toppings for the session's pizza delivery!

Need proof? Next time you play, look around your table. How many different kinds of character sheets do you see? If your group is like many, each player has some different iteration of the **D&D** character sheet. One has the most current sheet from the **D&D** website, one has an Excel spreadsheet downloaded from this fan site or the other, and at least one has the character scribbled, often seemingly in some strange code, on one or two sheets of paper, sometimes crumpled and nacho-stained. The diversity of character sheets is just a symptom of the not-so-rugged individualism that marks most -- if not all -- **D&D** gamers. And many gamers swear whatever system they use is the best.

So how do you manage a group that is filled with people who always have a better way of doing things? With care, and through trial and error.

The first rule of successfully using a table management tool for **D&D** is to realize that no single tool is a golden ticket -- even if you might want it to be. For instance, I was surprised by the amount of email I received on the subject of initiative cards. Many of you had not tried this method of tracking initiative order and a good many of you were keen on trying it out in your very next game. And while I particularly like that style of initiative tracking and have been using it successfully for years, I know for darn sure some will try it and discard it, or improve upon it based on the play style and the needs of the group they run. That's the chief reasons that I made a call out for interesting table management ideas. The more ideas you know that are out there, the more likely you'll find the particular one that sings to you and works well with the needs of your group.

Readers' Ideas

While I received more emails and ideas on the subject of table management than I can print in one, two, or even more columns, I picked out some of the ones I thought were the most helpful and inventive. Enjoy!

More on Initiative

I was really surprised to find out how many people use clothespins, wooden pegs, or similar instruments to keep track of initiative. The first two letters feature this kind of method.

My group uses wasknijpers (known as clothespins in the U.S.) labeled with the players' names and monster1, monster2, and so on to track initiative. I arrange them in order, clipping them to the top of the DM's screen, putting one higher in case of delay or ready actions. Everyone can see the order, and it takes little effort to insert someone on a different position after delay or ready. The system is also very portable.

-- Johan from the Netherlands

We have boards that can stand up on which are marked the different initiative numbers (say 1 to 30). Each player has a wooden clothes peg with his or her name on it and they each place it on the board at the appropriate initiative score. One of the players has responsibility for keeping track of initiatives. Players delaying their initiative are given their pegs to hold until they want to join in again.



-- *Trebonius (playing since D&D came in a white box!)*

We don't roll for initiative during the game. Yep, I know it's crazy, but I have my players roll twenty or so initiative checks every few sessions. Between combats, while the players are roleplaying, searching, looting, taking a break, or whatever, I put my initiative cards in order using those pre-rolls. We've always found rolling initiative during the game to be an instant verisimilitude killer and this really speeds things up while not taking the players out of the scene.

-- *Rob the Roll Manager*

Similar to your cards for initiative, both groups that I am in use numbered cards. However, these cards are folded so that they stand up and the number is on both sides so that, when they are stood up in front of a player, everyone at the table can see what a person's initiative is.

-- *(Please, take a number) David*

The Fine Art of Shutting Up

Quite a few of you had some methods for keeping players on task while teaching them the fine art of speaking during their turn without being mean or overly authoritarian about it. Here are a couple of my favorites.

No talking except on your initiative. Players who break this rule are warned and then get (small) experience penalties -- typically their story award is reduced. Interestingly players tend to silence interrupters as much as the DM does, usually with a remark like "You play your character and I will play mine."

-- *Trebonius the Elder*

A very large group can cause major slowdowns, especially when there is a tendency for the players who are waiting for their turn to chat rather than research their next move. My solution? A timer. I have my timer set to countdown for 1 minute. This is how much time a player has to announce his action, then rolling can be done as I move on to the next player. I also have to allow myself the same restrictions to keep things fair and moving.

-- *TJ the Timelord*

The More Tangibles the Better!

A great number of you sent emails imparting the virtues of using *Dungeon Tiles*, other battle grid methods, and miniatures and tokens. I know that may make some of the more narrative players cringe (and some of the more militant of you may even vomit a little in your mouth at the idea), but there is nothing like the use of physical aids to get your point across in **D&D**. Here're some other uses of props, tools, and tokenlike objects that can help speed up game play.

One technique that I have found invaluable during mid- to high-level games is for each player to have a small bag of 'item cards' that represent the magic items and equipment their characters possess. I have them write their names on the bags, and toss them back into our miniatures box at the end of each session. Whenever characters exchange items, they physically hand over the card, or turn it in to sell it. This method removes the questions over who has which item.

-- *Mike, keeper of the bags of holding*

I have a special sheet of each of their spells (much like a "spell book"), which describes in detail each spell description and its saves. I also print all written handouts to give the players so they don't have to write things down -- this includes important statements by NPCs.

-- *Tom, Lord Master of the Handout*

One thing that has also sped combat up dramatically when faced with several of the same enemy is numbered bases. These are actually backgammon pieces that I painted numbers on the sides of. I put numbers on four sides so that all players can see them, and then I stack enemy figures on top of them. That way, the players can say, "I attack orc number 4," instead of, "I attack the orc over near the wall, no the other wall... not that guy, the one behind him."

-- *By the numbers Draven*

Thanks and Next Month

Again, thanks to all of you who took the time to send me your fantastic table management ideas. It's extremely rewarding when you can write an advice column that teaches you a few new tricks to try out in the process.

I must admit, though, that I purposefully avoided one important part of table management during this month's column, and that's the problem of keeping track of all the conditions and modifiers that scurry about like fiendish dire stray cats during a **D&D** game session. It's not that I didn't get any email on the subject -- I got a lot, but I have to admit that most of it was looking for help rather than putting forward solutions. So, next month, let's talk



about modifiers, conditions, and the various ways you can keep them straight in the game. Oh, and just for fun, I'll sprinkle in some 4th Edition examples, so I can help you get ready for running that game before the first events are unleashed at **Dungeons & Dragons Experience**, this February 28 to March 2 in Arlington, VA.

About the Author

Born on a stormy Christmas day, in our nation's capital, during the Nixon administration, the stars were definitely wrong when **Stephen Radney-MacFarland** came screaming into the world. Spending most of his impressionable years as a vagabond and ne're-do-well, Stephen eventually settled in the Northwest to waste his life on roleplaying games.

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Save Against Plot Corruption

Save My Game

by Stephen Radney-MacFarland

Last month's column ended with a letter from Donovan, who was frustrated by his players' constant focus on mundane aspects of the game. It's a typical frustration of many Dungeon Masters, as one realizes that -- as my friend Chris Lindsay loves to point out -- PC not only stands for player character, but it can also stand for plot corruptor.

I'm sure some part of Donovan wanted an answer in the form of: "Your players are crazy!" And who knows, they may be, but I suspect the real problem lies in the difference between what many DMs want from their game, and what the players want from the game.

There is this myth that being a DM is an institution of almost deific proportions. Some may like to think that a DM is the controller of the world -- the lone artist struggling to bring to existence an interwoven tapestry of character, story, and myth that will dazzle players with its mere existence.

Well, that's just hogwash.

It's true enough that as a DM you're going to create stories, adventures, encounters, and NPCs that you think are fun and compelling, but the greatest trick to being a fantastic DM is to cater your creations directly to your audience: that group of friends that sit around the table with you every week.

Weighty tomes of rules aside, at its heart **Dungeons & Dragons** is a game of interactive storytelling. By that I don't just mean that you come up with the story and your players look upon that narrative in amazement -- that form of DMing can soon become both frustrating and fruitless, especially if you've got your heart set on how the story *should* play out from session to session. What I'm talking about is more nuanced. It's the kind of interactive storytelling where you're painting the scenery with the brushes of word and props, laying out the hooks, placing the antagonist, coming up with the back story and communicating it all to your primaries (the players). Through it all, you're doing a bit of manipulation to keep the story interesting and dynamic. You're actively creating conflicts -- rabble-rousing at opportune times for dramatic effect -- and you should be riffing off what your players find cool about your game. Just realize that their ideas may be cooler than the plot you came up with in the wee hours of the night before. Some of you will find what I am going to say next shocking, so sit down... take a deep breath: Your game is more akin to a reality television show than a novel or play.

Don't worry -- this doesn't mean you have to delve into the tawdry, or replay scenes over and over again, or use other cheap gimmicks to build anticipation. It does require a realization that the characters are the stars of your show, and a deep connection exists between player and character (the deepest since they are, after all, the same person), which is another hallmark of most reality TV shows. It also means that you can guide the action of "your" game, but you can't control it and you shouldn't want to.

Most DMs have a tendency to think of themselves as writers. Instead, try thinking of yourself as a program director. With that hat on, keep careful note of not only what your players say they want out of the game, but also how they react to different aspects of the story. If social encounters bore most of the players, keep them short, sweet, and to a minimum; on the other hand, if long, drawn-out combats don't hold their attention, then only unleash them when it means the most. And for goodness sakes, don't ever, ever, ever, make your players jump through hoops to do things just because it's the "way it works in your world." That's not sufficient reason at all. The world is a stage for the play, not the reason for the play to exist.

In short, the best way you can save against plot corruption is to not have a plot that can be corrupted, only molded and shaped by the actions and desires of your players. Stay on your toes, know your audience, and bend your story to the will of the players and the characters. Find hooks that make your stories and adventures active because they *interact with* the characters rather than *happen to* the characters.

Now, on to the mailbag and our current batch of problems!

Problem 1: Dispel Spotlight Hog

I have a train wreck staring me in the face.

One of the players is impossible to deal with. He is convinced that he's a fantastic roleplayer, which is somewhat true. He never lets his meta-gaming get in the way of his role, and he always stays in character. The problem is, he always plays characters who are not only evil, but highly antisocial, and he always tries to steal the spotlight. Worse, if I confront him, he'll insist he's not doing



anything wrong, and if the issue is pressed, he begins acting in a passive-aggressive, game-stalling fashion. I don't want to tell him he can't play (although I have planned for that eventuality), and I know it has to be mine (and my co-DM's) responsibility. What can we do?

--Troubled with Player

Roleplaying is no excuse for being a jerk. While I'm a strong proponent of the school of thought that suggests you should cater a game to the desires of the players, and that you should listen to them and riff on what they are excited about to create drama and action, having a player that hogs the spotlight is a sure way to kill fun -- not only fun for you, but fun for his fellow players. If his behavior is really as destructive as you describe, talking to him about it is a fantastic first step.



Explain to him that while he is a great roleplayer and all, you're concerned that his character choices may actually be hurting the play experience of you, your co-DM, and the other players. Try to do this in a nonconfrontational manner, and expect some defensiveness on his part. If he is not responsive, talk to the other participants in the game and get their take on it. Maybe one of the other players can chat with the problem player. Sometimes people blow things off if they come from one source, only to take it seriously when it comes from a second. Maybe he doesn't realize that his actions are making the game less fun for others. Then again, maybe he doesn't care.

We play **D&D** to have fun, and we should be cognizant that other people play the game for that reason as well. If your idea of having fun is to be the center of attention and hog the spotlight all the time, then maybe **D&D** really isn't the game you want to play. It sure as heck won't be the game that others want to play with you.

If all else fails, putting the problem in this black-or-white approach may be the thing that has to happen. It could be the realization your player needs, or it could serve as the explanation as to why he'll not be playing in your game any longer.

Problem 2: Greyhawk No Longer!

What campaign would you consider best to start a new group in? I play D&D with 25-year Greyhawk veterans, and we all want to do something different. What would you suggest?

--Dragonmaster (formerly of Greyhawk)

As much as I love *Greyhawk* (and *Forgotten Realms*, and *Eberron*, and well, a lot of worlds that aren't produced by Wizards of the Coast), I don't think there is any game world that really stands out as the best one to start out with. If you are shopping around for a new world, I propose you do just that: shop around. Take a few weeks and have each person who is interested run a game in a world that interests them. Keep sampling until a world feels like home.

Alternatively, you may want to try running a "worldless" game. Take any low-level published adventure you would like to play, or even a cool adventure you came up with, and start running it. Keep character options pretty open, and then start building a world around the play of the group. In this way, you and your players can build a homebrewed world from scratch one play experience at a time. This method is great fun and can be some of the most rewarding interactive storytelling you may ever do!



Problem 3: A Minute of Nonstop Action in an Hour!

I DM for a group of seven players, and the game always slows down whenever we get into combat. Each round takes about 5 minutes, since we're always getting stuck on initiative and the like. Could you please give me some tips on how to speed things along?

--Joey of the Five-Minute Rounds



Ah, Joey, table management is your friend, especially if you want to cut in half the amount of time it takes to get through a round! If initiative is giving you troubles, there are two really good solutions.



The first involves using cards to track initiative. Have each PC and monster at hand with handy index cards, and keep the game moving by calling out when each PC gets to go. If a character readies an action, turn the card sideways to remind you that she has an action in the queue. If she delays, hand the player the card, and let her hand it back when she is ready to go. I use these suckers all the time, and not only do they allow me to have relevant stats at hand at all times, the delay "hot potato" game is a great way to get even your most tentative players to get back in the action quicker than if their place in the initiative was out of sight and mind.

The cards' one chief drawback is that the order is not immediately visible to anyone but you. Some tactical or forgetful players find this a tad annoying. The second solution that addresses these concerns is to hang a dry-erase board up near your game area. List the initiative in plain sight, making revisions on the board when need be. Also, dropping the dry erase board won't screw up your initiative count -- I've done that a couple times with my index cards.

Once you've settled on a method for tracking the initiative order in a fast and effective way, the next step is guiding your players into good table habits to help speed up the game. Rolling all the dice -- attack, damage, and miss chance -- together is a great way to speed things up, as is getting them to decide upon their move -- or a group of possible moves -- before their turn comes up. At the very least, they should have the rules they need ready and at hand before their turns begin. Get them to cut down their look-up-the-rules time before their action -- there is plenty of time to do that during other turns. Lastly, once you got these good habits down, I find a measured amount of good-natured ribbing at slow play can help speed things up also. It can also build excitement and anticipation.

The tricks of table management deserves a column all by itself . . . how does next month sound? Feel free to drop me a line at dndcolumn@wizards.com to ask for advice, but also share some of your favorite table management techniques for **D&D**. I'll share some of the best ones I get in next month's column!

About the Author

Born on a stormy Christmas day, in our nation's capital, during the Nixon administration, the stars were definitely wrong when **Stephen Radney-MacFarland** came screaming into the world. Spending most of his impressionable years as a vagabond and ne're-do-well, Stephen eventually settled in the Northwest to waste his life on roleplaying games.

Once that **RPGA** guy, Stephen is now a developer in RPG R&D where he doesn't create the traps... he just makes them deadlier. He also teaches a class on roleplaying design for the Art Institute of Seattle, molding the minds of young and upcoming designers. Be afraid. Be very afraid.