The Malady Chronicles



Adventures for levels 1-15

Nine Cataclysmic Adventures
Featuring the Deadliest Plagues and
Diseases the Realms Have Ever Seen!

GUILD

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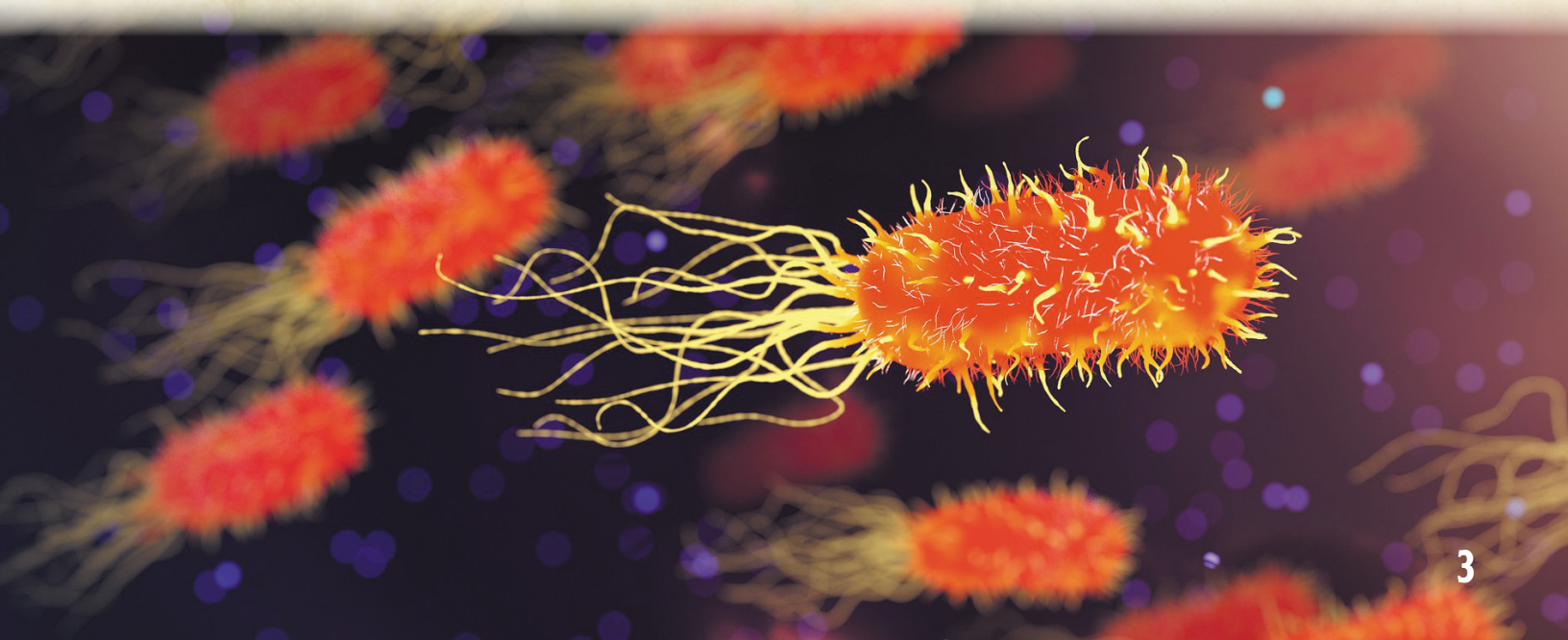
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The Malady Chronicles

Thank you for purchasing the Malady Chronicles. We hope you enjoy reading and using it as much as we did creating it. Many talented people came together to tell these stories, and we are very proud to bring them to you.

This is an anthology of adventures that share a single feature: diseases. Ever since we wrote the Malady Codex, we have envisioned how fantastical diseases could serve as plot hooks, driving forces, or even the entire backbones of stories. With the help of some wonderful people, we have assembled these Chronicles to showcase the true power of diseases as a storytelling tool.

These stories can all be run as individual adventures, with a plausible beginning, an entertaining journey, and a satisfying ending. Having said that, we offer another approach. In between the lines, there are many plot threads that await you and your players to explore. They start from one place, and branch out, inviting the story and its characters to follow a journey through lands plagued by horrible diseases, in an effort to seal away an elder evil. This is the story that the Malady Chronicles tell, and it is one of dark realism mixed with inspiring heroism.

Whichever mode of play you choose, remember that each adventure is written by an individual author. Each story will differ in many ways, including the feeling and presentation. We actively encouraged this, as we believe that every small detail counts when you are trying to convey your creative ideas through an adventure. Rest assured, however, that we have tried our best to prohibit inconsistencies from developing, though it still remains to be seen if we have succeeded.

Diseases are something to be feared and respected. Most of us have been ill at some point in our lives, and unfortunately most of us know what it means to see someone we love become ill, even if for a brief amount of time. There is nothing in our hearts but respect for those that suffer from ailments of the body and mind, and for those that stand beside them, supporting them. All this to say that we hope you do not take this anthology of adventures as a mockery of disease, but rather, as an effort to paint a picture wherein the heroes are struggling with all that the world has to throw at them, and in the end, they succeed and overcome those hardships. We hope that through the harsh representation of some of society's worst aspects, you see the good in situations and people, as our heroes do.

The Chronicles as an Entire Campaign

While we realize that most DMs will read these stories and cherry-pick what they like most, we offer the option for storytellers to present this collection of adventures as a cohesive story. To accomplish that, we need to establish some ground rules and create a connective tissue around which the whole story will grow. Since the stories are not strictly connected, there will not be a perfect flow between them, but the collective story told is still cohesive enough to run as a campaign. The following notes are presented with the intent to inspire, not as rules you cannot break. Take what you want from it, adjust the rest to fit your needs, and play a fun game.

Note that these notes are complementary to the actual adventures. If you want to get a quick read on the whole story, we suggest that you read each introductory point here, then the Adventure Summary part of each adventure, and then return here to continue. You can, however, get a clear feel for the story just from the following paragraphs.

The Connective Tissue

Welcome to a dark world. These stories can be placed in any campaign setting, world, and cosmological system, including the Forgotten Realms, Eberron, Ravenloft or even your own homebrew world! The only prerequisite for the story to begin is this: an Elder Evil has risen.

Ucul'thu, an ancient entity that was imprisoned millennia ago, has finally managed to rise from his deep slumber and break his chains. With his arrival on the Material Plane, he entire area around his gigantic risen body turned into a rotten wasteland, and the world plunged into pestilence. His influence is so great that across the world, every disease has become significantly more potent. In a matter of weeks, entire cities succumbed to maladies and all around the world, society fell into chaos.

That is when hope arrived. The great healer Acesius went on the move, sending out messengers from his healing island, the Acesion. He called heroes to action, as he claimed he had a plan to end this terror.

It is in this quest for a better world that our heroes endeavor. Their story should play out as follows.



The Blossom of Oshadis

This story begins with our heroes waking up with no memories of themselves and of the world around them. They appear to be in some sort of temple, and a beautiful flower is growing on a sunbathed hill close to them. They soon discover a note and their memories slowly resurface. They remember that they are on a mission to retrieve the Blossom of Oshadis, and so they do. It is when they emerge from the temple that they finally remember the truth about this world, and how they were sent to retrieve a vital piece of information that could help banish Ucul'thu.

The Key to Slumber

Our heroes expedition into the temple was catalytic for our story, as they returned with a powerful asset: a legend about the Guardians, a group of legendary heroes that first banished Ucul'thu years ago. It is here they learn that five things must be found, with the help of Aryala:

1. The Temple of the Guardian, where the Ritual of Slumber takes place
2. The Blossom of Oshadis
3. A Solar's Tear
4. The Egg of a Couatl
5. The Promise of a God

They entrust this information to an ally of Acesius, who they will soon meet.

Our Heroes

It is up to you to choose why our heroes matter. Perhaps, unbeknownst to them, they are a chosen group of prophecy. Perhaps they were lucky individuals. Perhaps they forged their own destiny, driven by sheer will to change the world for the better. Whatever you choose, keep in mind that there should exist a reason for them to accomplish all that they do. If there isn't, when it comes to the end of the story, they are bound to ask questions like "Why didn't stronger heroes do what we did?" or "What were Acesius and his allies doing all this time?" and "Couldn't they have found the materials for the ritual for us?" All these are valid questions, so you should at least keep in mind that they might come up. One easy answer to this question is the fact that while our heroes, and many others, are searching for clues on how to seal Ucul'thu, there is an ever growing demand to directly combat the risen evil. If powerful heroes ceased to battle Ucul'thu and his forces, then his reign of terror would become permanent.

The King's Evil: Investigating the Lazar Walls

Agreeing to help the cause, the heroes join the search for the five ritual parts. First, they are sent to investigate a large city, (Baldur's Gate if this story is set in the Forgotten Realms), where a shady operation has emerged involving the victims of an ancient disease known as King's Evil. This quest could be assigned to them by Aryala, who knows the dwarf Delbert. Delbert's cousin was dragged into a vile scheme, and the heroes are sent to the Lazar Walls to retrieve him.

Plaguebearers

If the heroes are victorious in their struggles in the Lazar Walls, they set out to return with their report, but they must travel through a swamp to get there. If the heroes flee the Lazar Walls and the city after a defeat, they soon realize that the only way to shake-off their followers is to travel through the swamp. There might be other reasons as to why they arrive at the Greenskull orc camp; including a party member or important NPC being an orc or half-orc from the clan. Whatever the reason, the clan always accepts adventurers to do its dirty work, and our heroes are now tasked to locate three scouts that were sent on a recon mission.

Rise of the Druid's Curse: A Meeting with the Healer

"Plaguebearers, harbingers of doom.".That is what the Fabled Druid called our heroes, as they are the ones to spread his message. They are the only ones alive who know about a looming threat, the so-called Druid's Curse. Following the advice of a kenku shaman known as the Whistler, they must seek someone with enough power to help them spread the word about the coming threat. In any case, they gravitate to the largest city they can find (Waterdeep if the story is set in the Forgotten Realms), and they meet Acesius.

Note here that the meeting with Acesius is not detailed in the corresponding adventure. Thus, we present some tips on how to run the meeting here:

Acesius is an old man with a thick accent. Tall, with short white hair and a curly white beard, and well-built for a man his age. His gaze is reassuring and calm, but vigilant in perceiving his surroundings. He is sharp-witted and can be playful, but the current situation has become a heavy burden on his shoulders and it shows.

He accepts a meeting with the heroes easily if they claim they have information on a deadly new disease. He hears them out patiently and then formulates a plan based on what they tell him.

He proposes that they join his Alliance of Healers, The Iakion, as it would be mutually beneficial for both their search for the five ritual items and the Iakion's disease-combating purposes.

He then informs them of the problems that have emerged in Waterdeep.

Solar's Tear

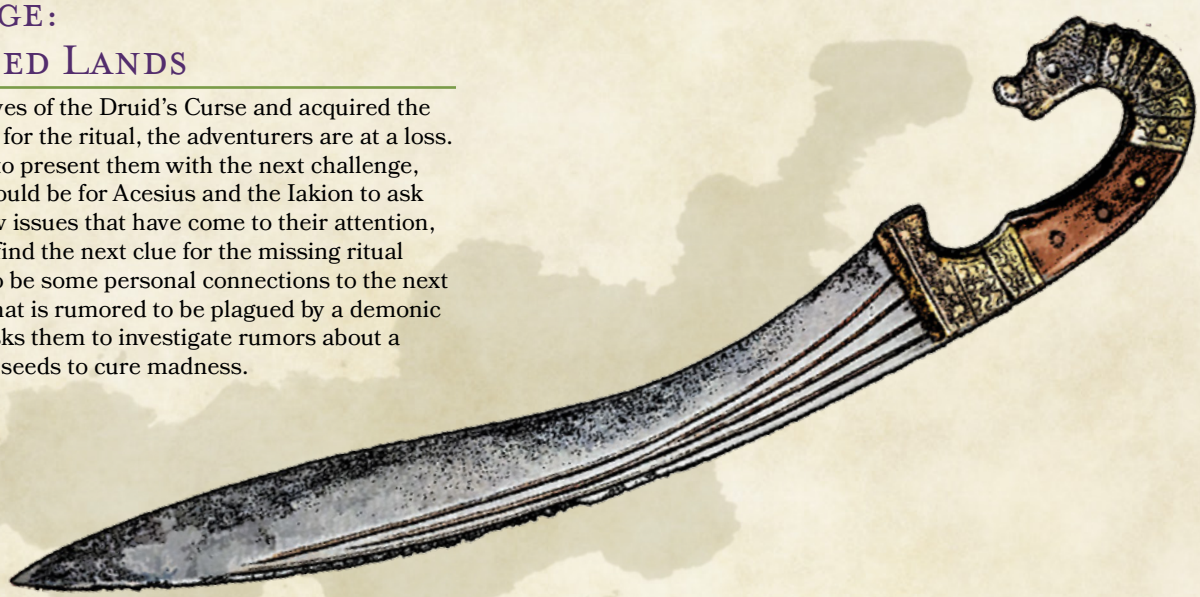
Thelon Lonathar, (or any other quest giver, for that matter) thanks the heroes for saving his twin sister, Elenaril. He then explains that a prophecy runs in his family, which always somehow breed twins, a boy, and a girl. The prophecy states the following:

> When the girl stares down at the eyes of death, the heroes that gift her with a flower shall be rewarded with the tear of an angel.

"In reality, the Solar's Tear is an ancient artifact entrusted to the Lonathar line for ages. It is a bright blue crystal the size of a fist and roughly the shape of a teardrop. The moment the North Ward burned down, the crystal magically started changing colors, slowly becoming a deep blue. This is, of course, the second item that the adventurers need; the legendary artifact that would capture the tears of a Solar when a great tragedy befell the world.

Viral Village: On to Cursed Lands

Having cured themselves of the Druid's Curse and acquired the second item they need for the ritual, the adventurers are at a loss. There are many ways to present them with the next challenge, the easiest of which would be for Acesius and the Iakion to ask them to deal with a few issues that have come to their attention, in the hopes that they find the next clue for the missing ritual parts. There could also be some personal connections to the next destination, a village that is rumored to be plagued by a demonic influence. Or Aryala asks them to investigate rumors about a cleric that spreads the seeds to cure madness.



The Purification of Ras Calaq: Couatl in the Swamp

Having faced the challenge of the Demonic Virulence created by a portal to the Abyss, the heroes go on their way to the next quest. Again, they could receive these orders from Acesius, but they could also come to somehow learn of some rumors about a Couatl roaming the swamps of Minoxia, where the great dragon, Oxitorus the Choleric, rules with an iron fist. They could also meet with Ato Kakas, who will lead them to a cure for the dragon's disease. Little do the adventurers know that the disease is deeply tied to the carcass of a dead Couatl, a truly holy creature, and that this would give them the opportunity to find the Egg they need.

Dovla Mine: Pride, Heritage, and Mold

The heroes might be sent to the Dovla Mine to help with the excavation of the ancient dwarven king's tomb, because the Iakion has divined that the site will soon be struck by a terrible disease. They could also arrive there for other reasons, such as to curry favor with Lord Hellander, the owner of the mine. Whatever the case, the heroes must juggle the tasks of containing a disease, keeping the dwarves of the Kierhammer clan united, and fending off the true culprit behind the malady.

The Passenger: They are Always Watching

Having completed their journeys, the heroes return to the large city (Waterdeep if set in the Forgotten Realms). They find themselves thrown into the fray again, as a huge plot set up by mind flayers forces them to become investigators. This story requires the heroes to be present in the city and accept the quest that Pancible "Mr. P" Poddlewink offers, which is also a great segue for the next and final story.

Shadow Over Waterdeep: The Illithid Dragon

One week after completing their previous assignment, a githzerai named Izag reveals to the heroes that Mr. P actually manipulated them into doing a powerful dragon's bidding. He will then explain how Brainstealer, a dragon-mind flayer chimera, is using his powers to infect this city to provide sustenance for himself. The heroes must embark on an epic journey to the lair of the dragon, survive, and defeat him, if they are to be free of his rule.

The Guardians' Temple

When he realizes that he has been bested by mere mortals, Brainstealer will do what he knows best: he will use his intellect. Due to his vast information network, he knows that the adventurers have been searching for the lost Temple of the Guardians, and he has managed to unearth a scroll that contains that exact piece of information. He will trade the scroll for his life, warning the adventurers that he has put a powerful spell on the scroll that will disintegrate it if his life ends. If the players accept, they return to Acesius with a powerful new asset. Now, they only need the promise of a god to complete Aryala's recipe.

Finale

At this point, the anthology has come to an end. But do not despair. You can still end this adventure on a high note. Now that the adventurers are so close to sealing Ucul'thu, you can send them to the temple to fulfill their destiny. Of course, Ucul'thu will not stand for this. Being locked in combat himself, he will send one of his followers to foil the plans of our heroes once and for all. The Ucul'thu minion's pursuit of the heroes as they rush the ingredients to the temple becomes a race to the finish line.

How you handle this is up to you. The promise of a god can come in a plethora of ways, and the emissary of Ucul'thu could be a new character, someone the players already met in their journeys, or even the Fabled Druid, who has allied with the evil just to get the materials for himself and unlock new powers.

If, however, you can wait a few months, we might be able to provide an finale of epic proportions in an upcoming release. That, of course, is a story for another time.

Running these Stories

These stories might be set in your own world, or in the Forgotten Realms, or any other setting, but they have some distinctive qualities. They are based on diseases and take place after an elder evil has risen. Keep these things in mind in order to flesh out your world. Some tips on how to do this could include the following:

Keep track of what each character goes through, both mentally and physically. The heroes are bound to see some things that shake them to their very core, and you could tell a more evocative story if you use them (we hope you realize that there is a distinct difference between telling a grim story and penalizing your players, of course).

On the same note, don't forget that diseases carry their symptoms until they are cured. Don't forget what happened in the previous adventure, if you run two or more of these stories as a campaign.

The world is alive. Events are transpiring in the background. Have news spread, mention Ucul'thu and the heroes' epic struggles, paint a picture of religion and magocracy and their efforts to calm people's hearts and minds. Eventually, the stories about the party will reach the ends of the world, if you want.

Don't dwell on the darkness. The world might be ending, but people don't spend every waking hour in despair and hopelessness. Life goes on, couples still love, kids still laugh, and everyday life demands that in spite of all the pestilence, people don't give up.

Level Range

This is the recommended level range for each adventure. In the second column, the levels for which the adventure is playable are listed, and in the third, we offer the recommended starting level for parties that run these adventures as a single story.

Please note that due to the structure and limitations of the adventures, leveling up is not strictly restricted to one level per adventure. Feel free to allow your players to level up accordingly after appropriate milestones, and dare to experiment with the level ranges. Especially in the later parts of the story, it may feel like the higher levels shouldn't come as quickly, but at the same time we feel that it could be fun to advance quickly and watch the characters grow. If you want to follow the leveling pattern strictly, then each adventure ends with a level up, except the Rise of the Druid's Curse, which features a level up in the middle of the adventure, and the final two-part adventure in Waterdeep, where you could even award two levels after the completion of the first part, in order to give the party a better chance of survival against Brainstealer and his lair.

Adventure	Playable Range	Suggested for Campaign
Blossom of Oshadis	1-4	2
The King's Evil	2-4	3
Plaguebearers	3-5	4
Rise of the Druid's Curse	5-7	5,6
Viral Village	5-8	7
Purification of Ras Calaq	8-9	8
Under Dovla Mountain	9-12	10
The Passenger	10-11	11
Shadow over Waterdeep	12-15	13



Sample Characters

Where in the world?
The adventures for *The Malady Chronicles* can be adapted to any fantasy setting. If you plan on setting these stories in the **Forgotten Realms** campaign setting, treat Aryala's city as **Elturel** and Grangor's city as **Baldur's Gate**.



Nisala Vorulon

Medium humanoid (tiefling), female, neutral good

Rogue (noble) level 1

Armor Class 13 (leather armor)
Hit Points 10 (1d8+2)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	15 (+2)	13 (+1)	13 (+1)	8 (-1)	16 (+3)

Proficiencies (+2 proficiency bonus)
Saving Throws Dex +4, Int +3
Skills Acrobatics +6 , Deception +5 History +3, Investigation +3, Persuasion +5, Stealth +6
Damage Resistances Hellish Resistance (fire damage)
Armor Light armor
Weapons Simple weapons, hand crossbows, longswords, rapiers, shortswords
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 9
Languages Common, Infernal, Thieves' Cant, Undercommon

Actions

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 1d6 + 2 piercing damage.

Dagger. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 1d4 + 2 piercing damage.

Hand crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. Hit: 1d6 + 2 piercing damage.

Bonus Actions

Two-Weapon Fighting. When you take the Attack action with a shortsword in one hand, you can use a bonus action to attack with a dagger in the other hand. You don't add your ability modifier to the damage of the bonus attack.

Expertise. Your proficiency bonus is doubled for any ability check you make using your Acrobatics or Stealth.

Options

Sneak Attack. Once per turn, you can deal an extra 1d6 damage to one creature you hit with an attack if you have advantage on the attack roll. The attack must use a finesse or ranged weapon. You don't need advantage on the attack roll if another enemy of the target is within 5 feet of it, that enemy isn't incapacitated, and you don't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

Equipment

Leather armor, shortsword, dagger, hand crossbow, gaming set for three-dragon ante, thieves tools.

Background

Born of two human parents into a wealthy family, Nisala Vorulon is well-connected, charming, and daring. Raised to become an information-gathering spy, she uses charm and stealth to observe other noble families within the city [of Elturel]. A friend of Valtirius Brightblade since their youth, Nisala trusts him above all other people. As an information broker, Nisala has connections to society's elite, as well as to the criminal underworld. She worked briefly with the Vultures of Fortune [in Balder's Gate], but their leader, Grangor fed her false information. Nisala has not forgotten this slight and wants to settle the score. Another of Nisala's underworld contacts is the drow elf, Valanthay Sorrowstar; the two have a grudging respect for each other, both being outsiders and having to work twice as hard to be recognized and trusted by their peers. When the Plague of Madness began showing up in the city, the Vorulons made a hasty pact with the other families to put aside their differences until the Plague of Madness passes. Nisala volunteered her services to the greater good and set out to find a cure.

Appearance

Meticulous about her appearance, Nisala is always well coiffed and fashionably attired. While on adventures she wears fitted oxblood leather boots, brown breeches, a purple silk blouse, and black leather gloves. She is a striking tiefling with slender, curled black horns, crimson skin, solid silver eyes, and light blue hair tied into a long braid.

Traits

Ideal: I will become the greatest information broker in the realm.

Bond: My family is everything. By serving them, I maintain order in the community at large.

Flaw: I fear that everyone presumes I'm untrustworthy because of my infernal heritage; I must prove them wrong.

Quotes

"I've been dancing at the ball the entire evening, my lord. I can't imagine anyone slipping past your guards."

"I have what you seek. My price is fixed. What say you?"

"Let me do the talking."



Valtirius Brightblade

Medium humanoid (human), male, lawful good

Paladin (noble) level 1

Armor Class 18 (chain mail, shield)
Hit Points 12 (Hit Dice 1d10)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	9 (-1)	14 (+2)	11 (+1)	13 (+1)	15 (+2)

Proficiencies (+2 proficiency bonus)
Saving Throws Wis +3, Cha +4
Skills History +3, Intimidation +4 Medicine +3, Persuasion +4
Armor All armor, shields
Weapons Simple weapons, martial weapons
Senses passive Perception 11
Languages Common, Dwarvish, Infernal

Actions

Longsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 1d8 + 3 slashing damage.

Javelin. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 30/120 ft., one target. Hit: 1d6 + 3 piercing damage.

Options

Divine Sense. As an action, you can open your awareness to detect evil forces.

Lay on Hands. As an action, you can touch a creature and draw power from the pool to restore a number of hit points to that creature, up to the maximum amount remaining in your pool (paladin level × 5).

Equipment

Longsword, shield, five javelins, explorer's pack, chain mail.

Background

Valtirius is a third-generation paladin in service to the powers of law and good. Though his predecessors displayed no sign of doubt in their calling, Valtirius is riddled with questions and speaks of these doubts often with his confessor, Toradon "The Hammer". Valtirius has seen good people suffer so that a greater good might be achieved, yet these concessions (so easily accepted by society) grieve Valtirius to the bone. Valtirius's family has a history of nobility, but their wealth is in their honor and spirit, not in coin. Both Valtirius and his cousin Ilandra dreamed of becoming paladins, but the family could only afford to train one of them. Ilandra voluntarily stepped aside, as she knew that Valtirius was more gifted and would do more good as a knight than she could. The Brightblades pooled their collective wealth to see that Valtirius was trained and equipped, and Ilandra and her family relocated to the humble village of Malphreen to live as tenant farmers. Because of this sacrifice, Valtirius feels an obligation to succeed in his role, even as he doubts his own convictions. Perhaps he is too philosophical to be a warrior—but for now, he follows in the footsteps of his forebears. When the Plague of Madness arrived, Valtirius immediately volunteered for service; his was not a desire for glory, but to protect all people, regardless of their social class or faith. Valtirius is the childhood friend of Nisala Vorulon. The two of them often discuss the struggle of meeting familial expectations as nobles while striving to become the independent adventurers the world needs.

Appearance

Dark haired, powerfully-built, and swarthy, Valtirius's brooding expression betrays his inner-turmoil. He dresses in plain attire, hoping to avoid attention, but despite his best efforts, his good looks and inborn charm draw people to him.

Traits

Ideal: Compassion—It is my duty to protect those who cannot protect themselves.

Bond: My family, the Brightblades, and especially my young cousin Ilandra invested all their hopes and fortunes in me. I owe it to them to live up to their dream.

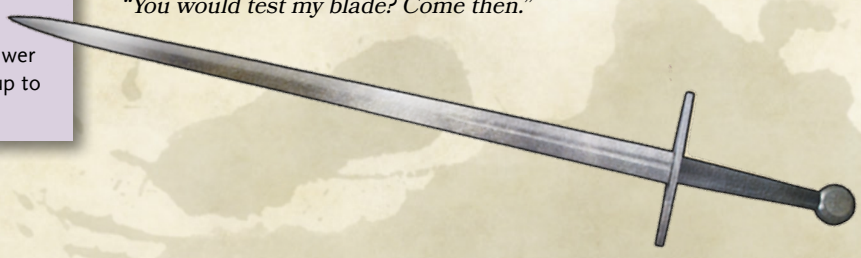
Flaw: I fear death, and I fear my courage will fail when truly tested.

Quotes

"I will fulfill the oath. Have I not already said so?"

"We march not for glory, but justice!"

"You would test my blade? Come then."





Toradon "The Hammer"

Medium humanoid (hill dwarf), Life domain, male, neutral good

Cleric (folk hero) level 1

Armor Class 18 (chain mail, shield)
Hit Points 11 (Hit Dice 1d8)
Speed 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	8 (-1)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)

Proficiencies (+2 proficiency bonus)
Saving Throws Wis +5, Cha +3; advantage on saves against being poisoned
Skills Animal Handling +5, Medicine +5, Religion +2, Survival +5
Damage Resistances poison
Armor All armor, shields
Weapons Simple weapons
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13
Tools Artisan's tools (cartographer's tools)
Languages Common, Dwarvish, Goblinoid

Actions

Warhammer. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 1d8 + 2 bludgeoning damage.

Handaxe. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. Hit: 1d6 + 2 slashing damage.

Options

Disciple of Life. Your healing spells are more effective. Whenever you use a spell of 1st level or higher to restore hit points to a creature, the creature regains additional hit points equal to 2 + the spell's level.

Spellcasting. You are a spellcaster who uses Wisdom as your spellcasting ability (spell save DC 13; +5 to hit with spell attacks). You have the following spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *sacred flame, spare the dying, thaumaturgy*
1st Level (2 slots): *bless*, cure wounds*, detect evil and good, detect poison and disease, guiding bolt, healing word*

* domain spell (Life Domain)

Equipment

Warhammer, handaxe, chain mail, shield, priest's pack, holy symbol.

Background

Trusted confessor and confidant of many noble families, Toradon "The Hammer" is also the most beloved cleric among the people for his generous nature, non-judgmental but straightforward advice, and willingness to accept differences in others. Known as "The Hammer" due to his ability to fulfill any assignment and "nail things down," Toradon is a reliable, sturdy dwarf possessing common sense and a deep love for the downtrodden. A rebel at heart, Toradon spends his free time among the sick and poor of the city [of Elturel], refusing to accept fees for his services. This often causes him to run afoul of his superiors. Toradon has always thirsted for the life of adventure and can no longer rationalize staying in one place. As the Plague of Madness began to spread and the power of the gods seemed to have no sway, Toradon sought other avenues. Through his network of allies on the streets, he heard mention of a powerful warlock named Valanthay who shared a pact with beings of darkness. The two became uneasy allies, pledging themselves to finding a cure no matter what the personal cost. Toradon is the trusted friend of Valtirius Brightblade and the uneasy ally of Valanthay Sorrowstar. An initiate into Acesius's healing party, Toradon is loyal to the sage and serves as a soldier and healer for Acesius, his mentor.

Appearance

Broad-shouldered, long bearded, and often smiling, Toradon knows that life is difficult, but does not allow himself to show his weariness to others. Dressed in plain garb when not in his armor, Toradon has a rugged, weathered face, long black hair and a beard worn in a neat braid. He has kind brown eyes, and large powerful hands.

Traits

Ideal: People deserve to be treated with dignity and respect.

Bond: I serve the interests of goodness and knowledge. I am loyal to the sage, Acesisus, and his devotion to healing.

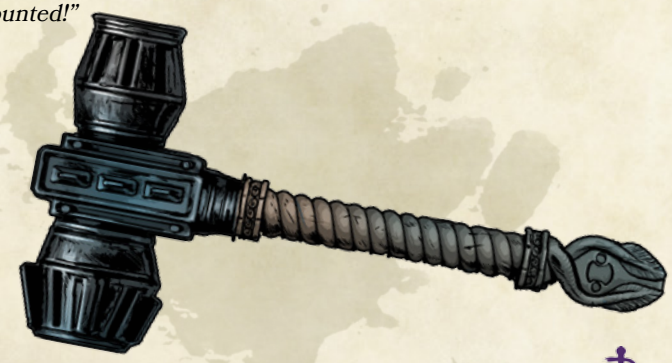
Flaw: I sometimes stretch myself thing by offering my aid to too many people at the same.

Quotes

"You want me to tell you what to do. I won't. You already know what you must do, you simply need to say it aloud. Go on. Say it."

"Dwarves complain about human mead, but I must say, this isn't bad at all!"

"When the poor call out, who but we shall answer? Stand up and be counted!"



Valanthay Sorrowstar

Medium humanoid (drow elf), Archfey otherworldly patron, female, chaotic neutral

Warlock (sage) level 1

Armor Class 13 (leather armor)
Hit Points 10 (1d8+2)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)

Proficiencies (+2 proficiency bonus)
Saving Throws Wis +3, Cha +5
Skills Arcana +2, Deception +5, History +2, Intimidation +5, Perception +3
Armor Light armor
Weapons Simple weapons, rapiers, shortsword, hand crossbow
Senses superior darkvision radius 120 ft., passive Perception 11
Languages Common, Elfish, Sylvan, Undercommon

Drow Magic. You know the *dancing lights* cantrip.

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, you have disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Fey Ancestry. You have advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put you to sleep.

Trance. Elves don't need to sleep. Instead, they meditate deeply, remaining semiconscious for 4 hours a day.

Otherworldly Patron (The Archfey)

Pact magic. Your arcane research and the magic bestowed on you by your patron have given you facility with spells using the warlock spell list.

Actions

Dagger. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 1d4 + 2 piercing damage or thrown 20/60.

Quarterstaff. *Melee Weapon Attack:* Melee Weapon Attack: +1 to hit, reach 5 ft. Hit: 1d6 - 1 bludgeoning damage or 1d8 - 1.

Light crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 80/320 Hit: 1d8 piercing damage.

Options

Spellcasting. You are a spellcaster who uses Charisma as your spellcasting ability (spell save DC 13; +5 to hit with spell attacks). You have the following spells prepared: Spell Save DC: 13 Spell attack modifier: +5

Cantrips (2 slots): *fire bolt, poison spray*
Spells known (2): *mage armor, witch bolt*
Spell slots (1): *mage armor*
Archfey Expanded Spells: *faerie fire, sleep*

Fey Presence. Your patron bestows upon you the ability to project the beguiling and fearsome presence of the fey. As an action, you can cause each creature within a 10-foot-cube originating from you to make Wisdom saving throw against your Warlock spell DC. The creatures that fail their saving throws are all charmed or frightened by you (your choice) until the end of the next term. Once you use this feature, you can't use it again until you finish a short or long rest.



Equipment

Leather armor, light crossbow with 20 bolts, 2 daggers, quarterstaff, dungeoneer's pack, bottle of blank ink, a quill, a small knife, a letter from dead colleague posing a question you have not yet been able to answer, a set of common cloths, a belt pouch containing 10 gp.

Background

Valanthay Sorrowstar never really fit in. Growing up in the Underdark she heard the call of the Archfey summoning her away from the clandestine schemes and machinations of her fellow drow, and up to the surface world. The whispers of her fey patron led her to a renegade drow smuggler named Jarlaxle Baenre and his mercenary company, the Bregan D'aerthe. Something about Valanthay intrigued Jarlaxle, and he agreed to smuggle her to the surface. When asked what payment he'd require, the pirate replied, "Let's just say you'll owe the Bregan D'aerthe a very big favor. And one day we'll collect." Life on the surface wasn't easy for Valanthay. She was one day ambushed by a gang of thugs and beaten within an inch of her life, until an unlikely ally came to her aid. Toradon "The Hammer" was ministering to the poor when he heard Valanthay's cries for help. After knocking the thugs out, Toradon healed Valanthay and listened to the tale of her own "calling" to serve a greater power. Even though this power, the Archfey, was foreign to Toradon, he saw Valanthay's sincere desire for knowledge, and to find a cure the Plague of Madness. The two have made for a strange pair of friends ever since.

Appearance

Like most of her people Valanthay is dark-skinned and white-haired. Dressed in dark purple robes with bright green accents, she wears her waist-length hair long, intertwined with wild roses—thorns and all.

Traits

Ideal: Knowledge - The path to power and self-improvement is through knowledge.

Bond: I owe a debt to the Bregan D'aerthe, for smuggling me out of the Underdark. I never know when they'll call it in. Until I have repaid them, I will never truly be at ease.

Flaw: Unlocking the secrets of the feywild is worth the price of my soul.

Quotes

"Delve deeply into the feywild—one secret there is worth a thousand elsewhere."

"Do not mistake my friendship for weakness."

"Let us dispense with these fools and show them the true meaning of power!"



Lynorae Yarjeet

Medium humanoid (bronze dragonborn), female, neutral good

Barbarian (folk hero) level 1

Armor Class 13 (unarmored defense)
Hit Points 14 (1d12 + 2)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	8 (-1)

Proficiencies (+2 proficiency bonus)
Saving Throws Str +5, Con +4
Skills Animal Handling +3 , Intimidation +5, Perception +3, Survival +3
Damage Resistances You have resistance to electricity.
Armor Light armor, medium armor, shields
Weapons Simple weapons, martial weapons
Senses passive Perception 13
Languages Common, Draconic

Actions

Greataxe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 1d12 + 3 slashing damage.

Handaxe. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., range 20(60) one target. Hit: 1d6 + 3 slashing damage.

Javelin. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one target. Hit: 1d6 + 3 piercing damage.

Breath Weapon. *(Bronze)* range 5 by 30 ft. line, DC 12 Dexterity saving throw, 2d6 lightning damage on failed save, half as much damage on a successful one, can be used once per short rest.

Bonus Actions

Rage. As a bonus action enter a rage for up to 1 minute (10 rounds), +2 melee damage with STR weapons, resistance to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage. You can't cast or concentrate on spells while raging. Your rage ends early if you are knocked unconscious or if your turn ends and you haven't attacked a hostile creature since your last turn or taken damage since then. You can also end your rage as a bonus action. Can be used twice per long rest.

Options

Unarmored defense. While you are not wearing any armor, your Armor Class equals 10 + your Dexterity modifier + your Constitution modifier. You can use a shield and still gain this benefit.

Equipment

Greataxe, handaxe, javelin, mess kit, rations (1 day), Rope (hempen 50 ft.), tinderbox, torch, waterskin, and bedroll.

Background

Lynorae came to the area as a refugee of a war between her clan and the followers of a nefarious black dragon named Oxitorus. Her clan was nearly decimated, and the dragon retreated. A rescue party, led by a paladin named Valtirius Brightblade, brought the broken dragonborn to a healer named Toradon "The Hammer". Her face and body were badly burned by the dragon's acid; her visage was unsightly. In her most vulnerable condition, Toradon always kept her comfortable and shared kind words of support. She never forgot this, and everything Lynorae does is to repay this kindness to others in need. Among the poor and common folk, her reputation is remarkable; she has always shown the same kindness and compassion that was shown to her as a child. The people love her back and hold her in high esteem.

Appearance

Lynorae is 7-feet-tall, has brilliant iridescent bronze scales, and has burn scars over most of her body. She dresses in the clothes of working folk. Although imposing, Lynorae has a gentle and quiet demeanor. Her favorite possession is a crude necklace given to her by Toradon, her mentor and healer, which he gave to her as he treated her wounds.

Traits

Ideal: My glory is found in the lives I protect.

Bond: I am a servant of the weak and dispossessed. When they call, I answer.

Flaw: I'm convinced of the significance of my destiny, and blind to my shortcomings and the risk of failure.

Quotes

"Don't let my scarred face scare you. I am a friend."

"A person's true character is revealed by how they act towards those in need."

"Fiercely love whenever you can. Savagely fight when you must."





Sal'More Kanker

Small humanoid (deep gnome), male, chaotic neutral

Wizard (acolyte) level 1

Armor Class 11 (dexterity bonus)
Hit Points 6 (1d6+0)
Speed 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)	17 (+3)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)

Proficiencies (+2 proficiency bonus)
Saving Throws Int +5, Wis +3
Skills Arcana +5, Insight +3, Investigation +5, Religion +3
Senses superior darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 11
Languages Abyssal, Common, Draconic, Gnomish, Undercommon

Stone Camouflage. You have advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks to hide in rocky terrain

Actions

Dagger. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +1 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 1d4 + 1 piercing damage. Thrown 20/60.

Options

Spellcasting. You are a spellcaster who uses Intelligence as your spellcasting ability (spell save DC 13; +5 to hit with spell attacks). You have the following spells prepared:

Cantrips (3 slots): *magehand, light, ray of frost*
1st level (2 slots): *mage armor, magic missile*
Spells known: *burning hands, charm person, feather fall, mage armor, magic missile, sleep*

Equipment

Dagger, component pouch, explorer's pack, spellbook.

Background

An intelligent and immensely vain gnome, Sal'More Kanker believes that people are drawn to him for his intellect, charm, and exceptional good-looks. These presumptions often land him in trouble and spawn misunderstandings between himself and his fellow party members. Regardless of his delusions, Sal'More is particularly close to Valanthay; they share an underdark kinship and a mutual admiration for the other's daring and magical mastery. Sal'More is also friends with Nisala, encountering her during clandestine meetings where she and Valanthay shared intelligence about the Plague of Madness. Sal'More is certain both Nisala and Valanthay are deeply attracted to him, but are too intimidated by his magical prowess to reveal their true feelings. Sal'More presents an aristocratic personae to mask his humble origins—he was orphaned at a young age, and forced to flee the Underdark when mind flayers attacked his village. On the surface, he was taken into an orphanage run by a benevolent family of human nobles, the Amcathras. Mirra Amcathra, the daughter of the family, visited him daily, helped him learn the Common tongue, taught him about the god of magic, and helped him begin a life on the surface. He views her as a beloved younger sister, and a better person than he will ever be.

Appearance

With pale gray skin, a neat silver beard, sparkling amber eyes and a coy, cunning expression, Sal'More is considered an attractive deep gnome. A swaggering spendthrift, he aspires to be in the finest clothing he can afford and has become obsessed with following the latest trends in fashion from the surface world. When his opinion is not sought, he fidgets and sighs until someone finally gives him the attention he desires.

Traits

Ideal: Knowledge is power. Always seek knowledge, no matter the risk.

Bond: I am devoted to the god of magic and will be of aid when the clerics of that god call upon me.

Flaw: I am perhaps a little full of myself. But you would be too, if you were me.

Quotes

"Don't overestimate yourself, nor underestimate my prowess. To do so is a fatal mistake!"

"I care little for these goons and goblins. Have at them. I'll come to your rescue if you can't manage."

"Ah my dear no need to be so shy. Say what you feel. I assure you, I am used to such advances."





Gnall Greenskull

Medium humanoid (half-orc), female, chaotic good

Barbarian (outlander) level 1

Armor Class 13 (unarmored defense)
Hit Points 14 (1d12 + 2)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	13 (+1)	15 (+2)	8 (-1)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)

Proficiencies (+2 proficiency bonus)
Saving Throws Str +5, Con +4
Skills Athletics +5, Intimidation +2, Nature +1, Perception +3, Survival +3
Armor Light armor, medium armor, shields
Weapons Simple weapons, martial weapons
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13
Languages Common, Orc, Abyssal

Relentless Endurance. When you are reduced to 0 hit points but not killed outright, you can drop to 1 hit point instead. You can't use this feature again until you finish a long rest.

Savage Attacks. When you score a critical hit with a melee weapon attack, you can roll one of the weapon's damage dice one additional time and add it to the extra damage of the critical hit.

Wanderer. You have an excellent memory for maps and geography, and you can always recall the general layout of terrain, settlements, and other features around you. In addition, you can find food and fresh water for yourself and up to five other people each day, provided that the land offers berries, small game, water, and so forth.

Actions

Greataxe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 1d12 + 3 slashing damage.

Handaxe. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., range 20(60) one target. Hit: 1d6 + 3 slashing damage.

Javelin. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one target. Hit: 1d6 + 3 piercing damage.

Bonus Actions

Rage. As a bonus action enter a rage for up to 1 minute (10 rounds), +2 melee damage with Strength weapons, resistance to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage. You can't cast or concentrate on spells while raging. Your rage ends early if you are knocked unconscious or if your turn ends and you haven't attacked a hostile creature since your last turn or taken damage since then. You can also end your rage as a bonus action. Can be used twice per long rest.

Equipment

Greataxe, 2 handaxes, explorer's pack, 4 javelins, staff, hunting trap, bearskin clothing and fur cloak, set of traveler's clothes, belt pouch, 10 gp.

Background

Gnall Greenskull is the seventh daughter of Ulllala, who was the seventh daughter of Ulgreth, the great mother of the Greenskull Orc Clan. Her father was one of many human tribesmen drawn into the Great Orc Nation when his lands were conquered by the green hordes. Gnall's physical strength won her the respect of her full-blooded kinsmen, while her wilderness skills earned her a place as one of the clan's most daring scouts. Despite Gnall's bravery and victories, Ullala never praises and seldom even acknowledges her daughter. This perceived coldness drives Gnall to ever more ambitious exploits, as she is determined to win glory for the Greenskulls and prove herself worthy in the eyes of Ullala. This urge to win glory and honor, to prove her prowess and to spread the legend of the Greenskull clan to every corner of the realm, has led Gnall to embark on a pilgrimage away from the clan in search of worthy challenges. One day she will return a hero and take her place among the great leaders. Gnall relishes physical challenges, is brave and ambitious, but is not cruel nor without sympathy for the poor, weak creatures of the world who will never know the glory of being a Greenskull. She rarely misses an opportunity to demonstrate how a Greenskull solves problems.

Appearance

Gnall has light blue-green skin and olive colored hair, and is nearly seven feet tall, muscular and hulking. Her skin is decorated with a latticework of battle scars, which she outlines in vibrant warpaint. She changes her facepaint regularly to reflect different moods or to evoke various spirits whose aid she requires. She regards her warpaint as her "true face." She wears the pelt of a grizzly bear she hunted and killed in single combat.

Traits

Ideal: Glory - I must earn glory in battle, for myself and my clan.

Bond: I will prove myself to my mother Ullala. The Greenskull Clan is the most important thing in my life, even when they are far from me.

Flaw: There's no room for caution in a life lived to the fullest.

Quotes

"Puny elf is funny. Maybe Gnall will not mush him into elf paste today. We see, who knows?"

"Let Gnall show you how a Greenskull would cook that."

"Ah - black dragon hunt. That would be a good death. When we start?"



Malady Equipment

Plague Doctor's Mask

Equipment, common

This ceramic mask reduces the wearer's chances of contracting airborne diseases. The long beak is filled with leaves, herbs, and other filtering materials. The wearer gains advantage on any Constitution saving throw against an airborne disease. (AC 15, HP 5).

Note: Wearing the mask impairs vision, thus the wearer treats normal environments as being lightly obscured.
Cost: (Mask) 5 gp, monthly dose of herbs 1 gp.
Weight: 2 lbs.
Special: On a successful **DC 10 Wisdom (Survival) check** while in a forest or jungle area, characters can attempt to gather herbs themselves (a process taking 1 hour).

Plague Doctor's Kit

Equipment, uncommon

This kit is a leather pouch containing enough herbs, cleansing solutions, siphons, tourniquets, and vials for 10 uses to relieve the symptoms of a physical disease. As an action, you can expend one use of the kit to aid a creature suffering from an ongoing physical disease; you are not required to make a Wisdom (Medicine) check and the character makes their saving throw against the disease with advantage. The user of the plague doctor's kit can use the equipment to take samples of the disease for use with a *plague doctor's sword cane*.

Cost: 75 gp **Weight:** 3 lbs.

Plague Doctor's Manual

Equipment, rare

This hefty tome is crammed with information about maladies of the body, soul, and mind. After an hour's study, the user of the plague doctor's manual gains advantage on identifying any disease.

Cost: 1000 gp **Weight:** 2 lbs.

Plague Doctor's Cloak

Wondrous item, rare (requires attunement)

This heavy black cloak is imbued with powerful protective magic. It confers advantage on any disease-related saving throw.

School of Magic: abjuration
Cost: 5,000 gp **Weight:** 2 lbs.

Plague Doctor's Sword Cane

Equipment, uncommon

This normal looking cane houses a blade (treated as a rapier) and a vial of disease. The cane creates an airtight seal around the blade. To draw the blade, the wielder pushes down on the handle sharply, cracking the vial and covering the blade tip with a single dose of the disease. The wielder can attempt to inflict a single opponent with the disease by successfully injuring them with the blade. On a missed attack, the sample remains intact. The disease remains potent on the blade for one hour after the airtight seal is broken.

Cost: 50 gp **Weight:** 3 lbs.

Grenatum of Sulfurous Vapors

Equipment, uncommon

Used specifically to rid a small area of diseases, the clever plague doctor can use this as a way to debilitate their enemies.

As an action, a character may light the fuse on the bomb and either place it on the ground or throw it at a point up to 40 feet away. On impact, the bomb explodes into a 20-foot radius stinking, sulfurous cloud that lasts 5 rounds. Creatures caught within the cloud must succeed on a **DC 15 Constitution saving throw**, or become nauseated. Nauseated creatures have disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks. Those inside the cloud are also immune to acquiring new diseases.

Cost: 250 gp **Weight:** 1 lb.
Chad M. Lensch

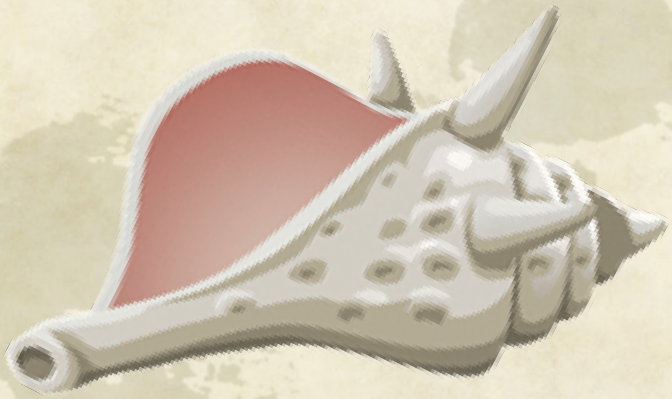
Conch Phonendoscope

Wondrous item, uncommon (requires attunement)

This magic necklace is comprised of a large opalescent seashell with a small hole at its end, connected to a silver chain. When the shell is placed on a patient's chest, the heartbeat and breathing sounds of a patient are heard with great discernment.

If attuned, the wearer gains advantage on Wisdom (Medicine) checks and +2 to passive Wisdom (Perception).

Cost: 1,500 gp **Weight:** 1 lb.
Chad M. Lensch



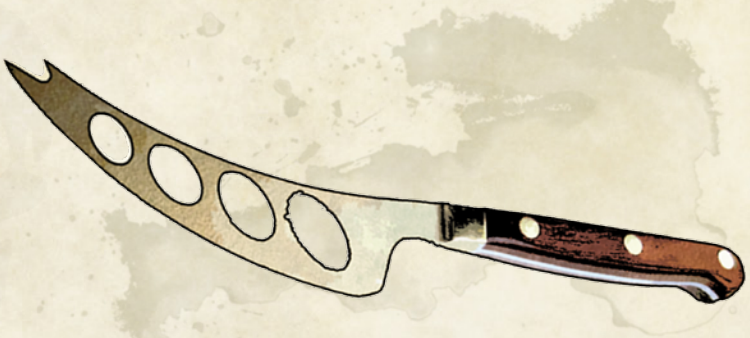
Pick of Trepanation

Weapon (dagger), rare (requires attunement)

This magical war pick is a thin electrum blade fashioned to a slightly-curved, ironwood handle. The blade's original purpose is to efficiently open small holes in the skulls of a plague doctor's patient, relieving pressure to the brain. In the times of the Malady Chronicles, the doctor's instrument can become an improvised weapon of war.

If attuned, the wielder gains a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon. On a critical hit, the target's skull is punctured and the creature must succeed on a **DC 20 Constitution saving throw** or be **stunned** for 1 round.

Cost: 3,500 gp **Weight:** 3 lbs.
Chad M. Lensch



Tincture of the Four Humors

Equipment, uncommon

This potion is painstakingly created to maintain a perfect balance of blood, phlegm, black bile, and yellow bile. When you drink this potion, it magically cures one disease afflicting you, removes the **paralyzed** and **poisoned** conditions, and restores 4d4 + 4 hit points. The liquid is comprised of four oily layers that won't mix together unless shaken.

Cost: 350 gp **Weight:** 1 lb.
Chad M. Lensch

Dart of Bloodletting

Ranged weapon (dart), uncommon

Constructed from the stinger of a stirge, these magical darts give you a +1 bonus to damage rolls. Upon a successful hit, the target must succeed on a **DC 12 Constitution saving throw** or take one level of exhaustion.

Cost: 100 gp **Weight:** 0.25 lb.
Chad M. Lensch

Agar Plate

Equipment, common

An agar plate is a lidded, sealed, disc-shaped glass dish in which a virus may be collected, preserved, or cultivated. If samples of a virus or infected matter have been identified, a creature proficient in Medicine can, with a successful **DC 15 Wisdom (Medicine) check**, store the sample in a prepared agar plate. The sample can then be safely transported for examination and study.

With the expenditure of 10 gp worth of nutrients and compounds, after 7 days of incubation the agar plate will contain an infectious virus. Breaking the agar plate at this point will expose the virus to air; the effects of doing so will depend upon the nature of the virus. An agar plate could be used to infect food, clothing, or a victim. An agar plate containing a virus that is infectious by contact can be thrown up to 20 feet as an improvised weapon; if the attack is successful, refer to a description of the disease for the effects. Saving throws against infection from a virus cultured in an agar plate are made with disadvantage due to the high concentration of bacteria in the plate.

Cost: 15 gp **Weight:** 0.25 lb.
Tal Aviezer

Tissue Staining Kit

Equipment, common

This kit contains a variety of vials, pipettes, magnifying glasses and special pigments. These pigments have been developed to stain tissues differently, if they are infected by a disease. An appropriate tissue sample must be used. This process requires 6 hours. Proficiency with this kit allows you to successfully diagnose a disease that is in your *plague doctor's manual*. This procedure consumes pigments costing 100 gp.

Cost: 15 gp **Weight:** 1 lb.

Surgeon's Tools

Equipment, common

This set of tools includes a variety of small knives and drills required to dissect a body, as well as needles and sutures. Proficiency with these tools lets you add your Proficiency Bonus to any Ability Checks you make to treat diseases surgically, remove objects from the human body, and stop bleeding. Also, proficiency with this kit is required to harvest sample tissues for a *tissue staining kit*.

Cost: 20 gp **Weight:** 3 lb.
Themis Paraskevas

Scalpel

Simple melee weapon (dagger), common

This dagger-like weapon is used by surgeons to dissect even the hardest tissues with ease. If a creature proficient with surgeon tools scores a critical hit with this weapon, it deals 1 extra die of damage in addition to the critical damage modifier.

Weapon: Finesse, light, thrown (range 20/60)
Damage: 1d4 slashing
Cost: 50 gp **Weight:** 0.5 lb.
Themis Paraskevas



Blossom of Oshadis



For Levels 1-4

by Blaise Wigglesworth

Introduction

This fast-paced adventure begins with the Player Characters (PCs) suffering from memory damage and waking in the lowest level of a temple complex. Waves of combatants attack as the perplexed PCs fight for their lives. **The Blossom of Oshadis** is a campaign kickoff designed for three to six 1st-4th level characters, but is optimized for a party of 2nd level characters. Options for scaling the encounters can be found below under "Reducing Risk for Level 1 Parties".

Adventure Background

Half the population of a city are in the grips of a fearsome, otherworldly disease. Bodies are piled in the streets; the temples and infirmaries are overrun with the sick. In an attempt to find some hope against this illness, a high-ranking cleric named Aryala sent the PCs to seek a legendary flower – the Blossom of Oshadis. This magnificent bloom is hidden in the depths of an ancient and abandoned temple. Aryala tore a page from an ancient text depicting the Blossom of Oshadis and containing information about how to safely retrieve it. Unfortunately, the PCs contracted the same disease ravaging the city and are suffering its debilitating mental-effects. To complicate matters, cultists of Ucul'thu (the god that crafted this disease) followed the PCs to the temple. The adventure focuses on escaping from the depths of the temple by fighting past Ucul'thu's cultists. Along the way, the PCs will learn more about themselves, their mission, and the disease that has taken hold of their minds.

Special Preparation

Since this module begins with the PCs suffering from a form of memory tampering, it is advisable that the DM hint that this introductory adventure is unusual and will involve a temporary lack of character-agency as the module begins. Assuring players that they will be treated fairly despite the unusual circumstances may be important to some players. The DM should not give away any plot points, and certainly should **not** inform players that their characters will begin the game with damage to their memories. Fair warning is one thing, but spoiling the adventure is out of the question.

Disease and Player Decisions

The DM should be familiar with the symptoms of Ucul'thu's Wrath (see Appendix D. Ucul'thu's Wrath). These symptoms have serious repercussions for PC decisions and interaction during this adventure. It is possible that PCs begin the game somewhat mistrustful of each other as a result of these symptoms (having their memory tampered with may cause PCs to wonder if one of their fellow PCs are responsible etc.). Symptoms of the disease that will most impact the PCs include: False memories, changes in behavior, and seeing things that aren't there (illusions). Although distressing and dramatic from the outset, the PCs' concerns can be quickly addressed as the introductory scene unfolds. The DM should judge how long to keep PCs in suspense before providing them with their first clue (**the torn page**, see next page). Introducing the torn page should provide enough good faith for the PCs to continue the adventure, assuring them that more will be revealed.

Note on Setting

This adventure is written to fit into most generic fantasy settings. The city where the PCs begin (and where they will end up if they are successful) is medium-sized, somewhat isolated, and located near a wilderness area less than a seven hour walk from the city. There should be a temple dedicated to a benevolent god in the city.

Reducing Risk for Level 1 Parties

DM tool: varying difficulty for level 1 parties

If your PCs are level 1, consider using the "medium" encounters found below the standard "hard" encounters in this module.

If your level 1 PCs are easily defeating the medium encounters, either switch back to the "hard" encounters, or add one foe of the lowest CR to an encounter after one of the same foes have been defeated. Each medium mode encounter includes instructions on this.



Act 1: Dark Awakening

The PCs begin the adventure standing in the middle of a large, mysterious room. Their memories are not wholly intact. When ready to begin, read or paraphrase the following:

> You shudder, looking at the powerful strangers standing beside you. For a moment you are gripped by mortal terror, fearing for your life. Similar expressions of fear and confusion contort the faces of the others. Fearsome though they appear, they seem just as perplexed and terrified as you!
>
> You are standing in the centre of a large, enclosed space. Stalactites hang from the cavernous ceiling. Behind you is a steep, crumbling stone staircase, at its upper landing a wide doorway opens into darkness.
>
> Strangely out of place, you see ahead of you a low hill, perhaps five feet tall at its apex. Equally out of place in this dark, wet cavern is the beam of sunlight washing over the hill. Amid the tall green grass, several magnificent flowers shimmer. One in particular catches your eye; its fuchsia blossom and gleaming, golden leaves make it impossible to miss.
>
> Along the left and right-hand sides of the cavern are two lines of low, stone platforms – ten in total. Although most are empty, four have well-preserved statues of heroic-looking beings kneeling penitently, looking toward the hill-garden. Along the even, worked-stone floor are six piles of broken stone and dry, old bones.

The Torn Page

Anyone who succeeds on a **DC 15 passive Wisdom (Perception) check** sees a piece of parchment on the floor near by; it appears to be a page torn from a large, old book. On the torn page is a hand-painted likeness of the gold and fuchsia flower on the low hill. Provide PCs with Handout #1 (see Appendix B. Handouts). When all the PCs are familiar with the contents of Handout #1, continue.

What the PCs Know

Now that the game is underway, inform the PCs that their memories have been badly muddled. The PCs feel certain of their names, their class abilities, and their childhood into their late adolescence. After that, their memories become muddy, even contradictory. They have a vague recollection that they came to this place with their fellow PCs, but aside from the torn page, they have no idea who sent them, or where they are.

Since this is an introductory adventure, this brief moment of calm and confusion is a perfect time for the players to describe their characters' appearances.

Features of the Hill-Garden Room

This room has an unworked cavern as its ceiling. Occasional drops of water fall from the stalactites. The arched cavern reaches 20 feet at its apex. The floors are smooth, flat, worked stone. The stone floor ends where the hill-garden begins.

There are ten stone platforms (five on each side), each 2 feet high.

Six of the platforms have no statute on them.

Four of the platforms still have statues on them.

The only **light source** is the magical light shining down on the hill-garden (15 feet bright light, 15 feet dim light).

Notes on Timing

Clever players might decide not to dig-up the Blossom of Oshadis until later in the adventure. This wise decision will provide them more time for dealing with enemies and obstacles. Once the Blossom of Oshadis is dug-up, the 8-hour timer begins.



So it Begins

Give the PCs a few moments to collect themselves. If the PCs examine any of the six piles of stone and bone, they can make a **DC 15 Intelligence (Insight) check**. On a success, they deduce that these piles of stone are similar to the statues lining the wall. The bones are brittle and dry. Bits of clothing and rusted old war hammers are found at each separate pile.

The moment one of the PCs exits the starting area designated on the map, characters who succeed on a passive or active **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check** hear hurried footfalls coming from the large door at the top of the stone staircases. **Roll initiative at this time.** The PCs can do anything they want during this preparatory round. The cultists use their Dash action to get to the edge of the large door. Combat begins at the end of this preparatory round (when the cultists reach the doorway at the top of the staircase).

The Blossom of Oshadis

This flower originates in a celestial realm of continuous sunlight. If deprived of natural sunlight for more than 8 hours, it dies. **Note:** only magical light that is described as sunlight can be used to keep the flower alive. Currently, a permanent but substantially weakened form of the *sunbeam* spell keeps the hill-garden in perpetual sunlight.

Encounter: Cultists of Ucul'thu, Hard

# of PCs	# of Cultists and/or Acolytes
3	five cultists
4	five cultists, one acolyte
5	four cultists, two acolytes
6	four cultists, three acolytes

Encounter: Cultists of Ucul'thu, Medium

# of PCs	# of Cultists and/or Acolytes
3	four cultists
4	three cultists, one acolyte
5	three cultists, two acolytes
6	three cultists, three acolytes

For increased difficulty, add one cultist after one cultist has been defeated.

Tactics

The cultists followed the PCs to this hidden temple, but are unaware of the significance of the Blossom of Oshadis. The cultists will focus their attacks on the PCs. Most of the cultists carry lit torches. All the cultists and acolytes have melee and ranged weapons (see Appendix C: Creatures). They engage the PCs using ranged attacks before joining in melee combat.

Lighting

A modified *sunbeam* spell emits bright light in a 15-foot radius and dim light for another 15-feet. The spell is focused on a stalagmite. If that stalagmite is damaged, the spell ceases to function.

Optional Development

If the PCs are having a hard time with the cultists/acolytes, the DM can activate the ancient guardians of this temple to aid the PCs. At DM discretion the ancient guardians join the battle at the end of the initiative order.

DM Tool: Helping PCs Track Time Spent

Since the Blossom of Oshadis cannot be away from sunlight for more than 8 hours, the DM should give PCs good idea of how much time has elapsed. If PCs want increased precision, allow a **DC 10 Wisdom check** or a **DC 5 Wisdom (Survival) check.**

If using this optional development, read or paraphrase the following:

> The sound of grinding stone rises from somewhere in the cavern. You detect movement from the statues!

Encounter: Animated Allies, Special

# of PCs	# of Animated Allies
3	one animated ally
4	two animated allies
5	three animated allies
6	four animated allies

Using the Animated Allies

The animated allies only attack creatures wearing the holy symbol of an evil deity who enter the room. When such creatures are dead or have fled the room, the animated allies return to their original position. They will not leave the room to pursue enemies. They ignore the PCs (unless they are wearing the holy symbol of an evil deity).

After the Battle

If the PCs wish to collect the Blossom of Oshadis now, allow them to do so. Inform the PCs that beneath the illustration on the torn page, are instructions for how to safely uproot the Blossom of Oshadis and how to place it safely in a bag of soil. Placing the flower in the bag begins the 8-hour sunlight-deprivation countdown.

If the PCs study the cultist's holy symbols, the obscure nature of the deity will provide less information than the PCs hope for.

Study the holy symbol: Intelligence (Religion) check:

DC 10	The strange symbol reminds you of something from your studies; an evil cult whose name you can't recall. There is something deeply unnerving about this symbol that sends a shudder through your frame.
DC 15	The strange symbol is of a long-forgotten god. Its origins are shrouded in mystery as is its name. It is an evil god unfit for mortal souls to worship. There is something deeply unnerving about this symbol that sends a shudder through your frame.
DC 20	This strange symbol comes from a place of great darkness, a realm beyond the ken of mortals, and perhaps even the gods themselves. You can't recall the name but know it in your blood to be ancient and evil; a deity from realms of immoral madness. There is something deeply unnerving about this symbol that sends a shudder through your frame.
Failure	This strange symbol is beyond your ken, yet there is something deeply unnerving about this symbol that sends a shudder through your frame.

Act 2: Three Hallways

When the PCs climb to the top of the staircase, read or paraphrase the following:

> A small vestibule opens into three dark, stone hallways. These halls seem strangely familiar, but you can't recall exact details. The northmost hall is dimly lit by a flickering yellow glow.

The PCs took the southmost path to get to the temple, but right now, they can't remember that fact. The PCs may attempt to determine which path they took.

DC 10 Wisdom (Survival):

Failure	"Trying to find clear footprints here is impossible. Your footprints have been intermingled with those of the raging cultists."
Success	"In the southmost path, you discover signs of your own footprints heading west into the temple."

If the PCs succeeded, ensure they know which tunnel they took (the southmost path). It is up to the PCs if they wish to go down this path, or try the others.

Development

At this point, a symptom of the disease strikes the PCs. Read or paraphrase the following:

> A burst of searing pain crackles over your senses as you cast your mind back to the moment you entered this temple. Confusing, contradictory images of walking down each of the different paths flash across your mind's eye.

All PCs must succeed on a **DC 15 Charisma saving throw to continue down the southmost path**. If the PCs are aware of what path they took thanks to a successful Wisdom (Survival) check above, the Charisma saving throw is reduced to **DC 10**.

Players who fail their saving throw are impacted by a false memory. Instead of taking the southmost path, the PCs must choose one of the other two paths available.

Features of the Hallways

There is no light source in these hallways aside from the two torches left by the cultists in the northmost path.

The hallways are 10 feet high, 10 feet wide, 40 feet long.

The flowers on each mosaic can be pushed one inch into the wall. If two paired mosaics are pushed, they slowly return to their original position; this process takes one round.



The Southmost Path

If the PCs are successful in their saving throw and choose to go down the southmost path, read or paraphrase the following:

> This 40-foot-long corridor is made of smooth, cool stone. Two magnificent mosaics depicting a beautiful gold and fuchsia flower grace the walls. At the far end of the hall is a similar pair of mosaics.

Twigs a Memory

If the PCs go down the southmost path, they have a chance at remembering hidden dangers ahead. On a successful **DC 15 Intelligence check**, PCs have a moment of clarity. Successful PCs remember someone pointing at the space between each set of mosaics, indicating 10-foot-square pit traps. The traps were not disarmed but merely lept over by the PCs the first time. PCs can attempt to either leap over the traps or disarm them.

If the PCs do not receive a moment of clarity, they can spot the traps on a successful **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check**. A successful **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check** is necessary to confirm that the trapped section of the floor is the cover of a pit.

Failure

If the PCs spring the trap (by walking over the trapped tiles before disarming the trap), the floor tiles retract instantly for one round revealing a 10-foot-square, 10-foot deep pit. PCs on the trapped squares fall 10 feet taking 3 (1d6) bludgeoning damage. After 1 round, the tiles slide back into position. Being inside the pit when the trap resets does not cause additional damage.

To determine how to disarm the traps in this hallway, PCs must succeed on a **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check**. If successful, the PCs determine that the flowers on each pair of mosaics must be pushed simultaneously to deactivate one trap for 1 round. This process works for both pit traps in this southmost hallway.

The Central Path

If the PCs opt for the central path, read or paraphrase the following:

> This hall is devoid of decoration. It stretches off into the darkness ahead.

There are two pressure plate traps in this hallway. A character must succeed on a **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check** to detect the pressure plates. A successful **DC 15 Dexterity check** using thieves' tools disables each trap. A character without thieves' tools can attempt this check with disadvantage using any edged weapon or edged tool. On a failed check, the trap triggers. When the trap is triggered, poison darts fire out from the wall: 3 darts per effected square, darts: +3 (1d4) piercing. Any creature in the effected area damaged by the darts must make a single **DC 11 Constitution saving throw** taking 7 (2d6) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much on a successful one. Once the darts are fired, they do not reset. **Note:** Even if hit by more than one dart, only one Constitution saving throw is necessary.

The Northmost Path

The northmost path is the path that the cultists took. There is grim evidence of the cultists' fanaticism. When ready, read or paraphrase the following:

> This corridor is made of smooth, cool stone. The hall is flanked by two magnificent mosaics depicting a beautiful gold and fuchsia flower. At the far end of the hall are two similar mosaics. Two burning torches lay along the length of the hallway.

Like the southmost path, this path has two ten-foot-square pit traps. The cultists discovered these traps by setting them off. Seeing their comrades fall between the two mosaics, the cultists placed one torch at the centre of each trap, then jumped over those tiles as they ran forward.

On a successful **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check** the PCs spot the traps. A successful **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check** is necessary to confirm that the trapped section of the floor is the cover of a pit.

Failure

If the PCs spring the trap (by walking over the trapped tiles before disarming the trap), the floor tiles retract instantly for one round revealing a 10-foot wide, 10-foot deep pit. PCs on the trapped squares fall 10 feet taking 3 (1d6) bludgeoning damage. After 1 round, the tiles slide back into position. Being inside the pit when the trap resets does not cause additional damage.

To determine how to disarm the trap, PCs must succeed on a **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check**. If successful, the PCs determine that the flowers on the western pair of mosaics must be pushed simultaneously to deactivate this trap for 1 round. The eastern pair must be pushed in a specific order: southern mosaic first, northern mosaic second. Doing this deactivates this trap for 1 round.

If the PCs look down into the pits, they see a ten-foot drop into darkness. Inside each pit is a dead cultist, their torches still glowing eerily in the dark.

Timing Wandering Cultists Encounters

There are four additional groups of cultists investigating the area surrounding the temple. If the PCs do not advance through the temple within an hour, the DM should send one group of cultists identical to the group from the first encounter into the temple. The DM should feel free to do the same every hour the PCs linger in the temple until the four groups of cultists have been slain. These four groups of cultists are wandering the area looking for signs of the PCs and are expected to meet in the Outer Courtyard (see Act 4) before sunset (8 hours after the PCs entered the hill-garden room).





Act 3: Thralls of Evil

When the PCs get to the other side of the tunnels, read or paraphrase the following:

> Beyond the tunnels is a spacious, virtually empty room. The walls of this large chamber are decorated with bas-relief sculptures of solar symbols, flowers, and animals. The work is magnificent and has endured the years well. Phosphorescent climbing vines have found purchase on the ceiling of this room blanketing the upper reaches. The entire room is thrown into a soft aquamarine light from the vines. Ahead of you is a steep, crumbling stone staircase at the top of which a wide door opens into darkness. This room would be immaculate if not for the remains of a campfire. A few bedrolls and other mundane equipment lay neatly packed nearby.

PCs wishing to explore the ceiling are free to do so. The vines hanging from the ceiling are 5-feet long. Climbing the walls requires a **DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check**. A PC at the top of the wall gains three-quarter cover from the thick vines.

This campsite is where the PCs camped the night before. They were already feeling the effects of the disease and became careless, leaving their gear here rather than bringing it with them. Give the PCs time to pick up their equipment if they wish to.

Features of the Bas-relief Room

This room has a 15-foot high ceiling. The vines are 5 feet long. The phosphorescent vines provide the entire room with dim light.

The vines are flammable. If the vines come into direct contact with normal or magical fire, they ignite, burning at a pace of five square feet per round. A character coming into contact with the flames, takes 2 (1d4) damage or half on a successful **DC 10 Dexterity check**.

Treasure

There are two potions of healing in the PCs' equipment.

Twigs a Memory: Whose Trinket is This?

The DM is free to determine which of the PCs left a trinket at the campfire. If the DM wishes, all the PCs' trinkets could be discovered here. The PC(s) the DM has selected to notice their trinket must make a **DC 15 Charisma check**. Successful PCs begin to remember something of their past. When ready, secretly provide the PC Handout #2 (See Appendix B: Handouts).

If the PCs fail the Charisma check, secretly provide the PC with Handout #3.

DM Tip

To get the most out of this experience, do not provide both handouts at once. Instead, allow the players to think you have many handouts OR are handing out the same paper to each player.

Note: The **false memory** listed on Handout #3 is a symptom of the disease the PCs have contracted. Clever PCs who share information will be able to identify that the false memory in Handout #3 is in clear contradiction with the torn page from Handout #1. This false memory's purpose is to create paranoia among the PCs and cause concern about trusting their own memories. PCs who receive the false memory are NOT bound to obey the memory and can be convinced of its falseness by reference to Handout #1 if the PCs decide to do so.

A Moment's Warning

After the PCs enter this room and interact with the campsite, PCs who succeed on a passive or active **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check** hear footfalls coming from the staircase to the east. **Roll initiative at this time.** The PCs can do anything they want during this preparatory round. The cultists use their Dash action to get to the edge of the large door. Combat begins at the end of this preparatory round (when the cultists reach the doorway at the top of the staircase).

Note: The PCs might retreat into the trapped hallways or even into the large garden-hill room. Clever PCs might attempt to use the trapped hallway or the Animated Allies optional development to defeat the cultists. PCs might also attempt to hide among the vines in the ceiling. All such clever decisions add to the excitement and should be supported by the DM.

Otherworldly Enemies

When the Uculspawn and cultists appear, read or paraphrase the following:

> Black clad madmen rush into the room. Close behind them lurks a creature from the realm of nightmares! Barely humanoid in appearance, rubbery black and yellow skin honeycombs the exterior of this otherworldly creature. Lacking a neck, its head protrudes halfway out from its torso. Long, thin arms grope forward, at the end of which are three long, sharp claws snapping at the air.

Foes without Form

When the PCs are able to see the group of cultists and Uculspawn, the PCs must make a **DC 15 Charisma saving throw**. If they fail, they become victim of powerful illusory magic resulting from the disease they've contracted. For PCs who fail the saving throw read or paraphrase the following:

> A cold sweat washes over you. Among the foes gathered here stands a terrifying opponent; part shadow, part beast, the creature towers over the others and sniffs the air as it approaches.

This illusory creature looks like a large Uculspawn (ten feet tall). Physical interaction with it reveals it to be an illusion because things can pass through it. **Note:** If a PC who failed their Charisma saving throw attempts to attack the illusion, treat the illusion as having an armor class of 10. If a PC who failed their Charisma saving throw hits AC 10, the attack can be seen to pass harmlessly through the creature. If a PC who failed their Charisma saving throw misses an AC 10, that PC is unable to determine that the illusion is not real. Alternatively, a PC that uses an action to examine the illusion can determine that it's not real with a successful **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check**. If the PC discerns the illusion for what it is, the image disappears from the PCs mind, otherwise, the PC believes it to be real and must consider it a capable combatant.



DM Tip

Adjudicating illusions can be difficult. Some of your PCs might fail the saving throw, others might succeed. For those who fail, this illusion appears as real as any other foe. Even warnings from other PCs will not cause the victim to disbelieve the illusion. Note however, that if one of their fellow PCs moves through the illusion, and if the victim of the illusion sees this, the victim can immediately attempt a second **DC 15 Charisma saving throw** with advantage.

Encounter: Cultists, Uculspawn, Illusions, Hard

# of PCs	# of cultists and Uculspawn
3	three cultists, one Uculspawn
4	three cultists, two Uculspawn
5	three cultists, three Uculspawn
6	five cultists, three Uculspawn

Encounter: Cultists, Uculspawn, Illusions, Medium

# of PCs	# of Cultists and Uculspawn
3	two cultists, one Uculspawn
4	three cultists, one Uculspawn
5	three cultists, two Uculspawn
6	three Cultists, three Uculspawn

For increased difficulty, add one cultist after one cultist has been defeated.

Tactics

An Uculspawn will use the *detect infected* ability to find targets for the *telepathic interference* ability. If more than one Uculspawn is present, the Uculspawn will use telepathy to share its knowledge of the PCs' infection with the other Uculspawn, allowing the Uculspawn to use their own *telepathic interference* ability to complicate the combat.

Ucul'thu's influence

The PCs often feel the same effects of their disease at the same time. This is because Ucul'thu is able to use the disease to work his will. The disease is a tool Ucul'thu uses to thwart his infected enemies.

Act 4: The Final Push

If the PCs climb the staircase, they discover a short, winding, stone passage. The passage appears to end in a smooth, 5-foot stone wall.

On a successful **DC 15 Intelligence check**, they remember that this was an illusion when they entered. Upon realizing this, the illusory stone immediately becomes a translucent, shimmering outline. If the PCs fail the Intelligence check they can use an action to attempt to interact with the wall. Once they interact with the wall, on a successful **DC 15 Wisdom check**, the wall becomes a translucent, shimmering outline. They can now proceed to the outer courtyard.



The Outer Courtyard

When the PCs reach the courtyard, read or paraphrase the following:

> The ruins of a once beautiful courtyard spread out before you. At its center is a square fountain brimming with clear water. The tinkling of water rings in the air. Near the front of the courtyard are six well-tended horses, tied, saddled, and ready to ride.

Any PCs succeeding on a **DC 15 passive or active Perception check** notice enemies in the two lookout towers. Unless the PCs attempted to use stealth as they exited the passageway, the guards in the watchtowers will notice the PCs. Once the battle begins, the other guards standing in front of the ruin will join the battle.

Encounter: Battle of the Ruin, Hard

# of PCs	# of PCs	# of Guards/Enforcers/Thugs
3		five guards
4		three guards, one enforcer
5		one guard, one enforcer, one thug
6		three guards, one enforcer, three Thugs

Encounter: Battle of the Ruin, Medium

# of PCs	# of Guards/Enforcers/Thugs
3	three guards
4	one guards, one enforcer
5	one enforcer, one thug
6	three guards, one enforcer, one thug

For increased difficulty, add one guard after one guard has been defeated.

Tactics

The enemies in the towers attempt to use ranged attacks against the PCs. If the PCs can not be targeted by ranged attacks, the guards in the tower join the melee.

Development

The horses are frightened from the battle. If the PCs attempt to mount the horses, they must succeed on a **DC 5 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check**. On a failure, a PC must wait 2 (1d4) rounds before attempting the check again. The PCs are free to take the six riding horses if they wish. The path through the wilderness is not well worn, but riding allows the PCs to move more swiftly than going on foot. The PCs are aware they are on a timer: they must get the Blossom of Oshadis back to Aryala as soon as possible. The journey back to the city is a 7 hour walk, 3 hours on horseback.

If the PCs search the horses, they will find an unholy text inside one of the horses' saddle bags. If they bring this to the Aryala, it will prove vital in their attempt to discover the true nature of the disease plaguing their city.

Twigs a Memory

Being in the Outer Courtyard reminds the PCs of their arrival here. For the PCs to remember the directions back to the city, they must succeed on a **DC 5 Charisma saving throw**. On a failure, a PC must wait 2 (1d4) rounds before attempting the check again.



Act 5: Grim Reality

If the PCs get back to the city, they encounter an unnerving scene. The local guards have been on the look out for the PCs. Life in the city has grown almost unbearable for its citizens. When ready, read or paraphrase the following:

> A foul scent wafts on the air as you approach the city. Wisps of black smoke rise from within. Mournful cries and shouts of agony echo down the streets. Bodies wrapped in linen are piled outside, and the buzzing of flies grows louder as you approach. Raising his hand and moving forward, a city guard shouts out to you, *"Halt! This city is under quarantine! None may enter and none may leave! A grave illness has taken hold here. Go back before you become infected!"* As the guard speaks, another hurries toward him. She looks at you and says, *"These are the ones Aryala told us about. The ones we've been waiting for! Praise the gods!"* Nodding to you, the female guard bids you approach. Keeping a fair distance from you, she continues, *I will lead you to the temple. Come."*

If the PCs cooperate with the guard, read or paraphrase the following:

> The interior of this once beautiful temple is strewn with cots and bedrolls. People squirm in unbearable terror, some are tied down screaming in anguish. Clerics rush about to try and calm their patients, but their efforts are futile. The victims of this evil disease jibber and quake regardless of the clerics' ministrations. A man bound to a cot with leather belts raises his head and stares at you. His screams rise above all the others, *"He's coming! He sees you! He sees you! He sees all of us! He's coming! He is the end of time!"*
>
> You enter a dimly lit study at the back of the temple, here an elderly woman greets you. She looks exhausted. Barely able to raise her hand in greeting she embraces you with tears in her eyes, *"My friends, you've returned! Tell me, did you find it? Did you find the Blossom of Oshadis?"* Pausing, she examines each of you, a look of deep concern in her eyes, *"Are you well? Tell me...do you remember who I am?"*

This cleric, Aryala (lawful-good, Cleric 10, human female) rightfully suspects that the PCs have been infected by Ucul'thu's Wrath. She is deeply concerned but informs the PCs about how they volunteered to find the Blossom of Oshadis to save the people of this city. She also tells the PCs that this mysterious, unidentified disease swept through the city and has been manifesting among the citizens at an alarming rate. Citizens have been rioting, and the town guard is stretched beyond its breaking point. The disease impacts people's memory, personality, vision, and even causes them to hear voices that they cannot identify. If the PCs provide Aryala with the Blossom of Oshadis, she takes it carefully and, in the gentlest way imaginable, shakes some pollen from the Blossom of Oshadis onto a wooden board. She then carefully pushes the pollen into a boiling pot. After drinking some of the tea, she asks the PCs to do the same. Although not a cure, this tea helps calm those who are afflicted, reducing the **Charisma saving throw DC** by 5 for every saving throw associated with Ucul'thu's Wrath and with saving throws associated with the "Servant of Ucul'thu Template" on page 29.

Aryala is interested in the evil holy symbols the PCs found on the cultists. She is equally intrigued by the unholy book the PCs recovered from the horse's saddle bag. The book is filled with poetic verses written in the strange language called "deep-speech". Even if PCs are literate in deep-speech it will take weeks to translate, and weeks more to read and analyse the strange poetry of the evil text.

Regardless, Aryala will begin her research into this vile god and how it is connected to the disease. For now, she makes a few batches of Oshadis Blossom tea for the PCs. Each PC receives 4 doses. Each dose reduces the **DC of Charisma saving throws** associated with Ucul'thu's Wrath and with saving throws associated with the "Servant of Ucul'thu Template" by 5. One dose of tea works for seven days, therefore, each PC has a twenty-eight day supply of Oshadis Blossom tea as they begin the quest to find the root of this evil malady.

Aryala is capable of casting a simple spell called "sunlight" (evocation, cleric level 4) that mimics a beam of real sunlight. She prays to her god to give her the ability to make this spell effect permanent to keep the Blossom of Oshadis alive.

This adventure ends with the PCs about to begin an epic quest. That quest, however, is outside the scope of this brief module. A few ideas about how to expand this quest are listed in "Beyond the Module" on page 29.



Aryala Valsyrion

Medium human, Life domain, lawful good

Cleric (acolyte) level 10
Armor Class 16 (chainmail)
Hit Points 73 (10d8 + 2)
Speed 30ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	9 (-1)	7 (-1)	13 (+1)	20 (+5)	11 (+0)

Proficiencies (+4 proficiency bonus)
Saving Throws Wisdom +9, Charisma +4
Skills Insight +9, Medicine +9, History +5, Religion +5
Armor Light armor, medium armor, heavy armor, shields
Weapons All simple weapons
Languagges Celestial, Common, Infernal, Deep-Speech
Senses passive Perception 15
Equipment Mace, chain mail, holy symbol, research library available at her temple

Options

Spellcasting. Aryala is a10th level spellcaster. Their spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 17. Spell attack modifier = 9)

Class features. *Divine Domain: Life Domain, Bonus Proficiency: heavy armor, Disciple of Life, Channel Divinity (1/rest), Channel Divinity, Destroy Undead (CR1/2), Channel Divinity (2/rest), Blessed Healer, Destroy Undead (CR 1), Divine Strike Divine Intervention*

Domain Spells
1st level: *bless, cure wounds*
3rd level: *lesser restoration, spiritual weapon*
5th level: *beacon of hope, revivify*

Prepared Spells
Cantrips (5 slots): *guidance, light, resistance, sacred flame, spare the dying*
1st level (4 slots): *bless, cure wounds, detect poison and disease, healing word*
2nd level (3 slots): *lesser restoration, prayer of healing, silence*
3rd level (3 slots): *daylight, dispel magic, mass healing word*
4th level (3 slots): *banishment, death ward, guardian of faith*
5th level (2 slots): *greater restoration, mass cure wounds*

Actions

Mace. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5ft., one target. *Hit* 5 (1d6 + 2)

Beyond the Module

Seeking knowledge

Little is known of Ucul'thu outside the unholy book the PCs (and Aryala) now possess. The book entitled "Cosmos of the Fell Seed" is evil to its core. There are five chapters, each more fiendish than the last. To read the book, a character must firstly be fluent in deep-speech. Next, to understand the first chapter requires success on a **DC 10 Intelligence (Insight) check**. A **DC 10 Wisdom saving throw** is also required. Failure at the Wisdom saving throw allows the DM to roll on the Indefinite Madness table in chapter 8 of the Dungeon Master's Guide and apply that Indefinite Madness to the PC.

The **DC** to understand each chapter and the **DC** for each saving throw increases by 5 each time; thus, chapter 2 requires success on a **DC 15 Intelligence (Insight) check** and a **DC 15 Wisdom saving throw**, chapter 3 will require **DC 20 saving throws** and so on. Each of the first four chapters hint at materials required for a ritual to defeat Ucul'thu. Of course, an unholy book would not directly contain such information, but a clever and sensitive reader is able to infer not only from what the text says but also from what it doesn't say to discover the four materials required. The fifth chapter of the unholy book speaks of religious rites and beliefs surrounding the vile god Ucul'thu. Moreover, this final chapter contains a reference to a temple of Ucul'thu and a ritual required to summon the god into the material plane!



Aryala Valsyrion's Equipment

Equipment. Mace, chain mail, holy symbol, research library available at her temple

Background. Aryala is a wise, elderly, venerated cleric of good, light, and healing. A student of history, Aryala has forewarned the people of a coming calamity for many years, yet despite their general respect for her as a cleric, her dire warnings have been ignored. Undeterred, Aryala served her people and delved deeper into history, religion, philosophy, and cosmology. Now that the plague has arrived as she foretold, Aryala has summoned the mighty and willing to turn back the coming disaster and seek a cure to the growing sickness infiltrating the world.

DM Note

If you are placing these adventures in the Forgotten Realms campaign setting, a suitable home city for Aryala would be **Elturel**.

Seeking a cure

Successfully reading the first four chapters of "Cosmos of the Fell Seed" allows for educated guesses about where to find the four materials required for the ritual. It also provides guidance about how to perform this ritual in the temple of the ancient Guardians who first sealed Ucul'thu away.

In ascending order from chapter one through four, the materials required for the ritual are:

1st material: Successful **DC 10 Intelligence (Religion)** and **Wisdom (Medicine) checks** allow for an educated guess about the first material: **The Blossom of Oshadis**. PCs might be interested to know that Oshadis is a celestial, lawful-good anthropomorphic plant. Her colouring resembles that of beautiful flower the PCs have retrieved. Oshadis is charming, beautiful, wise, and compassionate. She holds the PCs in high regard.

2nd material: Successful **DC 15 Intelligence (Religion)** and **Wisdom (Medicine) checks** allow for an educated guess about the second material: the **egg-shell of a couatl**.

3rd material: Successful **DC 20 Intelligence (Religion)** and **Wisdom (Medicine) checks** allow for an educated guess about the third material: **the tear of a Solar**.

4th material: Successful **DC 25 Intelligence (Religion)** and **Wisdom (Medicine) checks** allow for an educated guess about the fourth material: **the promise of a god**.

Stopping Ucul'thu

Chapter 5 of the unholy book describes the location of the temple and the rituals for summoning Ucul'thu into this world. If the PCs have cured themselves of the disease, they may wish to face Ucul'thu head-on. This epic battle would be a perfect capstone for any high-level, heroic adventure you as DM have planned!

Synergy Between the Disease and Foes

The DM shouldn't have to create new monsters every time to PCs go out on an adventure. Instead, it is recommended that the DM reskin already existing fiends or aberrations. In addition, the DM should feel free to apply one or two abilities from the "Servants of Ucul'thu" template. These abilities are listed from least dangerous to most dangerous and should not be applied without careful consideration. DMs can add other mind affecting spells. The DCs will be subject to DM judgment.

Note: The abilities associated with the Servants of Ucul'thu template only affect targets infected with Ucul'thu's Wrath.

Servant of Ucul'thu Template

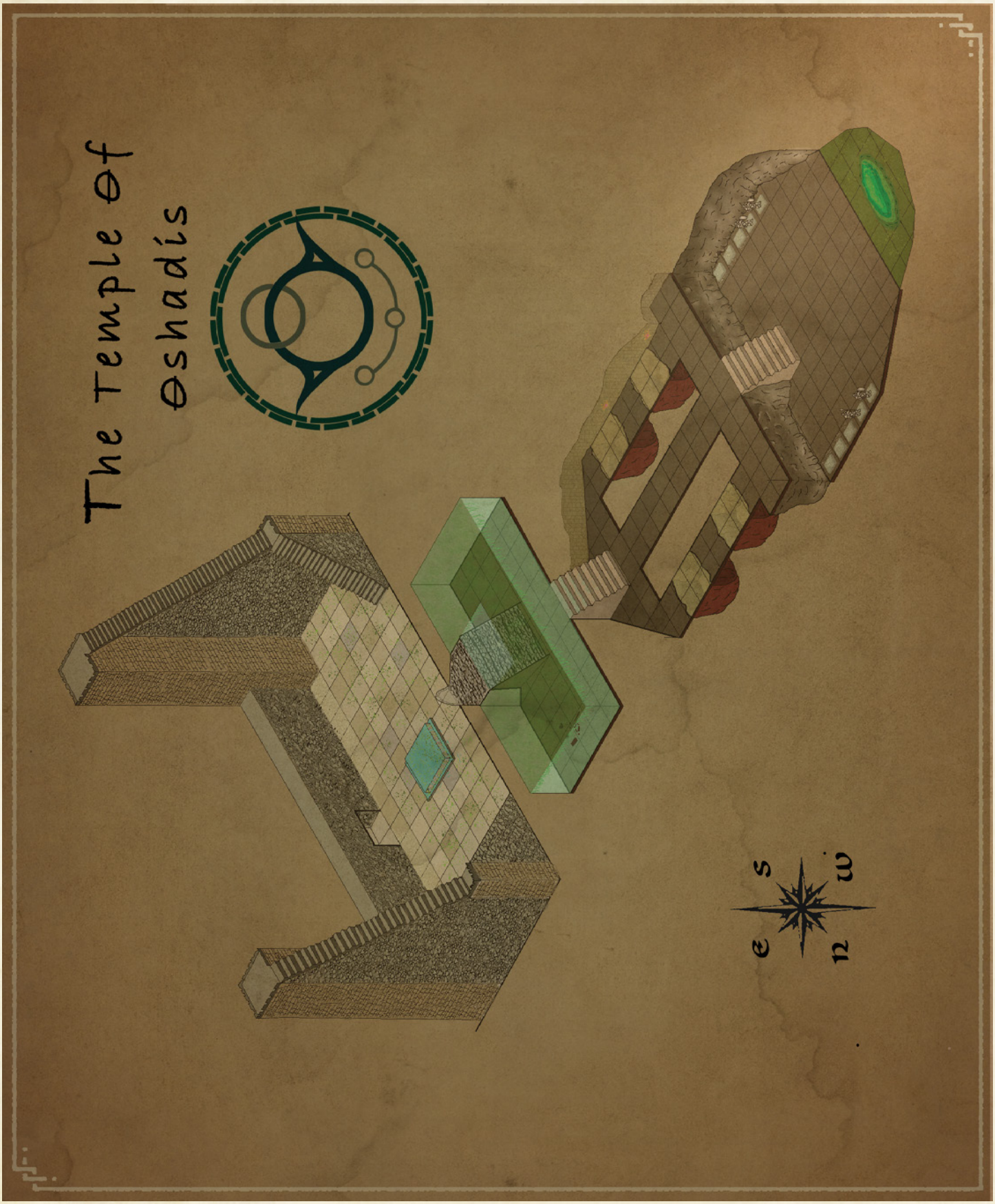
Telepathic Interference. Once a day as a reaction a Servant of Ucul'thu can attempt to shake the confidence of a creature within a 30-foot radius that is infected with Ucul'thu's wrath. The targeted creature must make a **DC 15 Charisma saving throw**. On a failure, the creature rolls with disadvantage on their attack.

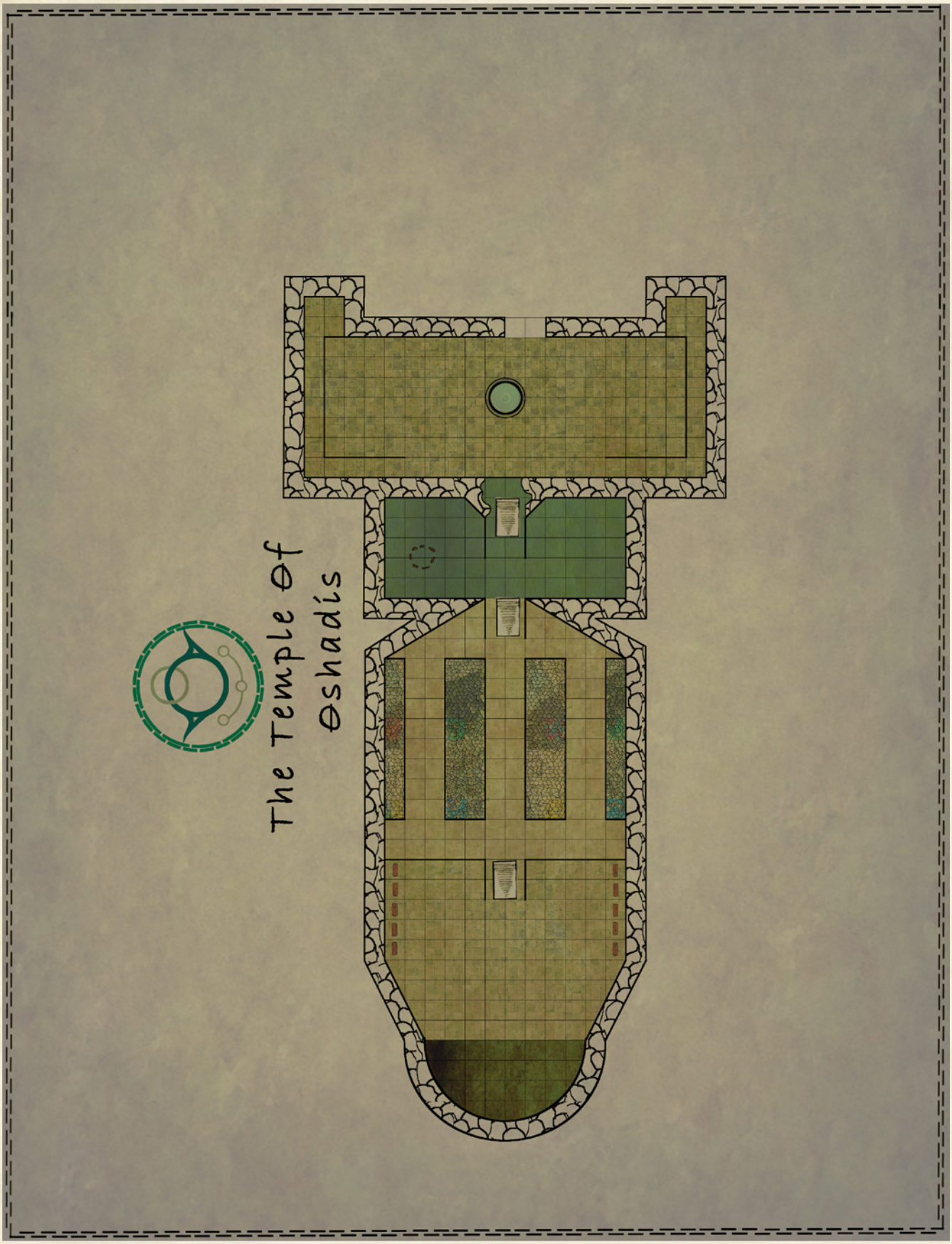
Hold Person. Once per day as a bonus action, a Servant of Ucul'thu can cast *hold person*. (**DC 15 Wisdom saving throw**).

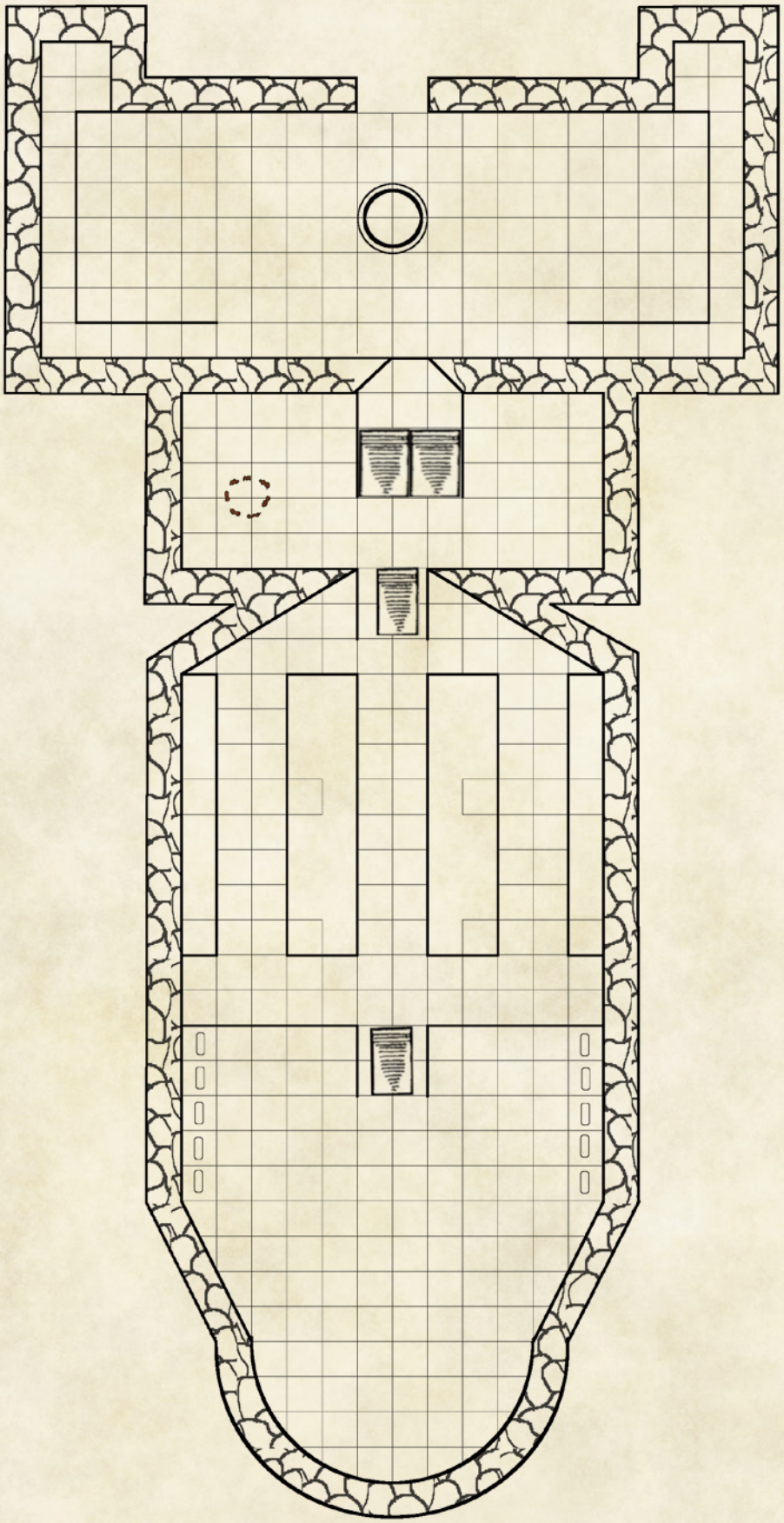
Confusion. Once a day as a bonus action a servant of Ucul'thu can cast *confusion*. (**DC 15 Wisdom saving throw**).

Dominate Person. Once a day as a bonus action, a servant of Ucul'thu can cast *dominate person*. (**DC 15 Wisdom saving throw**).

Phantasmal Killer. Once a day as a bonus action, a servant of Ucul'thu can cast *phantasmal killer*. (**DC 15 Wisdom saving throw**).


The Temple of Oshadis
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The Temple of
Oshadis



Handout #1

This is the flower you must retrieve, the "Blossom of Oshadis". Its curative powers are legendary and will no doubt serve us well in our pursuit of the truth. The Blossom of Oshadis has been forgotten by nearly everyone, for this reason I believe it will be unguarded and abandoned. Remember my friends, the Blossom of Oshadis cannot live if kept in darkness for more than 8 hours. Be wary of this, for it takes nearly 7 hours to return home from the temple! Retrieve the living Blossom of Oshadis, roots and all, and bring it back to me at the temple. From there we will do what we can to solve the riddle that plagues us.

An image of the trinket flashes across your mind's eye as a memory rises unbidden within you. You are standing in a dimly lit room, an exhausted woman opens a large, leather tome. Frantically turning through the pages she finds a picture of a gold and fuchsia flower. Tearing the page from the tome, she hands it over and speaks, "This is a faint hope, but in such times, even the faintest hope is treasured. Go to the temple of the Blossom of Oshadis. Bring the living flower here. Surely if anything can save us, it is the tea of the Blossom. Go with your allies. All of our hopes rest in you."

An image of the trinket flashes across your mind's eye as a memory rises within you, unbidden. A woman, her ancient skin honeycombed with black and yellow pustules weeps in agony. Flipping quickly through an ancient tome, she finally stops at a page depicting a gold and fuchsia flower. Tearing the page from the tome, she hands it over and speaks, "This is the cause of all our ill. Pluck it from its hiding spot, then when you have escaped the madmen bent on its protection, burn that flower a cinder! Bury its ashes and never speak of the temple or the flower to anyone again."

Appendix C: Creatures

Uculspawn

Medium aberration, chaotic evil

Armor Class 13
Hit Points 22 (4d8 + 4)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	10 (+0)	13 (+1)	5 (-3)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)

Senses Senses passive Perception 10
Languages Deep Speech, Telepathy 60 Ft.
Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Appearance. Uculspawn are amorphous yellow and black blobs only vaguely humanoid in shape. They have no necks and only the top half of their heads protrude from their shoulders. As Uculspawn move, puss and other fluids spurt unpredictably from anywhere on their shapeless form. Their arms are thin and their three fingers are tipped by long, sharp claws.

Actions

Multiattack. The Uculspawn makes two attacks, with its claws.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 3 (1d6) piercing damage.

Detect Infected. As an action, the Uculspawn can detect creatures infected by Ucul'thu's Wrath within a 30-foot radius.

Telepathic Interference. Once a day as a reaction a Uculspawn can attempt to shake the confidence of a creature within a 30-foot radius that is infected with Ucul'thu's wrath. The targeted creature must make a DC 15 Charisma saving throw. On a failure, the creature rolls with disadvantage on their attack.

Telepathic Interference. Once a day as a reaction a Uculspawn can attempt to shake the confidence of a creature within a 30-foot radius that is infected with Ucul'thu's wrath. The targeted creature must make a **DC 15 Charisma saving throw**. On a failure, the creature rolls with disadvantage on their attack.

Appearance. Uculspawn are amorphous yellow and black blobs only vaguely humanoid in shape. They have no necks and only the top half of their heads protrude from their shoulders. As Uculspawn move, puss and other fluids spurt unpredictably from anywhere on their shapeless form. Their arms are thin and their three fingers are tipped by long, sharp claws.

Animated Ally

Medium construct, unaligned

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)
Hit Points 33 (6d8 + 6)
Speed 25ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	11 (-+0)	13 (+1)	1 (-5)	3 (-4)	1 (-5)

Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned
Senses blindsight 60 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 6
Languages -
Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Antimagic Susceptibility. An animated ally is incapacitated while in the area of an antimagic field. If targeted by dispel magic, the animated ally must succeed on a Constitution saving throw against the caster's spell save DC or fall unconscious for 1 minute

False Appearance. While the animated ally remains motionless, it is indistinguishable from a normal statue.

Actions

Multiattack. The animated ally makes two melee attacks.

Slam. Melee Weapon Attack: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 5 (1d6 + 2) bludgeoning damage.

This magically animated statue sounds like grinding stone when it moves. It is carved in the form of an elegant, winged being dressed in flowing robes.



Guard of Ucul'thu

Medium humanoid (human), chaotic evil

Armor Class 16 (chain shirt, shield)
Hit Points 11 (2d8 + 2)
Speed 30ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)

Skills Perception +2
Senses passive Perception 12
Languages any one language (usually Common)
Challenge 1/8 (25 XP)

Actions

Spear. Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack: +3 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. Hit: 4 (1d6 + 1) piercing damage, or 5 (1d8 + 1) piercing damage if used with two hands to make a melee attack.

Shortbow. Ranged Weapon Attack: +2, range 80/320, one target. Hit 3 (1d6) piercing damage.

Cultist of Ucul'thu

Medium humanoid (human), chaotic evil

Armor Class 12 (leather armor)
Hit Points 9 (2d8)
Speed 30ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)

Skills Deception +2, Religion +2
Senses passive Perception 12
Languages any one language (usually Common)
Challenge 1/8 (25 XP)

Dark Devotion. The cultist has advantage on saving throws against being charmed or frightened

Actions

Scimitar. Melee Weapon Attack: +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. Hit: 4 (1d6 + 1) slashing damage.

Shortbow. Ranged Weapon Attack: +2, range 80/320, one target. Hit 3 (1d6) piercing damage.

The Cultist is carrying a holy symbol of Ucul'thu.

Acolyte of Ucul'thu

Medium humanoid (human), chaotic evil

Armor Class 10
Hit Points 9 (2d8)
Speed 30ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)

Skills Medicine +4, Religion +2
Senses passive Perception 12
Languages any one language (usually Common)
Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Spellcasting. The acolyte is a 1st-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 12, +4 to hit with spell attacks). The acolyte has following cleric spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): resistance, sacred flame*, guidance

1st level (3 slots): bane, command inflict wounds, sanctuary

Actions

Club. Melee Weapon Attack: +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 2 (1d4) bludgeoning damage.

Shortbow. Ranged Weapon Attack: +2, range 80/320, one target. Hit 3 (1d6) piercing damage.

The Acolyte is carrying a holy symbol of Ucul'thu.

**sacred flame* is identical to the spell of the same name, but the flame appears in the form of a black and purple spiral.





Thug of Ucul'thu

Medium humanoid (human), chaotic evil

Armor Class 11 (leather armor)
Hit Points 32 (5d8 + 10)
Speed 30ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)

Senses passive Perception 10
Languages any one language (usually Common)
Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Pack Tactics. The thug has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of the thug's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

Actions

Multiattack. The thug makes two melee attacks.

Mace. Melee Weapon Attack: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. Hit: 5 (1d6 + 2) bludgeoning damage.

Heavy Crossbow. Ranged Weapon Attack: +2 to hit, range 100/400 ft., one target. Hit: 5 (1d10) piercing damage.

Enforcer of Ucul'thu

Medium humanoid (human), chaotic evil

Armor Class 11 (leather armor)
Hit Points 32 (5d8 + 10)
Speed 30ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)

Skills Intimidation +2
Senses passive Perception 10
Languages any one language (usually Common)
Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Pack Tactics. The thug has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of the thug's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

Enthralled by Ucul'thu. As an action, the Enforcer of Ucul'thu can cast command (DC 10) once per day on anyone infected with Ucul'thu's wrath.

Detect Infected. As an action, the Enforcer of Ucul'thu can detect creatures infected by Ucul'thu's Wrath within a 30-foot radius.

Actions

Multiattack. The enforcer makes two melee attacks.

Nexrynite **Battleaxe.*** Melee Weapon Attack: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. Hit: 6 (1d8 + 2) slashing damage, or 7 (1d10 +2) slashing damage if used in two hands.

Heavy Crossbow. Ranged Weapon Attack: +2 to hit, range 100/400 ft., one target. Hit: 5 (1d10) piercing damage.

*It is believed only a dozen nexrynite meteorites have been found. This glittery black ore suppresses healing magic and increases virulence of pestilence. Damage dealt by nexrynite weapons cannot be healed by magical means – though mundane healing is unaffected.

Note: *Nexrynite originates from the adventure "The King's Evil" by Dylan Hyatt.*

The Enforcer of Ucul'thu is honeycombed with yellow and black skin, and has been gifted with *enthralled* and *detect infected* abilities as a reward for worshipping Ucul'thu.



Appendix D: Disease

Ucul'thu's Wrath

Penetrative, Divine, Non-Lethal, Internal, Crippling, Chronic

"Experienced as I may be in defeating ascended wizards, even I fear the resurrection of Ucul'thu. It has been millennia since he was imprisoned, and it has been millennia since he managed to escape. After he was set free, his reign lasted for 7 months. The whole world fell into chaos, and it took the lives of thousands to lock him up again. If he breaks his chains again, then we must be prepared; knowledge is power."

Ucul'thu is an ancient, evil god, imprisoned by the Guardians of the Realm in the age of Heroes. Millennia have passed and Ucul'thu's imprisonment has nurtured his rage, which has grown immensely. Now a group of cultists managed to set him free him from the powerful shackles that bound him, and he is once again ready to unleash his wrath upon the world.

Origins

The disease is caused by the influence of the evil god himself on the material plane. Madness and destruction take place in every part of the world, all due to the dark energy this elder god is imbued with. As for Ucul'thu himself, his origins are shrouded in mystery, but he is considered to be one of the oldest entities to ever walk the planes.

Causes

The disease slowly spreads as Ucul'thu's presence affects cities, one by one. It can infect half of a city's population in a mere week. If adventurers come across Ucul'thu or his cultists, they may also be infected by the disease either by Ucul'thu's aura or by a cultist's spell. In the presence of the deity's influence, any creature must succeed on a **DC 25 Charisma saving throw** or submit to his maddening will. When targeted by a cultist's spell, granted by the god himself, a creature must succeed on a **DC 15 Charisma saving throw** or be infected with the disease.



Symptoms

Ucul'thu's Wrath mainly affects the brain. Those affected will slowly slip into insanity, their consciousness affected by the words they hear and the images they see. Soon, their behavior will change, following the shift in their worldview and a new-found reverence for the risen deity.

Pseudomemories

The first horrifying symptom is the loss and change of memories. Relationships will crack and break under the pressure of false recollections, and each creature affected will come to question their own thoughts, shattering their image of self.

Frontal Lobe Syndrome

The infected creature's behavior changes. It becomes hostile, distant, guarded with secrets, and even a most lawful Paladin may perform evil deeds.

Programmed Illusions

Ucul'thu inflicts some creatures with Illusions occasionally. These illusions, more like programs than simple spells, will play out once certain conditions have been met. Combined with the Pseudomemories, even a total shift in perspective is not out of the question for anyone under the influence of the malady. The programmed illusions are different for every infected creature, as the god himself decides how it will manipulate its subjects.

Voices

After he gains dominance over a creature (on average 1 week after the contagion), the creature will begin to hear voices. The god may whisper to its victims at will, once per hour. Treat this effect as a *command* spell. The creature has disadvantage on saving throws against this instance of the spell.

Chaos

The combined effects will lead entire cities to go mad and begin to kill each other or form an army for Ucul'thu's evil schemes and ultimately lead to chaos.

Diagnosis

Having been lost to time, only a few masters of medicine know of this disease and how to cure it. By succeeding on either a **DC 32 Wisdom (Medicine)** or **Intelligence (Religion) check**, a creature will know how to cure it, how it is spread and what symptoms it causes. An old manuscript containing lore about the "Old God" is probably hidden somewhere that might contain information on how to deal with this immense threat. If the players manage to find it the check is made at **DC 5**.

Cure

Ucul'thu's Wrath cannot be cured by any spells known to most spellcasters or through other magical means. The only way to break his magic is the ritual created by the Guardians, but the whereabouts of the scroll describing it are unknown. Players will have to begin a journey to find the last "Descendant of the Guardians" and persuade him to come to their aid.

The King's Evil



For Levels 2-4

by Dylan Hyatt

My smithy on Swan Street is a money-spinner, employing six blacksmiths. I'd turned up to open shop when it occurred to me to write a will. During the religious turmoil blighting Baldur's Gate, my sister died meaning that Ironhelm, my wretched cousin, would inherit the business instead. Never trusted that creep: his parents died before their time in a boating accident and I've always suspected he'd a hand in it. So, I was just about to write a will to ensure my smithy would pass to my hardworking employees instead when in through the door burst four Flaming Fist soldiers. Before I knew it, I was bundled across the street into a caged wagon crammed with the infected. 'But I haven't got the King's Evil,' I protested. The soldiers grinned: 'You have now.' As the wagon trundled away, I saw my cousin arrive to nail a poster up on my premises' door, declaring: UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT. That's how I ended up here in Lazar Walls, and just when I thought things couldn't get worse, they did ...

From Thordyn's diary

Introduction

The King's Evil, an adventure optimized for four 3rd level characters, starts in Baldur's Gate. The story is easily adaptable for a homebrew setting, the DM simply needs a densely populated city. The people of Baldur's Gate are beginning to think they're cursed: after the recent intrigues around Bhaal (god of murder), came the *religious strife*. For reasons yet to be fathomed, the previously tolerant priesthoods of Gond, Tymora and Umberlee became fanatical. When the temple of Umberlee was burned down by followers of Tymora, the dockers took revenge by chasing the Tymoran priesthood over the dockside and watching them drown. Before long, worshipers of Gond were fighting devotees of both Umberlee and Tymora for desecrating their High House of Wonders. The Flaming Fist failed to impose order, now most of the city's healers (the clerics and paladins) have fled. Mobs of zealots control their respective temple 'turf', and if a citizen of the wrong faith wanders into the wrong district, another senseless lynching follows. So it was, with the ensuing lack of healers in the city, pestilence was inevitable.

The *King's Evil*, a contagious disease (akin to *leprosy* and *scrofula*) is rampant in Baldur's Gate. Some say the Duke took advantage of the old superstition purporting that only the touch of nobility can cure the afflicted, charging exorbitant fees for his miraculous healing hands. It has even been whispered that the ducal house deliberately incubated the *King's Evil*—what better way of controlling your enemies than by refusing to cure them when afflicted? Others claim elite priests within the sects cynically manipulated their own zealots from behind the scenes, inciting the *religious strife* to reduce the availability of healing provided by their own clerics. Certainly, the fee for magical healing has increased a thousandfold. If these conspiracies are true, they backfired: The *King's Evil* is now such an epidemic it could lead to the collapse of the city's economy. To limit the contagion, the Parliament has commissioned the Flaming Fist to round up the infected (the *unclean*) and quarantine them in epidemic colonies (think *leper colony*). So far, three epidemic colonies have been established atop isolated hills ten miles from Baldur's Gate. Every day, caged wagons cart the diseased out of the city. Life at two of the colonies is not that bad, the afflicted are allowed out to collect alms if carrying the bell of the unclean. This is not so at the third colony, *Lazar Walls*. There the *King's Evil* has taken a virulent manifestation and the Flaming Fist has fortified the compound.

Adventure Outline

The PCs are hired by a dwarf, Delbert, to rescue his friend Thordyn. Ostensibly, Thordyn contracted the *King's Evil* and, despite running a successful smithy, was seemingly unable to afford healing, and so was exiled to the fortified epidemic colony of Lazar Walls. Delbert suspects foul play as Thordyn's cousin, Ironhelm, now runs his business.

To enter the epidemic colony, the PCs must feign the disease's symptoms. Once inside, it should be a straightforward task of finding Thordyn and cure him with *lesser restoration*. Or, upon escaping, the PCs could get a cleric—few though they are in these dark days of the *religious strife*—to purge the disease. Delbert has arranged for one of the colony's Flaming Fist guards to let the PCs escape once Thordyn is located. If the party doesn't have access to *lesser restoration*, Delbert gives each PC a potion of the magical remedy for protection. However, seldom do things go to plan. The PCs find that no healing magic works inside the compound. Further, there's no sign of Thordyn. Exposed to a virulent form of the *King's Evil*, the PCs must act quickly. If asking questions discretely, the adventurers discover that many of the unclean have disappeared.

Their investigations lead to a secret underground complex below Lazar Walls where the missing have been forced into slavery, mining under the tyranny of a criminal gang known as the *Vultures of Fortune*. The gang controls ooze monsters, marshalling them against slaves slacking at work or fleeing. For, embedded deep under Lazar Walls lies a meteorite consisting of nexynite, a highly prized (and feared) ore that suppresses all healing magic and intensifies pestilence. Because weapons forged out of nexynite deal damage that cannot be healed magically, the ore fetches huge sums on the black market. Among the unclean enslaved by the *Vultures of Fortune* is Thordyn. The PCs must either defeat the gang and their oozes or, through stealth, free the dwarf.

Setting and Hook

The adventure opens in Baldur's Gate or a similarly densely populated city. The citizens are gripped by paranoia as the *King's Evil* threatens to infect all; doomsayers proclaim the end of days, a punishment for sins against the gods. Militia patrol the streets, calling on households to bring out their unclean. Meanwhile, religious intolerance casts its dark shadow; previously friendly temples are now bitter rivals, blaming one another for the pestilence. Most Baldurians proclaim to follow a particular faith (such as Tymora) one day, then another (such as Gond) the next, just to appease whichever mob of zealots is visiting the neighborhood. Amid these dark times, Delbert approaches the PCs:

> *"A month ago, I visited my friend Thordyn. He runs a smithy on Swan Street. On entering, I found his cousin, Ironhelm, in charge. This struck me as odd: Thordyn hated Ironhelm, whom he suspected disposed of his parents for their wealth. I learned Thordyn had been forcibly removed to one of these new epidemic colonies. That didn't add up either: though the cost of healing has rocketed, Thordyn had the money. So, what I need you to do is enter the colony, feigning the symptoms of the King's Evil, and smuggle Thordyn out. I can offer one hundred gold pieces each; but Thordyn is generous and, if we can restore him to his business, he'd reward you, too."*

The Disease

For running this adventure, here are the salient points on the "King's Evil" from **The Malady Codex** by Jason Bakos and Themis Paraskevas.

This leprous contagion spreads through touch, a PC coming into contact with an infected creature must pass a **DC 14 Constitution saving throw** or contract the disease. Normally, symptoms show randomly from within weeks to years. Early stages are signified by pale patches on the skin that might become insensitive. In middle stages, large areas of skin appear blanched white. In the late stages, the skin becomes transparent, such that muscles are visible.

The afflicted can (normally) be cured by a *lesser restoration* spell. However, the nexynite meteorite below Lazar Walls not only suppresses healing magic, it enhances the virulence of diseases. The potency of the *King's Evil* has increased so dramatically that mere proximity is enough to spread the contagion, symptoms worsen daily; many of the colonists already show the advanced stages. Because the disease appears more potent in the compound (for reasons unknown), the Flaming Fist has been ordered to impose the strictest quarantine regime. However, due to the large number of unclean rounded up in Baldur's Gate each day, many are still sent to Lazar Walls.

If a PC fails a saving throw and becomes infected, early symptoms show within 24 hours. Every subsequent 24 hours, the PC repeats the saving throw: on each fail the disease advances a stage. Upon acquiring the advanced stage, the PC not only suffers *disadvantage* on Dexterity checks, but also must succeed on a death saving throw every ten days or die! If surviving, the PC repeats the saving throw on every tenday cycle until cured, or until succumbing. There is a high death rate at Lazar Walls, the infected that arrive daily face a grim outlook.

Part 1. Lazar Walls

Delbert reveals his trade is in theatrical makeup:

> *"I can get my makeup crew to paint you as victims of the King's Evil. The makeup won't last long, but I know a Flaming Fist guard at the compound, Stephan, who'll smuggle in deliveries for you, including fresh cosmetics."*

Delbert adds that though the PCs will have their weapons confiscated, Stephan can return them at some point:

> *"Life in Lazar Walls is cutthroat. Though you can't liaise with the guards, your contact in the colony will be Hodo Busyfingers, a halfling who works in the kitchens. Just give the following gesture and pass phrase: scratch behind your ear and ask for 'roast lamb and gravy'–you'll still get gruel. Hodo can tell you where to find your weapons once they're smuggled in and can arrange your escape when you locate Thordyn. Hodo will be escaping with you."*

Delbert arranges for the PCs to be rounded up by the Flaming Fist: loaded into a caged wagon and, with a dozen poor souls suffering the King's Evil, driven to Lazar Walls.

Arrival

> The caged wagon travels out the city and into the countryside. On a sparse and windswept hill, the ominous walls of your destination come into sight. Lazar Walls sits on the edge of a sheer cliff.

As the name implies, Lazar Walls is a fortified compound. The outer wall, made of stone, is 30-foot high and patrolled by sentries. The Flaming Fist have no close contact with the unclean. An inner fence sits about 15 feet within the compound and marks the boundary of the colony. Four feet high and easy to scale, the fence is meant only as a marker: any infected escaping is targeted with thrown spears. The community has a representative who is allowed to leave the inner fence and approach the gatehouse. Using a bull-horn megaphone, the representative liaises with the sentries. Food is delivered by charitable farms, the supplies left just inside the outer wall. The colony representative is then allowed to bring helpers to carry the food inside.

Driven through the outer gate, the PCs and their fellow unclean are let out of the caged wagon (the sentries keep safe distance) and ordered to enter via the fence's open gateway:

> In a large, open courtyard with various buildings sprawled along the edges, hundreds of bustling folk display the late stages of the King's Evil. Their blemished or transparent faces are hidden under the hoods of their filthy clothes. Others have bandaged hands and feet concealing their lost digits due to lack of sensation. The stench of raw sewage is mixed with that of smoke emanating from a pyre of disease-ridden corpses.

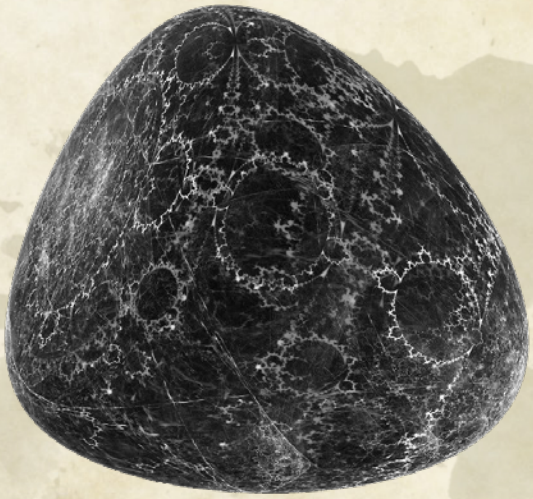
Though there is some attempt at mundane treatment by infected monks in the colony, Lazar Walls is little more than a concentration camp where the diseased are left to rot.

Exposure inside Lazar Walls

The colonists are ridden with the nexynite-enhanced contagion. Close confinement with them means the PCs must succeed on a **DC 14 Constitution saving throw** each day or contract the *King's Evil*. If failing, a PC shows the first early symptoms after 24 hours. Infected PCs won't need makeup hereon. As soon as it becomes apparent that healing magic doesn't work, they will be caught in a race against time to find Thordyn before the disease kills them.

Nexynite

Only a dozen nexynite meteorites have ever been found. Millennia ago, a nexynite meteorite fell on a remote hill near the Chionthar river. Had anyone known about the nexynite meteorite, the glittery black ore that suppresses healing magic while increasing the virulence of pestilence, Lazar Walls would never have been built on the site. Weapons forged from nexynite deal damage that cannot be healed by magic—though mundane healing is unaffected. When Grangor, boss of the *Vultures of Fortune*, noticed his potion of lesser restoration (smuggled in at great cost) had no effect, he guessed the cause.



Nexynite Suppression

The meteorite's aura cancels healing magic, and the aura itself is immune to spells such as *antimagic field* and *dispel magic*. Basically, any healing magic, whether accessed through enchanted items, potions, spells or innate abilities, fails when utilized within a mile radius of Lazar Walls. Below is a list of spells from the *Players Handbook* that would fail if cast within Lazar Walls:

aura of life, aura of vitality, cure wounds, goodberry, heal, healing word, lesser restoration, mass cure wounds, mass heal, mass healing word, prayer of healing, raise dead, reincarnate, resurrection, true resurrection

If the PCs use healing spells from the various supplementary *Dungeons and Dragons* books, they too would fail. The first time the PCs become aware of this effect, allow a **DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check**. On a success, the PC recalls legends about the nexynite meteorites and their properties. A PC succeeding on a **DC 20** result also knows that nexynite exists simultaneously on the ethereal and material planes, and that the extracted ore can be used to forge fearsome weapons. A single meteorite could fetch 10,000 gp!

Lazar Walls

The adventure early on will largely be driven by the PCs' investigations. This section gives a breakdown of the epidemic colony and important NPCs. Although there are events to follow, if the PCs are indiscrete, they may draw unwanted attention from spies in the service of either Halmond (Lazar Walls' representative), or Grangor (boss of the *Vultures of Fortune*).

About 30% of the colonists at Lazar Walls know that Grangor runs the show. They have been ordered by Halmond not to speak to the Flaming Fist or to new arrivals about the situation. Grangor eliminates those with loose tongues. None know for sure what he is mining for. Halmond, comes out to meet the new arrivals and show them their quarters (see the East Dormitory). Halmond is accompanied by four colony henchmen carrying clubs.

Investigating

If the PCs want to question a fellow unclean, use the Lazar Walls Colonist Table (see Appendix) to determine who they interrogate. Due to the hardship of life at Lazar Walls, many colonists are desperate and act as spies for Halmond or Grangor just for a crust of moldy bread. Asking questions in an uncrowded place is safer, if crowded there's more risk of the PCs arousing suspicion.

Inquiring after an individual's whereabouts might not arouse much concern but asking why some unclean are missing would prick ears, as would speaking in languages other than Common. Whether a location is crowded or not depends on the time of day.

Because only 30% of the colonists know about Grangor and his mining operation, roll a d10: if the result is '3' or under, the person questioned knows something—though only talks if the PC passes a social skill check.



Question	Social Skill* Check DC	Detection†
Have you seen Thordyn?	**DC 10**	C = 6 in 20 U = 3 in 20
Why has Thordyn been abducted?	**DC 20**	C = 8 in 20 U = 4 in 20
Why are many unclean missing?	**DC 15**	C = 10 in 20 U = 5 in 20
Where are the captured taken?	**DC 20**	C = 12 in 20 U = 6 in 2

Social Skills** include ***Deception, ***Intimidation*** and ***Persuasion*** -see notes below.

† Detection: roll d20, referencing the crowded (C) or uncrowded (U) probability. If a spy overhears, re-roll the d20: 1-15 = it was one of Halmond's spies who overheard, 16-20 = it was one of Grangor's spies who overheard.

***Deception** could entail pretending to be an authority figure in Halmond's service. The players may come up with more ingenious ploys, if so, reward the check with *advantage*.

***Intimidation** is not easy here due to the hopeless plight of the colonists, not to mention the fear inspired by the *Vultures of Fortune*. All intimidation checks are at *disadvantage*.

***Persuasion** many unclean are malnourished. Offering food or water grants *advantage* to the check.

The PCs are Detected

Should the PCs attract attention, the spy in question leaves. Allow a **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check** for the PCs to notice. The spy in question will be a **commoner** (*MM* p345), but armed with an improvised club:

Improvised Club. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft. one creature. Hit: 2 (1d4) bludgeoning damage. If delivering *critical damage*, the weapon breaks.

Possibilities that might ensue...

Possibility A: The Spy Informs

The PCs don't notice, or fail preventing, the spy reaching their boss. One hour later, either 5 of Halmond's henchmen (see Halmond's Office below) or 3 of Grangor's **thugs**, visit the PCs to rough them up.

Possibility B: The PCs Follow

A PC following the spy makes a **Dexterity (Stealth) check**. If following one of Halmond's spies to his office, the **DC = 15 (Day) or 10 (Night)**. If following one of Grangor's spies to the Stores, the **DC = 20 (Day) or 15 (Night)**. If the PCs aren't stealthy, the spy wanders to the nearest plausible building.

Possibility C: The PCs Intercept

This probably results in combat—the spy will yell for help. If not silenced, d4 rounds later Halmond's henchmen and others in the community emerge to see what's causing the commotion. If the PCs capture the spy, they might extract information if succeeding on a **DC 15 Charisma (Intimidation) check** -remember at *disadvantage*.

Message Cantrip Overuse

If the PCs overuse the *message* cantrip (*PHB* p259) for silent communication, bear in mind common folk aren't accustomed to magic in the way adventurers are. Having a voice intrude in your mind could be startling, the simple Lazar Walls folk might freak out: "*Hey, who's that in my head?*" This would alert spies in earshot.

Key Lazar Walls Areas

Gatehouse, Wall and Barracks
East Dormitory
The Courtyard
- -The Rat Seller
- -The Well
- -The Basket Weavers
- -The Ilmater Monks
- -Quacks' Corner

Halmond's Office
The Coin Smiths
The Kitchens (Dining Hall)
The Stores

Gatehouse, Wall and Barracks

Attended by four Flaming Fist **guards** (*MM* p347), the gatehouse portcullis is opened only for supplies and the arrival of unclean. Atop the south, east and west walls, six guards keep watch. Made of stone 30-foot high and 5-foot thick, the sheer walls are not an easy climb: **DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check**. Spears are stored atop the southeast and southwest corners in turret stations. Ten more Flaming Fist will be in the barracks resting until time to relieve those on duty. If a riot occurs, all twenty of the sentries mobilize. Kendrick, Captain of the Guard (**knight** *MM* p347), has his office opposite the barracks. The Captain's Office (door faces west) and the Barracks (door faces east) are both single story buildings.

Two of the Flaming Fist sentries are corrupt, one in a bad way and one in a good way. Stephan, in the pay of Delbert, belongs to the latter case. He's been told Thordyn was sent here on false pretexts and wants to help. When food is delivered, among the colonists accompanying Halmond to collect the supplies, is Hodo the halfling. Stephan is always one of the sentries overseeing the collection from atop the gatehouse and, using a magic ring, casts *message* (*PHB* p259) to communicate with the halfling in secret.

The other corrupt sentry is Debra Loran who works for Grangor. Initially, the plan was for her to help the *Vultures of Fortune* escape Lazar Walls, but when Grangor discovered the nexynite meteorite, that plan was put on hold while his mining operation got going. It was Debra who smuggled in the gang's weapons.





East Dormitory

Like the other two dormitories, East Dormitory is a two-story building that houses 100 unclean. Its doors are on the west and south. The PCs are assigned places on the first floor, their bedding nothing more than filthy blankets. A few unclean are so ill they're "bed-bound." The dormitory stinks of sickness and someone is always coughing.

> You enter a long hall, its floor covered with filthy blankets. There are no beds, the unclean must rub shoulders on the hard flagstones. A number of them, too weak to wander into daylight, lie wretched in their misery. A stair in the corner leads up to the second floor.

Conditions are no better on the second floor. Halmond, before leaving, informs the PCs that speaking in any language other than Common will arouse suspicion–a house rule introduced after recent rioting.

During the day, the dormitory is largely empty (uncrowded), with about ten unclean at any one time. As evening falls, the unclean come in and settle down (crowded: fifty per floor).

Courtyard

In daytime the courtyard bustles with up to three hundred unclean (crowded):

> The expansive courtyard is packed with throngs of the unclean. Close to the funeral pyre, a man trades barbecued rats. At a well, the unclean queue dejectedly. A store warehouse at the southern side is attended by two unclean armed with improvised clubs. A seated group weaves wicker baskets. In an area cordoned by a red ribbon, Ilmater monks, themselves infected, treat the sick. There are lots of wooden sheds where firewood and other supplies are stored.

At night the courtyard is empty (uncrowded).

The Rat Seller (Courtyard)

Lazar Walls rarely has meat, the main diet consisting of gruel or, as a luxury, turnip stew. Roasted rats are much in demand. Rogar trades the delicacy for favors or colony currency.

Despising Grangor's thugs, Rogar knows they're abducting colonists and tells the PCs he has information and arranges a nighttime meeting behind the South Dormitory (see Gibbering Men Tell No Tales). Give the PCs time to pick up their weapons before running the meeting.

Unbeknownst to Rogar, he is being watched by one of Grangor's **thugs**. If the PCs talk with him, on a successful **DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check** a PC notices a hooded figure watching nearby carrying a mace. After the PCs finish talking with the rat seller, the thug returns to the mine (via the Stores). If spotting the thug, the PCs may wish to follow him. To do so without being detected requires a successful **DC 20 Dexterity (Stealth)** check or a **group check** if more than one PC follows. If not confronted, when getting to the Stores, the thug is let in. This is one way the PCs might guess the mine is accessed inside the warehouse.

The Well (Courtyard)

Every day a queue forms here (crowded area). Getting enough to wash is a challenge. Before the lamps are put out in the dormitories, a few unclean who missed their turn during the day come to fetch water, providing a better opportunity to ask questions as the well is uncrowded then. Wise PCs collecting water can use it to gain *advantage* in persuasion checks during their investigations.

The Basket Weavers (Courtyard)

During the day, a dozen unclean sit on rugs (crowded) making wicker baskets. One night the rat swarm occurs here (see Events).

Monks of Ilmater (Courtyard)

Five monks from a monastery far south in the Greenfields have come to cure the sick. Their leader, Father Hadrian, was shocked to find his prayer of *restoration* useless and now he and his brethren have contracted the *King's Evil.* The monks offer mundane care to alleviate sores. They know about Grangor's mining operation and suspect it is to locate the source suppressing healing magic. Normally, these monks would not fear the *Vultures of Fortune*, but Grangor holds Father Hadrian prisoner. Though reluctant to give any information away lest Grangor kill Father Hadrian, the monks show anguish which can be detected by a PC succeeding on a **DC 10 Wisdom (Insight) check**.

Quacks' Corner (Courtyard)

Near the South Dormitory, a number of unclean profess to have discovered the secret of how to halt the spread of the *King's Evil* through their bodies. Their "quack" remedies include everything from drinking (allegedly) gold solution, applying leeches, and bathing in an iron tub filled with (allegedly) virgins' blood (more likely pigs' blood). The Ilmater monks have nothing to do with these peddlers of superstition.

Halmond's Office

The only colonist to have his own sleeping quarters, Halmond always has a henchman guarding the door. The door faces west and is locked when Halmond's out or sleeping. A PC succeeding on a **DC 15 Dexterity check** using thieves' tools opens the lock.

Inside is a desk, a bed, and a drinks cabinet containing sherry. The desk drawer contains colony currency and documents relating to provisions.

Roleplaying Halmond

Halmond is the only unclean allowed to carry a proper weapon (publicly), his robe and sandals are pristine, and he never goes hungry based on the size of his potbelly. Once a noble in Baldur's Gate, Halmond lost his property when a rival house engineered his disgrace. Bitter, Halmond runs the administrative side of things. His job is to maintain order. Currently he's preoccupied with setting up a currency for use inside the community (see The Coin Smiths).

On the rare occasions Halmond must deal with troublemakers, the Flaming Fist loan his henchmen shortswords on the strict understanding the weapons are returned–left near the approach to the Gatehouse after use. Halmond fears the *Vultures of Fortune*. He knows they're mining for something and have enslaved some of the colonists, but he would never dare inform the Captain of the Guard. Also, the *Vultures of Fortune* deliver smuggled luxuries to Halmond by way of payment for his silence. As indicated on the *Investigations Table*, if the PCs' inquiries are detected by Halmond's spies they will get roughed up by his henchmen (see below).

Pompous and vain, Halmond conceals his neck with a bright yellow scarf–his neck and shoulders being corrupted by the *King's Evil.*

Halmond has a total of 16 henchmen (armed with clubs) at his disposal, 3 attend him at all times. In the case of a riot, they are armed with shortswords.

Halmond (Colony Representative)

Medium humanoid (human), lawful evil

Armor Class 12
Hit Points 27 (6d8)
Speed 30ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)

Skills Deception +5, Insight +2, Intimidation +5, Perception +2, Persuasion +5
Senses passive Perception 12
Languages Common
Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Reckless. At the start of his turn, Halmond can gain advantage on all melee weapon attack rolls during that turn, but attack rolls against him also have advantage until the start of his next turn.

Dueling. Halmond, when wielding a rapier in one hand and no other weapons, gains a +2 bonus to damage rolls. He loses the damage bonus when fighting recklessly.

Actions

Rapier. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

Halmond's Henchmen

Medium humanoid (human), lawful evil

Armor Class 11
Hit Points 11 (2d8 + 2)
Speed 30ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	8 (-1)	8 (-1)

Senses passive Perception 9
Languages Common
Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Brute. A melee weapon deals one extra die of its damage when the henchman hits with it (included in the attack).

Actions

Club. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 7 (2d4 +2). ***Shortsword (riot issue).*** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. one creature. Hit: 9 (2d6 + 2) piercing damage.

The Coin Smiths

Khazan, a Granitehome dwarf, has been assigned this workshop (door faces north) and two human workers. Inside, there is a small smelting furnace, tongs, hammers, and tools (usable as weapons) for minting tin and bronze coins. The door is locked at night: a successful **DC 10 Dexterity check** using thieves' tools opens it.

Khazan shows only the middle stage symptoms of the *King's Evil*. Somehow, he was not ordered to discard his studded leather armor when he was rounded up. Cunning, the coin smith won't answer questions directly but drops sly hints. He wouldn't hesitate to inform Halmond (in return for some luxuries) about the PCs' nosing around. He carries a smith's hammer.

If the PCs are involved in a skirmish outside, Khazan might come out to join the fray (fighting against the PCs). Use the **bandit captain** stat block (*MM* p344), but instead of a scimitar, Khazan wields a hammer that delivers 1d6 + 2 bludgeoning damage.

The Kitchens

This large hall is where the unclean come for breakfast and supper. The open kitchen area, at the south end of the hall, is separated by a canteen bar where gruel is slopped into wooden bowls. The kitchen has five cooks, one of them Hodo Busyfingers.

Hodo Busyfingers

Small humanoid (halfling), lawful neutral

Armor Class 12
Hit Points 21 (6d6)
Speed 25ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)

Skills Deception +5, Insight +4, Perception +6, Sleight of Hand +4, Stealth +4
Senses passive Perception 16
Languages Thieves' Cant, Common, Halfling
Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Cunning Action. On each of his turns, Hodo can use a bonus action to take the Dash, Disengage or Hide action.

Sneak Attack (1/Turn). Hodo deals an extra 7 (2d6) damage when hitting a target with a weapon attack and having advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally that isn't incapacitated, and Hodo doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

Actions

Multiattack. Hodo makes two melee attacks.

Dagger (Kitchen Knife). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. one target. Hit: 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage.

Roleplaying Notes

When the PCs attempt their break-out with Thordyn, Hodo's coming with them. If the PCs have a quiet word or cast message to converse with him, this is what he knows. He knows that the *Vultures of Fortune* have been abducting colonists for some mining operation. He doesn't know what Grangor is mining or how to access the mine. If the PCs tell him they can't find Thordyn, Hodo guesses it is because he's been abducted by the Vultures. Hodo will be cautious in talking with the PCs, he suspects Halmond has put a spy on him (true). On first meeting, Hodo tells the PCs in whispers where to recover their weapons: *"Behind the coin smiths, under some copper ore. Pick them up after nightfall."*

Before becoming a cook, Hodo was a pick-pocket operating in the Wide in Baldur's Gate. After a brush with the law, he decided to walk the straight and narrow. When he contracted the *King's Evil* and was rounded up, he sent word to his friend Delbert (the dwarf hiring the PCs).



The Stores

At the doors of this timber frame building, two of Halmond's henchmen are stationed day and night. Officially their role is to protect the supplies, but it is really to prevent discovery of Grangor's mining operation. The henchmen (see Halmond's Office for stat blocks) allow only those working for Halmond or Grangor to pass.

The warehouse has double doors facing west. The ceiling is 20 feet high, there are no windows, light comes in when the doors are opened at daytime. If the PCs break in, ideally at night when easier to deal with the guards...

> The warehouse is stacked to the ceiling with sacks and crates: donated food supplies and clothing.

This description assumes the PCs enter via the warehouse's double doors. The supplies are only stacked in the front (west) end of the building to prevent detection of the secret trapdoor in the back, southeast corner. The trapdoor opens onto a vertical shaft accessing Grangor's mine. Climbing quietly over the supplies requires success on a **DC 10 Dexterity (Stealth)** check. Alternatively, the PCs might try breaking into the warehouse from the rear by hacking through the wooden walls. This would entail stealth checks to avoid being spotted either by Halmond's henchmen or the Flaming Fist patrolling atop the walls.

In the southeast corner of the Stores is a floor trapdoor obscured by empty sacks. A PC succeeding on a **DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check** notices the trapdoor. It is easier to find if actively searched for: requiring success on a **DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check**. Other ways the party may discover that the Stores accesses the mine include: following Grangor's thugs back here, following one of Grangor's spies, or by interrogating Halmond's henchmen.

The trapdoor opens to the mine entrance (see Mine Features in Part 2).

Events

Rat Swarm (Event)

You can run this little event on the night the PCs sneak back to their dormitory after collecting their weapons. As they pass the rugs where the basket weavers sit during the day…

> The area where the basket weavers work during the day catches your eye. Their seating rugs seem to be writhing. Suddenly, out from under them scurries a verminous horde of rats.

Encounter (Rat Swarm)
4x **swarm of rats** (*MM* p339)
XP 200

Gibbering Men Tell No Tales (Event)

This event occurs when the PCs rendezvous with the rat seller behind the South Dormitory:

> As you head to the meeting place, you hear the rat seller's voice, but strangely multiplied. Around the corner comes slithering an amorphous mass of flesh covered with eyes and mouths. You can just make out the features of the rat seller's horror-stricken face in the fleshy mass, and among the words gibbered by his myriad mouths: *"No Grangor, I won't tell. Honest. Please no!"*

The rat seller has been turned into a gibbering mouther by Grangor (using his master *Ring of the Ooze* -see the Appendix). Grangor will have left by the time PCs arrive. Casting dispel magic on the gibbering mouther won't turn it back into the rat seller, the transmutation too far advanced.

Encounter (Gibbering Men Tell No Tales)
1x **gibbering mouther** (*MM* p157)
XP 450

Food Poisoning (Event)

With so many diseased folks in such unhygienic conditions, it will take the PCs time to become accustomed to the food.

On their first time eating at the Kitchens, the PCs must succeed on a **DC 12 Constitution saving throw** or acquire the *poisoned condition* for 24 hours (vomiting all night).

Filthy Blankets (Event)

One night when the PCs are bedded down in the dormitory, one of them is awoken by a nearby unclean spasming in his sleep. If nudged, the unclean does not wake up. Suddenly…

> You realize the person writhing is actually dead, rotten through. Suddenly his carcass ruptures and out from under his putrescent flesh swarm countless glistening grubs.

Encounter (Rot Grub Swarms)
2x **swarm of rot grubs** (*VGtM* p208)
XP 200

The PCs may have to reveal their weapons in this encounter, but given they're saving everyone from a horrible fate, no one will tell.





Part 2. The Mine

The PCs' investigations eventually lead to the mine. Down here Thordyn is held captive by the *Vultures of Fortune*.

The story of this inconsequential gang starts in the sewers of Baldur's Gate. The *Vultures of Fortune* were amateur criminals who got lucky. Grangor, their leader, heard there was going to be a 'turf-war' between the Ooze Lords and the Thieves' Guild in the sewers. Concluding that there could be rich pickings in the aftermath, Grangor and his gang hid near where the big fight was to happen. Though defeating the Ooze Lords, the Thieves' Guild fled after suffering many casualties. Searching the fallen, the *Vultures* came to possess the secret power of the Ooze Lords: their magic rings (see the *Rings of the Ooze* in the Appendix). With them, the *Vultures* could control the ooze denizens of the sewers (gray oozes, ochre jellies, etc). They would become the new ooze lords and hopefully rich enough to get cured of the *King's Evil*. However, celebrating in a seedy tavern, they were rounded up by the Flaming Fist.

Three years before, Grangor was wounded in the face while mugging a stranger near Wyrm's Crossing. Grangor won the fight, stealing his victim's dagger, made of a strange glittery black metal. After his face wound failed to respond to healing magic, Grangor discovered it was because the black dagger was forged from nexynite. Alas, he never got to sell the artifact, one of his own minions stole it and (no doubt) sold it for a fortune in another city. Eventually, Grangor's wound healed naturally, though the scar remains.

Fortunately for Grangor, some of his gang members escaped the Flaming Fist roundup of the unclean, and they have bribed a Lazar Walls sentry (Debra Loran) to help their incarcerated boss. Debra has smuggled into the compound potions of *lesser restoration* and weapons for the *Vultures*. After quaffing his potion, and finding the *King's Evil* still blighting his body, Grangor guessed that somewhere underground lay a nexynite meteorite.

Debra's next assignment was to smuggle in a *gem of seeing*. With this, Grangor was able to locate the nexynite's ethereal presence 120 feet below the Stores area. Then, using his magic

ring to spawn oozes out of his hapless victims, Grangor set about creating the shaft and underground mine (his oozes carving through the rock with their acidic secretions). In an underground cavern, Grangor located the meteorite crater. For some reason, the oozes would not enter the pit. That was when the *Vultures* started abducting colony members to finish the job.

Grangor and his Thugs

In Lazar Walls, the *Vultures of Fortune* consist of 8 thugs led by Grangor. Back in Baldur's Gate there are a further additional 12 thugs (also infected with the *King's Evil*) who have been using their contact in the barracks (Debra Loran) to smuggle in materials.

Simply use the **thug** (*MM* p350) stat block, but each wears a minor *Ring of the Ooze*. You can find Grangor's stat block in Area 4.

Mine Features

The trapdoor in the Stores warehouse opens onto a 10-foot wide shaft dropping vertically 90 feet to the floor of Area 1. Cut through semi-porous rock, the mine complex is damp (the water table quite high). Lined with pairs of wooden climbing pegs, the shaft is difficult terrain. A skill check is only required if climbed in a hurry (such as a PC taking the dash action): **DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check**. The ceilings of the mine complex are around 8 feet high. Note that though the nexynite meteorite cancels all magical healing, it has no effect on natural healing. So, if the PCs take short rests between encounters, they can spend Hit Dice as per normal recovery rules (*PHB* p186).

Encounters in the mine are highly dependent on the time of day. Entering the mine during the day constitutes a really tough (deadly) challenge: the *Vultures* and their oozes are largely concentrated in one place (Area 6) overseeing the slaves mining the pit. At night, to avoid making noise when Lazar Walls is quiet, the mining ceases; the enslaved prisoners are locked in Area 5 and Grangor's minions (and oozes) return to their own chambers.

If the PCs dealt with any of Grangor's thugs in Part I, do not reduce their number in the mine (Grangor grooms his spies for the role so has a ready supply of replacements).

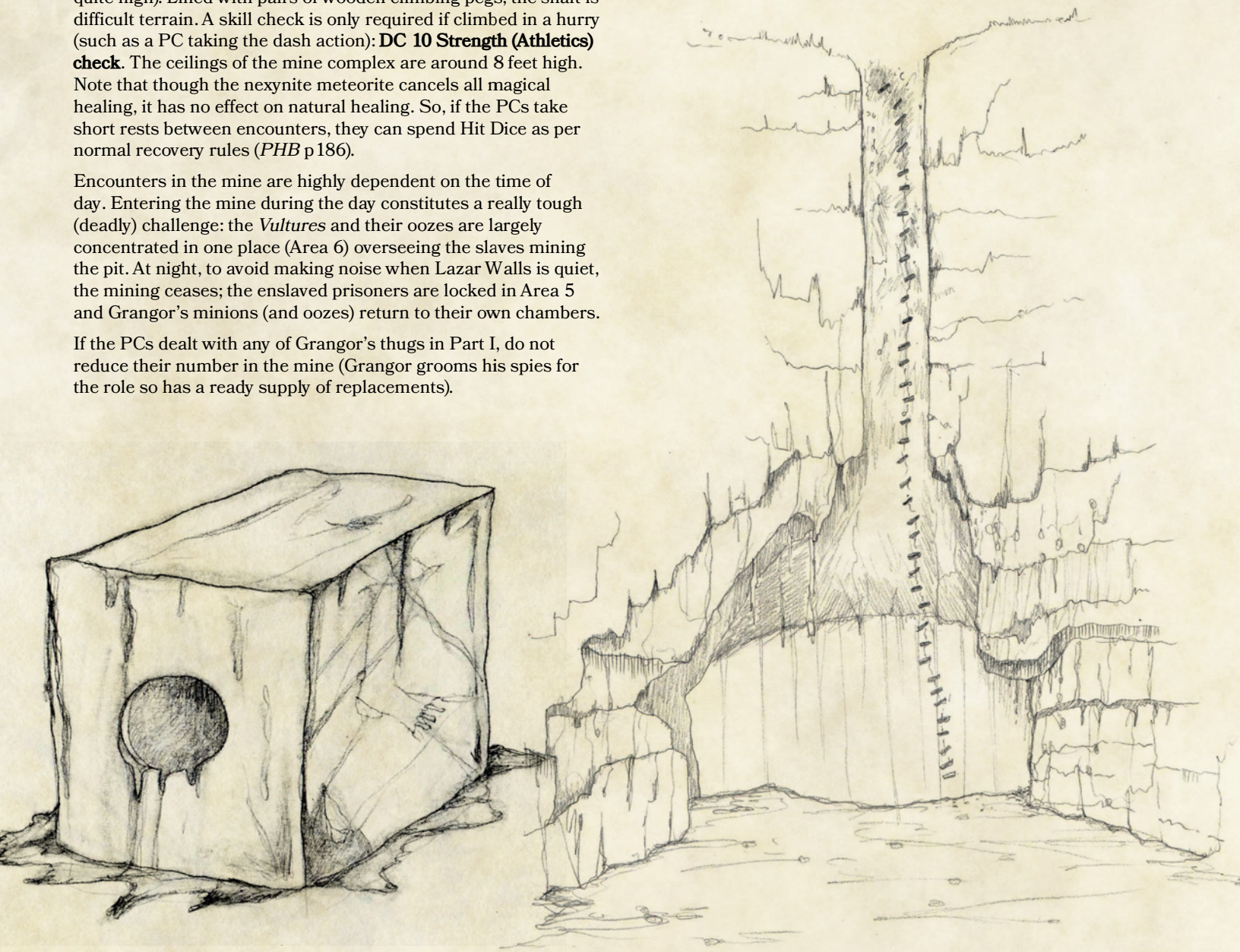
Area 1. Entrance Chamber

> You descend the cleanly cut vertical shaft, which opens through the ceiling of an empty chamber lit by an oil lamp in the northeast corner. The climbing pegs continue down to the glistening floor.

If in daytime, the PCs hear the distant sound of digging and shoveling echoing from somewhere ahead. Day or night, this chamber is empty apart from the gelatinous cube the *Vultures* leave on guard. If you deem the encounter easy, have the gelatinous cube squeeze up the shaft and engulf the descending PCs (at least they won't need to make stealth checks in the shaft). In the entrance chamber however, to avoid raising the alarm, fighting "quietly" requires the PCs to succeed on a **group DC 15 Dexterity (Stealth) check** after the first round of combat.

Encounter

1x **gelatinous cube** (*MM* p242)
XP 450



Area 2. Father Hadrian's Cell

> Behind wooden bars sits an elderly monk. The cave cell is lit by a solitary candle.

This chamber is the cell where Father Hadrian is held hostage. The wooden bars can easily be removed and are meant just to mark the boundary. In the chamber with Hadrian are three gray oozes which attack the monk should he try to escape.

Fighting here is likely to alert the *Vultures* unless the PCs succeed on a group **DC 15 Dexterity (Stealth) check**. The PCs might decide to free Father Hadrian later after dealing with Grangor. Despite his age however, the monk could be a formidable ally: **martial arts adept** (*VGtM* 216). If you feel the party is struggling, have Father Hadrian encourage the PCs to help him escape immediately.

Encounter

3x **gray ooze** (*MM* p243)
XP 300

Sagging Ceiling

In the tunnel just beyond Father Hadrian's cell, the ceiling sags and is supported by rafters buttressed by a solid wooden screen. Because the buttress divides the tunnel between Areas 3 and 4, it works well for a party acting stealthily.

Area 3. Thugs' Sleeping Quarters

During daytime this area is unoccupied, at night four members of the Vultures rest here.

> Four bedrolls clutter the cave floor. The cave chamber is lit by a lantern hanging from the ceiling.

DAY	NIGHT
Empty	4 thugs

In daytime, two of the thugs will be out conducting business for Grangor in the Lazar Walls compound, the other two will be in Area 6. At night, the PCs gain surprise if succeeding on a group **DC 10 Dexterity (Stealth) check**. To dispatch the thugs quietly requires success on a group **DC 15 Dexterity (Stealth) check**.

Encounter

4x **thug** (*MM* p350)*
XP 400

*each thug wears a minor *Ring of the Ooze*.

Area 4. Grangor's Quarters

During the day, Grangor is either siting here at his desk enjoying the gruesome fate of his chained prisoner (see below) or checking on the mining operation in the crater cavern (Area 6). Roll a d10: 1-4 = Grangor is here; 5-10 he is in the crater cavern.

DAY	NIGHT
roll d10 1-4 = Grangor + black pudding 5-10 = Empty	Grangor + black pudding

At night, Grangor rests here. He is always accompanied by his pet black pudding (a past lover who two-timed him).

> This chamber contains a plush wooden desk, chair and bed. On the desk is an oil lamp, ink pot, and quill. In the corner, one of Grangor's prisoners is chained by the wrist. She quivers with revulsion, for her body is half-transmuted into a hideous mass of mouths and eyes.

The prisoner, Susie (**commoner** *MM* p345), is half-way to becoming a gibbering mouther. Grangor's growing attunement to the master ooze ring enables him to make those succumbing to its nether ray transform at an agonizingly slow rate. This means the victim's intermediate state (that of a gibbering mouther), which normally occurs instantly, gradually takes hold over a period of weeks instead. Susie pleads to be slain. Not realizing that she can be saved, she seeks a merciful end. A PC succeeding on a **DC 10 Intelligence (Arcana) check** deduces that, because her transmutation has been delayed, there's a window to reverse the effect before she becomes a full-fledged gibbering mouther (and then later an ooze). If *dispel magic* is cast on her, the corruption is reversed and her body restored to normal form, albeit still infected with the *King's Evil*. If the PCs don't have *dispel magic*, they know back in Baldur's Gate they can pay a spellcaster. So, Susie might join the party's escape from Lazar Walls. She explains:

> *"Grangor's magic ring did this to me, I refused to mine for him. Gloating, he told me he knows how to make the 'oozing destiny' a drawn-out process. Now he watches this gradual corruption of my already diseased flesh for pleasure, says soon I won't need this chain 'round my waist, 'cause I'll slither free and join his oozing brood."*



Breaking her chain requires a successful **DC 20 Strength check**, or the padlock can be picked on a successful **DC 15 Dexterity check** using thieves' tools. Grangor has the key to the padlock.

The desk's drawer is locked, it can be opened by a PC passing a **DC 15 Dexterity check** using thieves' tools. Alternatively, Grangor has the key on his person, or the drawer can be forced on a successful **DC 20 Strength check**. Inside is a purse holding 50 gp (for bribing the sentries if needed), Grangor's *gem of seeing* (*DMG* p172), and personal notes scribbled on parchment. Though written in Common, the notes aren't easy to read because

Grangor is semi-illiterate. A PC succeeding on a **DC 12 Intelligence check** can decipher them (see Appendix for a handout of Grangor's diary notes):

Grangor's diary goes on to tell how the *Vultures of Fortune* came to possess the *Rings of the Ooze*, and how he turned his ex-girlfriend into his black pudding guard for two-timing him. As usual, fighting here quietly so as not to raise the alarm requires success on a group **DC 15 Dexterity (Stealth) check** after the first round of combat.

Encounter

1x Grangor
1x **black pudding** (*MM* p241)
XP 1,550

Grangor (Vultures of Fortune Boss)

Medium humanoid (human), neutral evil

Armor Class 15 (studded leather)
Hit Points 65 (10d8 + 20)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)

Skills Deception +4, Intimidation +4, Perception +2, Stealth +5
Senses passive Perception 12
Languages Common
Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Actions

Multiattack. Grangor makes two melee attacks.

Scimitar. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 6 (1d6 + 3) slashing damage.

Master Ring of the Ooze. *Ranged magical power (once per three days):* range 30 ft., target must pass a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or immediately transform into a gibbering mouther.

Roleplaying Notes

Grangor keeps his black hair in a pony tail. The scar down his face would look ugly except that, like everyone else inside Lazar Walls, his skin is riven with the *King's Evil*. Grangor wears the powerful master *Ring of the Ooze*. The master ring compels its wearer once every three days to attempt transmuting a humanoid into an ooze. This requires the wearer to spend an action discharging its nether ray at a humanoid target within 30 feet. If the target fails a **DC 10 Constitution saving throw**, it immediately transforms into an amorphous mass of gibbering flesh. Whether its nether ray is successful or not, the master ring cannot repeat the attack for three days. Destined to become an ooze monster, the victim enters an intermediate state as a **gibbering mouther** which lasts one hour (this was the rat seller's fate). After that, the affected creature becomes (roll d4): 1 = **gray ooze**, 2 = **ochre jelly**, 3 = **gelatinous cube**, 4 = **black pudding**. This means if the rat seller wasn't turned into a gibbering mouther, or was, but three days have passed, Grangor's ring will have recharged!

Area 5. Slave Miners' Prison

At night, twelve enslaved colonists (**commoners** *MM* p345) rest here, one of them Thordyn.

DAY	NIGHT
Empty	12 enslaved colonists (including Thordyn)

The chamber is dark. At its entrance, flimsy wooden poles serve as bars, one of which detaches to let the prisoners out. What keeps them from escaping are the two ochre jellies lurking on the ceiling. If an encounter occurs here, fighting quietly is easier as the chamber is out the way: the PCs must succeed on a **DC 5 group Dexterity (Stealth) check**, resolved after the first round of combat.

Encounter

2x **ochre jelly** (*MM* p243)
XP 900

During daytime, the chamber is empty—the slave miners in the pit (Area 7) and the ochre jellies nearby (Area 6).

Area 6. Crater Cavern

This part of the underground complex is a natural cavern, the walls and ceiling rough, lit by oil lamps at various points. At the west wall lie four bedrolls and at the back of the cavern a large crater basin is rimmed with piles of excavated rock. Leaning along the east wall is a collection of picks and shovels.

It was here Grangor finally located the crater in which the nexynite meteorite is deeply embedded. During the night, the cavern is empty apart from the four thugs on guard, who rest by day.

At nighttime, the slave miners are locked in the prison chamber (Area 5), but in daytime they are all down in the crater pit, digging for the meteorite. Guarding over them, along with the four resting thugs noted above, are two **ochre jellies** (from Area 5) and two of the **thugs** from Area 3. Finally, there is a chance Grangor and his **black pudding** are here, too (see Area 4). Marching in here during daytime could be an overwhelming encounter (even with Father Hadrian helping) and the PCs might have to beat a retreat. Fighting quietly so as not to raise the alarm requires the PCs to succeed on a **group DC 15 Dexterity (Stealth) check** after the first round of combat.

DAY	NIGHT
6 thugs (4 of which resting); 2 ochre jellies (from Area 5); Grangor and his black pudding (if not in Area 4)	4 thugs

Night Encounter

4x **thug** (*MM* p350)*
XP 400
*each thug wears a minor *Ring of the Ooze*.

Daytime Encounter

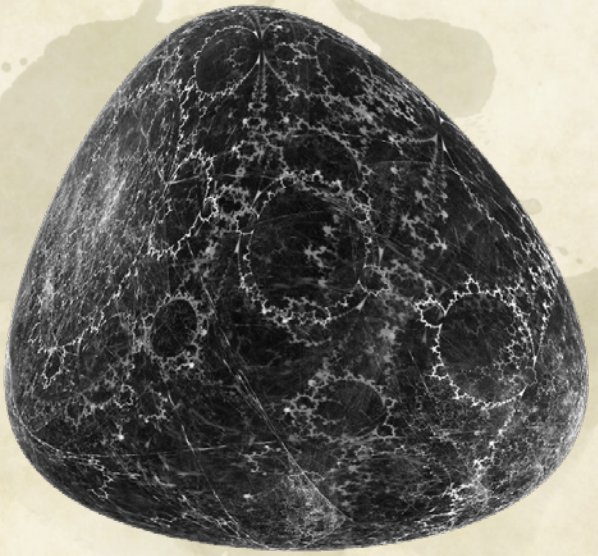
6x **thug** (*MM* p350)
*each thug wears a minor *Ring of the Ooze*.

2x **ochre jelly** (*MM* p243), plus (if not in Area 4)
Grangor and his **black pudding** (*MM* p241)
XP Variable

Area 7. The Pit

The oozes shun the pit because the anti-healing aura of the nexynite is strongest here. In a combat situation, the PCs could use that knowledge to their advantage, firing ranged attacks from the lip of the pit. The pit is 20 feet deep, climbing down (or up out of) it requires success on a **DC 5 Strength (Athletics) check**. At this point in the story, there is just 10 feet more of rock to dig up before the meteorite can be unearthed.

If the PCs defeat the *Vultures of Fortune*, they may decide to finish the excavation and claim the nexynite for themselves.



Concluding

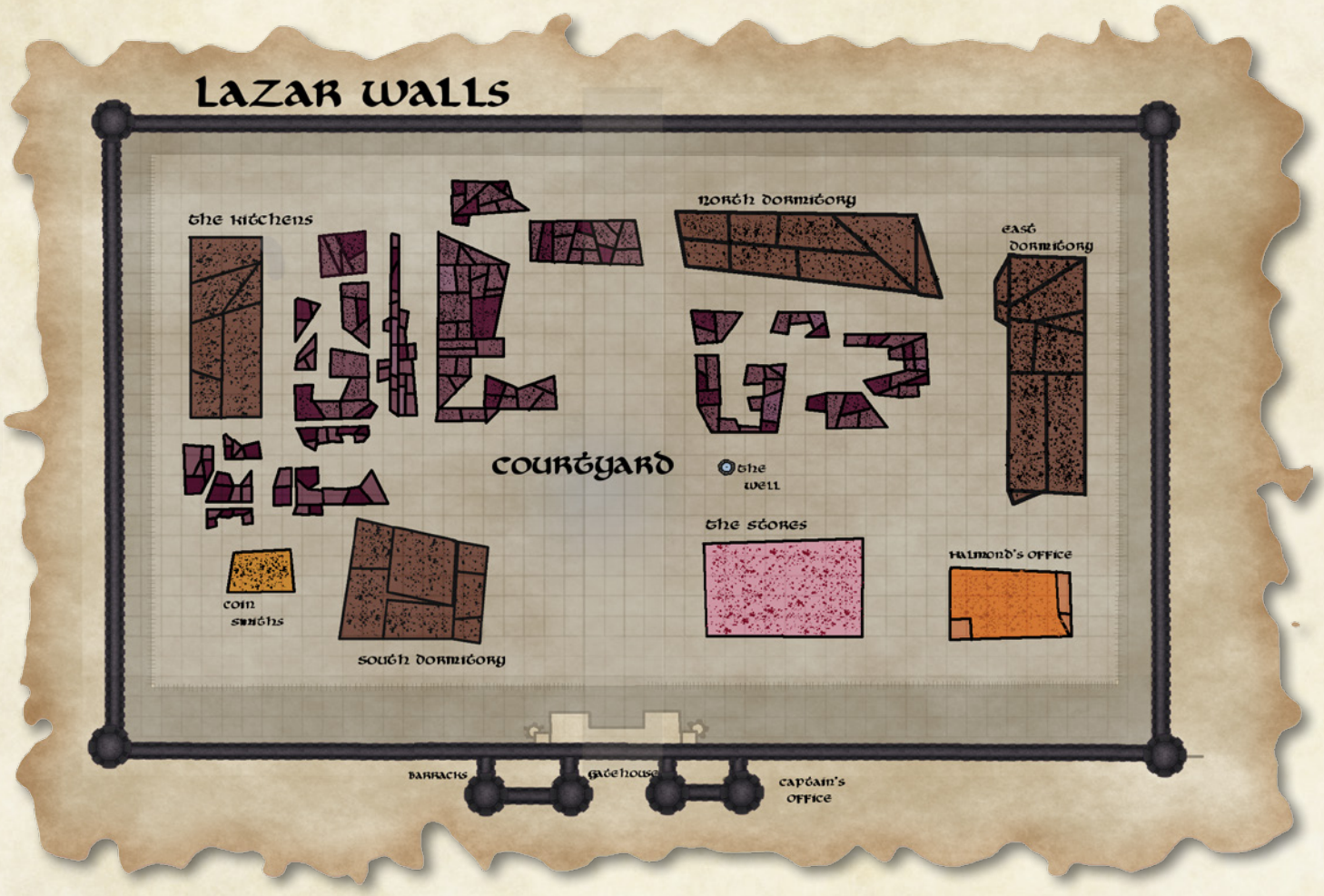
If the PCs free Thordyn, they will need to talk to Hodo who will either be in the Kitchens or sleeping in the North Dormitory. He arranges for the PCs to meet him on the next night at the southern, inner fence of the compound. He, Thordyn, and the PCs must then succeed on a **group DC 12 Dexterity (Stealth) check** to clamber over the fence and sneak up to southwest corner of the stone wall unnoticed. If the party is spotted, the alarm is raised, and the escape will have to be delayed at least a tenday due to increased vigilance by the Flaming Fist (assuming the PCs avoided or survived a skirmish with them). If the group stealth check is successful, the PCs reach the southwest corner of the outer wall unnoticed and find Stephan (having gotten the other guards normally accompanying him blind drunk) waiting atop it alone. Stephan throws down a rope. Climbing up requires success on a **DC 5 Strength (Athletics) check**. Once the PCs are atop the wall, Stephan can lower them down the other side. All that's required at this stage is another **group DC 10 Dexterity (Stealth) check** to avoid detection.

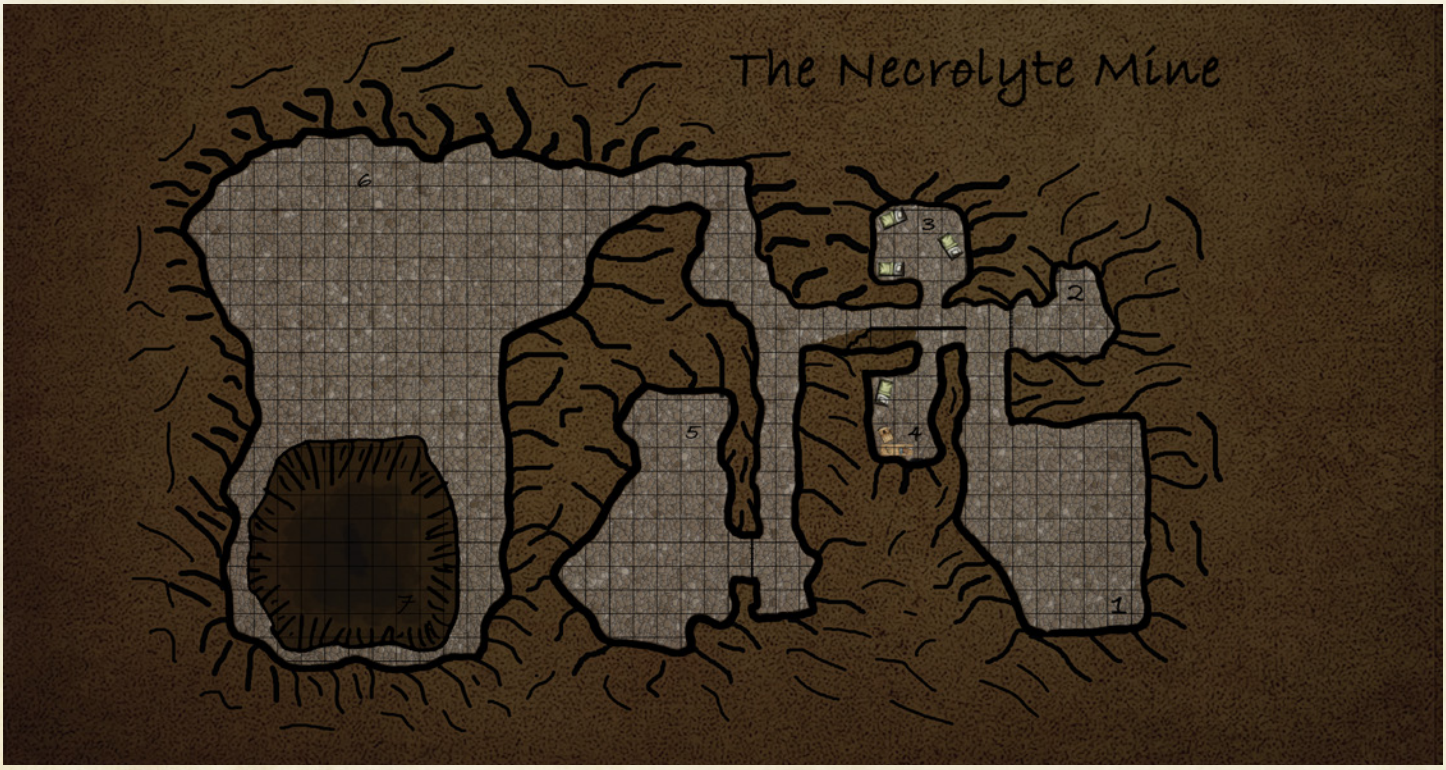
The nexynite meteorite radiates its nefarious power over a mile radius, this means if the PCs escape Lazar Walls carrying it, they won't be able to benefit from any healing magic till moving out of range (they could decide to bury it to retrieve later). Further, while remaining within the radius of the meteorite's unwholesome aura, PCs infected with the *King's Evil* find the disease still progresses at its accelerated rate. A PC suffering the advanced stage of the disease will still have to make a death saving throw every tenday. As soon as leaving the aura of the meteorite, the PCs find the *King's Evil* stops progressing at the accelerated rate, though remains at its current stage until cured by *lesser restoration* or a higher-level spell.

Back in Baldur's Gate, Delbert pays the PCs their reward (100 gp each) and Thordyn promises to pay them triple that if they help him get his smithy business back from Ironhelm.

d10	Lazar Wall Colonist Table
1	***Fingerless Woman.*** This middle-aged woman is missing fingers from both hands. When questioned (regardless of whether she knows anything or not), she first asks the PCs to do some menial tasks (laundry washing, etc) on her behalf as she has lost all dexterity. These chores keep the party busy all day.
2	***Super-Contagious Man.*** This man's contagion has afflicted all his body–skin almost see-through and limbs showing gangrene. Out of spite for his fate, he hobbles around greeting people (with a hug or handshake), hoping they get the disease as bad as he does. To dodge the man's embrace requires success on a **DC 10 Dexterity saving throw**. On a failure the PC automatically contracts the *King's Evil*, or if already suffering it, the PC's disease advances a stage. If already suffering the advanced stage, the PC must immediately make a death saving throw.
3	***Girl with the Cat.*** While this girl is questioned by the PCs, her cat (Sheba) is grabbed by a hungry colonist. If the PCs chase the offender and rescue Sheba, the girl turns out to be *lucky*. Each PC gains a point of *Inspiration*.
4	***Anyone for Cards?*** This colonist is a gambler. He will only answer questions as payment for beating him at poker (PCs must gamble clothes or trinkets). Beating the gambler requires success on a **DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check**, or the PC might want to cheat which, though easier, carries the risk that the gambler exacts revenge in some fashion. To succeed at cheating, the PC must succeed on a **DC 10 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check**.
5	***Besotted.*** This colonist falls madly in love with one of the PCs, following the PC around all the time (which might prove problematic when the party needs to be stealthy).
6	***Untrustworthy.*** This colonist, after being questioned, goes straight to Halmond's Office to inform on the PCs.
7	***The Mad One.*** This colonist was out in the courtyard one night when she witnessed one of Grangor's oozes chasing (and dissolving) an escaping slave miner. Since then she has gone quite mad and gibbers: *'Oozing hunger, pestilence, the Old One returns!'*
8	***The Canny One.*** When questioned by the PCs, this colonist deduces they plan to escape at some point. The colonist follows the PCs to see if he is right and can escape at the same time.
9	***The Blind Man.*** As is often the case with the blind, this old man has keen hearing. Two things his ears have picked up: there's something going on underground, and sometimes at night a slithering sound accompanies footsteps. He doesn't know anything else.
10	***The (Fake) Fixer.*** This colonist trades anything for anything and promises to arrange almost anything: *'For example, if you ever want Halmond's henchmen distracted or out the way, I can fix it.'* The 'fixer' expects up-front food or clothing for payment. Of course, the 'fixer' is a fake and never makes good on promises.

Appendix A: Maps





Grangor's Diary

I only figured out why no healing magic works n Lazar Walls because of that guy I mugged three years back near Wyrm's Crossing. He pulled this weird dagger, made of some black alloy–that's how I got this scar down my face. Luckily, my quarry tripped and cracked his skull in the struggle. After taking his stuff, went to a temple for healing–this was before the religious turmoil broke out. For some reason, my wound didn't respond to the priest's healing. So, when I returned to our den, got the Vultures to pay a friendly visit on the city's lore masters. Turned out the dagger was made of nexynite, an anti-healing, disease-magnifying ore that falls from the stars. The substance exists simultaneously on the Material and Ethereal Planes. Could've made a fortune selling the blade, but then Padrick betrayed us, running off with it when my back was turned. Bet he's rich now, but if the Vultures of Fortune ever catch up with him, we'll skin him alive. Anyhow, because no healing magic works here and the King's Evil disease has intensified tenfold, I figured there might be a nexynite meteorite underground and got my crew back in Baldur's Gate to bribe this Lazar Walls guard named Debra Loran–she smuggled in the gem of seeing so I could locate the meteorite's ethereal signature. Then with my ring I transmuted a number of the colonists into oozes to mine for it–the ooze acid eats through solid rock real neat. We've found the meteorite's crater, but the oozes seem to fear the pit and won't go down it. Fortunately, we got a ready supply of slave miners here in Lazar Walls to finish the job.

Appendix C: Disease

King's Evil

Non Lethal, Natural

Just one family. With their magic powers, just one family rules over all of these lands. See? The power of a disease is unfathomable.

In the faraway kingdom of Mitaria, a disease plagues the lands. Poverty-struck but hardworking, the citizens are forced to pay crippling taxes to the royal family. They endure it however, out of respect and out of fear... For in this kingdom, the Royals have a magical ability; the power to cure the so called King's Evil with just one touch.

"This malady was inspired by the real, historical King's Evil, combined with Leprosy. In parts of Europe during the Middle Ages it was believed that a touch from royalty could heal skin disease known as scrofula or the 'king's evil'. Scrofula was usually a swelling of the lymph nodes in the neck caused by Tuberculosis. The healing effect was thought to be passed down from generation to generation, giving the monarchs an divinity, adding to their authority. To avoid confusion with the Druid's Curse, we changed the symptomatology into that akin of leprosy"

Origins

King's Evil's origins are a highly controversial subject amongst historians. Some claim that an ancient king, perhaps first in the line of the Kurari, heartbroken by his peoples' suffering, asked of a wizard to make him able to heal them himself. Others believe in a far more sinister theory, one that states that the royals created the disease and then monopolized on the cure with magic. Whatever the case, the true cause is lost in history, or buried deep in a crypt, documented on an ancient book that has not seen the light of day for centuries.

Causes

King's Evil is a disease that spreads through touch. A creature that comes into contact with an already infected creature must succeed on a **DC 14 Constitution saving throw**, or become a carrier of the responsible microorganism. After a creature becomes a carrier, symptoms might manifest randomly in a few weeks, up to years away from the infection. There really is no way to know when it will happen, but creatures that are already sick and weakened appear to have a higher chance of becoming symptomatic.

Symptoms

King's Evil is predominantly a malady that affects the skin. The first noticeable sign of leprosy is often the development of pale or pinkish patches of skin that may be insensitive to temperature or pain. As the infection rages, the skin of an infected individual becomes unnaturally pale, to the point of becoming an almost clear white. When the condition reaches its terminal stage, the skin becomes almost transparent, and patient's muscles can be seen. This results in a most horrifying of sights, as a person appears to be made out of sick muscle tissue, with the facial features mostly missing. This breathtaking sight is the reason why most of society has shunned the victims of the disease, and why all who live with it would do anything to have a royal cure them. Other symptoms include susceptibility to diseases, a heavy coughing and muscle weakness.

Mechanically, patients with King's Evil have disadvantage on all charisma based skill checks except intimidation, on which they have advantage. If they have reached the point in the disease where their skin is clear, they also gain a point of exhaustion that cannot be removed unless they are cured.

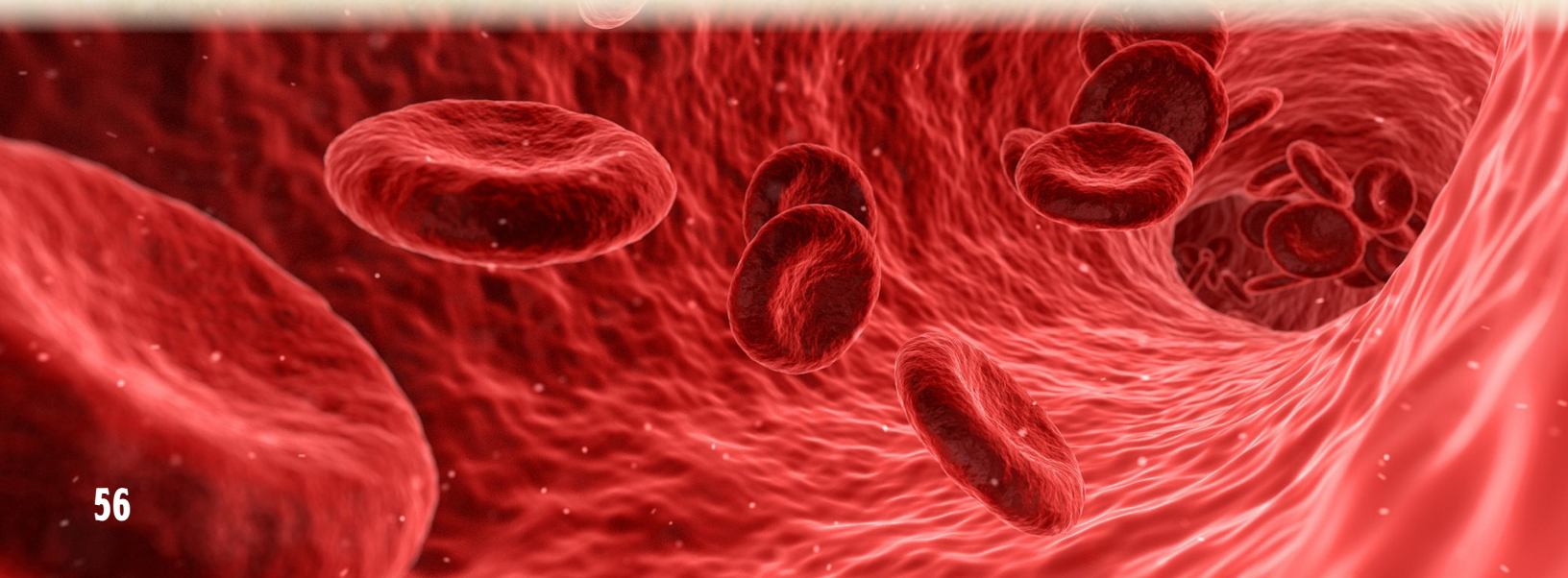
Diagnosis

Diagnosing this disease while in Mitaria is fairly easy, and it can be done with a successful **DC 11 Wisdom (Medicine) check** or a **DC 14 Intelligence (History) check**, to either identify it as a medical singularity or to remember about this infamous disease that thrives in these lands.

Cure

Unfortunately for patients, the only way to get cured is by the touch of a royal Kurari's hand. This blessing can be achieved either by paying a royal a large sum of money for their pity, or randomly, as Kuraris have a habit of acting on a whim, and healing a few people affected by this terrible disease.

If you so desire it, you could specify what the Kurari Royal Family does to cure the disease. If, for example, you decide that due to their heritage they have the innate ability to cast *lesser restoration* or any other spell, that means that the adventurers could also succeed in healing King's Evil, which could cause the fall of an entire dynasty, as the foundations it is built on suddenly crumble. Think about these options you have, and experiment.





Appendix D: Other Information

Rings of the Ooze

Members of the *Vultures of Fortune* each wear one these ancient rings crafted by the cult of Juiblex (arch demon of the Oozing Hunger). Made of grey translucent crystal, the rings bear no adornment, except the master ring which is engraved with the symbol of the Faceless Lord (Juiblex).

A creature wearing one of these rings is never attacked by an ooze (or a gibbering mouther). Further, as an action, the ring wearer can convey simple mental commands to any ooze within 30 feet, such as *guard*, *attack intruders*, etc. The minor rings (worn by the thugs) are all keyed to the master ring (worn by Grangor). The wearer of the master ring must sate its hunger to propagate oozes by transmuting a humanoid with its deadly nether ray (see Area 4 for details of this attack under Grangor's stat block). Once discharged, the ring's nether ray cannot be used again for three days (regardless of whether the attack was successful or not). When the master ring powers back up, the wearer must succeed on a **DC 12 Charisma saving throw** or be compelled to make its nether attack. Grangor, and all its previous owners, have voluntarily surrendered to the compulsion. Note the minor rings only have their power while the master ring is worn.

If a PC takes one of the minor rings from a thug and wears it, the PC is ignored by oozes and can issue commands to them as noted above. An ooze however cannot be commanded to attack another creature wearing one of the rings.

Further Adventures

If the PCs dig out the nexynite meteorite, selling it on the black market could be a murky and challenging tale in itself. Should word get out, the party might have to go into hiding to avoid greedy thieves' guild agents, or warrior monks dedicated to the destruction of the unwholesome ore.

Thordyn's dilemma is the obvious sequel. Proving Ironhelm bribed Flaming Fist officials to have him falsely quarantined in Lazar Walls won't be straightforward. The PCs might find themselves on the run from the very Flaming Fist officials they accuse.

And then there is the religious strife. The PCs might set about trying to reconcile the main religions of Baldur's Gate (Gond, Tymora and Umberlee); an opportunity to run adventures based on diplomacy. If going with the conspiracy theme, unmasking the corrupt high priests who orchestrated the religious tensions (in order to line their pockets by making magical healing rare) would make for a more dangerous intrigue.

Regarding the *Rings of the Ooze*, the PCs might set out on a quest to destroy them or keep them despite the risks. Either way, cultists of Juiblex could be close behind the party.

Finally, why not run a campaign based on the premise that gives the disease its name? The *King's Evil* being that the Duke of Baldur's Gate (or the king in your homebrew campaign) was behind the spreading of the infection and religious turmoil. Unmasking such a conspiracy would see the PCs immortalized as the champions of the people.

Plaguebearers



For Levels 3-5

by Richard Malena-Webber

Introduction

Plaguebearers is the tale of the dread Druid's Curse, the birth of a disease that brought the world to its knees. The story begins when an adventuring party takes on a simple scouting mission for an orc clan, and climaxes with the devastation of the entire clan at the hands of a vengeful druid and his deadly new disease.

This adventure is designed for a party of four 3rd-5th level characters.

Running the Module

Read the adventure module in its entirety before running it.

Creatures written in bold refer to the corresponding entries in the Monster Manual (*MM*), Volo's Guide to Monsters (*VGtM*), Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes (*MToF*) or Appendix B: Creatures. Creatures from *MToF* are included in Appendix B.

Magic items and spells written in italic refer to the corresponding entries in the Dungeon Master's Guide (*DMG*) or Players Handbook (*PHB*).

Adventure Background

The Greenskull Clan is a nomadic orc tribe, specializing in war and conquest. What sets them apart from other clans is their sociable nature, shown by a tendency to work with outsiders and mercenaries from time to time. They have no place to call home, instead traveling the world, raiding small villages and natural habitats, and basking in the glory of victory in their small camps.

Ten years ago, a deadly threat from the east forced different orc tribes to come together to form The Great Orc Nation under the wise commands of Bakh the Ruler. Once the Greenskull Clan joined the alliance, Bakh sent the clan to the west in order to find new places for the Nation to conquer.

Traveling west, the Greenskull Clan came across Halnia Bog, a swamp inhabited by twisted firbolg worshippers of Malar, a savage deity of nature. The mighty orcs underestimated these quiet creatures, believing they would easily fall to the might of their dread blades. However, in their early skirmishes, the firbolgs proved to be competent strategists, using their mastery of the swamp to their advantage.

Two days ago, the firbolgs ambushed a small group of orc scouts. The leader of the Greenskull Clan, a female orc named Ulultha the Unrepentant, has hired a small army to track her enemies and lead an assault on the firbolg stronghold. She believes that with one strong push, the puny firbolgs will be forced to flee the might of the Clan.

Fate, however, has other plans.

Adventure Summary

Part One

As the adventure begins, the party is given their first task by Ulultha, the leader of the Greenskull Clan. The party begins scouting the swamp but are quickly ambushed by a group of firbolg scouts, dragging a wounded orc scout on a long, iron chain. To heal the orc, the party must return to the Greenskull camp and take the injured orc to the tribe's doctor, a kenku cleric, called The Whistler.

While the scout is treated, Ulultha meets with her personal guards, the Marauders, and decides to send the party with some support to locate and, if possible, assault the firbolg stronghold. Ulultha is unwilling to risk the rest of the clan until the area has been fully scouted and they can build the proper defenses.





Part Two

With the orc scout as their guide, the party returns to the swamp. The characters must battle the elements until they arrive at the firbolg stronghold where they are attacked by diseased firbolgs deep into the final stages of the Druid's Curse. After the battle, the party must defeat an enraged troll defending a cave full of plagued corpses.

While exploring the village, the orcs all show signs of the final stages of the Curse, and the characters each begin to feel the early stages. Racing against the advancing plague and the difficult travel through the swamp, the players must make their way back to the Greenskull camp.

Part Three

The party arrives to find the orcs are sick with a devastating disease the Whistler is unable to heal. The suddenly somber Ululltha is a practical leader and knows that the clan is finished. She orders her Marauders to prepare the camp to be burned to the ground to stop the deadly outbreak. Before the guards can begin, a plague druid, the creator of the Curse, arrives to watch the imminent fall of the formidable orc clan.

Plot Hooks

The Greenskull Clan is known to hire mercenaries to help with various missions, and Ululltha knows this is ever more important as the orcs try to build a secure home here on the edge of Halnia Bog. Though isolated, the Greenskull camp is not too far from major routes of travel and is a regular stop by adventuring parties looking for work.

The following scenarios can be used to insert the player characters in the adventure. However, you can use any other method that results in the adventurers being in the right place, at the right time.

- The adventurers have met a young orc along the side of a major trade route. The Greenskull recruiter offers gold in exchange for work especially suited for a band of adventurers. If the party accepts, the orc hands them a hastily drawn map to the Greenskull camp.
- At the tavern, a town crier enters and clears her throat. With a look of total disbelief, she recites an offer for "honor and glory to those who befriend the Orcs of Greenskull." She informs the party that even though she rarely receives jobs from local orcs, this recruiter paid quite well for her services.
- If one or more of the adventurers is an orc or a half-orc, they receive notice from a representative of the Great Orc Nation. The ambassador wants to see the Greenskull Clan succeed in their mission and offers a favor to those orcs who assist them in their tasks.
- If one or more of the adventurers is a druid, ranger, or worshipper of a nature deity, they are visited by a cleric of Silvanus. The Forest Master has heard rumors of an enclave devoted to Malar in Halnia Bog, and they would like the party to investigate.

NPCs

Ululltha the Unrepentant

Ululltha, leader of the Greenskull Clan and Chosen of Gruumsh is feared and respected throughout the Great Orc Nation. She is a highly capable leader and has singlehandedly turned the tide in many battles with her twinned greataxes. It is said that Gruumsh visited Ululltha during one such battle and bestowed on her a portion of his overwhelming rage.

Ugash the Twin Marauder

Ugash is responsible for the needs of the Greenskull Clan, taking care of the camp whenever Ululltha and her warriors are absent. Ugash follows the ways of Luthic, Mother of the Orcs, and reveres her as he protects the Clan. The shaman does not wield weapons, instead using his fierce claws to slash through enemy flesh.

Uram the Twin Marauder

The powerful Uram is Ululltha's right hand in battle. He is an experienced strategist and a fearsome warrior. During the heat of combat, Uram's orders are obeyed as if they have come from Ululltha herself.

Mevi the Tribeye

Mevi the Goliath is Ululltha's mate and most trusted companion. She leads the tribe's scouts on the most dangerous missions in hostile lands. Many of the Greenskull Clan treat her with a grudging respect due to her outsider status but follow her orders regardless.

The Whistler

The Whistler is a kenku cleric of Yurtrus. He is looked upon with curiosity and fear by the rest of the Clan, seldom speaking unless forced by circumstance. The Whistler is an important advisor and helps Ulultha keep the camp healthy. When not caring for his patients, the cleric can be found wandering through the camp whistling an ominous tune.

Adventure

The Quest for Vengeance

Read or paraphrase the following to begin the adventure:

> Perched on the edge of a fetid swamp, the home of the Greenskull clan is a lively orcish community. In the center of the camp is a small wooden structure full of hunters and warriors. Nearby is a large pen for the clan's stock of riding wolves, dark red blood still spattered on their coats from the recent raid. The smell of blood and iron fills the camp, and mercenaries from nearby settlements have gathered on the orcs' behalf.
>
> You watch as a few small groups gather their belongings and leave the settlement, each venturing in a different direction. Finally, you hear a rough voice call your names, inviting you to a nearby tent.

Ulultha, head of the Greenskull clan, waits inside the tent with a few of her advisors. When the party enters the tent, read or paraphrase the following:

> As you enter, you find four orcs standing in front of a crude map of the swamp. One, bearing a well-crafted longbow, sets a small wooden block on the map. *"Those filthy swamp-dwellers can't hide from us forever."* Another orc notices your presence and turns with her arms outstretched.
>
> *"Clan Greenskull welcomes you, adventurers! We offer gold and honor in exchange for your assistance."* Ulultha smiles and gestures for the party to join her before the map.

The Greenskull Clan has hired many teams of mercenaries and adventurers to search through the swamp for a group of firbolgs who attacked their camp. The map table shows four small, wooden blocks, each representing a team of scouts heading in a different direction from the camp at the swamp's edge.

Ulultha wants the party to make their own way through the swamp to find the firbolgs' nest. Once the scouting foray is successful and the firbolgs have been found, Ulultha expects the party to return and report back to the clan.

> *"The first team to return with proof that they've located the firbolgs will win a special prize! There's a lot you can accomplish with a favor from the mighty Greenskull Clan!"*

Ulultha's mate, Mevi, leads the party from the tent and offers to sell them any goods they may need before entering the swamp. Mevi also points out the Whistler in a nearby tent, caring for the orcs who were injured in the firbolg raid. Every orc in the camp will happily boast that The Whistler is the greatest healer in the region.





Swamp Travelers

The smell of rot and sulfur fills the air as you forge a trail through the swamp. Creatures flit between the trees, while others send ripples through stagnant, murky pools. Eerie howls echo across the bitter landscape and a chill descends as you lose sight of any sign of civilization.

Traveling through the swamp takes a toll on the party as they search for the firbolg raiders. Soon enough, rain begins to fall. After six hours, each party member must succeed on a **DC 10 Constitution saving throw** or gain one level of exhaustion.

Battling the Environment

This swamp is a terrible place for anyone exposed to the elements. Without shelter from the rain and cold, characters must continue to succeed on **DC 10 Constitution saving throws** every six hours or gain a level of exhaustion. Increase the **DC** by +1 every twelve hours until the party takes a long rest shielded from the elements.

Characters regain one level of exhaustion after a long rest, whether or not they remain exposed to the swamp.

After a grueling eight hours of searching, the party finds a small clearing in the swamp. The dry land rises from the murky water, perfect for a camp. If the party scouts the area before making camp, they can make a **DC 14 Wisdom (Perception or Survival) check**. Characters who succeed notice tracks through the loose soil, possibly belonging to a band of firbolg scouts, and are not surprised in the following combat.

Whether or not the party succeeds, they are quickly attacked by a group of **six diseased firbolg scouts**. Three of the firbolg attack as shapeshifted **giant vultures** before joining the main battle. One of the six drags a captive orc on a heavy iron chain, dropping him face-down in the swamp and drawing a longspear.

Tactics

The firbolgs are easily scared by the adventurers and flee once one of their companions have been slain.

Development

The captive orc has been badly beaten and is incredibly weak from the rain and cold. He survives the night, though he remains unconscious and feverish. Any magical healing provided by the party merely relieves the symptoms without fully healing the captive. By the next morning, the orc is completely unconscious.

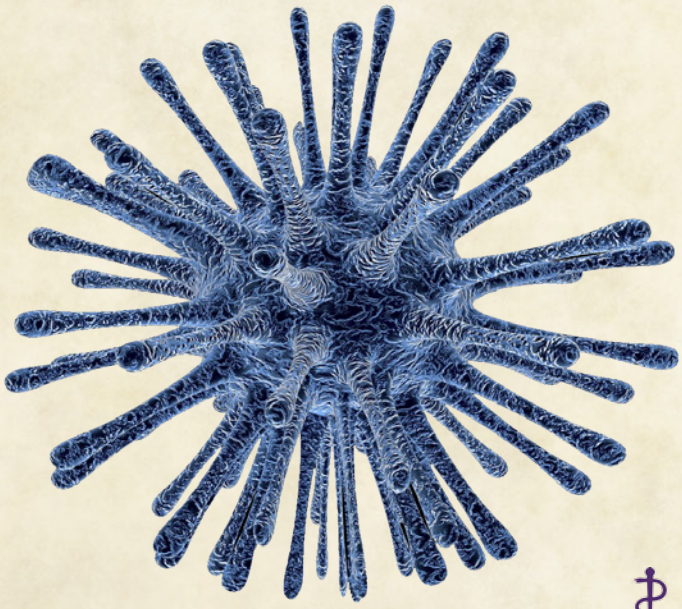
The Whistler's Mercy

The rainfall stops during the night, making the trip back to the Greenskull Clan feel that much faster. Loud shouts from the camp begin as soon as the party enters line of sight. Within moments, Ulultha commands the twins to carry the injured orc to a tent where The Whistler waits.

The avian cleric casts a quick spell and his beak and talons suddenly shine in the sun as if freshly washed. With one hand, the Whistler begins making a series of expert gestures, the ritual motions of a spell he casts with a creepy, whistled tune.

After a few moments, the kenku drives his other talons deep into the orc's flesh. The patient trembles as wounds knit together and his color returns to normal. In a swift, final motion, the kenku draws his talons from the orc, who immediately screams himself back to consciousness.

Ulultha and the patient have a quick conversation in Orcish, discussing the possible tactics of attacking the firbolgs, before inviting the party to join the discussion.



Planning the Attack

The Greenskull Clan provide many different options for the PCs as they decide how to attack the firbolgs. However, Ulultha will refuse to let the entire Clan rush out on a raid and leave the camp exposed.

If the PCs accept Uram's assistance, they gain three orc warriors during the assault. These orcs use the Help action, granting the PCs advantage on the first three rounds of the raid.

If the PCs accept Mevi's assistance, they gain three orc rangers during travel and the assault. The rangers grant the PCs advantage on saves against exhaustion due to travel. The rangers launch ranged attacks during combat, which easily defeat the group of reinforcements before the firbolgs can join the fight in the third round.

In either case, the orcs retire from the combat after the third round due to injuries and illness.

The orc explains that he was part of a scouting mission that tracked the firbolgs immediately after the raid. The trio were ambushed, and he believes that his clanmates are still held captive in the firbolg stronghold.

"I can get you close," says the scout. *"We only saw the edges of the stronghold when they attacked us, so it should be safe to stop and scout."*

Uram the Twin Marauder leaps up with a toothy smile. *"Lead us there and we will slaughter them all! My axe thirsts for glory!"*

"Calm yourself, Uram." The looming Mevi the Tribeye, goliath leader of the clan's rangers and scouts, leans against a support in the rear of the tent. *"One silent strike and those firbolgs will never touch us again."*

Ulultha stands and furrows her brow. *"We will not leave our camp weakened until we know what else lives in this swamp. Besides, we already hired these adventurers to attack the firbolgs. If this scout can lead the way, I'm sure they can handle it."*

Neither Uram or Mevi are entirely satisfied leaving this task to the party, so both offer some assistance for the upcoming raid. Ulultha accepts this but will only allow the party to accept help from one leader. Besides the scout, only three more members of the Greenskull Clan will venture into the swamp.

See **Planning the Attack** for more information about these NPCs.



Finding the Firbolgs

Read or paraphrase the following after the party has been walking through the swamp for the first six hours and have made their first Constitution saving throw against the elements:

> A gloom comes over the entire party as you once again enter the swamp. A chill from the endless muck seeps into your feet, while the return of the oppressive rain soaks you to the skin. The guide points out some trails that avoid the stagnant pools, but the swamp is punishing to any kind of travel.
>
> As you march through the downpour, your guide suddenly stops and vomits into the dark water. He waves away any help and continues trudging through the swamp. Soon enough, as darkness starts to fall, the guide slips and falls with a splash of mud. *"Maybe we should make camp here."*

With a successful **DC 12 Wisdom (Medicine) check**, it becomes clear that the orc scout is still suffering from some kind of disease. He is having trouble seeing clearly and is increasingly nauseous as the night progresses.

Though the other orcs are trying to hide it, a successful **DC 16 Wisdom (Insight or Medicine) check** reveals that they are all starting to show symptoms of illness as well.

In the morning, each of the orcs seem to be showing the same symptoms as the scout. However, each seems determined to gain their clan's vengeance on the firbolgs.

With the scout feeling especially ill, it is up to the party to follow clues and find the firbolg stronghold throughout the day.

- During the first two hours, the party must make a **DC 13 Wisdom (Survival) check** to find a solid trail. If they fail, two random characters fall through loose mud into a deep pool. These characters must succeed on an immediate, additional **Constitution saving throw** or gain a level of exhaustion.
- During the second two hours, the party must succeed on a **DC 14 Wisdom (Survival) check** to find the firbolgs' path. If they fail, the party spends an additional six hours in the swamp before finding the proper path, which results in an extra Constitution save for the entire party.
- During the final two hours, the party must make a **DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check** as they attempt to find a location to scout the firbolg stronghold. If they succeed, allow them to scout the stronghold. If they fail, the party moves immediately to the front gates and the first encounter.

The Firbolg Stronghold

As the party arrives at the stronghold, read or paraphrase the following:

> A high, wooden wall surrounds a small, firbolg encampment deep in the swamp. Strange vulture effigies built from twisted branches and rotten ferns hang above the camp like eerie protectors. The wall's edges run up against a rocky outcropping which erupts from the murky waters.

Though the landscape is difficult, the party can easily sneak around and get a sense of the stronghold's layout. If any players fail on a **DC 10 Dexterity (Stealth) check**, the firbolgs notice the party and are not surprised during combat.

The stronghold has ten thatched huts for the firbolg people, though no villagers can be seen walking through the small village.



The wall is only broken by the massive front gates, which are guarded by a small patrol of firbolgs. The party also locates the command structure (see below) near the entrance to a cave.

Climbing the stronghold's walls is difficult but can be done with a successful **DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check**. Cutting through the thick, wooden walls takes time, but can provide the party with a surprising avenue of attack.

Stronghold Walls

The slick, wooden walls have an AC of 12. Each log has 27 hit points, though players must deal damage exceeding the wall's threshold of 10 before dealing any damage at all. The wall is vulnerable to fire and lightning damage.

Whether the party decides to attack the front gates or sneak to the command structure, reinforcements appear after three rounds of combat. Enraged by their fatal illness, each firbolg fights to the death.

The outcome of these battles depends on which orcs the party brought from the Greenskull camp. If the party chose the warriors, the orcs provide them advantage in their first combat. If the party chose the scouts, the firbolg reinforcements are defeated by their ranged attacks.

Front Gates

> A large gate stands open, providing entrance into the stronghold. You see two lamps swinging to-and-fro, as firbolg guards pace along the wall's interior.

Four **diseased firbolg warriors** guard the front gates. As the combat begins, the party sees that the firbolgs have broken out in enormous boils, oozing with dark blood.

Command Structure

Near the back of the stronghold, you see a large, thatched hut with smoke pouring from a central chimney. Racks of weapons and shields stand ready beneath protective wooden canopies. Behind the hut, the mouth of a cave stands open in the rock wall. Two firbolg guards in heavy cloaks slump against the hut.

When engaged in combat, the two **diseased firbolg warriors** begin shouting in Giant. During the second round, the door to the structure is kicked open, and two more **diseased firbolg warriors** exit, along with the **diseased firbolg chief**.

Reinforcements

As the battle continues, a group of three firbolgs stumble forward with weapons drawn. Each limps in obvious pain, but they shout in rage as they advance.

Three **diseased firbolg scouts** arrive as reinforcements during the third round of either combat and may attack during the fourth.

Development

Strangely, no other firbolgs come out to help the warriors, nor are there any other signs of those who lived in the town. If the party searches any of the huts, they find them completely empty. With a successful **DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check**, it becomes clear that nothing seems to have been packed or moved, so an evacuation seems unlikely.

The Cave Guardian

Once the center of the firbolg's reverence of nature, this natural cave has now become a home for the recent dead. Inside, a swamp troll suffering through the final stages of the illness will attack the party in a mindless rage if they enter the cave.

The gaping maw of a cave leads down into the darkness beneath the firbolg stronghold. Even with the dim sunlight, you can see faint etchings covering the cave walls in a pattern that reminds you of the nearby shrubs and trees. Before you can investigate more, a shouting swamp troll bursts from the darkness. You can see that his entire body is covered in large boils and a sheet of black blood.

The illness has taken hold of the **plagued swamp troll**, negating its natural regenerative ability and greatly reducing its hit points. However, the disease can be felt in its tainted bite. Characters who are damaged by the troll's bite attack must succeed on a **DC 16 Constitution saving throw** or gain the poisoned condition for the next minute.

Development

Upon further investigation, the party notices that the troll wears a pair of stone and leather bracelets. These are etched with icons of Malar and seem to be gifts from the firbolg tribe. These may be sold to a collector for 100 gold.

Finishing the Firbolgs

The swamp troll once maintained this cave as a sanctum to Malar but has since been forced to carry and store firbolg corpses below. In its rage against the druid who caused the plague, the troll has defiled every sign of the savage god it could find.

Read or paraphrase the following when the party enters the cave.

The dampness of the swamp leaves a thin fog swirling through the cave as the tunnel spirals down beneath the surface. Animal symbols cover the cave walls, though they have been recently marred by a pair of large, clawed hands.

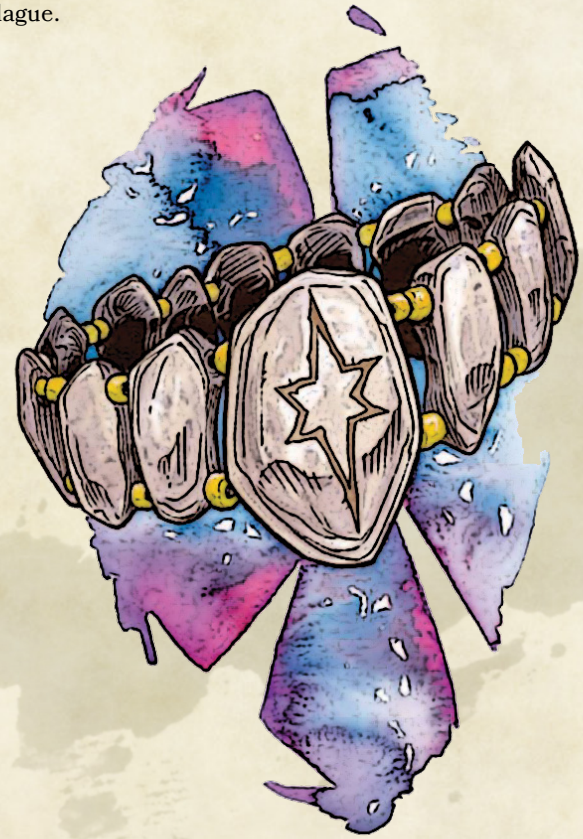
As you descend, the air grows heavy and the scent of rot begins to fill your mouth. You enter a large cavern and see that it is littered with firbolg remains. The hands of each corpse stretch out like twisted branches, as if each firbolg died in agony. Every face is covered in large boils, and a pool of bloody pus has gathered in the deepest parts of the room.

In the back of the room, a heavy, stone altar to Malar, the Beastlord, has been thrown to the cave floor and smashed into pieces.

Each character who tries to enter the chamber must succeed on a **DC 16 Wisdom saving throw** or gain the frightened condition for the next ten minutes. Frightened characters are unable to enter the chamber, and vomit before fleeing the room.

The party quickly finds the two missing orc scouts among the firbolg corpses. In stark contrast to those killed by the plague, the orcs have been killed by a combination of spears and giant claws.

Characters who investigate the room notice that corpses of the tribe's guard dogs are also left in one corner. A successful **DC 13 Wisdom (Medicine) check** reveals that the dogs have been dead longer than the firbolgs and were likely transmitters of the plague.





The stone altar was destroyed within the last few days, and only something as strong as the troll could have thrown it aside so easily. Each icon to the nature god had been scratched out before it had been toppled to the ground. It is unclear why the troll has defiled the entire cave.

Development

Before leaving, the party must decide what to do with the firbolg stronghold. It is clear that a plague has struck, and it is common knowledge that the disease may spread through the region.

If the party decides to stop and burn down the stronghold, the entire process takes them an additional six hours due to the cold and damp in the swamp.

Return to the Greenskulls

Rain starts pouring with even more strength, causing the return trip through the swamp to take two full days. With a successful **DC 13 Intelligence (Nature) check**, a character realizes that the force of the storm doesn't seem to be completely natural.

Soon after leaving the firbolg stronghold, the orc scout shouts in fear as he finds a pair of oozing boils bursting from the back of his neck. A quick search reveals many more. The other orcs remain nauseous but are very motivated to get back to The Whistler with as much information about this plague as possible.

The party easily finds a place to make camp during the night, but even if they attempt to care for the orc scout, he dies during the night in screaming agony. The next morning, the other orcs wake to boils on their skin and struggle during the walk home (See **Effects of the Curse** below).

Read or paraphrase the following in the morning:

> As you wake up, you begin to feel the devastating effects of what can only be the plague. Even the faint light through the swampy mist is almost blinding, and you struggle to make out distant sights. Breakfast refuses to settle and you shudder helplessly as you vomit until your belly is completely empty.
>
> The orcs begin to count the days since the firbolg attack and come to a grim conclusion. Without timely assistance, you expect you only have a few days left to live.

After a long day of travel, the party arrives back at the Greenskull camp at dusk. Torches and bonfires fill the center of the camp, and the greasy smoke of burning flesh fills the air. Orcs began dying from the plague that morning, and The Whistler immediately began throwing the diseased corpses into the flames. Half of the town has already perished. The kenku knows the results of plague, even if he cannot determine the nature of this one.

Guards attempt to keep the party from the camp but allow them in once it is clear that they've also caught the plague. As they enter the camp, they are met by the chieftain, Ulultha, along with her remaining advisors, Mevi and Uram. All three remain standing, even though their necks are caked with dark blood.

> The chieftain smiles wryly as you approach. "Welcome back. Now you can perish along with the entire Greenskull Clan. Those firbolg have been the death of us. Did you manage to kill them all first?"

As the party relates the devastation at the firbolg stronghold, Ulultha grunts and closes her eyes. The Whistler shrugs and hands each character a *potion of healing*. Drinking this potion also removes all levels of exhaustion a character might have. Afterward, Ulultha points at two plague-stricken warriors and waves them closer.

> *"If this is to be our end, we will not allow this plague to spread beyond our walls. Seal the gates. If anyone tries to flee, spend every arrow to bring them down."*
>
> The warriors turn towards the front gate, but immediately stop in their tracks. Walking through the front gate is a figure in tattered grey robes, surrounded by rats and wolves. Beneath the robe's hood, you can just see the glint from a wide, toothy smile.

Effects of the Curse

The party was infected by the Druid's Curse when they arrived at the Greenskull camp, and the disease has slowly progressed ever since. Characters affected by the early stages of Druid's Curse have disadvantage on Perception checks while in sunlight.

By the time the party returns to the Greenskull camp, they have already reached the fourth day of the affliction. If they reach the sixth day, their necks begin to break out in painful lumps oozing black blood. It is unlikely that a character will live longer than eight days.

Bleeding creatures must make a **DC 10 Constitution saving throw** every hour. On a failed saving throw, their hit point maximum is reduced by 5. The **DC** is increased by 2 every 6 hours, even if the infected creature succeeds on its saving throw.

When the Druid created the virus, he made sure that it was protected from spells that remove diseases. Spells that remove disease, such as a Paladin's *lay on hands* ability or the *cure disease* spell only serve as a brief break in the progression of symptoms. Any time that a spell like cure disease is cast on an inflicted creature, the **DC** for the disease does not increase by 2 for the next 6 hours.

The Druid's Curse

The druid has come to watch the Greenskull Clan burn in The Whistler's fires. He expects a final challenge, which is why he travels with a small army of two **plagued dire wolves** and eight **plagued rat swarms** trailing behind. If attacked, the druid only plans to toy with the orcs, knowing that his plague is already destined to spread throughout the region.

The orcs snarl at the wolves, but none are healthy enough to battle the druid's forces. In the entire camp, only the party and The Whistler are not suffering in the final stages of the plague.

Before combat begins, the Whistler tries to gain the party's attention. Read or paraphrase the following:

> Standing at your side, the kenku whistles and points a sharp talon at the druid's belt. You see a small bundle of silver leaves tied with a red ribbon. The Whistler's eyes grow wide and he pulls a small mortar and pestle from his satchel. He pounds them together and whistles urgently.
>
> The druid sees the kenku's gestures and laughs. *"Oh, you've seen Sparkleaf before? A last seed of hope, I suppose."* With that, the druid tosses the Sparkleaf into his sea of rats, and with a smirk, sets the bundle ablaze.

Tactics

The druid does not wish to fight and merely harasses the party during the battle with minor spells, like *chill touch* and *entangle*. If attacked, the druid uses *gaseous form* and *pass without trace* to flee and hide in the swamp. The druid knows that the burning Sparkleaf represents the last possibility anyone in the camp has of surviving, though the Curse is already destined to spread throughout the region.

The plagued vermin attack the camp's defenders, including the party, with infected bites which each progress the Curse by one day. A bitten character immediately loses 5 hit points as if they'd failed a save against the Curse. A character who reaches eight total days of the Curse immediately drops to zero hit points and must begin making death saves.

Development

The Sparkleaf remains viable if the fire is extinguished within four rounds. After that, the curative properties fade and everyone in the camp is doomed.

Adventure Conclusion

Though a master healer, The Whistler can only save so many people with this small amount of Sparkleaf. If they are only suffering from lesser symptoms, the characters begin feeling the disease fade within one day of the kenku's care.

Unfortunately, The Whistler can only heal three creatures who have progressed to an advanced stage. Ulultha refuses the cure unless it has already been given to her mate, Mevi. The Whistler seems to be immune to the plague, which may be due to his avian nature.

By the time any survivors begin to feel free of the Curse's symptoms, the afflicted have all perished. This Whistler, along with any surviving orcs, prepare to burn the Greenskull camp to the ground.

- **If the party stayed to burn the firbolg stronghold,** then the orcs are also doomed. The Greenskull camp will also need to be burned to stop the curse from spreading any further, though this process may have already begun.
- **If the party didn't burn the stronghold,** more orcs have only the lesser symptoms and can be saved through the Whistler's care. However, the Druid's Curse will quickly spread through the swamp and beyond.

In the end, the survivors split the treasure of the clan between them. Reward the party with a roll from the **Treasure Hoard: Challenge 0–4** table with a +20% bonus (see chapter 7, *DMG* p137).

As the party leaves the Greenskull camp, a pale image of the grey-cloaked druid appears and speaks before dissipating.

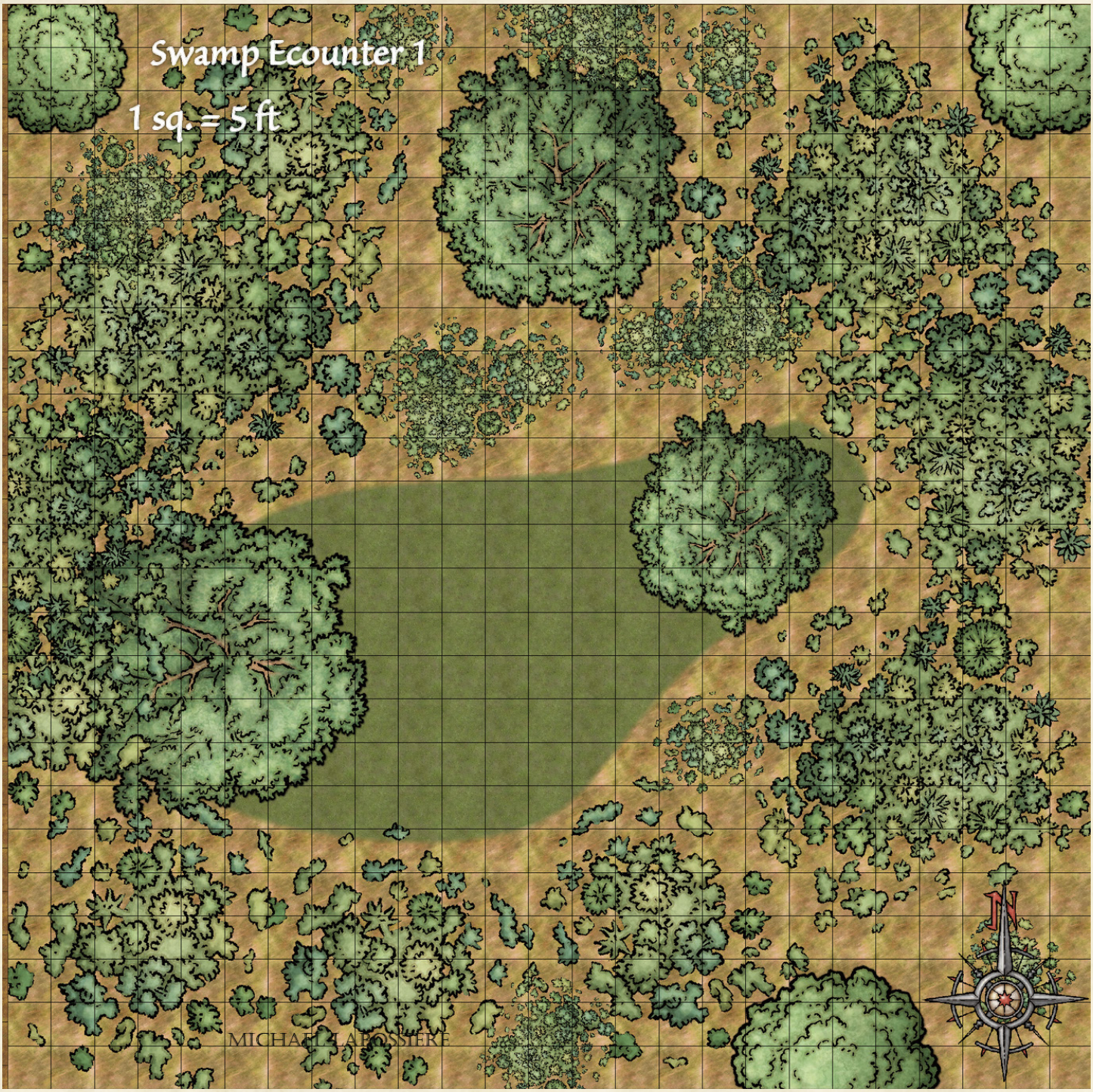
> *"Well fought, scions of civilization. You survive this night not by your strength, but by my will alone. It is your destiny to tell the world of my dreadful Curse. You are the fated caretakers of my great legacy. Make them tremble in fear at the coming destruction. Go forth, my harbingers of doom!"*

Continuing the Adventure

Having chosen his harbingers, the Cursed Druid provides an excellent, long-term villain to add to further adventures. The druid will continue to spread his plague, attempting to move into more and more populated regions, and leading the world to the edge of cataclysm. At the same time, the druid wants the characters to witness the Druid's Curse spread and will hesitate to kill them and end his fun before his plans comes to fruition.

In order to stop the plague from spreading, the characters may wish to enlist help from powerful clerics and priests of healing in nearby cities. By surviving the fall of the Greenskull clan, the characters are the primary source of information about the plague in the region, and without their best effort, it is possible that the entire world may fall to the Druid's Curse.

Appendix A: Maps





Diseased Firbolg Scout

Medium humanoid, neutral

Armor Class 12 (leather armor)
Hit Points 12 (2d8 –1)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	13 (+1)	8 (-1)

SkillsPerception +3, Stealth +3, Survival +2
Senses passive Perception 13
Languages Common, Elvish, Giant
Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)
Equipment longspear, two javelins

Reactions

Hidden Step. The scout may use a bonus action to become invisible until the start of its next turn.

Actions

Shapeshift. Once per day, the scout may spend an action to shapeshift into a Beast with a CR of no more than 1/4. They may return to their natural form by spending a bonus action.

Longspear. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage.

Javelin. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one target. Hit: 5 (1d6 + 1) piercing damage.



Diseased Firbolg Warrior

Medium humanoid, neutral

Armor Class 13 (leather armor)
Hit Points14 (2d10 –1)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	13 (+1)	8 (-1)

SkillsPerception +3, Stealth +3, Survival +2
Senses passive Perception 13
Languages Common, Elvish, Giant
Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)
Equipment longspear, two javelins

Reactions

Hidden Step. The scout may use a bonus action to become invisible until the start of its next turn.

Actions

Multiattack. The warrior makes two weapon attacks

Longspear. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 7 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage.

Javelin. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one target. Hit: 5 (1d6 + 1) piercing damage.



Diseased Firbolg Chief

Medium humanoid, neutral

Armor Class 14 (leather armor)
Hit Points 30 (4d10 +3)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	15 (+2)	8 (-1)

SkillsPerception +3, Stealth +3, Survival +2
Senses passive Perception 13
Languages Common, Elvish, Giant
Challenge 2 (450 XP)
Equipment Greataxe

Reactions

Hidden Step. The scout may use a bonus action to become invisible until the start of its next turn.

Actions

Mighty Swing. The chief makes two weapon attacks, each targeting a different opponent

Greataxe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 10 (1d12 + 3) slashing damage.

Plagued Swamp Troll

Large giant, neutral evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)
Hit Points 64 (8d10 + 20)
Speed 30ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	13 (+1)	20 (+5)	7 (-2)	9 (-1)	7 (-2)

Skills Perception +2
Damage Vulnerability Fire
Senses Darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12
Languages Giant
Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Muted Regeneration. The troll's natural regeneration has been completely counteracted by the plague.

Actions

Multiattack. The troll makes three attacks: one with its bite and two with its claws.

Weakened Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

Weakened Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.



Plagued Dire Wolf

Medium beast, neutral evil

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)
Hit Points 37 (5d10 + 10)
Speed 50ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	15 (+2)	15 (+2)	3 (-5)	12 (+1)	7 (-2)

Skills Perception +3, Stealth +4
Senses passive Perception 13
Languages none
Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Plaguebearer. Whenever a plaguebearer deals damage, the target must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or lose five hit points and advance in the Druid's Curse by one day. A creature may only suffer from this effect once per round.

Pack Tactics. The wolf has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of the wolf's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

Actions

Multiattack. The plagued wolf makes two cursed bite attacks. ***Bite.*** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 10 (2d6 + 3) piercing damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 13 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Plagued Rat Swarm

Medium swarm of tiny beasts, neutral evill

Armor Class 10
Hit Points 24 (7d8 – 7)
Speed 30ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
9 (-1)	11 (+0)	9 (-1)	2 (-4)	10 (+1)	3 (-4)

Damage Resistances Bludgeoning, piercing, slashing
Condition Immunities Charmed, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, prone, restrained, stunned
Senses Darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10
Languages none
Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Plaguebearer. Whenever a plaguebearer deals damage, the target must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or lose five hit points and advance in the Druid's Curse by one day. A creature may only suffer from this effect once per round.

Swarm. TThe swarm can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and the swarm can move through any opening large enough for a Tiny rat. The swarm can't regain hit points or gain temporary hit points.

Actions

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 0 ft., one target in the swarm's space. Hit: 7 (2d6) piercing damage, or 3 (1d6) piercing damage if the swarm has half of its hit points or fewer.



The Cursed Druid

Medium humanoid (half-elf), neutral evil

Armor Class 16 (hide armor, shield)
Hit Points 132 (24d8+24)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	20 (+5)	11 (+1)

Saving Throws INT +5, WIS +9
Skills Medicine +12, Nature +5, Perception +9
Senses passive Perception 19
Languages Common, Druidic, Sylvan
Challenge 12 (8,400 XP)

Cursed Halo. Whenever a character moves into a space within 10 feet of the druid, they become afflicted by the Druid's Curse.

Legendary Resistance (2/Day). If the druid fails a saving throw, he can choose to succeed instead.

Plaguebearer. Whenever a plaguebearer deals damage, the target must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or lose five hit points and advance in the Druid's Curse by one day. A creature may only suffer from this effect once per round.

Spellcasting. The cursed druid is an 18th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 17, +9 to hit with spell attacks). He has the following druid spells prepared: Cantrips (at will): chill touch, druidcraft, poison spray, produce flame

1st level (4 slots): cure wounds, entangle, pass without trace, speak with animals

2nd level (3 slots): animal messenger, beast sense, hold person

3rd level (3 slots): conjure animals, gaseous form, water breathing

4th level (3 slots): blight, dominate beast, stoneskin, wall of fire

5th level (3 slots): contagion, insect plague, scrying

6th level (1 slot): heal, sunbeam, wall of thorns

7th level (1 slot): fire storm

8th level (1 slot): antipathy/sympathy

9th level (1 slot): foresight

Actions

Scimitar. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6+2) piercing damage.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 3 (1d6) piercing damage.

Change Shape (2/Day). The cursed druid magically polymorphs into a beast or elemental with a challenge rating of 6 or less, and can remain in this form for up to 9 hours. The druid can choose whether his equipment falls to the ground, melds with his new form, or is worn by the new form. The druid reverts to his true form if he dies or falls unconscious. The druid can revert to his true form using a bonus action on his turn.

While in a new form, the druid retains his game statistics and ability to speak, but his AC, movement modes, Strength, and Dexterity are replaced by those of the new form, and he gains any special senses, proficiencies, traits, actions, and reactions (except class features, legendary actions, and lair actions) that the new form has but that he lacks. He can cast his spells with verbal or somatic components in his new form.

The new form's attacks count as magical for the purpose of overcoming resistances and immunity to nonmagical attacks.

Plagued Mist (Recharge 5-6). As a bonus action, the druid can breathe out a foul mist up to 30 feet away, where they swirl in a 10-foot cube for 1 minute. Whenever a creature moves into the cube or starts its turn there, that creature becomes afflicted by the Druid's Curse. Afflicted creatures also take 40 (9d8) poison damage, unless the creature succeeds on a DC 17 Constitution saving throw. A creature can take this damage no more than once per turn.

Legendary Actions

The druid can take 2 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The druid regains spent legendary actions at the start of his turn.

Cursed Blessings. The druid casts a spell of 3rd level of lower, taking 1d8 necrotic damage for each level of the chosen spell.

Escape. The druid breathes out a cloud of noxious mist and uses the confusion to move 10 feet without provoking attacks of opportunity.





Appendix C: Disease

Druid's Curse

Penetrative, Lethal, Natural

Of all the diseases in this codex, there is none more mysterious. Perhaps the deadliest of them all, this is a disease whose origins are lost in time. Let me tell you the tale of the fabled druid...

This is the story of a disease born out of vengeance. A pandemic that brought a civilization to ruins and the whole world to its knees.

Loosely derived from the disease caused by *Yersinia Pestis.* a rod shaped *coccobaccilus*. The disease most commonly known as the Plague, may manifest as the Bubonic Plague, with swollen possibly hemorrhagic bubonic lymph nodes, or as the Black Plague, with subcutaneous bleeding and absence of swollen lymph nodes.

Origins

There was once a druid. A peaceful elf that happily spent his days in a swamp with a few of his fellow elves, sharing their love for the biome and the druidic arts. One fateful day, the druid's altar was raided by orcs and he found himself, along with 3 others, running for their lives in the swamp. To save themselves, they spent the night hiding in a flea ridden cave. Three nights later, at the time the moon was at its highest, the first of his companions started bleeding from his neck and his fingers slowly turned black. The others followed,, and just one week later, he was all alone, miraculously unharmed. In that swamp, in that cave, the druid came to the realisation that nature was filled with death and that even the smallest insects could kill the strongest creature, even the elves of the forest. Thinking only of revenge, he used his druidic abilities to harness the power of the fleas and infected the orcs' camp. They all bled to death. Fierce warriors, unable to fight this fatal weapon. The druid took an oath of vengeance against the greenskins, swearing it upon the moon itself, and headed back to the swamp.

Causes

The disease is spread by infected fleas. They are carried to towns on small animals, such as rats and squirrels. The fleas bite any creature they cross paths with, and the disease enters the blood, spreading to every inch of the now infected creature's body. A creature must succeed on a **DC 20 Constitution saving throw**, or become infected.

Symptoms

The symptoms start 5-6 days after a creature is infected, with them developing fever, nausea and photophobia. The next day, the lymph nodes on the neck and the bubonic area get swollen and start bleeding. Most people die from severe bleeding in just two or three days.

Any creature affected by the disease has disadvantage on Perception Checks while in sunlight. Bleeding creatures have to make a **DC 10 Constitution saving throw** every hour. On a failed saving throw, their maximum health is reduced by 5. The **DC** is increased by 2 every 6 hours.

Diagnosis

Its characteristic symptoms make the diagnosis obvious, but it is too late when one understands that they are infected. Someone with enough knowledge on the disease can see the epidemic pattern ,as usually whole villages are infected and not an individual. The diagnosis could also be made by finding fleas with purple patterns on their carapaces on the diseased or on animals. If a creature has never heard of the disease and the legend of the druid, they can draw the connection between the fleas and the symptoms with a successful **DC 14 Wisdom (Medicine) check**.

Cure

There is no easy cure of the disease, but doctors have noticed that victims of the disease that spend time in swamps live relatively longer, even a few weeks more than the norm. There have been some documented cases of people being cured after removing the swollen lymph nodes on the neck. This of course is a risky medical procedure and only a few experienced doctors have managed to save their patients.

A very rare herb known as Sparkleaf can cure the symptoms of the disease if brewed and consumed as a tea. To acquire Sparkleaf however, one must locate a Shambling Mound that lives in a swamp, and remove a purple flower with lighting-like patterns on its flowers from the creature's body. To brew the tea, a creature proficient in Medicine or with the Herbalism Kit must succeed on 3 or more out of 5 **DC 16** checks with the corresponding skill.

When the druid created the virus, he made sure that it was protected by spells that remove diseases. Spells that remove disease, such as a Paladin's lay on hands ability or the cure disease spell only serve as a break to the symptoms progression. Any time that a spell like cure disease is cast on an inflicted creature, the **DC** for the disease does not increase by 2 for the next 6 hours.

Rise of the Druid's Curse



For Levels 5-7

by Chad M. Lensch

Introduction

Adventure Design

Rise of the Druid's Curse is an adventure written for a party of four 5th level characters. Encounters can be scaled to the appropriate difficulty for characters level 5.

Keep in mind, time should feel like it is in short supply: the ability to long rest after Part 2 should be discouraged, and short rests be limited to only one or two.

Nomenclature for DM

Please note that the adventure is organized in the following manner:

When you see boxed text like this, you can read or paraphrase the contents to the group. If you are a new DM, feel free to read "as-is." However, if you are an experienced DM, then paraphrase and embellish the story as you wish! *This is your group's adventure---do what you want!*

When you see a shaded area like this, you should not read this to the group; it is special information just for the DM.

The Druid's Curse: A Concise Explanation

The Druid's Curse is a disease created by a druid to enact vengeance upon orcs who desecrated his altar.

Mode of transmission. The disease is spread by purple, infected fleas that travel upon small animals, such as rats.

Initial symptoms. The symptoms start 5 to 6 days after a creature is infected. They develop fever, nausea, and photophobia (sensitivity to light). Soon after, the lymph nodes in the neck get swollen and start bleeding. Most die from bleeding out in 2 or 3 days.

Struggling against the disease. Any creature affected by the disease has disadvantage on Perception checks while in sunlight. Creatures who are bleeding must make a **DC 10 Constitution saving throw** every hour. On a failed saving throw, their maximum health is reduced by 5. The **DC** is increased by 2 every 6 hours, even if the creature makes its previous saving throw.

Penetrative disease. Abilities and spells that remove disease, such as lay on hands or cure disease only give a temporary break to the disease's progression. Any time a cure disease spell is cast on a creature, the **DC of the Constitution saving throw** does not increase by 2 for the next 6 hours.

Making the cure. The cure can be made by brewing a tea from a rare herb known as sparkleaf. To brew the tea, a creature proficient in Medicine or with an herbalism kit must succeed on 3 of 5 **DC 16 checks** with the corresponding skill.

Run Times

Part 1: 30 minutes ± 15 minutes

Part 2: 2.5 hours, ± 30 minutes

Part 3: 1.5 hours, ± 30 minutes

Part 4: 1 hour, ± 15 minutes

Epilogue: 15-30 minutes

Leveling Up

Milestones or Experience Points (XP) may be used to level up in this adventure. Feel free to use or modify any system you wish to manage experience for your group.

Character Death

If any of the characters should die, they can be replaced by "Harper Agents" sent by Thelon Lonathar, the initial story hook (see Part 1. The Paper Bird Consultation).

Synopsis

Rise of the Druid's Curse is made up of the following five parts:

Part 1: The Paper Bird Consultation

The party is summoned to a meeting with the Harpers to investigate strange occurrences in the Field Ward. Thelon asks the party to go in his stead to find the answers to their following questions: where is the missing Harper operative, why is the ward being quarantined, and what is the strange illness that seems to be taking hold?

Part 2: The Field Ward Purification

The party reaches the Gnaughty Gnome and finds Elenaril, the lost Harper operative. She explains that there is a terrifying disease surging through the ward, and that she believes the Gnaughty Gnome Inn is the origination place for the disease. The party investigates a few surrounding places for answers. By the time the party figures out the source of the sickness, it is estimated that 15,000 citizens have already succumbed to the Druid's Curse. Waterdeep prepares to dispense a cleansing of the ward by fire. The party races to escape the condemned Field Ward before the eradication takes place.

Part 3: The Badgerboar Mill Conflagration

After escaping the Field Ward and the confines of Waterdeep, the party must make its way to the source of the Druid's Curse. The party starts to see Elenaril fail and knows that time is running short for her. On the way to Badgerboar Mill, a few encounters take time and resources from a pressured party. Once there, the party must deal with Finnus and Gnasher and find a way to destroy the tainted food supply.

Part 4: The Sparkleaf Concoction

The source of the Druid's Curse is eliminated! The party can't celebrate for long as they desperately search for the cure–Elenaril and the infected party members are doomed without it. They search for the elusive sparkleaf, a rare flower that grows on a frightening shambling mound and hope to concoct an antidote before the Druid's Curse claims them!

Epilogue: After the Adventure...

A few loose ends are tied up, and hooks for continuing the adventure presented.

Adventure Adaptability

Although Rise of the Druid's Curse takes place in the city of Waterdeep, it can be easily adapted to any city or urban location by simply changing the name of the city and manipulating the adventure elements presented in this narrative. The factions (specifically, the Harpers, Gray Hands, and the Lords' Alliance), NPCs, locations, and the guilds may all be renamed as it fits your current adventure.

Waterdeep

Rise of the Druid's Curse takes place in the city of Waterdeep, the City of Splendors. This bustling metropolis is one of the largest and robust port towns in the northwestern coast of Faerun, called the Sword Coast. Waterdeep has eight main wards, or sections: the Sea, North, Castle, Trades, Southern, Dock, City of the Dead, and the Field Wards. Each of the wards has its own ambience and personality. The wards used in this adventure are the North Ward, where Trollskull Manor, the home base of the party is located, and the Field Ward, "ground zero" for the Druid's Curse.

Caution

Some of the content in this adventure can be graphic and disturbing. The adventure contains descriptions of the Druid's Curse, a virulent disease, the ruthless behaviors of citizens and rulers in a pressurized society, and the eradication of a ward's population to contain the disease. Talk to your players, be sensitive about this, and alter the information if needed to make it more suitable to their feelings.

Part 1: The Paper Bird Consultation

Please read or paraphrase the following:

For a firstday of the week, it seems unusually quiet around Trollskull Manor. The familiar smells of your home, however, are not present this morning. Your maidservant, Lloren, normally would have had your favorite cheeses and meats, a few eggs, as well as a whistling pot of tea ready for you by this time. But today, she isn't here. *"Perhaps the market was crowded today, and she is just running late."*

Like most of the help in the North Ward, Lloren lives in the dejected area in the northern part of Waterdeep known as the Field Ward. It is often the living area of refugees and the downtrodden. Those that live there hope to make enough to move to another "higher" ward, like the Dock Ward or even the Southern Ward.

A small paper bird, folded from what appears to be fine linen parchment, flies into the room, sparkling as it beats its pleated wings, until it rests on the table before you. When it is finally still, it magically unfolds before you, and reveals a note written in the formal handwriting of an educated elite:

On behalf of the Harpers, I would respectfully request your presence for parlay at the Lightsinger Theater in the Sea Ward. Please use the side entrance and meet me in the under-stage. Respectfully yours, Thelon Lonathar

As if on cue, a cart-driver enters the manor, and says, *"Did you order a ride to the Sea Ward? Should have you there in no time, I will!"*



Arriving at the Theater

It takes about thirty minutes to get to the theater. Feel free to describe the ride from a middle-class neighborhood of the North Ward, to the extravagant streets of the Sea Ward. The group passes extravagant temples, guildhalls, and lush parks before coming to the posh Lightsinger Theater.

Entering the Theater

As the party enters the side entrance, the light of day gives way to the darkness of the theater. Oil lamps dimly light the back rooms where costumes and props are kept. Ropes and pulleys fill the back of the stage, where a staircase in the very back goes downstairs to the control area under the stage.

Meeting Thelon Lonathar

In the dim light under the stage are the shadows of levers, counterweights, and ropes. A trapdoor in the ceiling is attached to a lift apparatus in the middle of the room. An elf quietly steps from behind the lift and addresses you, *"Thank you for coming on such short notice. My name is Thelon, and the Harpers would like to hire you to investigate some curious incidents happening in the city. May we talk for a minute?"*

Profile: Thelon Lonathar.
Thelon is an elvish mage, who is a member of the Harpers and the Watchful Order of Magists and Protectors. He is polite and calm but also direct and pragmatic. He wishes to hire the party because they seem to be competent adventurers, but also because he doesn't want to risk losing any more Harper operatives. He believes that the good of the larger group overrides the will of a single person. However, he is not ready to lose his missing sister, Elenaril, who is in the predicament in the Field Ward.

In the discussion with Thelon, relay the following information as needed to the party:

- *"The Lightsinger is one of many bases of operation for the Harpers. What do you think of it?"*
- *"The reason why we have called you here, is that our network has caught wind of rumors that strange things are happening in Waterdeep, specifically, the Field Ward. "*
- *"We have seen all the gates in the area, the Troll and the North gates, and those that enter the North and Sea Wards, close. No one is allowed in or out."*
- *"Some of our agents within the Gray Hands, the protectors of Waterdeep, say that Vajra Safahr, the leader of the guardians has issued a quarantine of the Field Ward. She is also referred to as the Blackstaff."*
- *"There are Gray Hand patrols in the streets enforcing the quarantine."*
- *"There is an operative that was sent to an inn, the Gnaughty Gnome, where we think the sickness originated. We don't know what her findings were, or if she is still ok. The operative's name is Elenaril, and she is my twin sister."*
- *"The Harpers would really appreciate finding out what is happening in the Field Ward and locating our operative."*
- *"I have a pair of sending stones (DMG p199); I will keep one, and I'll give you the other. Once activated, you can speak 25 words through the stones, once per day. Only use them when you know what is happening and when you find my sister."*
- *"The Harpers have a map of the sewers that should get you to the Gnaughty Gnome.*
- *"You will be compensated for your efforts, when you return."*
- *"You should leave as soon as possible. I have a dreadful feeling about this."*

Traveling back to Trollskull Manor

It takes about forty-five minutes to get back home, because of the increased traffic of the afternoon. This may be a good time for the group to discuss what they think about what is going on, if they haven't done so already.

Part 2: The Field Ward Purification

After the party reaches Trollskull Manor, they can ready their equipment, and head to the sewer entrance to the east on Trollskull Alley.

As the party readies to enter the sewers, read or paraphrase the following:

Downstairs, there are more patrons here now than before. It is still short-staffed, as Lloren has not returned to work.

The sewer access is east of the manor, down Trollskull Alley.

When they reach the bottom, they should decide their marching order, and who is reading the map. The assumptions are that the sewers are dark, and are 10 feet high, and 10 feet wide.

Consider travelling through the sewers as a "contest". The map reader must carry the map in one hand, and a light source in another and must make three successful **DC 11 Intelligence (Investigation) checks** to find their way out of the sewers. It is possible another party member to trade places and read the map. For every check that is failed, they will have a 50% chance of having an encounter (see Sewer Encounter Chart). Also, note that for each encounter, there is a roll to see if the party noticed the group, or if caught by surprise.

The group *must* have at least one encounter before reaching the Gnaughty Gnome. This encounter should be the first encounter of the Sewer Encounter Chart (next page).



d6	Sewer Encounter Chart
1	3 **Swarm of Rats** (*MM* p339), 3 **Wererats** (*MM* p209), **DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check** for surprise
2	6 **Giant Spiders** (*MM* p329), **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check** for surprise
3	1 **Bandit Captain** (*MM* p344), 1 **Bandit** (*MM* p343), **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check** for surprise
4	1 **Swarm of Bats** (*MM* p337), 1 **Vampire Spawn** (*MM* p298), **DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check** for surprise
5	4 **Zombies** (*MM* p316), 2 **Ogre Zombies** (*MM* p316), **DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check** for surprise
6	None



Arriving at the Gnaughty Gnome

When the party arrives at the Gnaughty Gnome, read or paraphrase the following:

> It is evening when you reach the point on the map indicating the location of the Gnaughty Gnome. You know you are in the right place when you see an inconspicuous trap door in the ceiling. Hoisting one another up, you climb into what appears to be a small store room. It is very quiet in the inn.

The Gnaughty Gnome is comprised of 4 main areas: the storeroom, kitchen, dining area and bar, and the guest room.

Storeroom

Read or paraphrase the following:

> The storeroom is a 20-foot by 30-foot room, with shelving full of foodstuffs, fruits and nuts, and various salted meats. A set of stairs appear to rise to the kitchen upstairs. A few large sacks of flour lie on the ground, next to some large barrels of ale.
>
> If the party searches here, they will find that the sacks of flour have the letter "B" on the outside.

If the party searches here, they will find that the sacks of flour have the letter "B" on the outside.

If the party specifically searches the sacks of flour, they will find that the flour is about half gone, and that there is a dead rat inside. They also notice small purple fleas in and around the bag. The insects are dead.

Kitchen

Read or paraphrase the following:

> The 20-foot square kitchen of the Gnaughty Gnome is simple, if not a bit unkempt. Dirty glasses and tableware lie scattered about on the counter next to a tub full of dirty dishwater.
>
> A cold brick oven, with a pile of wood on the floor, contain a few burnt loaves of bread, and food is lying about. A horrific-looking, dead dwarf sits on the floor in the corner of the room. He wears an apron, has flour on his arms and chest, and is huddled under a heap of blankets.

If the party searches the dwarf, they will notice that he is pale, and the lymph nodes on his neck are unusually large. The skin around these swollen areas have large black patches with thin tendrils radiating from them and are covered with copious amounts of dried blood. If the party succeeds at a **DC 9 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Medicine) check**, they surmise the dwarf has been dead for about one or two days. If they succeed by 5 or more, they also deduce that the disease is some sort of rare, highly dangerous disease that may be somehow related to the fleas.

Dining and Bar Area

Read or paraphrase the following:

> The 30-foot by 50-foot dining area has three round tables in it. Plates and dishes with the scraps of unfinished meals still rest on the tables; the carcass of a chicken, a few loaves of bread, and a plate full of radishes and carrots. A few of the chairs are overturned, and the room appears to be in some disarray.
>
> The bar area has four wooden stools next to a counter where about a dozen mugs of ale rest in various stages of imbibition.
>
> Across from the front door, a circular stairway goes up to a second floor.

There is nothing of note in this neglected room.

Guarded Door

However, if the party looks out the front door, they will see two heavily-armed Gray Hands stationed outside. They will not allow the group to leave, and will say either *"By order of Vajra Safahr, the Blackstaff, you are ordered to remain in the building,"* or, *"The Blackstaff orders this establishment to be under watch until further notice."* If the party tries to leave, the guards yell

and attract attention of a patrol or two (2 **veterans** and 8 **guards** in each patrol). The walls that surround the Field Ward are also lined with **guards**, **archers**, and **scouts**. Their attention will be also be attracted and will prepare to fire from above as well.

Guest Room

Read or paraphrase the following:

> At the top of the circular staircase, there is a narrow hallway with a door halfway down on the right. At the end of the hall is a small window, under which is an end-table with a small vase of wilted flowers.

The window outside looks over the front door of the Gnaughty Gnome. The two guards can be seen near the door.

When the party goes inside the room, read or paraphrase the following:

> The door opens to a 15-foot by 25-foot room. The ceiling at the door is about 8 feet high. A desk and chair are immediately to the left. A rucksack and a rapier lie on the floor next to the desk. As you look to the right, you see a bed, with an elf on it. She looks as though she isn't healthy. She levels a light crossbow at you, and laboriously breathes as she says in a weak voice, *"Stop right there, and tell me what your intentions are, or I put this arrow through something important."*



Finding Elenaril Lonathar

Profile: Elenaril Lonathar

Elenaril is an elvish bard, who is a member of the Harpers. She is the twin sister of Thelon. She is calm and pragmatic like her brother but tends to have more of a sense of humor in stressful situations. She also has emotions not typical for an elf; she cares a lot about the people of Waterdeep. She helps the party however she can, if she is able, but in her weakened state will not be able to fight.

She is carrying the Druid's curse. She has had a fever and has been vomiting most of the day. If a light source, such as a lantern or torch, is brought into the room, Elenaril covers her eyes and ask them to put it in the hallway.

Learning About the disease

When speaking to Elenaril, relay the following information as needed to the party:

- *"My name is Elenaril. I have been sent here by the Harpers to find out about this illness. Let's just say I think I am now an expert in it."*
- *"I spent a few days in this ward asking about the illnesses and found that this inn seemed to be the place that fell to its effects first."*
- *"Did you look at the dwarf? Jarnath Flintbottom is... er, was... the owner of the inn. He was as stubborn as he was cheap. He completely denied that he was sick, and I watched him literally collapse and die while trying to keep his inn going!"*
- *"Jarnath started to feel sick a few days ago and had symptoms like mine. He went downhill very quickly. I couldn't stop the bleeding, once it started. My spells didn't have their normal effect! I have noticed that my spells temporarily stave off the symptoms, but then they return."*
- *"Other people around the ward are also having the same symptoms."*
- *"I believe the Gray Hands know that the Gnaughty Gnome is where it all started. They have been watching over us and won't let anyone leave."*
- *"I suspect that the disease was introduced into Waterdeep by some outside source. The illness started here. Do you have any ideas or clues where it could have come from? Please look around for me for anything that could be a clue. Let me know when you find something."*

IF the party tells Elenaril about the following:

1. The dead rat and the purple fleas in the flour in the storeroom
2. The flour bag has a "B" on it
3. The sending stone given to them by her brother.

THEN read or paraphrase the following:

> After hearing what you have found, Elenaril's face pales as she speaks to you. *"I have a feeling we are up against something... catastrophic. I think I've read about this in a druidic tome, a long time ago."*
>
> *"I think I need to rest now; I will need my spells to hold off this disease. You should sleep too---we are going to need it. Tomorrow, we can send-stone my brother and tell him what we know. Rest well! I have a feeling we will have a lot to do tomorrow!"*

Sleeping with the Enemy

After the party takes a long rest, read or paraphrase the following:

> You awake to an obnoxious rooster crowing. Elenaril rolls over, barely disguising her irritation at the noise, and says, *"Unfortunately, the chickens of the Field Ward have survived the disease."*
>
> You all begin to stir and wake up.

Signs of Infection

As the group gets up, the DM may tell one or more members of the party that their skin itches. If they decide to see why, the said members find red raised insect bites on their torso, the back of their neck, and around their ankles. If they search around their sleeping areas, they find the same dead purple fleas in their belongings.

Sending Stones

Whenever the party decides to use the stones, they can only send 25 words, or less, until the next morning. After they send their message, read or paraphrase the following (or make up your own appropriate message):

> After a few agonizing minutes, the sending stone begins to glow in a soft blue light, and you receive a message that doesn't sound like Thelon's voice, but in a hollow, raspy, and unnatural tone:
>
> ELENARIL.
> FIFTEEN THOUSAND DEAD.
> HARPERS THINK DRUIDS CURSE.
> BLACKSTAFF WILL ERADICATE WHEN DARK.
> FIND FLEA SOURCE.
> MUST ESCAPE BY BREEZEWAY.
> AVOID GRIFFON CAVALRY.
> RESEARCHING CURE.
>
> The stone then goes quiet and stops glowing.
>
> Elenaril, after hearing the message, sits quietly with her eyes closed for a minute or two before opening her eyes and looking around at the party. She has tears rolling down her cheeks.

Plan of Action

Elenaril has more information after hearing the message. Relay the following information as needed to the party:

- *"I didn't realize there was so many deaths. It's claimed so many..."*
- *"I feared this may be the Druid's Curse, but I wasn't sure. Until I heard how many were dead, that is." Feel free to explain the Druid's Curse to the party at this time (except for the cure).*
- *"Blackstaff oversees the special subset of guards called the Gray Hands. I know her; she is a good person and I know she tries to do the right thing. If she is going to destroy the Field Ward, it's because she knows the situation is dire."*
- *"If we don't find out the source of the disease before we leave, the Druid's Curse may spread to the rest of Waterdeep."*
- *"The Breezeway is the road that travels parallel to the eastern cliff of Waterdeep. Thelon thinks this is the best way out of the town. I am going to have to trust him."*
- *"We'll have to come up with a plan to escape over the cliff edge."*
- *"The Griffon Cavalry will, no doubt, be patrolling the cliffs. We will need to make sure they don't see us escape."*
- *"As far as the cure goes, Harper operatives are the best minds in Waterdeep. I'm sure they are researching this to the best of their abilities. We must now focus on finding the cause."*

Sewer Extermination

If the party opens the trapdoor in the storeroom and looks down, they see a thick, green mist in the sewer. Any character that enters the tunnel must make a **DC 18 Constitution saving throw**. The creature takes 5d8 poison damage on a failed save, and half as much damage on a successful one. This is repeated every turn. Holding one's breath does not mitigate this damage.



Waterdeep's Watchful Order of Magists and Protectors have moved into the sewers and cast *cloudkill* to eradicate everything in the sewers and prevent escape by anyone in the Field Ward. Elenaril (or the party) may figure out why Thelon, who belongs to the Watchful Order, told her to go over the cliff instead of through the sewers.

They will rest today, to prepare for the eradication of the Field Ward tonight. They want to wait until people are asleep before, as humanely as possible, annihilating them.

Abandoned Posts

In the early afternoon, Elenaril looks out the window, and notices that the guards are gone. She does not think this is necessarily a good thing. In truth, they are withdrawing as to not be destroyed in the upcoming cleansing of the Field Ward.

The empty posts and streets allow the party to "move about" in the Field Ward.

Local Places of Interest in the Field Ward

Elenaril is familiar with a few places around the neighborhood. Now that they are free to travel around the ward, she recommends that they try to find the source of the disease first. She is happy to tell the party how long it takes to travel to each location.

Greta's Sundries

Greta's isn't the most comprehensive general store in Waterdeep, but for the people here, it is an inexpensive alternative to the North and Sea Ward prices.

When the party travels to Greta's Sundries, read or paraphrase the following:

> You come to street named The Fieldway, what one would loosely call 'the market area' of the Field Ward. For three or four blocks, it has wide streets that the people find agreeable to set up their street carts of food, stands with handmade goods, and makeshift stages for musical and acrobatic shows. In Waterdeep, they call this mystifying assembly, the "Pretenders' Bazaar".
>
> Today, the streets are empty, except for a confused old woman, obviously hallucinating, stumbling through the streets. She beckons a non-existent dog to come to her, as you see blood weeping from black, necrotic sores on her neck. You can smell them from across the street.
>
> A wooden sign hangs over a respectable-looking store that reads "Greta's Sundries". The front windows are broken, and much of the merchandise in the window-displays are missing. The front door creaks as it swings open and closed.

Looters Beware

When the party enters the store, it is in complete disarray: display cases are smashed and overturned, barrels of food pillaged, and garbage lying about. There are two dead bodies on the floor, each with a crossbow bolt protruding from their body; one is a halfling, the other a human.

Greta (**guard**, *MM* p347), the dwarven owner of the shop, is hiding in the corner. If the party succeeds on a **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check**, they will see Greta behind a stack of barrels. She has a crossbow, cocked and a bolt notched in place, leveled at the party.

If they haven't seen her right away, Greta says to the group,

> *"One step further, and you'll have another hole in your body Moradin didn't give ya'."*
>
> A red-haired dwarf coughs and wipes off her pale brow before nodding her head towards the door. *"Why don't ya' just turn around, and leave this place, before I do something you'll regret."* She covers her mouth and coughs again. This time, a fine blood mist sprays from between her fingers. She looks down at her hand, wipes it on her shirt, and shrugs at you before saying, *"Unless ya' want to buy somethin'?"*

Shopping

She protects what is left of the store with great ferocity. She can be convinced to put her weapon down on a successful **DC 12 Charisma (Persuasion) check**, or if the party wishes to purchase her goods. She will not be frightened easily, unless the party succeeds on a **DC 18 Charisma (Intimidation) check**.

If the party can calm Greta down, she will relay the following information to the party as needed:

- *"What is your intention here? To steal?!"*
- *"I came here after I heard rumors that people were looting my store for food and medicine. It looks like they decided to take everything else they wanted, too. After all these years of serving this community, this is what I get?"*
- *"If you want something from the store, you can BUY it. I don't care if the end of the world is happening or not."*
- *"By the way: crossbow bolts are NOT for sale." She pats her crossbow. "Here is what isn't stolen, if you want it".*

Gear Available at Greta's Sundries

Backpack	2 gp	Ball Bearings	1 gp
Basket	4 sp	Bedroll	1 gp
Blanket	5 sp	Bucket	5 cp
Chain (10 ft.)	5 gp	Climber's kit	25 gp
Crowbar	2 gp	Grappling hook	2 gp
Ladder (10 ft.)	5 sp	Lamp	5 sp
Manacles	2 gp	Piton	5 cp
Rope, hempen	1 gp	Sack	1 cp
Spikes, iron (10)	1 gp	Tent, two-person	2 gp
Torch	1 cp		

- *"Is that all you need? Thank you for shopping at Greta's Sundries! Come back soon! If we make it through this, that is..."*

The players may use the items from Greta's in their escape plan. Consider it a puzzle for them to figure out.

Nucklebritch's Bakery

This is a place that may be able to tell the party more about the sacks of flour with the letter "B" on them. It is the only bakery in the Field Ward.

When the party travels to the Nucklebritch's Bakery, read or paraphrase the following:

> After a half-hour of walking, you come across the Nucklebritch's Bakery. It is a small shop cramped between the crude tents and shacks, which serve as the homes of those in the field ward. Muted groans, and occasional cries for help can be heard. For an area this densely populated, it is otherwise strangely quiet. As you push the door in, a small bell rings announcing your entrance. A young human boy, about five years old, darts quickly out of the shop, and runs down the street holding a loaf of bread under each arm. *"Sorry, mister! I got the last ones!"* he yells back at you as he runs out of sight.

Inside the Shop

The shop is a 10-foot by 15-foot room, with a counter and large, empty shelves (where the baked goods used to be) behind it. It smells wonderful in here, which is different than everything else in the Field Ward. There is a narrow doorway that leads to a kitchen with an attached storage area. Many bags of flour with the letter "B" on them lie on the storeroom floor. Rats chew open the bags, eating small piles of flour as it pours out. If the party looks at the rats, they find living purple fleas on them.

Correspondence

A letter lies on the countertop. It is addressed to 'Finnus, Badgerboar Mill, Southcliff Way'. If the group opens the letter, they read the following:

> *"Finnus – Yesterday's shipment of flour is the worst you have sent us yet, as if that were possible. I know that we don't get the best that you have, but how can you in good conscience send us flour sacks with rats in them? They are everywhere! You should be ashamed of yourself. I am writing this letter to tell you we are officially ending our contract. I will be getting my flour elsewhere! Disrespectfully yours, Grunda Nicklebritch"*
>
> *P.S. – I'm reporting you to the Council of Farmer-Grocers and telling the Bakers' Guild about your despicable product. You'll be out of business soon. Have a nice day.*

This letter is the information the party needs to find where the disease originated from.

Lloren's Home

If the party remembers that Lloren, their maidservant, is from the Field Ward, they can try to find her.

When the party travels to Lloren's home, read or paraphrase the following:

> Lloren's home is just as she described: a small yellow shack with sky blue shutters on Stench Alley. The name is well earned, since there is no sanitation system in the ward, and the homes are packed in tight. There is no answer to a knock on the door.

Tragedy

Inside the 15-foot square shack is a desk, a chest, and three bedrolls on the floor. Lloren, her husband Dron, and their daughter Llyleth, are huddled on the floor under the bedrolls. All three are cold and have probably been dead for at least a day.

The Deed is Done

Inside the chest are the clothes of the family, and a few trinkets of sentimental value. There is also a deed for a home in the Docks Ward. By the date on the paper, they would have taken ownership in a few days.

Fizzleshot's Shoppe of Concoctions

Fizzleshot is a bit eccentric, but his heart is in the right place. He's been known to give potions of healing to the poor when the situation is dire.

When the party travels to Fizzleshot's Shoppe of Concoctions, read or paraphrase the following:

> After a while, you find the residence of Fizzleshot's Shoppe of Concoctions on Shanty Lane. You are confident that you found the right place; above the octagon-shaped shop is a 6-foot tall wooden statue of a red potion.
>
> You hear cries for help coming from inside.

Holdup

There are 3 **bandits** (*MM* p343) armed with clubs beating up a gnome. He is crying out, *"Stop! You can take what you need! Take it all! Someone, help me!"* If the party succeeds on a **DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion)** or **Charisma (Intimidation) check**, the bandits stop their attack and try to run away.

Reward

Once the bandits have been dealt with, Fizzleshot relays the following information as needed:

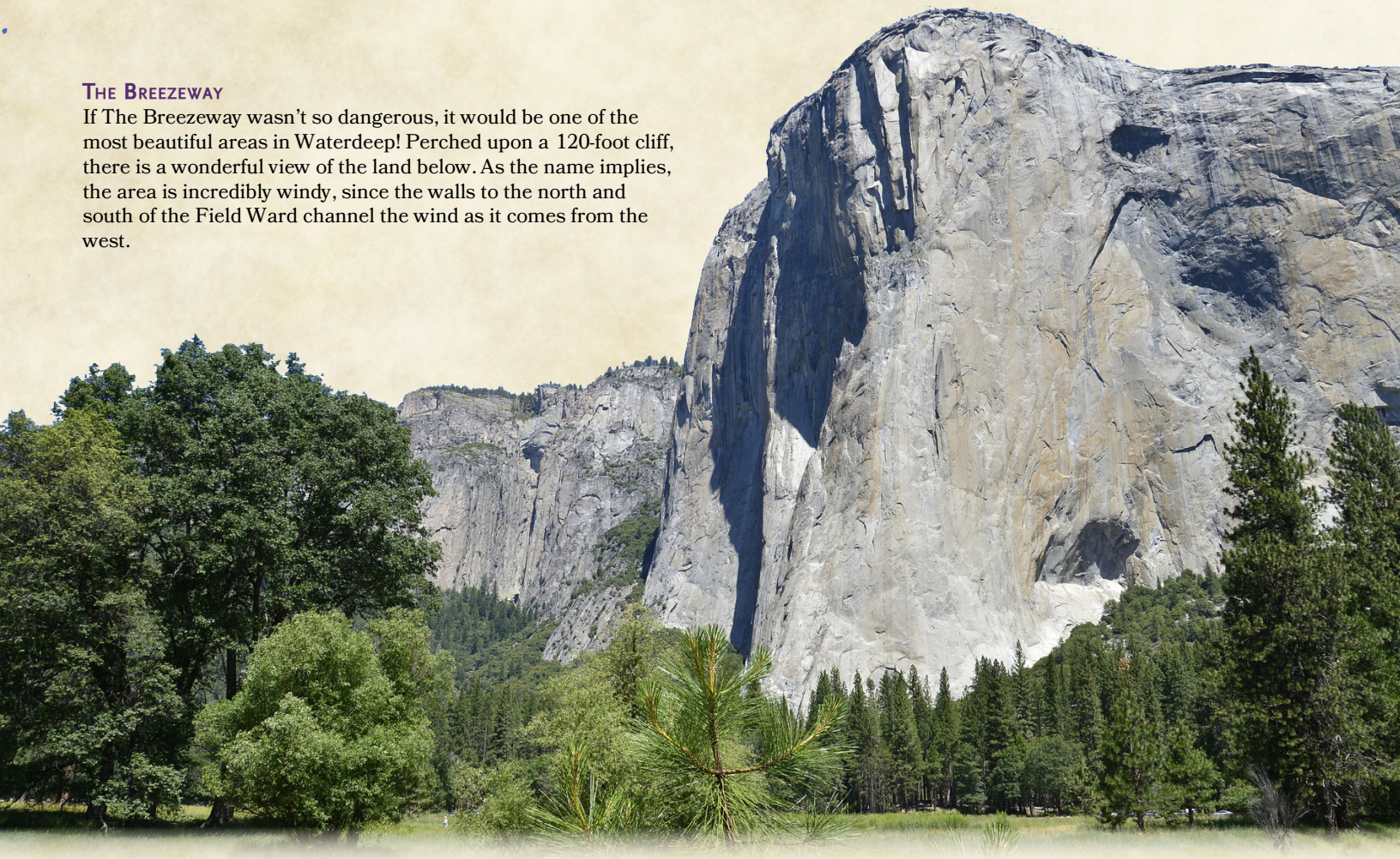
- *"Thank you so much for saving my life. Maybe you shouldn't have. It may be crueler that I die of this disease, than the beating those men were going to give me. By the way, my name is Fizzleshot."*
- *"If you wouldn't mind; I have a healing potion in the blue chest against the wall. Would you please give it to me?" The potion is a* potion of healing. *He drinks it, and he appears to be a bit stronger.*
- *"I don't have anything of high value, but you can take one of my scrolls if you wish. I won't be needing it anymore soon enough."*
- *"I have used up all my potions and cure disease scrolls; I know that I can't hold off whatever this thing is anymore. How else can I help you?"*
- *"Goodbye! And may Glittergold bless you!"*

The party may ask for one 1st level scroll. He will have it and give it to them. As he does, the party notices that his arms have large lumps up to his armpits. Instead of having black spots on their skin, as other humanoids have from the disease, the gnome's spots are yellow in color.

The players may use this scroll from Fizzleshot in their escape plan. Consider it a puzzle for them to figure out. A scroll of *feather fall* would be a good choice.

The Breezeway

If The Breezeway wasn't so dangerous, it would be one of the most beautiful areas in Waterdeep! Perched upon a 120-foot cliff, there is a wonderful view of the land below. As the name implies, the area is incredibly windy, since the walls to the north and south of the Field Ward channel the wind as it comes from the west.



When the party travels to The Breezeway, read or paraphrase the following:

> You can tell that you are getting closer to The Breezeway, as the wind starts to pick up at your back. The houses become fewer and smaller as it gets closer to the 120-foot tall cliff.
>
> The view is breathtaking. To the north, you can see the fields of Amendsfarm, and the Undercliff Way winding around the local farms of the area. It is ironic to see such beauty, when the Druid's Curse is ravaging the Field Ward behind you.
>
> You see three Griffon Cavalry flying from the south that glide towards your position as they ride the tailwind. In perfect formation, they circle around to face you, hovering about 100 feet away. They point at you, and yell, *"Get back from the side of the cliff. If we see you back here, there will be trouble. Go back to your homes. Now!"* The griffons let out a terrible screech, then set off to the east, catching the wind, and gracefully circling about to the south, until you do not see them anymore.

Elenaril warns the group that they should probably go inside one of the structures along The Breezeway until it is almost dark, as to not attract the Griffon Cavalry's attention. There are many empty tents and shacks in the area in which to hide.

> This would be a good time for the player characters to take a short rest, if the DM wishes.

Enacting the Escape Plan

When the party is ready to go on with their plan to escape, read or paraphrase the following:

> You watch as the sun begins to dip below the horizon, and the sky erupts in beautiful shades of orange and pink between the clouds. You look to the towers to the north and west of you and notice that all the Gray Hands are up on the walls. You see the brightly colored robes of the mages as they line up alongside of the Gray Hands. Whatever it is, it is going to happen soon.
>
> As the sun disappears, and darkness falls, you see torches light up and line the tops of the walls.
>
> A few of the sick, stumbling out of their homes, look up at the defenders on the wall, yelling and screaming for mercy. You think you hear someone crying on top of the wall above you.
>
> Elenaril grimly looks at you, and says, *"It is time."* She then says with a grin, *"Last one down is a rotten egg!"*

Escaping the Field Ward

The party must describe and execute their plan to escape. A few examples how to escape could include making a parachute, using a rope to climb down, and using a scroll of *feather fall* to get off the tall cliff at The Breezeway.

Anything the party does under the cover of darkness to attract attention (light a torch, cast a light spell, etc.) may attract the attention of **guards** or the **griffon cavalry**.

When the party escapes, read or paraphrase the following according to what stage of the escape they are in.



Read or paraphrase the following when the party first escapes:

> You see it before you hear it.
>
> Dozens of flashes of white light pop and expose the walls and cast momentary shadows on the ground. The display bewilders the eyes with sporadic blinking, like looking through a giant kaleidoscope while staring at the sun.
>
> A second later, as the flashes expand into yellow and orange spheres, obliterating all they contact, the sound shakes the ground and pierces your body, taking your breath away.

Read or paraphrase the following when the party is halfway through their escape:

> After a minute, you see thirty or forty Griffon Cavalry fly overhead. You see them throwing small objects that explode when they contact the ground. The yelling and screaming you heard at the start of the purification of the ward slowly becomes quieter, giving way to the sound of a giant, raging fire.

Read or paraphrase the following when the party finishes their escape plan:

> When you look finally back at the City of Splendors, you are awestruck with how big the fire is compared to the city; the flames stretch out above the walls. Black smoke pours from the Field Ward, fills the sky, and obscures the view of parts of Waterdeep from view.
>
> Elenaril looks at you, sensing your concern and confusion, and says, *"As horrific as this is, Waterdeep is not out of danger yet. If we want to save her, we need to keep going."*

Injured Griffon

Read or paraphrase the following:

> About 200 feet from the cliff's base, a badly burned griffon is laying on the ground, struggling to get up. Every so often, the distressed beast lets out a loud screech, and is looking up as if it wants to get the attention of its masters.

If the players look closer at the **griffon** (*MM* p 174), it has a finely crafted leather harness.

If the players succeed on a **DC 15 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check**, they calm down the bird and make it more comfortable. If the players heal or aid the griffon, it flies back up into the air, towards Waterdeep.

The party may also attack the griffon and kill it. It is considered incapacitated and has 10 hp.

Planning the Next Move

Read or paraphrase the following:

> After sneaking away and putting some distance between you and Waterdeep, Elenaril goes to one knee. She is breathing quite heavily and is sweating profusely. Her color is horrible.
>
> She looks up at you, and says, *"I can tell the disease is progressing. We must move with purpose. I can feel the Curse gaining on me. And I'm afraid in a day or two, you will be in the same boat as me. Let's hope my brother has some answers for us in the morning. We need to get to the Badgerboar Mill!"*

Part 3: The Badgerboar Mill Conflagration

The Need for Sleep

As stated in the *Xanathar's Guide to Everything:*

"A long rest is never mandatory but going without sleep does have its consequences. If you want to account for the effects of sleep deprivation on characters and creatures, use these rules.

Whenever you end a 24-hour period without finishing a long rest, you must succeed on a **DC 10 Constitution saving throw** or suffer one level of exhaustion.

It becomes harder to fight off exhaustion if you stay awake for multiple days. After the first 24 hours, the **DC** increases by 5 for each consecutive 24-hour period without a long rest. The **DC** resets to 10 when you finish a long rest."

The levels of exhaustion and their effects are as follows (*Player's Handbook*, p. 291):

1. Disadvantage on ability checks
2. Speed halved
3. Disadvantage on attack rolls and saving throws
4. Hit point maximum halved
5. Speed reduced to zero
6. Death

Finishing a long rest reduces a creature's exhaustion level by 1, provided that the creature has also ingested some food and drink.

> If the party has not finished a long rest for 24 hours (or so), feel free to give the PC's one level of exhaustion.

Traveling to Badgerboar Mill

It takes a total of 8 hours to travel to the Badgerboar Mill.

Found by the Captain Kooloru

As the party is traveling to the mill, Captain Kooloru of the Griffon Cavalry finds the group. Read or paraphrase the following:

> After a few hours into the journey, you see a beast flying towards you, from the north. It makes a direct path towards the party, as it gets larger rather quickly, until you can recognize the animal as a griffon.
>
> In a matter of a minute, it rushes 50 feet over the top of you, when you see a humanoid jump off the back of the griffon, stretch its wings majestically, and gracefully glide down to the surface in front of you. The griffon mount lets out a piercing screech as it circles about.
>
> When the pilot reaches the ground, she takes off her helmet to reveal a grey-feathered aarakocra. Her beak is masked loosely with cloths, which are covered in soot and ashes. She scratches the ground, ruffles her feathers, and turns her head back and forth to get a good look at you.
>
> She then addresses you in common with a pebbly voice, *"Am Captain Kooloru. Must stop!"*

Profile: Captain Kooloru

Captain Kooloru is an aarakocra soldier of Waterdeep. Her variety is that of the pigeon, who is not averse to the ways of the city, like most aarakocra are. Kooloru helps train the griffons for Waterdeep's Griffon Cavalry. Her natural way with the birds has made her an invaluable instructor within the guard. For this reason, she rose in rank quickly and is widely known as the best griffon trainer and rider. She is lawful to a fault; she follows every order she receives to the last detail. As she speaks, she turns her head to the left and right and coos like a pigeon. When upset, Kooloru scratches at the ground with her clawed feet, flaps her wings, and ruffles her feathers.



The friend of my friend is...my enemy?

Relay the information from Captain Kooloru as needed:

- *"Follow you when you escaped from Waterdeep. Very sneaky. Are infected. Should not have left. Spread the disease."*
- *"Cannot go. Endanger Waterdeep. Stay contained."*
- *"Cavalry incoming. Cannot escape. You must be stopped."*

If the party succeeds at a **DC 25 Charisma (Persuasion) check**, she understands that they are trying to help Waterdeep. If the party saved the injured griffon (the griffon told Kooloru about the party helping it), subtract 5 from the **DC**.

Thundertalon

If Kooluru engages the party, her griffon, **Thundertalon**, lands after one turn near Kooloru and engages and helps her master.

Run to fight another day

Kooluru is smart enough to get away when her hit points get to half (or so) of her maximum. She rides Thundertalon (if still alive) or flies off on her own. Kooluru, dissatisfied by her defeat, desires to hunt down the party later, when she has had a chance to recover from the skirmish.

Girl alone along the road

As the party travels to the mill, a young halfling girl, Lilda, is found by the road by herself. Read or paraphrase the following:

> As you walk along, you hear crying of a little girl. As you get closer, you hear the noise coming from some tall grass near the side of the road.

If they search through the grass, they find Lilda crouching among the grass, with her hands covering her face. About 8 years old, the 2-foot tall halfling child is wet and cold.

If the party speaks with Lilda, relay the following information as needed:

- *"Who are you? Are you going to hurt me?"*
- *"I am alone. As we were walking back home to Undercliff Village, my mum and I were attacked by horrible creatures! She told me to run and I ran and ran until I was too tired to run anymore. I run faster than my mum. I heard her screaming as I ran away! I couldn't do anything to help her!"*
- *"The monsters burst from the ground! They made clicking noises and loud shrieks. It looked like they had many legs, and pinchers for teeth. That is all I could see before I ran."*
- *"Please help me find my mother! Save her before it's too late!"*
- *"I can probably find where I ran from, but... I'm not exactly sure. I was so scared!"*



The Monsters' Lair

When the party reaches the point of the monster attack, read or paraphrase the following:

> When you finally retrace the steps of Lilda, you come to the spot of the attack. Lilda begins to softly cry again, *"I don't see my mother. Please hurry!"*
>
> About 10 feet from the road's edge is a raised mound of earth about 4 feet tall and has a hole in the middle that is about 5 feet in diameter. It leads underground.

If the party makes a successful **DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check**, they will recognize the pile of earth as an **ankheg** (*MM* p21) mound.

The tunnel is a wandering pathway of an ankheg colony. If the party decides to go inside the tunnel, read or paraphrase the following:

> The soft-walled tunnel angles downwards about 20 feet, before leveling off and extending another 30 feet. You hear soft clicks, snaps, and clacks as you continue down the passageway, before opening into a 30-foot diameter room with an 8-foot tall ceiling. Before you, you see giant insects digging away at the walls of this room. There is an exit on the opposite side of the room.

Busy Bugs

The ankheg do not hear the party traveling down the tunnel unless the party fails a **DC 11 Dexterity (Stealth) check**, or the party was not being stealthy. Once the party enters the room, the ankheg notices them and engages. The number of ankheg in the room can be determined by the chart below:

Party APL	Number of Ankheg
4-5	3
5-6	4
7-8	5

When the conflict is over, the party may continue down the exit, to the next room. When they do, read or paraphrase the following:

> After dealing with the insects, you travel down the next pathway, which twists and turns for about 60 feet, until it opens into a smaller room. There is a large pile of debris in the center of the room. There are no other exits leading out of this room.

Burial Mound

The mound of trash is the remains of animals, ankheg, and other unidentifiable creatures. If the party searches through the pile of carcasses, they find a halfling that resembles the description of Lila's mother. If the party makes a successful **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check**, they also find a severed human hand with a blue spinel ring on its finger that is worth 500 gp.

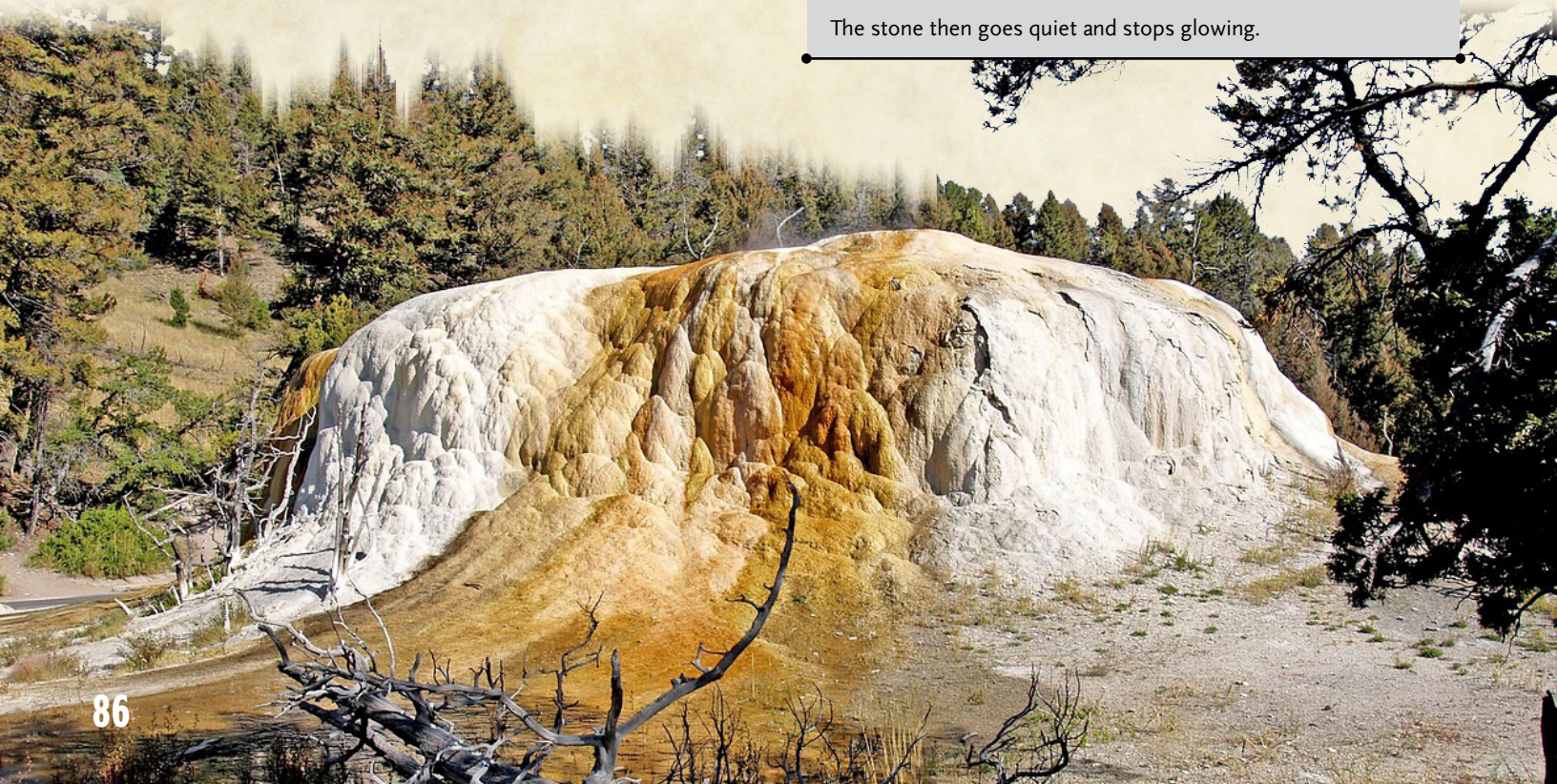
Break the Bad News

When Lilda finds out about her mother, she is devastated. She tells you where her home is, and that she wants to go home. She can find the way. Her father, Narbo, answers the door, and is relieved to see Lilda, but is overwhelmed to hear of his wife's death. He tearfully thanks you and gives you what he has, a purse with 5 gp and 11 sp, as a reward for saving Lilda.

Second Message with the Sending Stones

Elenaril may remind the party that they may use the stones at this time. After they send their message, read or paraphrase the following (or make up your own appropriate message):

> A few minutes go by, and the familiar glow of the sending stone shines as you receive a message that resonates in its hollow, raspy, and unnatural tone:
>
> NICE ESCAPE.
> FIELD WARD GONE.
> THIRTY THOUSAND DEAD.
> RESEARCHED CURE.
> MAKE SPARKLEAF TEA.
> PURPLE FLOWER ON SHAMBLING MOUND.
> UNSURE LOCATION.
> GRIFFON CAVALRY HUNTS YOU.
>
> The stone then goes quiet and stops glowing.





The Badgerboar Mill

When the party reaches the Badgerboar Mill, read or paraphrase the following:

> As you approach Badgerboar, you see a huge mill in the center of three storage barns. Off the side of each barn is a very large field, with deprived-looking workers tending to the crops, and loading them into the back of horse-drawn wagons. A few supervisors are heard shouting boorish orders to the workers.
>
> Groups of well-armed guards patrol around each of the barns. The mill itself, sails slowly turning with the wind, also has a group of guards keeping watch by the doorway. You notice several cats around the farm.

Talking to the Help

The workers are tired and demoralized. Finnus, the owner of Badgerboar Mill, works them hard, and does not pay well. It would not take much for the party to pay for information about the farm, the guards, or Finnus.

When talking with the workers, some may not wish to talk to the party, for fear of getting into trouble. When one does, relay the following information as needed:

- *"Hey! Don't let me supervisors see us talk. They will take it ou' on me later, fo' sure. Jus' a minute, then I need to get back to it."*
- *"I'm new here. The last of 'em died suddenly. Bad for 'em, good fo' me, I suppose."*
- *"Funnus always is in the mill. He don't do anything, 'cept count his money, if you know wha' I mean!"*
- *"His buddy Gnasher is a pain in the arse, that one. Like a yappin' dog at the heels!"*
- *"Whatever you do, don't make any short jokes to Gnasher. That man is mad!"*
- *"All the grain is kep' in the barns."*
- *"Now dat' you mention it...I 'ave seen rats in there."*
- *"Nope! No bugs or bites on me!"*

If the party talks too long with the help, a supervisor comes over to admonish the worker and ask the party questions.

Irritable Supervisors

When a supervisor (**commoner**, *MM* p345) notices the party interfering with the help, they confront the party. If the supervisor observes the party meddling around the barn or the mill, they alert the guards (**guard**, *MM* p347) to investigate. Relay the following information as needed:

- *"Hey! Who are you?! You don't belong here!"*
- *"Stop messing with the help! Finnus doesn't like it when they take too many breaks. Then I hear about it from Gnasher. I'm not going there if I can help it."*
- *"Rats? Fleas? What do you think this is, Waterdeep Castle? It's a farm, you fool! Of course, they are around here."*
- *"Purple ones? Oohhh yes, the purple ones! Would you like to look at my flea logbook and see all the pretty color of fleas I've seen, then here you go! Shove off, you idiot."*
- *"The help is dying? Yeah, people die. Next one in. Lots of folks around here want a job."*
- *"You are starting to annoy me with all your questions. Get going, or I'll call the guards."*

Party APL	Total Number of Guards at Badgerboar Mill
4-5	8 (2 at each building)
5-6	12 (3 at each building)
7-8	20 (4 at each building)

Barn Contents

Because the farm is so heavily guarded, in order to sneak inside one of the barns, the party must create a diversion and succeed on a **DC 16 Dexterity (Stealth) check**. Inside are hundreds of bags of grain, stacked up to the ceiling, with the letter "B" on them. A quick inspection reveals rats, infested with purple fleas, inside the barn. Cats are also inside, pouncing on their prey and feasting on the rats.

The guards can be bribed for 10 gp to let you look inside.

Barn Guards

The guards are paid by Finnus to protect the property and goods of the Badgerboar Mill. If a guard comes over to speak to the party, relay the following information as needed:

- *"Mr. Finnus hires us to keep meddlers away from his operation. I suggest you move along."*
- *"If there is something you need from Mr. Finnus, I suggest that you go to the mill, and talk to him yourself. Just leave the help and the property alone, and we'll be fine, friend."*
- *"Mr. Gnasher? Riding on the coattails of Mr. Finnus, if you ask me."*
- *"We don't get paid enough to deal with those two most days."*

Because the guards are used to the insults and threats of Finnus and Gnasher, the party must succeed on a **DC 15 Charisma (Intimidation) check** to scare the guards away. Additional bribes are accepted, if offered, to take a short walk for 10 minutes.

Mill Guards

If the party comes up to the guards at the mill to talk with Finnus, relay the following information as needed:

- *"Who are you? What is your business here?"*
- *"You want to tell him that his grain is infected? Are you guys from the Snobeedle Orchard? You aren't messing with us are you?"*
- *"I can tell you this: You had better not be messing with us. Mr. Finnus doesn't take jokes very well, just sayin'. And I don't want to listen to the bleating of his gnome goat in there, either. Tread lightly, if you are smart."*

If the party threatens or attacks any guard, they call for the others, including Finnus and Gnasher, and a fight begins.

The Mill

Finnus prefers staying in the shade of the mill during the work day. The mill is a 40-foot diameter circular room, with a single entrance door, and a 4-foot diameter grinding stone in the middle. In front of the grinding stone is a desk. Off to the side, near a small window is a table with playing cards on it, surrounded by 5 chairs.

Any person spending more than one turn on top of the spinning stone takes 10d6 bludgeoning damage.

Finding a Wagon

If the party acquires a horse-drawn wagon, it will allow the party on long travels, to sleep in the back, while one drives.

Enter, Finnus and Gnasher

Profile: Finnus

Finnus is an enormous, green dragonborn with beige scars on his face and arms. He is a brute that prefers to use his fists than weapons, because it is more "personal." He does whatever it takes to make a gold piece, and his business ethics are questionable at best. He enjoys intimidating people and is a convincing bully. He enjoys getting into the middle of a close combat situation and uses his sentinel talent to its fullest. He loves fighting with his fists so much, he had a special set of brass knuckles made that have the draconic words "Pain" and "Suffering" engraved into them. Before a fight, he enjoys the dramatic effect of putting them on slowly while taunting his enemies. Anyone who threatens his operation, or his ability to make money, is met with hostility and insults. However, if his life is in danger, he quickly backs down, like a typical bully. If the party looks, they will notice flea bite marks on his arms and neck.



Profile: Gnasher

Gnasher is a gnome who was abducted by goblins when a baby and raised inside the social system of a goblin tribe. Truly, he is a goblin trapped inside the body of a gnome. One day, a raiding party he was in attacked the Badgerboar Mill in the hopes to get food. Finnus singlehandedly killed the party with his bare hands. Gnasher decided to change alliances and serve an obviously superior master. He uses, and abuses, the power afforded to him by Finnus. He is extremely sensitive about jokes of stature, because he thinks it makes Finnus think he is weak. He talks about himself in the third person (i.e. – *"the mighty Gnasher is annoyed with your insolence"*). He often punctuates his sentences, or interrupts his adversaries, with a strum of his lute, or a trill of his flute. Gnasher has flea bite marks on his arms and neck. The party notices the gnome's spots are yellow in color, just like Fizzleshot's from the Field Ward.

Conversation with Finnus and Gnasher

When speaking with Finnus and Gnasher, relay the following information as needed:

- ***F:*** *"Outsiders are NOT welcomed here. So, it better be important if you are bothering me."* ***G:*** *"Gnasher is irritated as well." [strum]*
- ***F:*** *"What?! You are accusing me of having bad grain?! You have the look of a Snobeedle. You will stop at nothing to put me out of business!"* ***G:*** *"Gnasher has insulted a Snobeedle. He will do it again, if need be! [strum loudly]"*
- ***F:*** *"These bite marks? They are mosquito bites. Had them for a few days, and I'm not dead yet! Ha!"* ***G:*** *"The great Finnus, the face-smasher, is unstoppable! [strum]"*
- ***F:*** *"If you are proposing to destroy my barns, you may get to meet "Pain" and "Suffering".*
- ***G:*** *"Oh yes! Gnasher would like to watch that! [strum]"*

Bully the Bully

If the party succeeds on a **DC 17 Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion) check**, Finnus stands down, to the displeasure of Gnasher. Gnasher insults the party, and Finnus, as a result. If Finnus has had enough, he grabs Gnasher, and throws him in the grinding wheel. You hear a cheer and some clapping from outside. On a failed check, Finnus smiles, reaches into his pocket, and in a grand display, slips on "Pain" and "Suffering". He cracks his knuckles, points at a party member, and says, "I'll smash your face first." He then calls his guards and attacks the party.

Burn, Baby, Barn

No matter which way the party burns the barns down, it causes pandemonium. The help runs around, looking for pails to fill with water, as the supervisors shout orders. If the guards are still present, they walk home and talk to one another about finding new work (which they are not too sad about). Giant flames engulf the dry grain and turn into an immense inferno. Black smoke engulfs the whole farm and rises high up into the air.

After describing the scene to the party, read or paraphrase the following:

> An exhausted, but excited Elenaril coughs uncontrollably as she approaches the party. *"Friends, I finally have good news! I have cast a location spell while you were dealing with the Badgerboar Mill. I have detected a shambling mound about 5 miles east from here!"*
>
> For a moment, loses her balance. *"We must hurry now! My strength may fail me soon, if we don't find the cure!"*

Leaving Badgerboar Mill

Read or paraphrase the following:

> The flames and smoke of the Badgerboar Mill are but wisps on the horizon. You see a flawless V-formation of griffons on the horizon, heading towards Badgerboar Mill.
>
> As the cavalry swoops down, you see the familiar explosions obliterating the mill, as they did in the Field Ward. A moment or two later, the soft popping of the explosions is heard, hearkening the fact that the purification of the Druid's Curse continues.
>
> You hear faint screams in the distance. You surmise they are killing every last person at the Badgerboar Mill.

Part 4: The Sparkleaf Concoction

The party continues to travel to the shambling mound to try to find a cure. Read or paraphrase the following:

> After a couple of hours of travel, you begin to feel the effects of the illness: your legs feel heavy, your balance is unsteady, and your body feels chilled. Bright lights cause searing pain, which you can alleviate by covering your eyes.
>
> As you look at Elenaril, you can tell that the Druid's Curse is progressing at an alarming rate. She can't stop coughing. While keeping a lookout on the road, she winces from her clothing rubbing on her swollen neck. Elenaril's energy is clearly running low, and she rests often along the way.

The party now has photophobia. This means, any affected creature has disadvantage on Perception checks while in sunlight.

Travel to the Sunken Grotto

> As the group travels, Elenaril stops, crouches low, and whispers, *"Friends, we are very close. I think it may be just over the hill. I am afraid I cannot help you, as I am too weak. I will stay here until you return. Please hurry, for my death is near!"*
>
> She slowly makes her way to the ground and lies down. You notice that the leather armor she wears is soaked with blood at the neckline and under her arms.

Over the top of the hill is a sunken grotto about 100 feet in diameter. The rocky walls descend about 15 feet to the floor below. Vines and tall weeds overgrow the entire area, making the area difficult terrain. Animal bones are scattered around on the ground.

The **sparkleaf mound** hides near the center of the grotto and attempts to ambush any who enter the area. Because the area is so overgrown, the sparkleaf mound can only be found if the group makes a successful **DC 20 Wisdom (Perception/Nature/Survival)** or **Intelligence (Investigation) check**.

After Defeating the Sparkleaf Mound

Elenaril's symptoms are getting worse, and the Druid's Curse begins to take its toll. How efficient the party is with good decisions and effective ability rolls can make a difference in the progression of Elenaril's disease.





The bleeding phase of her disease begins, and she must succeed on a **DC 10 Constitution saving throw**, or her maximum health will be reduced by 5 hit points. This **DC** is increased by 2 every 6 hours, even if she succeeds on the saving throw. Her maximum hit points are 30, which means she has a minimum of 5 hours to be cured before she dies. Please note that after each heading or subheading, there is a set of brackets with a time inside them. Mark off one box on the "Elenaril Disease Progression Track" below for every hour spent on the event to help keep track of the disease effects.

> If you do not wish to use the time guidelines as stated, or the party uses some other method to solve a problem that is not listed below, the DM can use their judgement as needed to track elapsed time.

Remember: If *cure disease* or *lay on hands* is used on Elenaril, it only keeps the **DC** from increasing for the next 6 hours.

Harvesting the Sparkleaf [+1 hour/try]

Once the party has killed the sparkleaf mound, they must search the monster for the correct flowers. There are hundreds of purple flowers on this type of mound. The sparkleaf flower the party is looking for is a deep, iridescent purple, with lightning-like patterns on its petals.

The party must make a successful **DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check**, at disadvantage if done in the direct sunlight, to find a sparkleaf flower. If the party succeeds by 5 or more, they find 2 sparkleaf flowers; and if the party succeeds by 10 or more, they find 3 sparkleaf flowers.

Brewing the tea [+2 hours/try]

A tea brewed from the sparkleaf flower is the cure for the Druid's Curse. To brew the tea, a creature proficient in Medicine or with the *herbalism kit* must succeed on 3 or more out of 5 **DC 16 checks** with the corresponding skill. If the party is not proficient with either, then Elenaril will attempt to make the tea.

Drink the Tea

When the party drinks the tea, read or paraphrase the following:

> If good medicine tastes awful, then this is the best medicine you have ever had. After 10 minutes, you begin to feel your fevers break, and your energy restored. Elenaril, smiling softly, has a calm about her you have not seen since you've met her.

Elenaril Disease Progression Track

Hour 1	Hour 2	Hour 3	Hour 4	Hour 5	Hour 6	Hour 7	Hour 8	Hour 9	Hour 10	Hour 11
HP DC10	HP DC10	HP DC10	HP DC10	HP DC10	HP DC10	HP DC12	HP DC12	HP DC12	HP DC12	HP DC12

Each box represents one hour; check it off when used. Elenaril starts with 30 HP, unless the party finished a long rest; in that case start with 20. Elenaril must succeed **DC "X" Constitution check**, or maximum hit points go down by 5.

Every 6 hours, the **DC check** goes up by 2. When she reaches 0 HP, Elenaril dies.

Third Message with the Sending Stones

Elenaril may remind the party that they may use the stones at this time. After they send their message, read or paraphrase the following (or make up your own appropriate message):

> A few minutes go by, and the familiar glow of the sending stone shines as you receive a message that resonates in its hollow, raspy, and unnatural tone:
>
> SO GLAD YOU ARE HEALED.
> ALERTING AUTHORITIES ABOUT YOU.
> GRIFFON CAVALRY ALREADY LOOKING FOR YOU.
> THEY DO NOT KNOW YOU ARE CURED.
> BE CAREFUL.
>
> The stone then goes quiet and stops glowing.

Here Comes the Cavalry

A group of twenty cavalry, led by Kooloru (or another rider if she is dead), flies towards the group as they travel back towards Waterdeep. They circle the group overhead before landing, surrounding the group with lances drawn. Kooloru gets off her mount and addresses the group. Please relay the following information as needed:

- *"Hard to find. Worthy opponents. Must destroy disease."*
- *"Words for last kin?"*
- *"You cured?! Likely excuse. Priest will confirm."*

If the party "convinces" Kooloru that they are free from the Druid's Curse, a priest hops down from her griffon, and begins casting a spell.

Elenaril, if alive, may interject, "*Well, I sure hope the cure worked!*", or another witty comment the DM desires.

After one minute, the priest approaches and whispers to Kooloru, who flaps her wings and scratches the ground as she listens. If the party attacks the cavalry, the priest stops the fight, and tells Kooluro her findings. Relay the following information as needed:

- *"Not sure how. You cured."*
- *"Ride to Waterdeep. Many questions."*
- *"Mount griffons. Take you home."*

Ride back to Waterdeep!

Please read or paraphrase the following:

> Each party member climbs onto the back of a griffon behind its rider. With a lurching motion, beating of wings, and screeches of anticipation, the griffons all take off into the air. As the griffons go higher, the grotto and the farms become like specks below.
>
> After a couple of hours, Waterdeep comes into view. Remnants of smoke and ash still rise from the northern end, but the flames are now gone. As the griffon squadron approaches the eastern walls, the acrid smell of the horror sears your nostrils, confirming the unspeakable reality of the past few days.
>
> The griffons coast gracefully as they approach the Peaktop Aerie. As they do, a large group of soldiers, mages, and guards are seen congregating on the landing area.
>
> As you get off your steeds, Kooloru comes over, and says to you, *"Many have questions. No rest yet."* As she says this, the crowd parts as Vajra Safahr, the Blackstaff, and Laeral Silverhand, Waterdeep's Open Lord, slowly walk towards you.

Milestones/Experience Points

If the party is level 5, level them up to level 6.

The DM may also wish to use experience points instead, or any other method they desire.



Epilogue: After the Adventure...

The City of Splendors has a new scar on her face. But in just a few weeks after the "Burning," as the people now call it, life is beginning to return to normal.

Some of the following events may be used for hooks for new adventures. Feel free to use or change the following as needed for your story:

Rebuilding of the Field Ward

Use the following as needed for your adventure to describe the events after the eradication of the Druid's Curse:

- The entire city, for a few weeks, came together to help clear out the Field Ward. The debris is all removed.
- Funeral rituals from all the faiths of Waterdeep are being performed, all forgetting their differences in this time of suffering.
- Artists from the North Ward have erected a stone statue near the Troll Gate commemorating those lost to the Druid's Curse. It could be of a griffon cavalry rider, as they are given the credit for destroying Badgerboar Mill.
- Politicians spew rhetoric and promises about the "New Field Ward". Some may need jobs done to promote their political careers.
- Guilds are eager to get any building contracts for the New Field Ward. They may be willing to hire the party to advance their power and land any lucrative business deals.

Food Prices Soar

If you destroyed all the grain, it causes an economic ripple through Waterdeep.

- Unfortunately, with the destruction of the Badgerboar Mill, prices are noticeable higher, and the people of the Docks Ward are the hardest hit.
- Nearby farmers and landowners rush in to make their claim of the new land, seeing it as a new "business opportunity".
- Owners of the inns and restaurants are raising their prices, and crime has increased in food-related areas of the city.
- All food-associated guilds look for those who may help them with their supply issues.

Business is Booming

Everyone in Waterdeep wants to come to the place where the "Escapers" live:

- Some of the new patrons hold you in high regard, and others see you as glorified lawbreakers.
- For the next month or two, the Trollskull Manor bursts with curious customers and inspired bards. What new people and opportunities will come through the door?
- The manor is highly profitable, and the party gains a sizeable amount of gold from their business ventures. This may attract thieves, or new legitimate or nefarious business opportunities.



Gaining Renown and Rewards

The party earns the following renown for their actions during the adventure:

- **Harpers:** +3 renown; an additional +1 if Elenaril survives. Each player receives 500 gp, and a choice of one of the following: their own set of *sending stones*, a *ring of feather falling*, or 2 *potions of greater healing*.
- **Gray Hands:** +1 renown; -3 if Kooloru is killed, -2 if any guards were killed.
- **Lords' Alliance:** +1 renown for finding the sparkleaf flowers. Laeral Silverhand will pay the party 1000 gp for each flower they currently have, for his "personal supply'. The deal is void after this.
- **Emerald Enclave:** +1 renown for stopping the unnatural event

Lloren's Deed in the Dock Ward

The party has a decision to make, if they investigated the home of Lloren:

- If the deed was found and kept, the party may decide what will be done with the new home. If it is used as a soup kitchen or some other shelter, the party gains +1 renown with the Harpers or Order of the Gauntlet. If used for a front for Waterdeep's shadier factions, the party gains +1 renown with the guild it helps (Bregain D'aerthe, Xanathar Guild, or Zhentarim).
- It has 2 bedrooms and a small kitchen and is located off Cod Lane.

Kooloru

Kooloru will be a regular visitor to the Trollskull Manor. She was impressed by your tenacity and resourcefulness and may ask your help in other affairs.

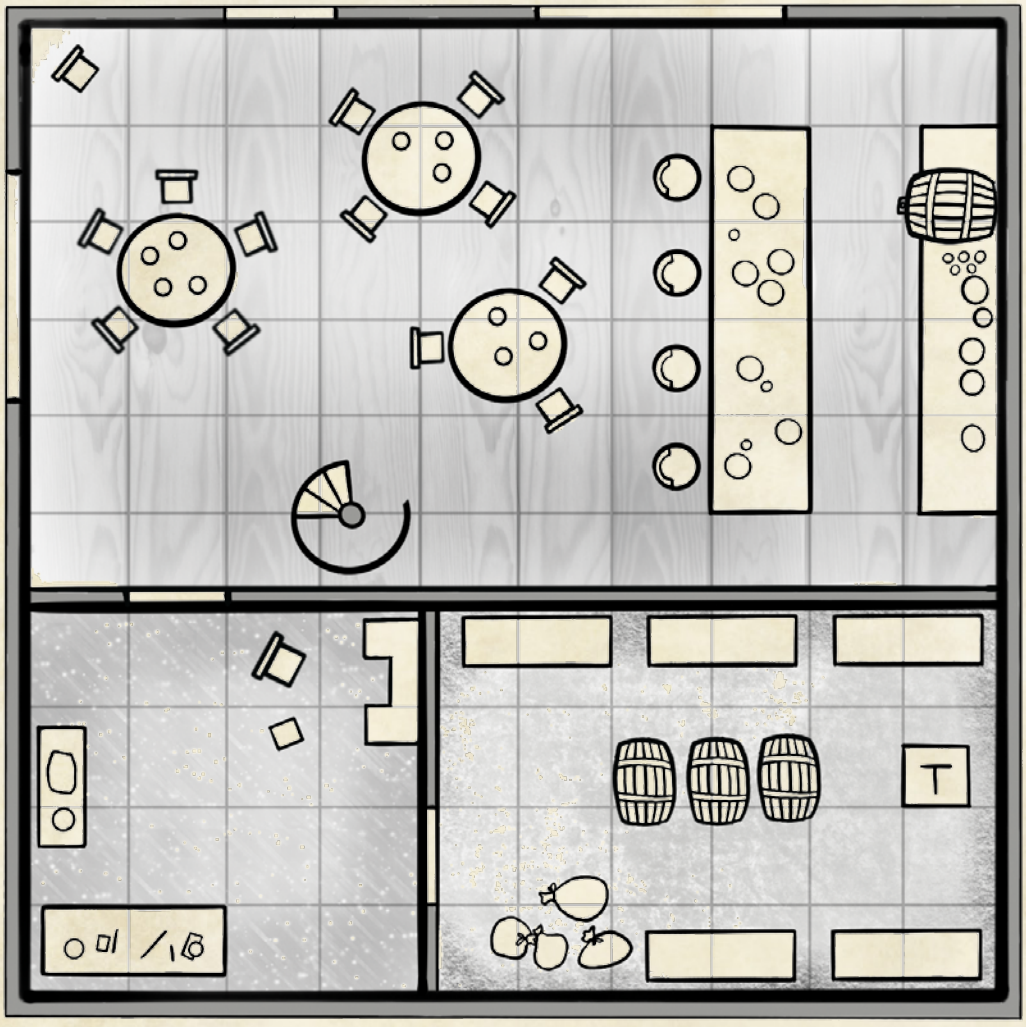
- She offers to instruct the party how to build a rooftop landing area on the Trollskull Manor (costing 1,200 gp). It also has cages for 4 griffons, which she personally offers to train for them, once they are caught. She will not give them any from Waterdeep's forces.
- These griffons will be recognized by the authorities of Waterdeep as "official" flying steeds, if the characters pay the tax, that is.
- Once built, everyone's Animal Handling ability is increased by one.

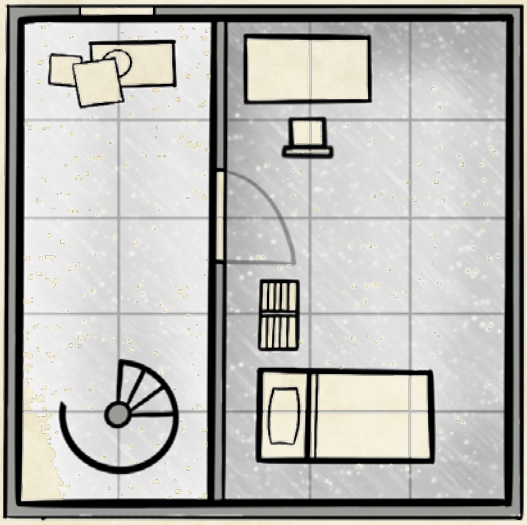


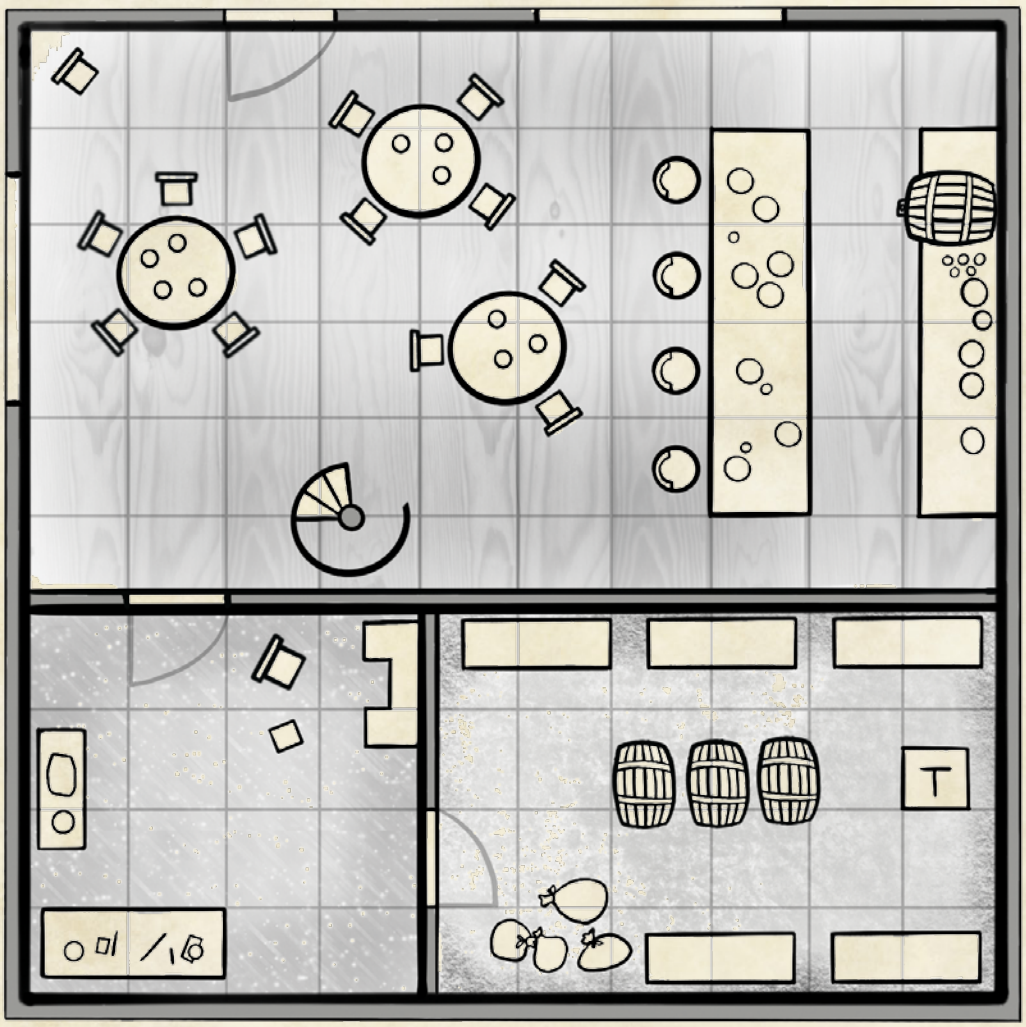
Top Floor (guest room)



Ground Floor






T

Appendix B: Creatures

Ankheg

Large monstrosity, unaligned

Armor Class 14 (Natural Armor), 11 While Prone
Hit Points 39 (6d10 + 6)
Speed 30 ft., burrow 10 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	11 (+0)	13 (+1)	1 (-5)	13 (+1)	6 (-2)

Senses Darkvision 60 ft., Tremorsense 60 ft., Passive Perception 11
Languages --
Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Actions

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) slashing damage plus 3 (1d6) acid damage. If the target is a Large or smaller creature, itis grappled (escape DC 13). Until this grapple ends, the ankheg can bite only the grappled creature and has advantage on attack rolls to do so.

Acid Spray (Recharge 6). The ankheg spits acid in a line that is 30 feet long and 5 feet wide, provided that it has no creature grappled. Each creature in that line must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 10 (3d6) acid damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.



Elenaril Lonathar

Medium humanoid (elf), chaotic good

Armor Class 16
Hit Points 30 (6d8 + 6)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)	13 (+1)	17 (+3)

Saving Throws Str -1, Dex +6, Con +1, Int +1, Wis +1, Cha +3
Skills Acrobatics +6, History +4, Investigation +4, Perception +4, Persuasion +6, Sleight of Hand +6
Senses passive Perception 14, passive Perception 14
Languages Common, Elvish
Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Skilled. Elenaril gains proficiency in any combination of three skills or tools of her choice.

Herbalism Kit

Calligrapher's Supplies

Medicine

Spellcasting. Elenaril Lonathar is a 6th-level spelicaster. Its spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 13, +5 to hit with spell attacks). Elenaril Lonathar has the following bard spells prepared: Cantrips (at will): Message, Minor Illusion, Vicious Mockery

1st level (4 slots): Charm Person, Cure Wounds, Longstrider, Magic Missle, Sleep

2nd level (3 slots): Cloud of Daggers. Hold Person, Lesser Restoration. Locate Animals or Plants

3rd level (3 slots): Fear, Tiny Hut

Actions

Rapier. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., *Hit:* 7 (1d8+3) piercing damage.

Shortbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 80/320 ft., *Hit:* 6 (1d6+3) damage.



Finnus, the Brute

Medium humanoid (dragonborn), chaotic neutral

Armor Class 11 (leather armor)
Hit Points 76 (8d10 + 32)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	8(-1)	18 (+4)	10(+0)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Str +8, Dex -1, Con +7, Wis +1, Cha +2
Skills Athletics +8, Deception +5, Intimidation +5, Stealth +2
Senses passive Perception 11
Languages Common, Draconic
Challenge 2 (450 xP)

"Pain And Suffering". Finnus is wearing a pair of electrum brass knuckles. When he is wearing Pain and Suffering, if he rolls a 20 on his attack roll with an unarmed attack, the target takes an extra 7 bludgeoning damage.

Actions

Action Surge Once per short rest. Finnus can take one additional action on his turn.

Breath Weapon (Green). DC 14 CON saving throw, Range 15 ft. cone, Hit: 3d6 poison damage.

Multiattack. Finnus makes 2 attacks per action.

Second Wind. Once per short rest, Finnus can use a bonus action to regain 1d10 + 6 HP.

Unarmed Strike. : +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., Hit: 6 damage.

Reactions

Sentinel Attack. When a creature within 5 ft. of Finnus makes an attack against a target other than Finnus, he can use his reaction to make an unarmed strike attack against the attacking creature.

Gnasher

Small humanoid (gnome), chaotic evil

Armor Class 15 (leather)
Hit Points 21 (3d8 + 3)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	15 (+2)	8 (-1)	15 (+2)

Saving Throws Dex +4, Con +1, Int +2, Wis -1, Cha +4
Skills Acrobatics +6, Intimidation +6, Performance +6, Sleight of Hand +6, Stealth +6
Senses passive Perception 10
Languages Common, Gnomish, Goblin
Challenge 1/4 (50 xP)

Spelicasting. Gnasher is a 3rd-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 12, +4 to hit with spell attacks). Gnasher has the following bard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): Dancing Lights, Vicious Mockery

1st level (4 slots): Charm Person, Detect Magic. Healing Word, Thunderwave

2nd level (2 slots):

Actions

Crossbow, Light. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 6 (1d8+2) piercing damage.

Flute Power Balad. As a bonus action, Gnasher plays his flute, and if Finnus is within 60 ft. and can hear it, gains an inspiration die (1d6). For 10 minutes, Finnus can add it to one ability check, attack roll, or saving throw. This can be added after seeing the roll, but before knowing the outcome.

Rapier. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 6 (1d8+2) slashing damage.

Griffon

Medium humanoid (any race), any alignment

Armor Class 12 (Half Plate)
Hit Points 59 (7d10 + 21)
Speed 30 ft., fly 80 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)	2 (-4)	13 (+1)	8 (-1)

Skills Perception +5
Senses Darkvision 60 ft., Passive Perception 15
Languages --
Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Actions

Multiattack. The griffon makes two attacks: one with its beak and one with its claws.

Beak. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit,reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) slashing damage.

Thundertalon

Large monstrosity,unalinged

Armor Class 13
Hit Points 95(10d10 + 40)
Speed 49ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)	4 (-3)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)

Senses passive Perception 12
Languages None
Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Keen Sight The creature has advantage on Wisdom checks that rely on sight.

Actions

Multiattack. The creature makes two attacks: one with its beak and one with its claws.

Beak. *Melee Weapon* Attack: +7 to hit, reach 5ft., one target, *Hit:* 8 (1d8+4) damage.

Claws. *Melee Weapon* Attack: +7 to hit, reach 5ft., one target, *Hit:* 11 (2d6+4) damage.

Griffon Cavalary Rider

Medium humanoid (any race), any alignment

Armor Class 17 (Half Plate)
Hit Points 58 (9d8 + 18)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	10 (-0)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)

Skills Animal Handling +3, Athletics +4, Perception +3
Senses passive Perception 13
Languages any one language (usually Common)
Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Actions

Lance. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit (with disadvantage against a target within 5 ft.), reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d12 + 2) piercing damage, or 11 (1d12 + 5) piercing damage while mounted.

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage.

Light Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage.

Reactions

Feather Fall. The rider wears a magic ring with which it can cast the feather fall spell on itself once as a reaction to falling. After the spell is cast, the ring becomes nonmagical.



Captain Kooloru

Medium humanoid (aarakocra), lawful good

Armor Class 21 (studded leather and shield)
Hit Points 94 (10d10 + 10)
Speed 25 ft., fly 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	20 (+5)	13 (+1)	11 (+0)	15 (+2)	11 (+0)

Saving Throws Str +6, Dex +5, Con +5, Wis +2
Skills Acrobatics +7, Animal Handling +4, Athletics +4, Perception +4, Sleight of Hand +7, Stealth +7
Senses passive Perception 16
Languages Auran, Common
Challenge 5 (1800 XP)

Action Surge. Once per short rest, Kooloru can take one additional action on her turn.

Durable. Increases her CON score by 1 (already done). When she erolls a Hit Die to regain HP, the min HP she regains from the roll equals 2.

Extra Attack. Kooloru can attack twice whenever she takes the Attack action on her turn.

Fighting Style - Defence. While wearing armor, Kooloru gains +1 bonus to AC (already added).

Improved Critical. Kooloru's weapon attacks score a critical hit on a roll of 19 or 20.

Indomitable. Once per LONG rest, Kooloru can reroll a saving throw that she fails - she must use the new roll.

Second Wind. Once per short rest, Kooloru can use a bonus action to regain 1d10 + 10 HP.

Tough. Kooloru's HP maximum increases by 20.

Actions

Scimitar, +1. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5ft., *Hit:*9 (1d6+6) slashing damage.

Beak. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5ft., *Hit:* 5 (1d4+3) slashing damage.

Ranged Weapon Attack - Bomb. As an action, Kooloru can light this bomb and throw it at a point up to 60 feet away. Each creature within 5 feet of that point must succeed on a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw or take 3d6 fire damage. She has 3 of these bombs.



Sparkleaf Mound

Large plant, unaligned

Armor Class 15
Hit Points 161 (17d10 + 68)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	8 (-1)	18 (+4)	5 (-3)	10 (+0)	5 (-3)

Skills Stealth +2
Damage Immunities lightning
Damage Resistances cold, fire
Condition Immunities blinded, deafened, exhaustion
Senses blindsight 60 ft., passive Perception 14
Languages -
Challenge 7 (2900 XP)

Lightning Absorption. Whenever the Sparkleaf Mound ts subjected to lightning damage, it takes no damage and regains a number of hit points equal to the lightning damage dealt.

Actions

Multiattack. The Sparkleaf Mound makes two slam attacks. If both attacks hit a Medium or smaller target, the target is grappled (escape DC 14), and the Sparkleaf Mound uses its Engulf on it.

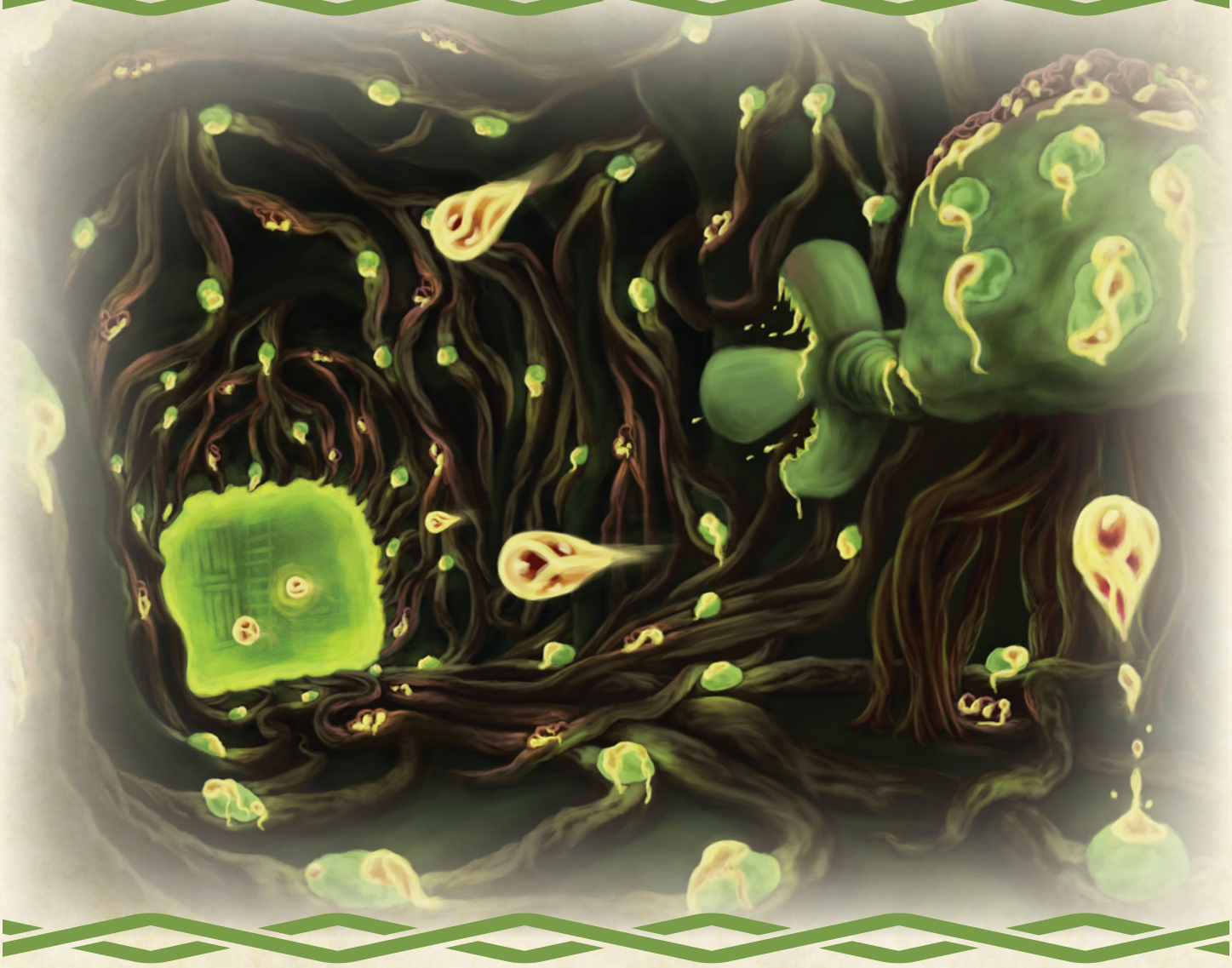
Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target, *Hit:* 13 (2d8+4) piercing damage.

Engulf. The Sparkleaf Mound engulfs a Medium or smaller creature grappled by it. The engulfed target is blinded, restrained, and unable to breathe, and it must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw at the start of each of the Sparkleaf Mound's turns or take 13 (2d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage. If the Sparkleaf Mound moves, the engulfed target moves with it. The Sparkleaf Mound can have only one creature engulfed at a time.

Pollen Eruption (Recharge 5-6). The Sparkleaf Mound opens the purple flowers on its body and forcibly erupts Sparkleaf pollen. Those within a 10 ft. radius must make a successful DC 15 Constitution saving throw, or have an acute allergic reaction that leaves them blinded for 1 turn.



Viral Village



For Levels 5-8

by John Parker

A cleric has tirelessly tended to the medical needs of his fellow villagers for decades. There have been occasional cases of madness among his charges over the years, enough to cause rumors, but now there is an outbreak, including people known for years to be quite sane. Can you discover the source of these terrible troubles and return the village to normal life?

Introduction

This adventure is designed for three to seven 5th-8th level characters and is optimized for five characters with an average party level (APL) of 7.

The player experience with this adventure is primarily the satisfaction of solving a mystery. Since the clues to the mystery are spread throughout the adventure, the DM is advised to read the whole adventure before running it at the table. Difficulty classes (**DC**) for discovering clues are provided but use your best judgement to provide more information. As the characters become familiar with the setting and build on evidence they have collected, they will naturally piece things together more easily. (Don't let the dice be the single determiner of what they discover). There are opportunities for combat and a final battle, but the focus is heavily weighted toward exploration and social interaction. Some ideas for where to take the story next and to escalate the combat focus are presented in "Continuing the Story."

Know Your Party

This adventure involves the exhibition of mental illness and psychotic behaviors. The source is demonic rather than medical, but the effects are similar and are not intended to be comical. This is a case where descriptions rather than depictions in NPC interactions may better serve your game experience.

Some antiquated, and potentially offensive, terms have been used to reinforce the historical understanding of mental health and approach to its treatment. If you or anyone at your table find these terms offensive, you are encouraged to use modern terms.

Adjusting this Adventure

This adventure provides suggested adjustments for smaller or larger groups, characters of higher or lower levels, and characters that are otherwise more powerful than the adventure is optimized for. Additionally, since this adventure relies primarily on investigation and discovery over combat, optional skills checks are provided to accommodate the makeup of your party.

To figure out whether you should consider adjusting the adventure, add up the total levels of all the characters and divide the total by the number of characters (rounding .5 or greater up; .4 or less down). This is the group's APL, which is compared to the adventure APL of 7. To approximate the party strength for the adventure, consult the following table.

Determining Party Strength

Party Composition	Party Strength
3-4 characters, APL <7	Very weak
3-4 characters, APL =7	Weak
3-4 characters, APL >7	Average
5 characters, APL <7	Weak
5 characters, APL =7	Average
5 characters, APL >7	Strong
6-7 characters, APL <7	Average
6-7 characters, APL =7	Strong
6-7 characters, APL >7	Very strong

Viral Village

Slowly drives you into madness and animosity. How fun. This is how a demonic invasion begins, dammit.

Acesius, Malady Codex (regarding Demonic Virulence)

Adventure Background

Malphreen is a remote village with a grim reputation for periodic madness among its inhabitants. Madness would afflict an individual or two each year – the victims would usually recover when they moved (or were forced) away. No cause has been determined, but the village is regarded with some suspicion.

For many decades, maybe centuries, the demon Rut has been creating a portal from the Abyss to the Material Plane through a cave network, which comes closest to the surface and to humanoid population under Malphreen. Chaotic energy leaking through the ground has been causing Demonic Virulence, which is exhibited among the villagers as various forms of madness (see Demonic Virulence in Appendix D: Disease) and in extreme cases, a form of psychosis called Phreen (see Appendix D: Disease).

Within the last few years, the demon has established a portal opening into the root cellar of the village cleric, Xpatimenoi (Xpati). With the portal open, the effects of Demonic Virulence are on the rise, particularly in areas near the portal. Xpati, living right in the wash of the portal, has unknowingly become a *harbinger* of the demon; he executes the demon's will, deceived into believing that it is his own and that he is acting in the best interest of the afflicted.

Fortunately, the Demonic Virulence effects are diminished by the immunizing qualities of a flowering plant, the pepper flower, that grows in the area and is used as a spice in local dishes. Some of the villagers are more affected by the Demonic Virulence than others for various reasons: they might not like the spice, they might be more susceptible to Demonic Virulence than others, or they may have attracted the demon's attention.

Those who show outward signs of the affliction are cast out or worse, so Xpati has established an asylum for them at an old sawmill near his home where he treats the patients with an extract of the plant. Strangely, the sawmill is also right in the demon's path. Xpati is secretly helping the demon raise an army that can be activated once the medication is stopped.

Xpati listens for news about madness in other villages and distributes dried flowers and seeds from the plant to his fellow "healers" who might be combatting a similar outbreak–at least, that is his story.

Demonic Virulence

A full description of Demonic Virulence is available in *The Malady Codex*. Here are some details about how it is exhibited in this adventure:

Exposure

Light, environmental exposure occurs anywhere near the village, seeping through the ground and flowing through the portal, and it escalates anywhere near the pepper flowers due to proximity to the cave network. Acute exposure occurs near the portal. Refer to Demonic Virulence: Diagnosis in Appendix D for instructions on how to determine if a character is affected or, for simplicity, unless precautionary or treatment measures have been taken, each character must succeed on a **DC 15 Charisma saving throw** each hour or effects are exhibited.

Effects

In addition to the Demonic Virulence Madness effects exhibited by the general Malphreen population, Phreen is exhibited by individuals who are contacted directly by the demon to do his bidding. Additionally, you may want to use other expressions of madness as listed in the Madness Effects tables in chapter 8 of the *Dungeon Masters Guide*.

Scope of Epidemic

The villagers are routinely exposed, but the disease remains in check for most of them due to ingesting the pepper flower.

Speed of Progression

The characters start showing symptoms within a day of arriving at the village and within two hours of getting close to the portal.

About Pepper Flower and Calmspice

Pepper flowers and the spice made from dried pepper flowers (calmspice) are distinctive of the local cuisine and used liberally, both for the peppery twist imparted to dishes and a believed calming effect. Very little is known about the plant's origins; it is not indigenous to the area but has grown there, continually spreading to new areas, for several decades. Due to their abnormally large and greedy roots, the plants crowd out other species of plants.

The plant's roots penetrate to the Abyssal Plane and form the support structure of the demon lord's cave network. Aspiring to expand his domain, the demon continues to extend his cave network and, through deception, distribute the plant seeds to establish portals in more populated areas. Seedlings quickly grow roots that seek out the Abyssal Plane, facilitating the demon's expansion plans.

Xpati has studied the plant and disease for years, believing they are connected, but he is one of only a few who are convinced or will admit that the flower's immunizing properties have maintained the sanity of the village population. The immunization and curative effects of the plant result from how the plant processes its food, a process that Xpati had been speculating on when the portal opened into his cellar (see Pepper Flower Morphology in Appendix B: Handouts). The plant's flowers are the synthesis of primal energy and chaotic energy, which aids the patient in reconciling the irrational thoughts and emotions created by those same energies at conflict in their minds.

Adventure Overview

This adventure presents a mystery for the characters to solve. As is the case when researching a disease, the plot changes directions and the characters may be misled into working against their own intent. Presumably, the characters will try to do the right things, but treating disease is complicated and requires research and trials. Depending on their response to the information that trickles out; they may be duped into distributing the plant, which is how the demon infects new areas, or they may try to destroy the plants, which could cause immediate havoc in Malphreen. In any case, the players may feel cheated or railroaded if you are too heavy-handed or there are too many red herrings.

This adventure is presented in three main parts, but this is a loose construction based on the progressive revelation of the true problem to the characters. Depending on the hook and player decisions, the locations may be visited, and relevant clues discovered, in a different order. Locations hold clues that may not be discoverable on the first visit, so characters may visit the same locations more than once to collect additional evidence. Each part includes a summary of clues, suspicions, and deductions the characters should experience for the plot to move forward.





Part 1. Madness Abounds
The characters witness psychotic acts and behaviors of villagers and meet a cleric who is treating patients who have been exiled to an abandoned sawmill in the woods.

Part 2. Cultivating the Cure
The characters discover more about the plant that provides a curative effect and protect a shipment of seeds to another town experiencing similar problems.

Part 3. Treating the Disease
The characters discover that the source of the insanity is a demon's presence, and they learn the cleric's role in the demon's plan.

Adventure Hooks
The characters may be drawn into the adventure in several ways.

Malady Chronicles Campaign
If you are running the Chronicles as a campaign, Acesius and the Iakion may have directed the characters to Malphreen to investigate.

Madness in the Family
Word has reached you through a travelling merchant that your young cousin Ilandra has been suddenly stricken with madness. You journey to her family's village, Malphreen, to see if there is anything you can do to help.

Culinary Connoisseur
The characters enjoy a meal prepared with a rare spice. Bryany Kesav, the halfling chef who prepared the meal is very proud of his new recipe and engages the characters for their opinions. Seeing that the party is quite capable, he asks them to bring him a sack of seeds to plant in his own garden. As far as he knows, the spice is made from the seeds of the pepper flower which grows wild near the town of Malphreen, but the spice is remarkably difficult to acquire; something about brigands waylaying shipments. He will pay the party 200 gp for a twenty-pound sack of viable seeds.

What the...?
If the party is traveling between locations, they may happen upon one of the encounters in "On the Road" and be drawn in to investigate the town of Malphreen which wasn't on their map.

Part 1: Madness Abounds
The implications from the odd behavior of Malphreen residents in the hook might pique the characters' suspicions about a case of mass hysteria, but Demonic Virulence symptoms can be subtle, especially among this highly-medicated population.

Locations
On the Road
For a village of its size, the roads leading in and out are remarkably free of travelers. Crossroads connecting other locations are obviously more traveled. The main road through Malphreen is little more than a cart path. Many of the domestic and commercial structures along the road approaching Malphreen are abandoned; some for a long time and some appear as if the occupants just walked off one day. There are few sounds indicative of civilization along the road, but a perceptive character will notice that beasts and possibly animated plant life have encroached closer than normal to civilization. In areas where the air is calm or there is an abundance of pepper flowers growing near the road, the air is brightened with a pleasant, floral but spicy scent.

As the party approaches Malphrene, they happen upon one of the following encounters. If you used the "Madness in the Family" hook, Ilandra (the victim in these encounters) is the cousin being sought by the party. If the party takes Ilandra into their care, she needs several days to convalesce and is no more aware of the Malphreen situation than other villagers. At the conclusion of these encounters, the party is expected to continue to the Petal Inn but may want to follow Xpati to the sawmill asylum. He will try to discourage them with, *"It isn't necessary. I have everything in hand,"* but won't stop them.

If you want to extend the adventure or need to provoke your players to action, you may want to another of these later in the adventure. In each of these encounters, if a skirmish should ensue, select an appropriate number of **commoners** for the combatants unless noted otherwise. These encounters are intended to challenge the party mentally, not physically.



She's a Witch

Two **commoners** from Malphreen have a young lady bound and are holding her head under water in a cold mountain stream to the point of drowning, then lifting her head barely long enough to take a breath, and then plunging it back into the stream. All the while they are mumbling what sounds like chastisements to their victim. The party may step in to protect the afflicted and as they get closer, the words sound more like a cleansing ritual. The victim is Ilandra and the abusers are her parents, Athyes and Tovia, who are secretly trying to cure her of a mental illness that they believe is caused by demon possession. *"She hears voices that tell her to do things."* In their ignorance, their cure essentially amounts to torture. In the characters' discussion with Ilandra and her parents, it might be difficult to discern who is suffering from delusions. While the characters are witnessing or resolving the dispute, Xpati, the local cleric, rushes to the scene, having heard that Athyes and Tovia were about to do something drastic. If the party hasn't revealed themselves yet, Xpati will detect them and ask for their assistance in restraining the parents. He takes Ilandra into his care, escorting her to the *"sawmill"* and asking the party to ensure that Athyes and Tovia return home. He will look for them at the Petal Inn the next day.

A Hanging Offense

Six **commoners** from Malphreen are preparing to hang Ealhwan, a fellow villager in his late teens. Ealhwan is accused of abducting and possibly killing Ilandra, another young villager, out of jealousy. Ealhwan claims he didn't abduct anyone and doesn't know where Ilandra might be, but the mob is intent on finishing what they started. Ealhwan is obviously distraught and saying anything to avoid hanging. His defense that he hadn't seen Ilandra all tenday and that they were no longer courting is obviously half-truths to any discerning character, but his intent is pure. The party may step in to protect Ealhwan or at least collect information before letting the hanging proceed. Given some support by the characters, Ealhwan fesses up that he had helped Ilandra escape *"this crazy village"* before it claimed her, too—she was starting to hear voices. The lynch mob was hastily formed and although they are acting as one, they have varied and complex purposes; possibly absolving their own guilt, denying any possible problem with the missing person as vicious lies, or punishing the accused for doing exactly what they ultimately confessed—helping the other to escape. While the characters are observing or resolving the dispute, Xpati, the local cleric, rushes to the scene. If the party hasn't revealed themselves yet, Xpati will detect them and ask for their assistance dispersing the crowd. He takes Ealhwan into his care, escorting him to the *"sawmill"* and asking the party to ensure that the mob returns to the village. He will look for them at the Petal Inn the next day. The mob disperses but with the parting warning, *"This isn't over."* If the party wants to locate Ilandra, proceed with "We Don't Want Your Kind."

Brother's Keeper

As the party approaches the village, they hear sounds of a fight in the woods just off the road. Two **demonslave thugs** (see Appendix C: Creatures), patients from the asylum, are brawling, cursing each other, and beating each other badly, potentially fatally. The party might break it up or attack one to protect the other, but as soon as they get involved, the two brawlers will defend each other against the party. If the party delays or withdraws, the brawlers will stop fighting and immediately tend to each other. *"Oh, look. You're hurt. You're bleeding. How did you do that?"* Not as if they buried the hatchet, but like they never wielded it in the first place. While the characters are observing or resolving the dispute, Xpati, the local cleric, rushes to the scene, looking for the two men who had wandered off from the "sawmill." If the party hasn't revealed themselves yet, Xpati will detect them and ask for their assistance. He immediately passivates the brawlers, escorting them back to the sawmill and thanking the party. He will look for them at the Petal Inn the next day.

We Don't Want Your Kind

Two **bandits** and two **thugs** from the neighboring village, Lucidity (or a location in your campaign), have waylaid Ilandra, a late-teens villager from Malphreen and are making serious death threats: *"Keep your crazy, diseased self in Malphreen. We don't want your kind in Lucidity." "If you take one step closer to our town, we'll kill you and throw your body to the wolves."* If the party protects Ilandra, she will direct them to Malphreen, but won't go with them, choosing to take another road to another town that hasn't heard of Malphreen (*"If that's possible"*). If the party engages the Lucidity villagers at all, the villagers will paraphrase the history of Malphreen—the paranoid, genocidal version—and why they don't want their diseased minds near Lucidity. *"Go to Malphreen and see for yourself."* From this hook, the party is likely to continue to Malphreen and look for the inn, but they might escort Ilandra first.

No Good Deed

In this encounter, meeting Xpati and being duped to help distribute the seeds (see "On the Road Again" in part 2) are in reverse order. If you think your players will not help the distribution after meeting Xpati (they are the suspicious sort or can sense the demon's presence), you might start here. The party comes upon the pepper flower seed shipment just as it is being ambushed. The cart driver will do everything she can to convince the party that the shipment is much-needed medicine and implore them to provide security for the segment of the trip near Lucidity, where brigands are known to lurk. She will praise the accommodations and dining at the Petal Inn and suggest that Xpati will reward them for their assistance with the shipment. Once the shipment is safely beyond Lucidity, the party is likely to continue to Malphreen and look for the inn or Xpati.

Roleplaying Villagers

When portraying NPCs, use the full range of Demonic Virulence effects to distinguish one NPC from another and to add variety. The more aggressive effects (tyranny, pestilence, and severe arrogance) are exhibited by the aggressors in the hook you have chosen, while most of the population is relatively normal, exhibiting more subtle variations of apathy, compulsion, and mild arrogance. Reserve the psychotic behaviors of Phreen for sawmill asylum patients.

Roleplaying Xpati

Xpati was once a diligent protector of his community and believes that he still is. No matter how bizarre, extreme, or violent his actions, he is certain that they are the rational responses of a dedicated caregiver and anything he says to that effect is very convincing. He is always calm and careful, describing his actions as he performs them like a doctor explaining treatment to a child. While it may appear that he can be healed or redeemed, all that is left of him is a shell that the demon now possesses. There is no hope for him. If the characters fight him, he will fight to the death, but never raise his voice or temper in the process, describing his violent actions in the same manner as he did is treatments.

Xpati seems to be the only truly sane person in the region. That fact alone may make the characters suspicious of him, but he is completely subdued by the demon lord and believes his thoughts and actions are genuine. A successful **DC 25 Wisdom (Perception) check** or **Intelligence (Arcana) check** will reveal that he is not in complete control of himself. Grant advantage to the check if the character has a history with demons. Grant advantage and reduce the check to **DC 20** if the character is tiefling or other race with demonic blood, but don't reveal the reason for this aptitude. A successful **DC 15 Intelligence (Religion) check** or **Intelligence (Arcana) check** will reveal that he is a more accomplished cleric and spellcaster than he lets on.

About Town

By the number of buildings and fortifications, Malphreen would be considered a town, but based on the number of inhabitants and occupied buildings, it is more of a village (see Appendix A: Maps). The village is surrounded by walls, but they are in serious disrepair. Many of the structures outside the walls and several within are abandoned. The place looks like no one cares about it; it is run down from neglect, not abuse. It is calm and quiet. The characters will find all the buildings and businesses typical of a village in Malphreen (tavern, general store, blacksmith, stables, etc.), but Xpati lives outside of town. If asked, villagers seem wary of giving exact directions to Xpati's house. A very enticing aroma of baked bread, and the spicy scent of the pepper flowers, flows from the Petal Inn. Otherwise, the village is dusty and musty.



The More I Hear

There are few people moving around and little is said. Anyone the characters engage will be generally personable, but few initiate interactions. Eventually, as the characters explore the village and environs, they will discover that almost everyone in Malphreen is native to the area and just a bit off kilter. The more villagers they interview, the more apparent this is. A successful passive or active **DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check** exposes the epidemic of mental disease. Reduce the difficulty by 1 for each new person or by 2 for each group they interview. (Note: This decrease isn't intended to encourage repeated attempts with every person, rather to approximate whether the characters have heard enough to be savvy to the problem with passive Perception or when they make the check.).

Petal Inn

The characters can acquire food and lodging at the Petal Inn. Its clean and brightly painted facade and flower garden are a welcome sight in an otherwise dismal town. The cooking aromas within are mouth-watering. On entering, the characters are greeted by a cheerful female halfling who is busy about everything: cleaning, straightening, setting the tables in the dining hall (which is open to the lobby area), etc. She introduces herself as Daisy Petal, with a playful wink, and offers meals or rooms or both.





Roleplaying Daisy Petal

Daisy Petal (which might actually be her real name in Common) is a gregarious, inquisitive female halfling (chaotic evil, rogue) who sings instructions to herself as she does anything. She does everything she can to please her boarders and dinner guests, short of being quiet. Her continuous inquiries appear to be the natural curiosity of an active imagination stuck in a boring location. She describes her culinary creations as having the ability to, *"excite the tongue, warm the stomach, and calm the mind."*

She is so amiable and flighty that she is above reproach. Except, like Xpati, she is a harbinger of the demon and will report anything she learns to Xpati or directly to the demon when he can get her attention. Unlike Xpati, her playful and easily distracted nature has confounded the demon from ever truly relying on her. However, her mastery of cooking was what made the pepper flower popular in the local cuisine and with the few travelers who pass through. Daisy would never engage in battle directly but will mislead and use her abilities as a trickster to foil any attempts to stop Xpati or the demon.

Daisy believes her thoughts and actions are her own. A successful **DC 25 Wisdom (Perception) check** or **Intelligence (Arcana) check** will reveal that she is not in complete control of herself. Grant advantage to the check if the character has a history with demons. Grant advantage and reduce the check to **DC 20** if the character is tiefling or other race with demonic blood, but don't reveal the reason for this aptitude.

Delicious...If you Like Pepper

If the characters eat the food prepared with pepper flowers or calmspice, they will find it to be as delicious and satisfying as described, maybe addictively so. If they avoid the calmspice, they will have to be content with water and bread (without the pepper flower jelly, of course); the salad is tossed with fresh pepper flowers, the soup and meat are seasoned with calmspice, and the ale is bittered with dried pepper flowers. If the characters have started exhibiting the effects of Demonic Virulence, the meal settles their stomachs and minds, which they may presume (or be led to believe) were unsettled due to the experience at the asylum or the general dreariness of the village.

Sawmill Asylum

Three buildings remain of an abandoned sawmill in the woods above the village; the woodcutter's home, the water wheel-powered sawmill along the river, and the wood storage barn connected by a battered, wooden chute to the mill above it. Xpati has converted the storage barn into a dormitory for villagers afflicted with mental illness and the house into an infirmary for anyone who is also physically ill.

General Features

The Sawmill. This 10-foot square structure is completely open on the side opposite the water wheel. The water channel has been lowered, so the wheel no longer rotates under its power. A battered wooden chute with a decayed rope and pullies connects it to the storage barn.

The House. This is a low, two-story structure, about 20-foot square, built into the hillside. There are few windows, all are closed and shuttered. The main floor is divided into quarters with the entry and stairway in one quarter, a kitchen and small dining area in another, a small bedroom in another, and the open hearth and smoke room in the last, which extends to the roof. The second floor is one large bedroom with curtains hung for privacy and a few cabinets against the walls. The ceilings are about 7 feet high on both floors.

The Storage Barn. This structure is about 15 feet wide and 30 feet long. Cots line the walls and a large fireplace and split wood occupy a 5-foot square area at its center. Curtains are hung across the room about halfway back to provide some privacy. The hole in the end where the chute enters has been sloppily boarded up and the hatches over the drying windows in the sides are all fastened down. The ceiling rises from about 6 feet on the sides to 12 feet at the center.

Lighting. The house and barn are each lit with lanterns and by the open fireplaces, but both are still dim light.

Smells. Both occupied structures smell of smoke, too many warm bodies, and pepper flowers. The storage barn also smells of sawdust.

Sounds. There is the steady murmur of multiple simultaneous conversations, but also the distinct sound of individuals murmuring to themselves.

The patients generally take care of themselves and each other's needs, taking turns at chores on *"good days,"* with Xpati providing them a daily dose of a potent calmspice broth.

Overreacting?
When a patient accidentally spills their broth on Xpati's hand, he quickly, almost frantically wipes it off and then acts like it was scalding. A successful **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception)** or **Wisdom (Medicine) check** reveals that Xpati avoids contact with the medicine and that he is treating different patients with different concoctions and potencies, adding drops to the broth from a couple different vials. If the characters ask Xpati why he doesn't make a more potent medicine, he will advise against it, saying he had tried but there were tragic results.

Calmspice at Work
The characters witness various symptoms of insanity, particularly responses to hallucinations, amnesia, and thought broadcasting (see the Phreen Symptoms table in *Malady Codex 2*). The calming effect of the pepper flower-based treatment is evident within a minute. Xpati explains to the characters that the treatment can only reduce the symptoms for a short time, but it is more effective than what he can do as a cleric; there are too many to treat daily with magic, and a cure is beyond his abilities. Hopefully, the characters will see this as a challenge and try to heal some of the patients so they can learn from the attempt. If they need prompting, a patient who becomes violent might suit.

Treating a Patient
The characters may try several means to treat or cure a patient. All patients suffer from the effects of Demonic Virulence which can be treated with *dispel evil and good* or any magic that removes a curse, but the patient would need to be removed from the area within one day or become susceptible to the disease again. Symptoms may be temporarily relieved by using a spell like *lesser restoration*, or an ability that treats disease or poisoning but, like the calm spice treatment, these only relieve symptoms. Consider honoring any reasonable attempt based on the skills of your party and their understanding of the disease. For example: a character who suspects that the source of the disease is chaotic or demonic energy might try a *protection from energy* spell.

It Hurts When You Do That
The patients who suffer from the symptoms of Phreen have been charmed by the demon and are unable to reconcile his chaotic thoughts and instructions with their own. Spells that charm or remove the charmed effect (*charm person, calm emotions, modify memory, mass suggestion*, etc.) are met with complications since the patients are resistant to being charmed and are not "willing" creatures (see **demonslave** in Appendix C: Creatures). In addition to the spell or check, the character must succeed in a contest of spellcasting abilities with the demon as they grapple for control of the patient's mind.

Attempting to break the demon's dominance over a Phreen patient immediately gets the demon's attention—the patient's first response is wild-eyed hostility and a complete loss of self, but the response will fade quickly whether the treatment is effective or not.

Clues, Suspicions, and Deductions
The following represent some key concepts that the characters should be mulling over at this point:

- The characters start exhibiting hallucination effects, but they aren't sure who is infected or if they all are. One may think and hear themselves say something, but another hears something completely different. One might hear the other threaten them. Who is delirious? The one who spoke or the one who heard?
- There is more to Xpati's story than he is telling. He exhibits no signs of madness, but also is never seen consuming or directly handling any pepper flowers or calmspice. Does he have natural immunity?
- The unwillingness of Phreen patients to be treated, their resistance to treatment effects, and their violent reactions to some treatments suggest something more virulent than madness. The symptoms appear to be different manifestations of the same disease, but Phreen is a little special. Are there two epidemics?
- Calmspice may be treating everyone in Malphreen. Without it, would the whole village could erupt with insanity and possibly violence?

Part 2: Cultivating the Cure
At this point in their investigation, the characters may have connected the pepper flower to the disease as a potential cause but, having witnessed Xpati's treatments, the value as a treatment should be evident. Through their investigations in this part of the adventure, the characters should come to realize that treating the symptoms masks the disease.

Locations
On the Road Again
Either as an adventure hook or at Xpati's or Daisy's request, the characters are asked to escort a shipment of pepper flower seeds, jelly, and paste from the Petal Inn through a hostile area near Lucidity. The driver is vague about the shipment destination, but this appears to be a matter of extreme caution instead of anything dubious. Somewhere near Lucidity, the cart is ambushed by two **bandits** and two **thugs**. These ambushers would easily stop the shipment with a lone driver but are obviously no match for the party. Their intent is to destroy the shipment and send the driver back to Malphreen on her horse with a warning to stop spreading their crazy disease caused by these flowers. With the party's intervention, the shipment should be able to get safely past Lucidity where the driver is comfortable to complete the journey alone. Although the ambushers sound prejudiced and a bit backward, their warning that the characters are making a mistake by helping Xpati has an ominous air.

> *"You foreigners have been fooled into helping those Malphreen crazies spread their mind disease. We don't need your ignorance or their craziness corrupting our town."*

Fields of Flowers
At some point in this part, the characters will likely want to investigate the flowers for themselves, but it may take a little encouragement. A general description follows and, although it isn't available to the characters until later, Xpati's sketch (see Pepper Flower Morphology in Appendix B: Handouts) will aid in describing the key characteristics of the pepper flower.





General Features

Growing Conditions. The areas where pepper flowers grow do not appear to have any growing conditions in common; fields, hills, across the stream, through the village, in the road, up the mountain, etc. They seem to have spread along curving lines that have no rhyme or reason.

Flower. The plant is topped with an attractive, aromatic flower that is tipped with a dewy nectar. The flowers and the nectar smell and taste peppery.

Plant. The leaves are prickly, like a thistle, and have a grassy smell and flavor. The base of the plant is dank smelling, sticky, and inedible. If ingested, it will cause slight nausea that will pass with consuming some water or food.

Root. If the root is broken or cut, it gives off a foul odor and oozes a black, tarry substance. The roots grow deeper than anyone can dig and become larger as they go deeper–the opposite of what one would expect. Not that anyone should be tempted to eat it but tasting any part of the root causes the *poisoned* condition for 2 hours.

Competition. Pepper flowers crowd out other plants, leaving abandoned farmland and dead trees in their wake.

Additional information about the pepper flower can be discerned through successful **Intelligence (Investigation** or **Nature)** or **Wisdom (Perception) checks** with the following difficulties. Results are cumulative.

DC 5: The path of the plants traces directly through the Petal Inn and sawmill and lead right up to a small cabin and root cellar between the village and the sawmill (this is Xpati's home, which may not be known to the characters yet).

DC 10: The growth pattern of the plants must mirror the path of something underground.

DC 15: That something underground has the entire village in its grasp.

DC 20: The base of the plant combines and transforms the food absorbed by the leaves and the roots, producing a flower and nectar that are the synthesis of these nutrients.

Also, a paladin's *divine sense* reveals that the flowers have a blended scent, but evil odor erupts from a broken or cut root.

Village/Inn

The characters will pick up more clues as they spend more time with the villagers around town or at the inn. This is an opportunity to run one of the other Adventure Hooks transplanted to the edge of town. If your players are wanting a combat encounter, add some higher-level adversaries to the villagers in the hook used. In particular, one belligerent but otherwise sane individual (this can be one of the aggressors or parents from the "She's a Witch" or "A Hanging Offense" hook if used) approaches the characters, accusing them of being in cahoots with Xpati.

> *"Some of us haven't forgotten when that crazy cleric was hooting and hollering and slobbering on himself. He's one of them, you know."* He eyes you up and down, *"I bet that's why you're here. You're one of them, too."* As he backs away, *"I'm watching you."*

With a successful **DC 15 Intelligence (History) check** a character realizes that a ready source for a spice is usually associated with wealth and prosperity.

Clues, Suspicions, and Deductions

The following represent some key concepts that the characters should be mulling over at this point:

- The accounts from other villages and the general conditions indicate that Malphreen residents are crazy and may have been for a long time. Are the pepper flowers spreading the disease or treating it?
- The pepper flower plant morphology and growth pattern indicate something unnatural. What makes them special?
- People start exhibiting the effects of the disease as soon the drug or spell wears off. Is there a permanent and chronic source?
- Throughout the Material Plane, the source of a valuable spice ensures wealth and prosperity. Why then, not in Malphreen?
- If Xpati doesn't take the spice or flowers and the psychotic feelings increase when approaching his place, is he immune? A carrier? Completely succumbed?
- The areas the plants take root is determined by something not seen. What directs their growth?
- The plants grow around Xpati's root cellar. This might reasonably be explained by the fact that he is collecting the flowers and processing them in his apothecary. Which came first, the flowers or Xpati processing them?

Part 3: Treating the Disease

At this point the characters are not capable of taking out the demon and his minions in the cave network, but they should conclude that it is time to start addressing the real problem, beginning with Xpati. Whenever Xpati is not known to be somewhere else, like the sawmill, he is at home and most of that time he is in the apothecary.

With the portal located in the cellar, demonic virulence is very strong here and increases in strength with proximity to the portal.

Locations

Xpati's Cabin

Xpati will not intentionally lead the party to his home, but it is easily located by asking around Malphreen, following the flower path, or secretly following him. There are two simple structures on his property, a small cabin and a smaller outbuilding. If the characters visit Xpati before they have assembled most of the clues, he will greet them at the cabin and steer them away from the outbuilding. If they insist on seeing the outbuilding, he will show them *"the simple apothecary of a simple cleric."* If the characters have assembled the clues and surprise Xpati in the cabin or in the apothecary, see "So You're a Cleric" for the encounter. Otherwise, he will hide in the cellar.

General Features

Dimensions. The cabin is a single room 20 feet square with a 7-foot ceiling.

Light. The windows are covered, and no lights are on, so the area is in dim light.

Smells. As anywhere in the area, there is the background smell of pepper flowers, but it is noticeably subdued inside the cabin. The smells of a recently prepared meal and a general mustiness dominate.

Sights. There are no signs of pepper flowers or calmspice in the cabin. The place looks barely lived in.

Xpati's Apothecary

The outbuilding on the property has been converted into an apothecary. Due to the high concentration of chaotic energy emerging from the portal in the cellar, any character who is not protected or treated for Demonic Virulence and enters the apothecary must succeed on a **DC 20 Charisma saving throw** or be affected by Demonic Virulence.

General Features

Dimensions. The apothecary is a single room 10 feet by 20 feet.

Outside. A path of pepper flowers leads right up to the outbuilding on the property and blanket the ground around it.

Light. There are no windows in this structure, but there are always lamps lit, so the area is in bright light.

Sights. The room is a clutter of equipment, burners, flasks, and vials on a long workbench. A typical laboratory. There is a desk along one wall that has a clutter of papers on top and a closed drawer.

Smells. Even with the background fragrance of pepper flowers, the strong smell of it pours out of the apothecary.

Sounds. The bubbling of liquids boiling in flasks and the steady plopping of condensed steam dripping provide a quiet symphony.

Trap Door. There is a secret door near the center of the floor that opens to a long ladder leading down to the root cellar.

If the characters are in a hurry, a **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check** of the desk will reveal a notebook on the desk (see Patient Records sidebar) and a similar check of the workbench reveals protective clothing, including gloves and a linen mask to cover the mouth. If they have time to search, they just find all these items. The desk drawer is locked but not trapped and is easily opened with thieves' tools or by smashing the desk. If the characters open it, they find Xpati's sketch of the pepper flower plant (see Pepper Flower Morphology in Appendix B: Handouts).



The characters may find a *flask of demon dew* and a *potion of calming* on the workbench and a *staff of pepper flowers* leaning in the corner (see Appendix E: Other Information). With a successful **Intelligence (Arcana) check** a character can discern the basic nature of these and what some of the experiments Xpati has been conducting. Results are cumulative.

DC 10: The nature and effects of the *potion of calming*.

DC 15: The location and treatment of the patients at the sawmill is an attempt to raise an army of chaotic evil and psychotic minions.

DC 20: The general nature and effects of the *flask of demon dew*.

A successful **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception)** or **Intelligence (Investigation) check** will locate the trap door. Roll with advantage if Xpati is known to be on the property and is hiding in the cellar.



Xpati's Root Cellar

The original root cellar was dug deeper, and a larger storage room carved out below. The characters will likely not be able to climb down to the cellar, but everything is visible from above except the portal in the wall. When the trap door is opened, any character who is not protected or treated for Demonic Virulence in the apothecary must succeed on a **DC 25 Charisma saving throw** or be affected by Demonic Virulence with Phreen hallucination symptoms.

General Features

Dimensions. The first 10 feet beneath the apothecary floor is a 5-foot square hole which was the original root cellar. The floor has been dug deeper and opens to a room 10 feet square below.

Light. There is almost no light in this area except what shines down through the trap door above and a dim green glow below. So, the area is in darkness.

Sights. A ladder descends to the storage room below where crates, similar to those used in the seed delivery, are stacked. Pepper flower roots are exposed along the walls. Most of one wall is the smooth mirror-like membrane of the portal and glows dimly green.

Smells. There is a strong, earthy smell here of freshly dug dirt and the smell of pepper flower roots.

A successful **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception)** or **Intelligence (Investigation) check** reveals that the pepper flower roots reinforce the cellar walls. This check can be performed later from memory of the cellar.

If Xpati is hiding in the cellar, he will send his minions ahead to occupy the characters before coming out himself to fight.

So, You're a Cleric?

On opening Xpati's cellar, if not earlier, the characters must fight the **demonized cleric**, Xpati, and two **myconid sovereigns** that the demon has provided him for protection.



Patient Records

Xpati has kept a careful record of his patients in his notebook. Most interesting is a table spanning the first several pages titled *"Patient Progress"* and with the headings: Patient, Symptoms, Rescued, Contact, and Notes (see Patient Records Sample in Appendix B: Handouts). There are about thirty patients listed, but a few have been crossed through with the notes concluding with something to the effect of *"Deceased"* or *"Location Unknown."* The data in the columns are:

Patient: A number in sequential order, sometimes followed by a name or initials.

Symptoms: A list of symptoms and their abbreviations for each patient that, based on the ink and weight of the writing, appears to have been updated occasionally for many patients, presumably as they exhibited new symptoms. Some are easily understood, and others are too cryptic to have even a guess as to their meaning, but there is enough evidence to understand that many patients get worse before they get *"better."*

Rescued: A date. Based on the date for the final entry or two, the characters can easily discern that this is the date when Xpati started treatment.

Contact: Another date that is almost always later than the first, but a couple entries have earlier dates and have a *"?"* after the date. It will take some very good sleuthing for the characters to figure out that this date represents when the demon made contact, which is also the date of Phreen onset.

Notes: In addition to the final disposition of patients whose entries have been struck through, this column is filled with cryptic and dubious notes indicating that some of the treatments of the benevolent cleric are more akin to torture than healing. But most concerning, is the use of words like *"envoy"* and *"deployed"* for some of the most advanced patients.

The rest of the notebook is essentially a diary of Xpati's observations and treatments administered at the sawmill asylum.

Tactics

Xpati will send his myconid minions ahead of him to lead the charge and occupy the characters while he works spells and uses his demonic weapons from a safer distance. If part of the boss party, the awakened zurkhwood will sneak in behind the characters from the woods.

Adjusting the Encounter

Here are some suggestions for adjusting this encounter:

Very Weak: Remove both myconid sovereigns and add one **myconid adult**.

Weak: Replace one myconid sovereign with one **myconid adult**.

Strong: Xpati will fight in the open. Add one **demonized zurkhwood**. Xpati has a *flask of demon dew* (see Appendix E: Other Information).

Very Strong: Xpati will fight in the open. Add two **demonized zurkhwood**. Xpati has a *flask of demon dew* (see Appendix E: Other Information).



If characters try to enter the cellar, they hear thundering from below—the demon using *chaotic rain* (see Viral Spore Demon in Appendix C: Creatures) – and a rush of chaotic energy and demon spores pours over them. A character in the apothecary must succeed on a **DC 15 Dexterity saving throw** or be subjected to the chaotic rain effects. A character on the ladder or in the cellar cannot escape the chaotic rain. This is at least frightening, possibly deadly, and should deter them from going further.

Clues, Suspicions, and Deductions

The following represent some key concepts that the characters should be mulling over at this point:

- The characters may have come to their own conclusion based on their investigations, but they can be confirmed or helped along with the Xpati's sketch of the pepper flower function: Roots collect demon dew (dark energy?). Leaves collect primal ether and sunlight. The plant combines them. The flowers distribute the product (nectar), which is a symptom suppressor but not a cure. See Pepper Flower Morphology in Appendix B: Handouts.
- Their experience close to the portal should confirm that the source of the disease is a demon and Phreen results from the demon's telepathic communication.
- The patients at the sawmill who appear to be the sanest may be the most dangerous—they have succumbed to the demon's control.
- Xpati's treatments have really been experiments with the villager's reaction to the Demonic Virulence to cultivate minions of those he can control and to passivate the rest (see Patient Records sidebar).
- The demon minions were fungus-based, so the demon is likely to be also.

Development

The characters may cave in the cellar or devise a more creative means to block the portal, but this is only a temporary deterrent. The experience gained should help them know what is necessary to engage the demon directly when they are more experienced.

Conclusion: Now Look What You Did

With Xpati gone (assuming the characters removed him from the scene in some way) the patients at the sawmill may need to be treated and removed from the demon's sphere of influence or temporarily passivated by continuing Xpati's treatments before all hell breaks loose. If the characters haven't removed Daisy from the scene, she will offer to become their caregiver. If she is no longer available, another villager will volunteer.

Continuing the Story

This adventure concludes with some serious problems still impacting the region and the party may have contributed to spreading them. Careful examination of Xpati's notebook on patient *"progress"* can provide the leads for additional adventures. Some suggested adventures to continue the story you and your players have started are:

Sleeper Cell

The demonslave patients at the sawmill need to be cured, if possible, and removed from the demon's sphere of influence or temporarily passivated by continuing Xpati's treatments. The characters can use Xpati's notes and some deduction to determine who among them can be recovered and who must be taken out. This scenario plays out like a hostage situation at the sawmill.

A Simple Misunderstanding

If the party assisted in delivering the seeds, they have assisted the demon in extending his domain—granted, this was not understood at the time, but the party should feel an obligation to remedy their wrongdoing. This involves some sleuthing as to which town ultimately received the shipment and who is the demon's harbinger there. Daisy Petal may not have been revealed as another harbinger but tracing the shipment might begin with interrogating her.

Hot Zone

Lucidity had been on the verge of an outbreak, which is why some of their citizens were so adamant about keeping out Malphreen refugees. Now, the demon has managed to construct a portal right in the middle of town. The sudden outflow of chaotic energy combined with the aversion to calmspice by the locals has resulted in mass hysteria and mayhem. No one else will go help because it has grown too dangerous there. The party may need to administer calmspice to restore the peace, knowing full well that it is not a cure and that cultivating the plant assists the demon's expansion plans. This scenario plays out like providing aid across enemy lines.

The Cure

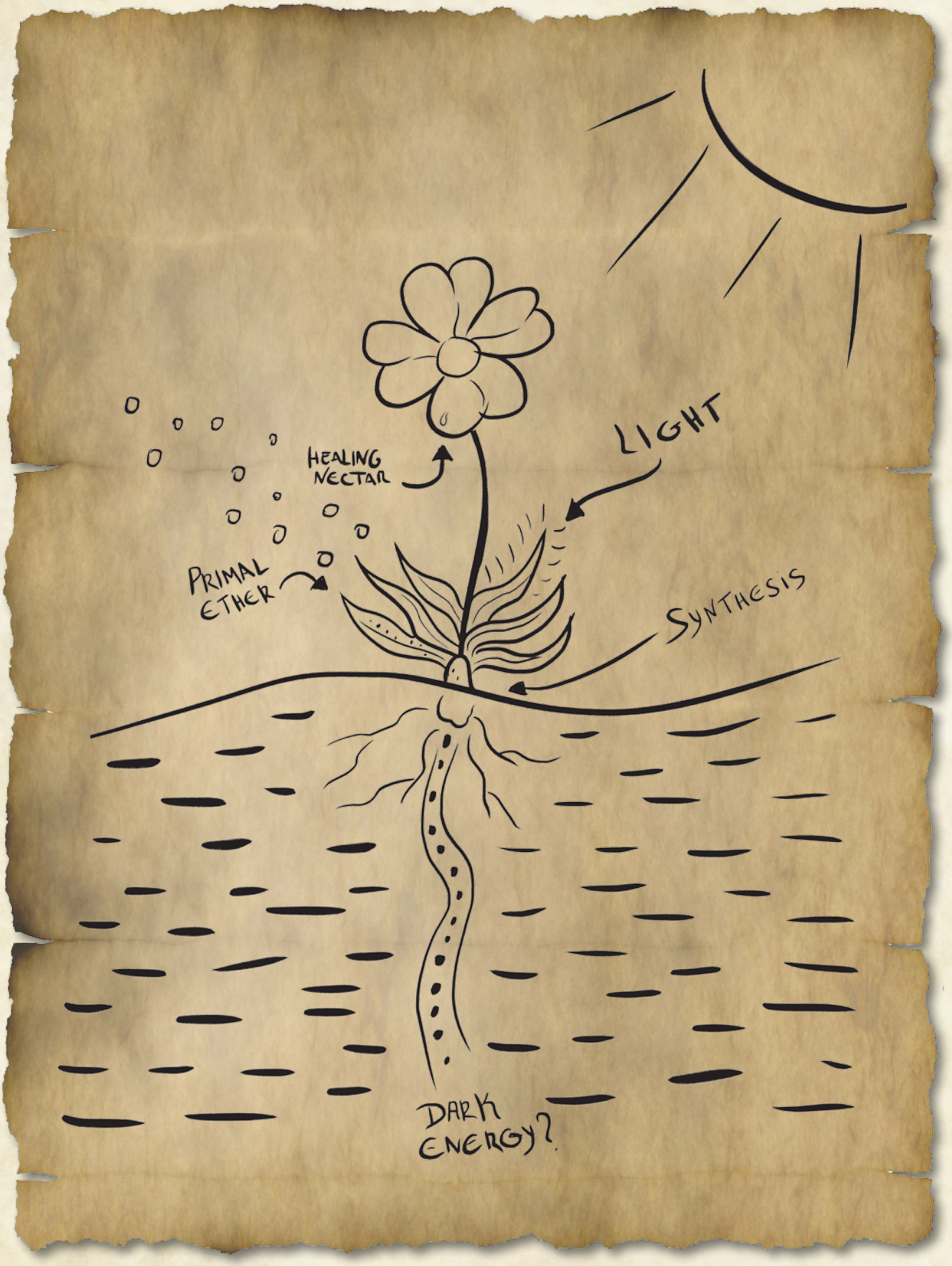
The party must gain some experience and prepare to finally face the demon at the heart of this problem, but a showdown is the natural conclusion to the story. At higher levels, the characters should have more powerful and effective abilities and spells (5th level and higher) available to them that will guard the villagers and protect themselves from the demon's effects then overcome the demon's lair abilities. They may also spend downtime to formulate and prepare more *potions of calming*. If the characters defeat the demon, they may recover a *staff of demon root* (see Appendix E: Other Information) from his lair.

Appendix A: Maps



Pepper Flower Morphology

This simple line drawing is found in the desk at Xpati's lab. Faded and stained, it appears to be several years old.



Patient Records

Patient	Symptoms	Rescued	Contact	Notes
1 - PJ	Hears voices, talks to the wall	Day 1	Day 13	Progressing nicely, Envoy to north day 102
~~2 - ?~~	~~Delusions of grandeur, magic tap?~~	~~Day 5~~	~~Some time ago~~	~~Uncontrollable~~ ~~Deceased~~
3 - Pobson	Moody, reaches for unseen objects	Day 7	Day 21	Progress moderate, can't deploy - prone to injuring himself, save for the day
4 - Touilta	amnesia	Day 13	Day 11?	No change, may never succeed but helpful with others

Appendix C: Creatures

Demonslave

Medium humanoid, chaotic evil

Demonslaves have been possessed by a demon and are treated as their original monster equivalent (typically **commoner, bandit, thug,** etc.) with the following modifications:

Damage Resistances. Psychic damage is reduced by half.

Actions

Demonic Whispers. The demonslave's verbal rantings, circular reasoning, and mumblings create a discordant melody perpetuating the demon's insidious whispers that one creature of your choice within range can hear, wracking it with terrible pain. The target must make a Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, it takes 3d6 psychic damage and must immediately use its reaction, if available, to move as far as its speed allows away from you. The creature doesn't move into obviously dangerous ground, such as a fire or a pit. On a successful save, the target takes half as much damage and doesn't have to move away. A creature that is deafened or under calmspice treatment automatically succeeds on the save.

Pack Tactics. A demonslave has advantage on attack rolls against a creature if at least one of the demonslave's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

Possessed A demonslave is resistant to being charmed and has advantage on saving throws against being charmed. Psychic damage is reduced by half.

Superior Read Thoughts. A demonslave who has completely succumbed to the Demonic Virulence gains this ability. Such an advanced demonslave magically reads the surface thoughts of one creature within 60 feet of it. The effect can penetrate barriers, but 3 feet of wood or dirt, 2 feet of stone, 2 inches of metal, or a thin sheet of lead blocks it. The demonslave does not need to maintain concentration to continue the ability. While reading the target's mind, the demonslave has advantage on Wisdom (Insight) and Charisma (Deception, Intimidation, and Persuasion) checks against the target.

Tactics

Once succumbed to the demon's influence, there is no cure and the demonslave is merely a weapon wielded by the demon. A demonslave has the benefit of the demon's higher intelligence. If not mortally threatened, they will conceal their advanced abilities to disguise their possessed state, but they will fight to the death against insurmountable odds, if necessary, to protect the demon's agenda.



Demonized Zurkhwood

Huge plant, neutral evil

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)
Hit Points 59 (7d12+14)
Speed 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	6 (-2)	15 (+2)	10 (0)	10 (0)	7 (-2)

Damage Vulnerabilities fire, radiant
Senses darkvision 120 ft.
Languages Abyssal (inaudible)
Challenge 2 (450 XP)

False Appearance. While the tree remains motionless, it is indistinguishable from a normal zurkhwood mushroom.

Mute. The demonized zurkhwood communicates telepathically with other similarly capable creatures.

Actions

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (3d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage.

Viral Spore Demon

Medium demon, chaotic evil

The characters will not encounter the demon directly in this adventure, but they may be subjected to one of his lair actions, which is explained here.

Actions

Chaotic Rain. The demon stomps, causing a rain of the demon dew which rushes down the tunnel and out the portal. A character in its wash must make a DC 17 Wisdom or Intelligence saving throw (depending on how they combat the psychic barrage). A target takes 28 (8d6) psychic damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Demonized Cleric

Medium humanoid (human), Demon domain, lawful evil

Armor Class 13
Hit Points 60 (10d8 + 15)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	10 (+0)	13 (+1)	12 (+1)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)

Proficiencies (+3 proficiency bonus)
Saving Throws Wis +7, Cha +4
Skills Athletics +6, Insight +7, Medicine +7, Perception +7
Armor Demon root-weave armor
Weapons Maul, staff of demon root
Damage Vulnerabilities radiant
Damage Resistances The cleric takes 3 less damage from nonmagical weapons dealing bludgeoning, piercing, or slashing damage. Psychic damage is reduced by half.
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 17
Languages Common, Abyssal
Challenge 6 (2300 XP)

Spellcasting. The cleric is an 7th level spellcaster that uses Wisdom as its spellcasting ability (spell save DC 15; +7 to hit with spell attacks). The cleric knows the following spells:

Cantrips (at will): guidance, mending, spare the dying, toll the dead (XGTE)

1st Level (4 slots): command, cure wounds, detect evil and good, inflict wounds

2nd Level (3 slots): blindness/deafness, lesser restoration, silence

3rd Level (3 slots): clairvoyance, life transference (XGTE), revivify

4th Level (1 slots): death ward

Harbinger. As a demonic harbinger, the cleric has the tenacity of its demon lord and is not put down easily, gaining +15 to HP (included).

Actions

Attack.

Maul. *Melee Weapon Attack:*+6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) bludgeoning damage.

Staff of Demon Root. The cleric is attuned to a staff of demon root with 3 charges (see "Staff of Demon Root" in appendix C. Treasure).

Channel Demon. Turn Good: As an action, the cleric acts as a conduit for the demon. Each non-evil-aligned creature that can see or hear the demon's call within 30 feet must make a Wisdom saving throw. If the creature fails its saving throw, it is turned for 1 minute or until it takes any damage. A turned creature must spend its turns trying to move as far away from the cleric as it can, and it can't willingly move to a space within 30 feet of the cleric. It also can't take reactions. For its action, it can use only the Dash action or try to escape from an effect that prevents it from moving. If there's nowhere to move, the creature can use the Dodge action.

Possessed. The cleric is resistant to being charmed and has advantage on saving throws against being charmed. Psychic damage is reduced by half.

Superior Read Thoughts. The cleric magically reads the surface thoughts of one creature within 60 feet of it. The effect can penetrate barriers, but 3 feet of wood or dirt, 2 feet of stone, 2 inches of metal, or a thin sheet of lead blocks it. The cleric does not need to maintain concentration to continue the ability. While reading the target's mind, the cleric has advantage on Wisdom (Insight) and Charisma (Deception, Intimidation, and Persuasion) checks against the target.



Appendix D: Disease

Demonic Virulence

See *The Malady Codex*, available on DMsGuild.com, for a complete description.

Symptoms

The disease mainly presents itself with a long-term madness. The following six can be applied, but feel free to use any madness found in the *Out of the Abyss* adventure or in *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes*.

Madness	Effect
Tyranny	Anyone weaker than me must obey my orders.
Pestilence	There is no beauty in nature, and I must desolate the Realm.
Harbinger	I am a bound to a demon lord and must do anything to bring my masters and his servants to the material plane."
Madness	My actions have no though behind them; I only act on a whim.
Apathy	The world around me seems gray and cold. I need to end it.
Arrogance	Everything in this world is mine for the taking. Make me king.
Compulsion	I am aware of the demonic influence and commit to ritualistic behaviors to quieten the voices.

Diagnosis

You can detect a corrupted creature using a *detect evil and good* spell. If the caster needs to be sure that the corruption is the result of influence from Abyssal powers, they must succeed on a **DC 15 Intelligence (Religion) check**. You could offer the option or rolling with Wisdom instead of Intelligence if the character is proficient in Religion, to signify that they feel the effect of the Abyss, instead of simply recalling lore.

Cure

After finishing a long rest, a corrupted creature can make a **DC 15 Charisma saving throw**. On a successful save, the corruption effect ends. A *dispel evil and good* spell or any magic that removes a curse also ends the effect.

Phreen

See *Malady Codex II*, available on DMsGuild.com, for a complete description.

Symptoms

A creature driven to Phreen is affected by at least three of the symptoms presented in the following table. You can pick them as you see fit or randomly roll for them.

Motor Hallucinations

The creature believes it is moving when it is not. At the start the first turn after rolling initiative, the creature must make a **DC 15 Wisdom saving throw**. On a failure, its speed for that round is reduced to 0, but it acts as if it had moved as expected, even attacking invisible enemies with its weapons. It regains its grasp of reality at the end of its turn.

Auditory Hallucinations

The creature constantly hears voices in its head speaking directly at it. It has disadvantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks based on hearing and disadvantage on Constitution saving throws to maintain Concentration.

Visual Hallucinations

Once each day, the creature suffers from visual hallucinations that may range from: random people passing by, a piece of furniture that isn't there, or even an ancient dragon flying overhead. The creature must make a **DC 18 Wisdom saving throw**. On a failure, the creature considers it real and will try to interact with it (converse with the people, sit on the chair, fight the dragon). On a success, the hallucination disappears. The hallucinations will also disappear with physical inspection. A creature that fails this saving throw will always try to interact with the hallucination first.

Delusion of Grandeur

The creature thinks of itself as a genius, a god, a king, etc. It uses provocative speech to anyone inferior and has advantage on Intimidation checks. Other creatures usually come across this behavior as offensive and are generally hostile to it.

Mood Disorder

The creature's emotions may be flattened or change radically and suddenly. Other creatures have disadvantage on **Wisdom (Insight) checks** about them and find it difficult to trust them.

Cognitive Disorder/Amnesia

The creature develops amnesia, failing to remember its distant past or hold on to passwords and directions given recently.

Thought Broadcasting

The creature strongly believes that other creatures are able to read its mind. Although this is not true, the creature's perception of other people also changes to align themselves with this paranoia.

Magic Tap

The creature's pursuit of power has been successful. Once per long rest, the creature may choose to add its proficiency to an Attack roll or an ability check of its choice. It may choose to do so after the roll, but before the outcome is decided.

Diagnosis

Experience with other Phreen patients is required to diagnose this disease. Only a person who has heard about it, studied about it, or knows someone suffering from it can try to diagnose it. The said creature must make a successful **DC 20 Wisdom (Medicine) check** to fully set the diagnosis. Although with a successful **DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation)** or **DC 14 Intelligence (Arcana) check** they will know about it generally.

Cure

To the dismay of healers and arcanists alike, there is no cure for Phreen. One can only hope to suppress its symptoms, a task far too difficult sometimes. Without help, it is highly improbable that the patient will stick to the schedule of the cure, meaning that it will soon relapse. It thus falls on the shoulders of family, friends, or henchmen to make sure they take their medication. The medication is a compound only a skilled herbalist can create, using rare materials associated with magic. It is to be taken once daily, and its effects wear off the following day, which paints a harsh reality: if even one dose is skipped, the disease will relapse fully. When the patient routinely takes the magic medicine, however, it must roll a d20 and check what occurs. On any result other than a 1, it is safe from most of the symptoms for that day, though not completely stable. On a roll of 1 the symptoms will resist the cure for that day. Taking more than one dose per day will only make things worse, adding one more symptom to the patient out of the list of eight.

Appendix E: Other Information

Demon Dew (Flask)

Equipment, very rare

A flask of sticky liquid, faintly glowing green. As an action, you can throw this flask up to 30 feet, shattering it on impact and sticking to any creatures within a 10-foot radius. Make a ranged attack against any creature within the affected area, treating the demon dew as an improvised weapon. On a hit, the target must succeed on a **DC 20 Constitution saving throw** or take 4d8 psychic damage and begin "chaotic fighting" (must use all action allowance available to attack the nearest creature) for 4 (1d4 + 2) rounds. On a successful save, the creature takes half damage and does not begin chaotic fighting. The creature must succeed on a **DC 15 Constitution saving throw** at the beginning of each of its turns or take an additional 1d8 psychotic damage and continue chaotic fighting. A creature can end this damage and effect if another intelligent creature uses its action to make a **DC 15 Dexterity check** to remove the sticky dew. This check is at disadvantage if the assisting creature is the last creature to be attacked by the affected creature.

Potion of Calming

Potion, rare

This viscous, pale-red liquid is concentrated pepper flower extract and has a more powerful effect than consuming the flowers or calmspice. As an action you may drink this potion and become immune to Demonic Virulence and Phreen for two days.

Demon Root-Weave Armor, +1

Armor (Light armor), unique

Carefully woven from thin strands of pepper flower roots growing on the Abyssal Plane, this natural armor is sturdy but supple—not at all like wearing a wicker basket—and possesses unnatural resistance to damage. It functions like +1 studded leather armor in all ways.

Staff of Demon Root

Staff, unique, requires attunement

Cut from a particularly straight section of root inside the Malphreen demon cave, this staff can be used to hurl a chaos ball (see "Demonized Cleric," Appendix C: Creatures). The staff is automatically attuned to the creature that cut it from the root and it cannot be attuned to another. There is only ever one in existence, currently wielded by the cleric Xpati of Malphreen, and if it or its wielder is destroyed, another may be created. The staff has 3 charges and will collect chaotic energy at a rate of 1 ball every 2 days in normal environments, 2 balls per day if within 1 mile of a portal to the Abyssal Plane, or 3 balls per day if on the Abyssal Plane. On destruction, it releases its remaining charges as if targeting itself. This item may be cursed.

Chaos Ball A bright green ball launches from the end of the staff to a point you choose within 30 feet (half damage up to 60 feet) and then explodes with a loud roar that sounds like whispering voices layered atop one another as the sound dissipates. Each creature in a 20-foot-radius sphere centered on that point must make a **DC 17 Wisdom or Intelligence saving throw** (depending on how they combat the psychic barrage). A target takes 28 (8d6) psychic damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. The chaotic energy spreads around corners.

Staff of Pepper Flowers

Staff, common

This is identical to the *staff of flowers* (see "Common Magic Items", chapter 2, *XGtE*) except it always produces a pepper flower, the roots of which will seek out access to the Abyssal Plane.





The Purification of Ras Calaq



For Levels 8-9

by GM Lent

Introduction

The small, swampy kingdom of Minoxia has seen better days. Ever since the arrival of the great dragon Oxitorus, the people of Minoxia have suffered from persistent illness, plagued by listlessness and diarrhea. Partially in honor of (or at least in reference to) the Dragon, people call the affliction Toxic Breath. Perpetually poisoned and culturally demoralized, the people of Minoxia have largely resigned themselves to their fate.

Within the kingdom, a small but robust medical community has developed over the centuries. Targeted by Oxitorus and his agents as well as the rebel group known as the Orange Talon, physicians seeking a permanent end to the plague meet in secret to share their discoveries.

A minor noble named Ras Calaq (Duchess Calaq) contracted Oxitorus' Toxic Breath and, in a moment of weakness, took the Dragon up on his offer for a cure in exchange for absolute loyalty. Calaq regrets her decision and seeks a way to break free from her oath but also remain cured of the disease. Ato Kakas, a member of the secretive physician's circle and personal attendant to Ras Calaq, has uncovered what he believes to be the source of Oxitorus' tainted power and believes that he can develop a cure from it. Operating cautiously to protect himself from the Dragon and the Orange Talon, Kakas seeks out adventurers to obtain the samples he needs.

Boxed Text: Segments outlined and shaded in this manner are intended to be read aloud or paraphrased to add depth and flavor to the adventure.

Adventure Hooks

- Ato Kakas approaches the party specifically, having heard of their selfless deeds and reputation. Alternately, a priest, sage, or other associate known to and trusted by the characters brings the physician to their attention.
- The party hears rumors of Minoxia, a small kingdom constantly beset by debilitating illness and ruled by a black dragon. Perhaps a traveling minstrel or merchant recalls hearing a song or story and recounts it.
- The party stumbles across a description of Oxitorus the Choleric, possibly in a vision from a character's deity. This information could also come in the form of a song or poem possessed by a defeated foe.
- The party is instructed to find and aid Ato Kakas by their patron, guardian, or other directing agent.

Breaking the Oath

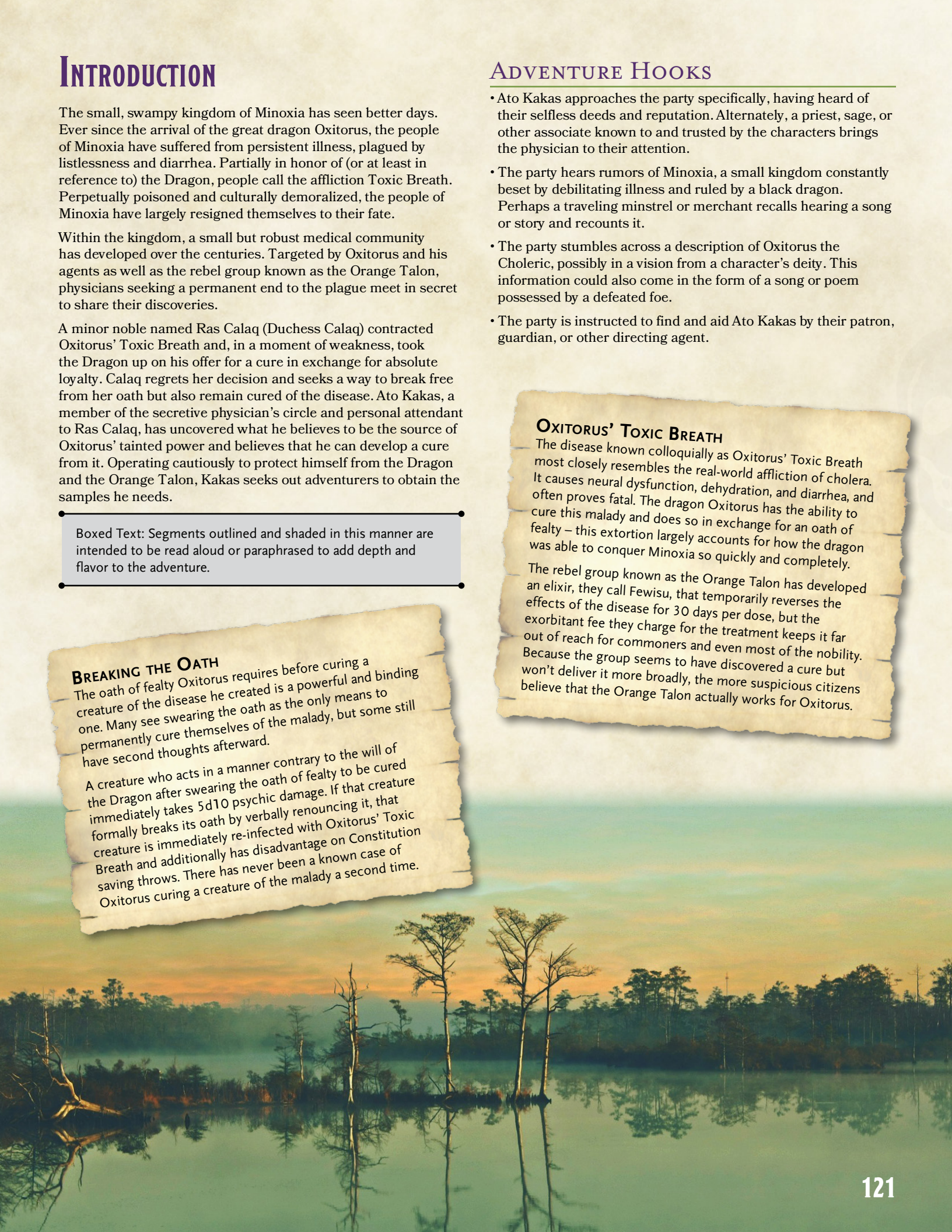
The oath of fealty Oxitorus requires before curing a creature of the disease he created is a powerful and binding one. Many see swearing the oath as the only means to permanently cure themselves of the malady, but some still have second thoughts afterward.

A creature who acts in a manner contrary to the will of the Dragon after swearing the oath of fealty to be cured immediately takes 5d10 psychic damage. If that creature formally breaks its oath by verbally renouncing it, that creature is immediately re-infected with Oxitorus' Toxic Breath and additionally has disadvantage on Constitution saving throws. There has never been a known case of Oxitorus curing a creature of the malady a second time.

Oxitorus' Toxic Breath

The disease known colloquially as Oxitorus' Toxic Breath most closely resembles the real-world affliction of cholera. It causes neural dysfunction, dehydration, and diarrhea, and often proves fatal. The dragon Oxitorus has the ability to cure this malady and does so in exchange for an oath of fealty – this extortion largely accounts for how the dragon was able to conquer Minoxia so quickly and completely.

The rebel group known as the Orange Talon has developed an elixir, they call Fewisu, that temporarily reverses the effects of the disease for 30 days per dose, but the exorbitant fee they charge for the treatment keeps it far out of reach for commoners and even most of the nobility. Because the group seems to have discovered a cure but won't deliver it more broadly, the more suspicious citizens believe that the Orange Talon actually works for Oxitorus.



Part 1: Ato Kakas

The party encounters Ato Kakas through any of the Adventure Hooks suggested above or through another method. Regardless of how the initial meeting comes about, Kakas insists on meeting at an inn called Tinishi at a table secluded as much as possible from the main section of the inn.

Ato Kakas explains his background per the Overview above. He further explains that he has uncovered a map that he believes reveals the location where Oxitorus performed the ritual that began the Toxic Breath plague. Based on information Ras Calaq extracted from an agent of the Orange Talon, Kakas also believes that this location holds the secret to how the rebel group makes its temporary antidotes. Kakas notes his dwelling, which also serves as his laboratory, on the map and gives it to the party if they agree to help him (see Appendix A: Maps).

1a. A Desperate Plea

Ato Kakas is a middle-aged human dressed in a leather tunic with long sleeves, ornamented with intricate beadwork and decorated with purple and yellow dye. His hands and face are covered with gauzy white cloth, and he makes every effort to prevent his skin from coming into contact with anything—he is not afflicted with the malady as far as he can tell but takes no chances of infecting others. His eyes are intense even through his obvious exhaustion, and he speaks with great urgency. After introducing himself and stressing the need for secrecy, Kakas explains the situation in Minoxia and the plague of Oxitorus' Toxic Breath.

> *"The Dragon can cure Toxic Breath with a word, but we physicians can't do anything but make sure an infected person keeps drinking water,"* the old man says. *"Still, the Orange Talon managed to find a treatment. I've never seen their elixir myself, but their head physician is a brilliant fellow named Pakin. If anybody could figure out how to cure this plague, it would be him.*
>
> *"Now, I've noticed that Toxic Breath seems to be diminished around certain types of—believe it or not—mushrooms. For reasons I don't fully understand, mushroom spores reduce the malady's symptoms in some cases. The treatment is not very effective, but it suggests the answer may lie in that direction and I began experimenting more with the idea. Then I found the map."*

The map to which Kakas refers came from an Orange Talon officer captured by soldiers of Ras Calaq while trying to break into the noble's treasury. It shows an area of the Minoxian swamp (known colloquially as the Sudd) containing a secluded thicket labeled "Grove of Abeba" and bears the legend "Pakin's Font." Not far from the grove is a mark indicating a village called Eskedare. A character who succeeds on a **DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check** notices that the village is noted in bolder lettering, seemingly a much newer notation than the one marking the grove.

> *"There's no guarantee, but if I'm right, 'Pakin's Font' will be some kind of mushroom growth. What I need are samples of the spores from the fungus in that grove. I think that's what the Orange Talon uses to produce their antidote, and that's what I can use to cure Ras Calaq and so many others."*

Kakas doesn't have much to offer as a reward but notes that the gratitude of a duke alone is nothing to discard—never mind the gratitude of a nation healed from a terrible affliction. He provides a treated leather receptacle in which to store the spores in addition to the map and instructs the party to meet him at his home on the estate of Ras Calaq when they return with the spores. He stresses that the party should bring the spores to that location no matter what happens to him.

1b. Ambush

As the party leaves their meeting with Kakas, they are attacked by agents of Oxitorus. Kakas recognizes the leader as Beshadu, one of the Dragon's most fervent supporters. The physician is shocked to see the group—he was certain he covered his tracks effectively when he left Minoxia.

Beshadu and her goons are not interested in fighting a losing battle; their goal is to capture Kakas and bring him before Oxitorus. Beshadu offers the party a chance to surrender the physician—this situation is Minoxian business and does not concern them. If they are clearly outmatched the Dragon's agents will flee, and Beshadu is happy to abandon her comrades if doing so will allow her to escape with Kakas.

Encounter

Beshadu (half-red dragon veteran) and four **lizardfolk** (Medium)

If Kakas is captured or killed during the encounter, he directs the party to carry out his request instead of trying to rescue or avenge him.





Part 2: Into the Sudd

Minoxia's geography is varied, ranging from high mesas and plateaus to swampy, humid lowlands. Though the entire country lies within the tropics, the elevation of the plateaus makes for a dry and temperate climate while the lands below are wetter and much hotter—especially in the deep swamps known collectively as the Sudd. The passage to Eskedare shown on the map Kakas provided drives straight through these wetlands; the trail is old and overgrown and filled with dangers even beyond those common to swamps.

The Sudd is heavily overgrown and covered by a perpetual foul-smelling mist that filters out sunlight. Unless otherwise noted, treat all area within the swamp as having dim light. At times rocky, at times spongy, the ground throughout is always difficult to traverse and counts as difficult terrain.

One near-constant feature of the Sudd are waterways; while rocky patches aren't uncommon the whole area is covered in water ranging from six inches to six feet deep. Kakas strongly recommends the party purchase poles for testing the depths of any watery stretches, and merchants in the areas surrounding the Sudd are also happy to sell buoyant pole rafts, rowboats, and barges to any interested individuals. Treat all these watercraft as rowboats, with the barges both costing and weighing twice the listed rates but carrying four times the normal capacity.

If Beshadu and the remainder of her goons fled during the encounter in section **1b**, they follow the party into the Sudd and wait for an opportune time to set up a new ambush.

Note that parties attempting to use teleportation magic will find it useless (and possibly quite dangerous) due to a *hallow* spell inundating the Grove of Abeba.

2a. A Perilous Journey

Finding the grove indicated on the map isn't easy. From the border of Minoxia to the grove is almost 100 miles—a journey of a week or more. In addition, the swamp surrounding the grove is tainted and actively malicious, and even the common fauna within is unnervingly quiet in its movement and actions. Weather in the swamp is unpredictable, with sudden patches of fog and downpours common.

The journey itself can be simple narration but should involve several encounters. The party is being followed by agents of Oxitorus and the area is patrolled by agents of the Orange Talon, to say nothing of the local fauna. Giraffes, elephants, antelope, flocks of great birds, and crocodiles all call the swampland home. In addition to the living creatures, the Sudd holds evidence of the settled areas overtaken by the dismal swamp; travelers will encounter ruins, strange obelisks, and colossal statues depicting forgotten animal-headed gods.

Have the party's navigator make a **Wisdom (Survival) check** against the Wilderness Navigation table (*DMG* p112) once per day to see if the party gets lost in the swamp. If you and your group particularly enjoy exploration, roll once per six hours traveled instead of once per day. The tables below will help you structure the trip for your group, but they do not include encounters with common animals. Feel free to add such encounters as you see fit.

In addition to the animals, small villages dot the drier areas of the great swamp. Not every person the party meets is afflicted with Toxic Breath, but some clearly are, and of the unafflicted it is impossible to say which are lucky, which healed after the ailment took its path, and which are sworn to aid the Dragon in exchange for their health.

Along the journey, the characters should experience at least three of the encounters listed below. Ideally, the party will experience at least one Easy, two Medium, and one Hard encounter from the list—you can roll randomly on **Table 1: Sudd Encounters** or choose as appropriate to your party.



Table 1: Sudd Encounters

1	Three **centaurs**: A party of centaurs hunts for food (Easy)
2	One **hydra**: Its stomach rumbling, the hydra attacks all trespassers (Easy)
3	Two **ettins**: A pair of ettins argues about the best way to eat thunder lizards (Easy)
4	1d4+2 **swarms of shrikes** (use swarm of ravens statistics): descend from the sky in a frenzy (Easy)
5	**Druid** and crocodiles (one **giant crocodile** and four **crocodiles**): a cantankerous druid defends its territory (Medium)
6	Oxitorus enforcer squad: four **lizardfolk** with a **triceratops**: the lizardfolk and their ride hunt for Kakas and his hired goons (Medium)
7	A **drider** and four **giant wolf spiders**: the drider seeks sport and magic, and sics its trained wolf spiders on likely providers of both (Medium)
8	Three **zombies** and four **Ogre Zombies**: an old bog vomits forth the undead remains of a scavenging party (Medium)
9	An **awakened tree** and two **shambling mounds**: an ancient tree, awakened by magic and abandoned, seeks revenge on all humanoids (Hard)
10	A **mimic** and two **otyughs**: a mimic disguises itself as a pool of clear water to trap prey for itself and its companions (Hard)
11	Orange Talon enforcer squad: A **gladiator**, two **gnolls**, and two **bugbears**: The Orange Talon patrol the Sudd in order to keep travelers from finding the Grove of Abeba–and to make sure those who do find it don't leave the swamp alive (Hard)
12	Thunder lizards: **A tyrannosaurus rex** and two **giant lizards**: A hunting pair of giant lizards tease a hungry Tyrannosaur hoping to tire it out for the kill (Hard)

Notes

The centaurs and the drider know the location of the grove and could be convinced to provide better directions but are also happy to mislead travelers. A character who receives accurate information from the centaurs or drider can treat the passage to the grove as normal terrain instead of difficult terrain.

The Orange Talon Enforcer Squad also knows the location of the grove but will not reveal it.

The Oxitorus Enforcer Squad do not know the exact location of the grove since the dragon doubts their reliability. You can substitute Beshadu for the triceratops if she is still alive; doing so makes this a Hard encounter.

Once you have selected an encounter, roll once on Table 2: Weather; the result indicates weather elements at the time of the encounter. Some results on the table direct you to roll on Table 3: Terrain Factors; these results indicate additional complications in the encounter.

Table 2: Weather

1	Clear
2	Clear (also roll on Table 3)
3	Thick fog
4	Thick fog (also roll on Table 3)
5	Patchy fog
6	Patchy fog (also roll on Table 3)
7	Rain
8	Rain (also roll on Table 3)

Table 3: Terrain Factors

1	Pool of water tainted with Oxitorus' Toxic Breath. This shallow pool of fouled water easily transmits the disease. A creature that enters the pool or begins its turn there must succeed on a **DC 13 Constitution saving throw** or contract Oxitorus' Toxic Breath. Constructs, undead, and creatures immune to or resistant to poison automatically succeed on this saving throw.
2	Pool of quicksand. The quicksand in this pool is inundated with the malice permeating the Sudd. The **DC** to avoid sinking into the pool is 12 plus the number of feet the creature has sunk into the quicksand (see *DMG* p110)
3	Slippery muck. Rotten leaves and animal remains make the footing in this area particularly treacherous. A creature who enters the area or ends its turn there must succeed on a **DC 13 Dexterity saving throw** or fall prone.
4	Dense foliage. The leaves and undergrowth in this area are particularly dense. Every creature in the area is heavily obscured.

The Sudd is a thick and overgrown swamp full of tall grasses, knobby trees, and suspicious animals. In places the ground is rocky, and in places the water reaches up to your knees or above. The air is humid and oppressive, and the constant sounds of the fauna forms an almost-hypnotizing background chatter as you walk.

Here and there you come across other people through the muck. Some clearly suffer from Toxic Breath, some clearly have recovered from the malady, and others simply look healthy.

2B. The Village of Eskedare

"Eskedare" means "Furthest Point" in the Minoxian language, though some of its inhabitants sarcastically refer to the village as "Ketema"—"Major City." Eskedare is a tiny settlement consisting of around two dozen huts scattered around a rocky outcropping. With a total population of less than fifty, Eskedare seems more of a trading outpost for hunters than a true settlement.

Eskedare is a poor village, without much in the way of trade goods. Here, the party can replenish travel rations and fill waterskins, but most other goods are in short supply. The village has no smithy or metalworking facility, but the residents are happy to sell or trade decent-quality pole rafts (treat as rowboats) for maneuvering through the swamp.

A character who succeeds on a **DC 25 Wisdom (Perception) check** notices that not only are there no residents of Eskedare suffering from Toxic Breath, there are no signs of the malady anywhere. Any resident asked about this unusual situation laughs in a carefree manner and praises the great health benefits that come from clean living and speculates that the village spring—found in the center of town—might also be a factor.

The truth is more sinister. Every current resident of Eskedare is an agent of the Orange Talon, and all are former victims of Toxic Breath who use the Fewisu elixir to stave off the malady. Eskedare exists as a way station for Orange Talon operatives to patrol the swamp and keep an eye out for intruders, and they do not take kindly to those who seek to uncover their secrets. While not overtly hostile unless attacked, the people of Eskedare will notify nearby patrols that the party is present. If a party member lets the nature of their mission slip, the people of Eskedare sound an alarm to warn the patrols.

At least one resident, however, is secretly a devotee of Oxitorus. This agent will do their best to remain unknown and will alert lizardfolk tribes in the area that trespassers are afoot. If discovered, the agent will attempt to flee into the swamp and return to the dragon.

Encounter

People of Eskedare (treat as **bandit captains**), Orange Talon enforcer squad (see Encounter 11 above), Oxitorus agent (treat as a **cult fanatic**), lizardfolk patrol (see Encounter 6 above)



2C. The Grove of Abeba

The Grove of Abeba is a blasphemous place hidden within the swamp. The tall grasses so common elsewhere give way to rockier ground and patches of vegetation floating in the omnipresent water. In the center of the grove is a ring of tall *cyperus papyrus* plants fifteen feet in diameter, surrounding a stony ledge on which lies the desiccated body of a couatl. From the corpse rises a mushroom stalk the size of an adult humanoid topped by a brilliant purple head, from which four long tendrils dangle and drift in the putrescent water. Similar mushrooms dot the entire grove, which has the feel of an unholy place.

The Grove of Abeba is the location where Oxitorus performed the profane ritual which gave him the choleric breath. The ritual involved drinking the water fouled by the couatl's blood and flesh within the boundary of a powerful *hallow* spell after the couatl was killed by a violet fungus. The spell prevents movement or travel using teleportation or by extradimensional or interplanar means within 60 feet of the couatl's body.

In addition to the violet fungus and the *hallow* spell, the grove has a more fearsome guardian: a djinni named Biniam, once afflicted by Toxic Breath, who swore allegiance to Oxitorus to rid himself of the disease. Wracked with guilt over swearing loyalty to such an evil creature and confined to the dismal swampland, Biniam has become dangerously unstable over the years.

Encounter

djinni and **violet fungus** (Deadly)

Tactics

Biniam does his best to hide and give no hint of his presence when characters enter the grove. He casts *invisibility* on himself and flies upwards to analyze the party, then viciously attacks whichever character he determines to be the weakest (usually a spellcaster). He is well aware of the necrotic damage dealt by the violet fungus and will try to back a character into the fungus' attack range or force them to move through the area and provide an opportunity attack. Biniam is also well aware that his master, Oxitorus, is an irredeemably evil creature, and weeps openly while fighting to carry out the dragon's commands.

Defeating Biniam is no easy task, and he gives no quarter. He avoids coming into range of the violet fungi, since he is susceptible to the plant's necrotic touch. Biniam will fight to the death, but if he is killed, he uses his last words to thank his slayer for freeing him from his oath.

Characters who wish to break the curse upon the grove itself can attempt to remove the *hallow* spell by casting *dispel magic* or using a similar ability. Removing the hallow allows the couatl's trapped essence to escape, but the effects of the ritual that transformed Oxitorus cannot be reversed.

Spores from the violet fungus are easy to gather once the fungus has been defeated, and placing them into the receptacle provided by Ato Kakas is an easy task that requires no skill check.

The Orange Talon use spores from the violet fungus in the grove to make the Fewisu elixir. Whether the spores are still useful for that purpose once the *hallow* spell is removed or not, the Orange Talon believe that the spell is part of the reason their antidote works. So, characters who break the spell earn the lasting enmity of the Orange Talon.

Part 3: Ras Calaq

The trip back through the swamp is more familiar but no less hazardous than the trip to the Grove of Abeba. The party is ambushed by an Orange Talon enforcer squad shortly after leaving the grove (see Encounter 11 above).

Thereafter, have the party navigator make a **Wisdom (Survival) check** against the Wilderness Navigation table once per day as before. If the actual die roll is 14 or higher, the party also encounters either a lizardfolk patrol (on an even number) or an Orange Talon gang (on an odd number).

3a. The Orange Talon

Thwarted at the Grove of Abeba, the Orange Talon operatives make another attempt to stop the party from delivering the spores to Kakas. This time, however, they send their best to lie in wait at the residence of Ato Kakas: an assassin named Jember and two of his loyal assistants.

The dwelling of Ato Kakas is a modest hut on the manor grounds of Ras Calaq. It is a combination living space and laboratory, and two of Calaq's soldiers are always on watch in front of the door.

Jember's waits until he is certain the party is the group he's after. His two allies have replaced the normal guards and await his signal to attack. Once Jember engages the party, the two thugs move in to take advantage of their pack tactics ability.

Encounter

One **assassin** and two **thugs** (Hard)

3b. Ras Calaq

When the party enters the dwelling, they find Ras Calaq waiting for them. Calaq is a tall, solidly built warrior whose ebony skin is covered in tattoos and battle scars. She moves with the dignity and watchfulness of a lion, and her eyes are soft with appreciation. When the party arrives, she expresses extreme gratitude for retrieving the spores.

> *"My friends!"* says the velvet-eyed woman with great enthusiasm. *"Kakas told me you were seeking the answer to my dilemma, and you cannot imagine my happiness at discovering that you have returned successfully! May I have the spores?"* She reaches out her hand eagerly.

In truth, Ras Calaq takes her oath to the Dragon very seriously and has no interest in breaking it. Ato Kakas is in the next room; if he was taken prisoner at the inn, he is bound and gagged, but if he was killed his body is simply tossed across the floor.

If the party asks to see Ato Kakas, Ras Calaq directs them to the next room where he lies. She will attempt to surprise the party with an attack from behind.

"Fools! Dreamers!" The duchess sneers as she attacks. "What made you think I was unwilling in my devotion to Oxitorus? What made you think I lack ambition, or desire for power?

Encounter

Ras Calaq (Hard)

If the party chooses to kill Ras Calaq, they may face legal and political difficulties for assassinating a noble–even Ato Kakas (if he survived) will be hard-pressed to defend them. If Ras Calaq and Ato Kakas both survive, Kakas will ask for the party's aid in convincing Calaq to recant her oath to the dragon now that he is able to produce a permanent antidote to Toxic Breath.

If Calaq survives but Ato Kakas has been killed, the party may be able to convince the duchess to recant her oath and may be able to formulate a treatment themselves (see "Cure" on page 8 of *The Malady Codex*). If neither Calaq nor Kakas survives, the party has a lot of explaining to do once the authorities arrive.

Regardless of the outcome, the party has made an enemy of Oxitorus, which you can exploit to the extent you desire.



Appendix A: Maps



Appendix B: Handouts



Appendix C: Creatures

Ato Kakas

Medium humanoid (human), lawful neutral

Armor Class 11
Hit Points 33 (6d8 + 6)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)	13 (+1)	16 (+3)	11 (+0)

Skills Nature +3, Medicine +7
Senses passive Perception 13
Languages Common
Challenge 1/8 (25 XP)

Bedside Manner. Bedside Manner. The physician has advantage on Charisrra checks against a creature they are treating or diagnosing, and against creatures they have successfully treated in the past.

Actions

Dagger. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 3 (1d4 + 1) piercing damage.



Ras Calaq

Medium humanoid (human), lawful evil

Armor Class 19 (shield)
Hit Points 212 (25d8 + 100)
Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	16 (+3)	19 (+4)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Str +13, Dex +7, Con +8
Skills Athletics +12, Intimidation +9, Perception +7
Damage Resistances Bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing
Senses passive Perception 17
Languages Common, Minoxian
Challenge 12 (8,400 XP)

Brave. Ras Calaq has advantage on saving throws against being frightened.

Brute. A melee weapon deals one extra die of its damage when Ras Calaq hits with it (included in the attack).

Battle Rage. At the start of her turn, Ras Calaq can enter a trance that gives her advantage on Strength checks and Strength saving throws, increases the damage she deals with a melee weapon, and gives her advantage on all melee weapon attack rolls, but attack rolls against her have advantage until the trance ends. Ras Calaq has resistance to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing weapons while she uses this trait (all modifications are included in the stat block above).

Actions

Multiattack. Ras Calaq makes three melee attacks or two ranged attacks.

Acid Sting. (Spear, acts as aflame tongue but sheds no ght and deals acid instead of fire damage) *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft. and range 20/60 ft, one target.*Hit:* 14 (2d6 + 7) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) acid damage, or 16 (2d8 + 7) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) acid damage if used with two hands to make a melee attack.

Shield Bash. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft, one creature. *Hit:* 9 (204 + 4) bludgeoning damage. If the target is a Medium or smaller creature, it must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Reactions

Parry. Ras Calaq adds 3 to her AC against one melee attack that would hit her. To do so, Ras Calaq must see the attacker and be wielding a melee weapon.

Appendix D: Disease

Oxitorus' Toxic Breath

Non Lethal, Natural

If I want you to take one thing away from this codex, it's this. There's nothing better to prove the power of maladies than a tyrant who rules with one.

If you ever travel to Minoxia, a small kingdom in the West, then be wary of its ruler, the Ancient Black Dragon known as Oxitorus the Choleric. With his strategic intellect and seemingly bottomless hunger for wealth, he has cast the shadow of a conqueror over many lands. Behind all of his successes, however, is his breath weapon; a modified, magical dragon breath with unparalleled toxicity. His whole kingdom is polluted by the remnants of his toxic breath, making it unfavourable for unlucky travellers. Woe to those who experience it first hand.

The effects of Oxitorus' Toxic Breath resemble the effects of the cholera toxin produced by Vibrio Cholerae (a similar toxin is also produced by a type of E. Coli). It causes massive, watery diarrhea. Clinically, it presents with neurological symptoms due to electrolyte deficit and severe dehydration.

Origins

Centuries ago, Oxitorus the Choleric, an Adult Black Dragon with tenacity and ambition greater than most, realized that his own powers were not enough. Following years of painstaking research, he found a way to make his poison breath even deadlier. With its enhanced poison prowess, his rise to tyranny was quick and with many victims. He now rules over a forgotten kingdom, lost in a network of swamps.

Causes

When Oxitorus uses his breath weapon, creatures must also succeed on a **DC 20 Constitution saving throw**, or become poisoned. The toxin in the dragon's breath enter the creature's body, and an infection is established.

The lands that Oxitorus the Choleric rules over are all polluted by remnants of his breath. While inhabitants have become somewhat resistant to the effects of the poison, the dehydration which characterises the disease makes the populace just weak enough to not consider rebelling, but without depriving them of the power to work.

Symptoms

The main symptoms of the disease contracted by Oxitorus' breath weapon are neural dysfunction, dehydration and diarrhea. All present quickly and extremely severely, often becoming life-threatening. Dehydration makes a creature feel weak, the diarrhea becomes painful after a while, and the nerve damage results in shaky limbs, loss of balance and powerful headaches. Within hours, Oxitorus' victims become incapable of fighting, and thus, victory is assured. At every dawn, after a creature is infected, it must succeed on a **DC 18 Constitution saving throw**, or take 1d8 poison damage. This damage cannot bring a creature to 0 HP. It also has disadvantage on all ability checks.

Diagnosis

Diagnosis is hardly a challenge in this case. If contracted by direct contact with Oxitorus breath, it is most likely that the proud dragon will boast about the impending doom that awaits. If a creature contracts it in the lands inflicted by the toxic gas, then the only way to diagnose the ailment is to ask the locals.

Cure

The Dragon Ruler himself can of course cure this disease, but at a hefty price. One must swear absolute loyalty to him if they are to be saved.

Alternatively, they could seek the help of a rebel group known as "Orange Talon". They act in the shadows, plotting the downfall of the Ancient Dragon. They have discovered a cure to the disease, but will not give it away for free. An infected creature must either pledge to help them in their cause, or buy it from them, for the price of 500 gp. This price, of course, can vary, depending on the setting and worth of gold, but make sure it's expensive, but not so much that it becomes improbable that the adventurers buy it. A single dose of the antidote will reverse the effects of the disease, and protect the creature for a month from the symptoms of Oxitorus' poison.

A creature proficient in *Alchemist's Supplies*, *Herbalist Kit*, *Poisoner's Kit* or in Medicine can attempt to create an antidote for the disease. They must succeed on a **DC 18 check made with the kit or skill** of their choice. On success they create an antidote similar to the one provided by Orange Talon.





Under Dovla Mountain



For Levels 9-12

by Ciaran O'Halloran

Introduction

Under Dovla Mountain is a Dungeons & Dragons adventure for four to five 9th-12th level characters. It is optimised for level 10. This adventure features a clan of dwarves and their story of tragedy, as they face both division and disease. The heroes must meet a plethora of NPCs, forge relationships, and in the end, count on the connections they formed when their fates are decided by everyone's true colors.

Adventure Background

Drilling deep underneath Dovla mountain, looking for the sources of rumored huge natural diamonds, a dwarven mining expedition found something they did not expect. Deep inside the mountain, their excavations revealed a huge carved relief that matched the description of the ancient vault of the dwarf lords of Dol Donnan. Bringing news back to the council, the decision was made to keep their finding a secret, until the vault itself could be fully excavated.

Lord Hellander of Mirabar took over the project. Hoping to minimize the rumors about the find, he recruited the rest of the Kierhammer clan to work exclusively on the excavation, trusting them to keep the secret before he could fully ascertain what was in there. Rightly paranoid, he had become concerned about who had access to information about the project, mindful of movements of rivals in the council and even worse, outsiders.

Fallanta is an evil dwarven transmuter who has sworn allegiance to Biathocax, a beholder bandit lord who preys on the valley between the site and Mirabar. He has become aware that dwarves from the city are massing focus on the mine and wants to find what has captured their attention. The dwarves are aware of the danger he presents but have thought he would not go further than the sporadic raids he has carried out. He has worked with his master to contaminate food supplies to the mine with Beholder Spores. Once they have been delivered to the mine, he causes a cave-in to trap them inside as the disease spreads. Fallanta communicates knowledge of what he finds from his spores, and once the colony has been decimated, he arrives with the cure and demands control of the vault be given to him.

Adventure Synopsis

The adventurers accompany supply carts sent from Mirabar to the mine. Hellander wants outsiders he can trust to go with the cart and see if there is any difficulty with the operation, hearing rumors of tensions within the clan, and provide support to the guard detachment.

On arriving, they meet Sergeant Khundra. Passing through the fortified mine entrance, she tells them that a grudge between two sides of the family has been festering. Rhin Shortbeard, a young dwarf, was found dead at the bottom of the pit. Some say he was pushed. His sister and father suspect the other side of the family's involvement and think they may be making a move to take control of the vault for themselves. The party escorts the caravan through the narrow shaft, descending a mile into the mountain.

Deep underground, the party arrives at the multi-story wooden pavilion the Kierhammer dwarves have constructed. This provides them a central hall and terraced balconies to access the stone face of the vaults entrance–which has been cleared to reveal a carving of two guardian dwarves holding a metal box. The relief is over 120 feet tall and 80 feet wide, and the metal box is the sealed entrance to the vault itself. The party are free to look around the complex and are given a welcome dinner. During the feast, arguments break out between rival factions. Some of the miners start to cough, and a green mist comes up with the cough.

During the night, a **Purple Worm** (*MM* p255) attacks the mine site. It has travelled down the mine shaft and caused a cave in. Before long, two **Umber Hulks** (*MM* p292) arrive and attack the pillars of the pavilion themselves. The party fight off the attackers with the help of the miners. Once the intruders have been defeated, the miners survey the damage. The entrance shaft can be cleared but will take at least a week. Meanwhile, the disease starts to spread.

The adventurers make the measures they can to mitigate the losses from its spread while keeping the simmering feud within the clan from boiling over, all the time gaining and losing favor with the various factions of dwarves.

After a few days of tensions and the occasional brawl, Fallanta arrives, accompanied by his two **Gorgon** (*MM* p171) guards. An ancient dwarf with bedraggled beard and robes, he is in thrall to Biathocax. He has used a teleport scroll given to him by the beholder who watches from a distance. Fallanta tells the dwarves that he is the descendant of the lords of Dol Donnan and has come to claim the right to his vault. He has with him the cure to the ancient curse they have triggered and will hand it over when they swear allegiance to him. Doing so, they will exchange their lives for access to the face of the vault and control of the mine.

Story Hooks

Lord Hellander approaches the party with a special request. He has been fully briefed on the existence of the ancient vault and wants to make sure the excavation is progressing well. He does not want news of the find to spread through the city so he enlists outsiders to go see what is happening. If they pledge to represent his interests he gives them a seal which they can show to Khundra and access the mine. A supply caravan leaves tomorrow and they are asked to accompany it.

There are rumors the dwarves of Mirabar have discovered a great treasure and are keeping it a secret. On investigation, the party learns that Lord Hellander has taken control of a mining operation and has exclusively employed dwarves from clan Kierhammer to excavate it. They are known, even amongst dwarves, for their discretion. They hear that a supply caravan is making its way to the mine. If they catch it, they can accompany it and may gain access to the mine itself. That is, only if they can convince Khundra to let them in.

Jhogo Kierhammer has heard that things are not well amongst the Kierhammers. His relations are working on the excavation, and there is a rumor that there have been mysterious deaths, with suspicions on Blind Fergal's family. He entreats the PCs to help him find out what has been happening and encourages them to find a way to join the supply caravan that leaves tomorrow.

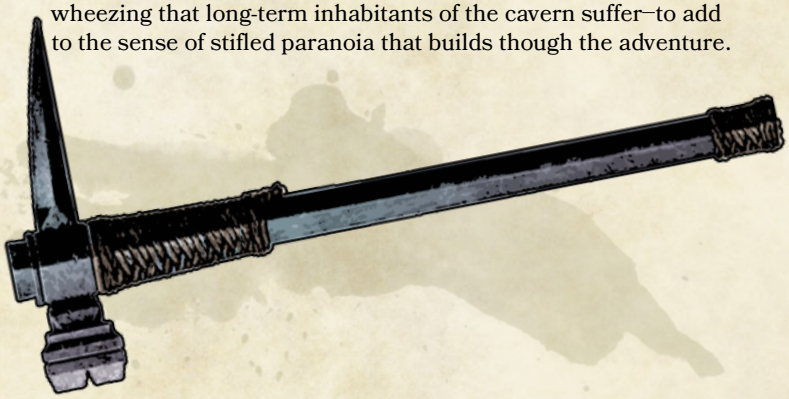


Running the Adventure

Events unfold in this adventure in two different ways—through location, as the party explores the underground colony, or through time, as they become trapped inside and the disease slowly spreads through the camp.

Specific events of the adventure are presented on a timeline, detailed below. The party can influence these events in a plethora of ways. They may have access to healing magic to stem the flow of the disease. They may be able to intervene in the simmering feuds between the dwarven families. These actions may have a bearing on the ultimatum Fallanta gives the dwarves at the end of the scenario.

Most of the adventure takes place in the underground outpost the dwarves have built. After excavating the earth around the facade of the vault, the dwarves built a great wooden pavilion as a meeting hall and to access the ancient carved wall of the vault. They have also built lodgings separately for each family. The cavern is illuminated by oil-burning torches. Although ventilation shafts have been created, the quality of air is poor and stuffy. The torches and cooking fires fill the cavern with lingering smoke. Play up these details to the PCs—describe how even moderate action causes them to sweat, play on the heavy breathing or wheezing that long-term inhabitants of the cavern suffer—to add to the sense of stifled paranoia that builds though the adventure.



Part 1: Access to Dovla

The party follows the supply caravan of seven carts laden with goods. Each is driven by two squat ponies and a teamster and is guarded by two members of Hellander's court. The dwarves accompanying the delivery think that although the guard detail is high, there is nothing too suspicious about the delivery. The carts are loaded with food and drink, including fresh apples, turnips and potatoes, dried and salted meat, planks of wood with nails, broad sheets of sealed canvas, splint, torches and oil for burning, and a generous number of barrels of ale—Lord Hellander has splurged on the finest Mirabar Gold Ale to show his appreciation and respect for the Kierhammers. Unbeknownst to the party, the apples have been infected with spores of Biothacax's Mold. Without incident, the caravan winds its way through valley paths and climbs to the foot of Doval's mountain granite face.

On arrival, read the following:

> Arching over the road ahead are the crumbled remains of a dwarven stone gateway. In place of the fallen granite walls is a recently built high wooden palisade. As you close in, your view widens and you see that on the remains of an ancient stone guardhouse, a battalion of dwarven warriors has built a wooden garrison, with high fencing and towers built over the ruins of ancient stone walls. The wooden boards placed over the stone gateway are closed.
>
> On approaching, a head pokes out from over the top of the palisade. Gripping the shaft of a double-blade polearm, a dwarf bellows as he sees you -
>
> *"Declare!"*
>
> *"Supplies -"* answers one of your guards. The head disappears and soon the wooden-board gate is lifted, a makeshift opening to let you and the cart train through.



The party finds little challenge on entering–the dwarves have been expecting the caravan. The guards take over most of the communication with their fellows. As the caravan enters, read the following:

> As you go through the gatepost the interior of the improvised fortress is revealed. More like a construction site, there are fenced piles of earth and rock, carefully banded pyramids of huge hewn rocks, carts full of mining and digging equipment, and everywhere dwarves are busy at work–hacking and sawing the wood, emptying excavated earth–with guards marching in small squads as they prepare to defend the site. There are a few quickly fabricated wooden structures around. To the north, beyond the piles of earth, is an open-roof enclosure surrounded by 30-foot walls. The occasional angry roar comes from within. At the end of the path, a long hall leads into the mountain. Long boarding houses line the inside of the palisade wall, where the battalion eats, drinks and rests.

The caravan continues to the hall entrance. Guards come to the caravan when it stops and unharness the donkeys. A tall female dwarf in half plate approaches, her long blond hair is tied in a practical topknot. Her shoulders are broad, and she smiles easily. This is Sergeant Khundra, Hellander's appointed leader of the camp. She is flanked by Ghul and Halbek, her two deputies.

> *"Welcome to Dovla–and witness the work of dwarves!"*

While the caravan is prepared for the mine, Khundra takes the PCs into a small office. If they have been sent by Hellander, she asks for the seal he gave them. If Hellander has not sent them, they must succeed on a **DC 18 Charisma (Persuasion) check** before Khundra reveals the information below.

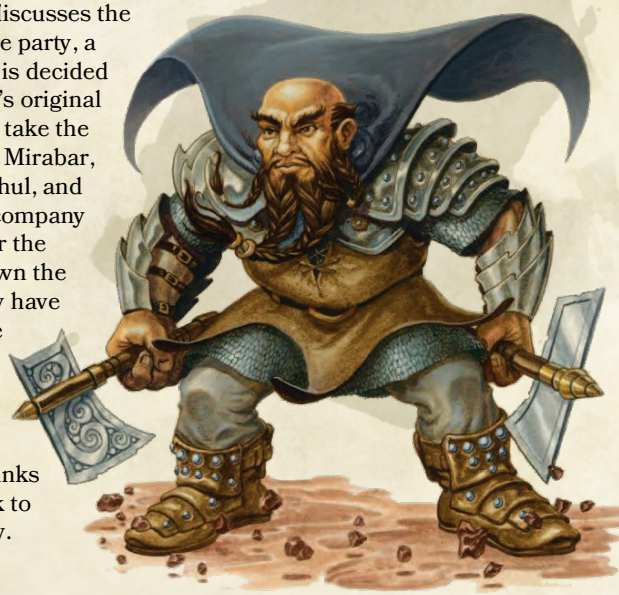
If the party was not sent by Hellander and fail the check, Khundra thanks them for delivery of the caravan and provides them with bed and board for a night, before they return the donkeys to Mirabar. They must come up with a plausible reason to access the mine. Spending time in the fortified entrance post reveals the following:

- The dwarves helped excavate a tunnel leading to a mine deep below the earth.
- Dovla mountain is a huge slab of granite. The tunnel has been dug through softer earth and rock and the mine is the same.
- The 30-foot pen hides six ogres. The creatures are used by the dwarves to carry their drilling equipment and the hundreds of trees they use to construct their dwelling.
- The Kierhammers are the clan that are inside the cavern. They are admired and feared and are known to hold grudges.
- Some are wondering when the diamonds will be found.
- There are no stores for precious stones, or any space set up to clean and prepare newly excavated stones.
- A body of a young dwarf was sent out of the mine last week. Dwarves believe it is a very bad omen for a body to leave a mine before any bounty is found.

Khundra knows the Kierhammers present a problem. The excavation needs a few more weeks and they need to stay together for that time. She needs the party's assistance. At the same time, she knows the Kierhammers will not appreciate being bullied or threatened. She and Lord Hellander both feel that powerful outsiders can be objective enough to maintain order through diplomacy. Once convinced that the party is capable of helping her, she tells them some of the following information:

- The "mine" is a front for excavating an ancient dwarven vault. In order to maintain secrecy, Hellander is very reluctant to allow those excavating the tomb to come out until it is all cleared.
- Rhin "Shortbeard" was Oskar Kierhammer's son. He was a foolish young dwarf and died after falling from the vault's facade.
- Bollo Kierhammer was working with Rhin and was responsible for holding the rope that was slung over a pulley to keep him up. The rope was frayed and broke, but Bollo blames himself for the death.
- Gardain is Rhin's sister and she also blames Bollo. Gardain has long mistrusted Fingal, Bollo's father and the head of his family, who he sees as trying to control the whole clan.
- According to custom, a dwarf responsible for the death of another must exile themselves from the family for a period. Bollo wants to do this, but his father won't let him, as he does not want Bollo to accept responsibility.
- The truth is that Rhin caused his own death, but Fingal's refusal to accept his son's possible role in Rhin's death has infuriated the other dwarves.
- This view is shared by Amber Kierhammer, the head of the other family of the clan in the colony.

Once Khundra discusses the situation with the party, a course of action is decided on. The caravan's original guard detail will take the donkeys back to Mirabar, and Khundra, Ghul, and Halbeck will accompany the party to steer the carts in train down the shaft. While they have been talking, the carts have been tied to each other and mounted on the twin wooden planks that form a track to the colony below.





Part 2: Exploring the Colony

Dovla Mine

> Creeping through the darkness, you steer the supply carts down the trackway, firmly holding them over the wooden tracks that lead down into the mountain. The occasional jerk is caused on the steep and twisting downward path into darkness, and you have to concentrate to keep control of the carts.

The descent to the rockface takes about 45 minutes. The party needs to steer the caravan down the shaft. There are three moments when the caravan veers off the track. At each of these moments, the party must all pass **DC15 Strength (Athletics) checks** to keep the caravan under control. If a party member fails, another member can take a second check at disadvantage to compensate. The dwarves all make the check automatically, having done this many times before.

If the party loses control, roll on the table below to see the consequence. Add 2 to the roll for every party member who failed the original check:

Controlling the Cart

d20	Consequence	Effect
1- 8	Jam	A cart has become stuck, holding up the train. It takes a **DC 15 Intelligence (Carpentry) check** to loosen it, or a combined strength of 50 between four people to push the cart back on the track.
9 - 12	Runaway	The caravan runs free down the track for 1d10 x 10 feet, before coming to a stop.
13 - 17	Damage	The caravan runs free and crashes into a wall. Not only is it stuck, but some of the goods are damaged or lost.
18 +	Injury	The caravan runs free and injures one of the guards or a party member. Succeed on a **DC 15 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check** to get out of the way or suffer 1d6 bludgeoning damage and wound a limb, giving disadvantage on Strength or Dexterity checks until your next long rest.

> Yellow light spills over the shaft wall ahead and to your right. The tunnel goes through a steep turn, and you guide the train carefully through it. About a hundred yards in front, lights floods from an opening. On either side of the wall beyond dwarves are lined up, watchful and silent. In loose tunics and some in trousers alone, many are tattooed and covered in streaks of grime. As you pass, they join you in steering the caravan through the entrance and lead you into the middle of a huge open hall. The heat rises towards you as you approach.

The dwarves help guide the caravan onto the wooden pavilion then lock the wheels and get to work unloading the carts. They work quickly, and a crate of apples are spilled, but they quickly pick them up again.

The party find their eyes sting mildly from the thin smoke through the cavern. The light is dim and they take some time to grow accustomed to it. Illumination is provided by torches that provide bright light in a 60-foot radius and 60 feet of dim light beyond this. Although the dwarves have darkvision, they need this light to work, so the pavilion and rock face are illuminated to this extent. Their log houses and dwellings are lit by oil candles, which provide dim light for 60 feet.

In the colony, the party find their breathing is heavier than normal. This makes them feel at first slightly disoriented and they must succeed on a **DC 12 Constitution check** to avoid coughing. This check must be repeated every morning the heroes stay in the underground colony. Characters who fail are subject to coughing fits during the day–when they exert themselves, they must succeed on the check again or spend a standard action coughing.



Wooden Pavilion: First Floor

You pull the cart onto a wide-open space, lit by torches suspended from pillars. The thick smoke from the torches and the smell of the burning oil make the open space seem smaller than it looks. The dwarves have created an underground pavilion. The well-worked wooden planks beneath your feet stretch out to make a rectangular floor, about 40 feet across and 100 feet long. Huge supporting cylindrical pillars line the pavilion about 10 feet from the edge of the floor, supporting a wooden ceiling about 30 feet over head. These form a smaller rectangle within the constraints of the floor itself.

Various male and female dwarves get to work unloading the supply carts, lifting the boxes and barrels then passing them down the line. Immediately to the north of the entrance is the top of an earthen ramp, leading down to the dimly lit excavated site below. Beyond the wooden pavilion is darkness, occasionally streaked with amber light as workers in the distance of the cavern move around.

Immediately in front of you and east of the pavilion is the exposed face of a great stone facade. From your position, carved from stone the middle section of two great stone tower shields and chain mail clad legs of armored figures, statues hewn from the vast rock face. The shields are emblazoned with the ancient crest of Dol Donnan and are the size of great ship sails, the crouching legs like giants preparing for battle. Strung along the face of the facade are lit torches, and suspended from makeshift balconies and halters are dwarves at work, clearing the face of the ancient carving, tapping away with fine headed hammers, and pulling ropes strung through pullies to move up and down the statue face.

Around the edge of the pavilion are many stairwells. In addition to the natural ramp to the second floor, the dwarves have built gantries to help them move up and down. The pavilion functions as an entry hall, storage facility, meeting and dining hall, and work station.

Khundra welcomes the characters to the colony. The dwarves eye them with suspicion–at first, distrusting the party–and behave as detailed in the table below. Rather than quizzing them as to their motives, the dwarven tactic is to pretend they simply aren't there. Khundra points out to them the guard's quarters and says that is where they will stay. She says they will feast together tonight, but for now they are free to explore the colony and get to know the personalities. She has told them they are guests of Hellander and are being shown the pride of Mirabar–the work of the Kierhammers.

As the party explores the colony, they have a chance to sway their standing in the eyes of the dwarves. The party's status in the eyes of each dwarf has a bearing on Fallanta's proposal at the end of the adventure. They can change this by meeting the priorities of each family, or by addressing the traits, bonds, flaws, and ideals of named NPCs. Each family has its own priorities, listed in their individual sections. Each dwarf has a view of the party as represented below, from disengaged to engaged. The party's actions can shift the opinion up and down the chart below. Non-named dwarves reflect the view their family holds. The DM should track the status of the party in the view of each named dwarf and separately the view of the family as a whole. It is to the DM's discretion to determine whether an action has shifted an attitude or not. Follow these guidelines:

- Until they have been individually interacted with, a dwarf shares the view of their family.
- An action can only shift the attitude by one place any given time.
- If a family becomes *disengaged*, the heroes cannot shift the view of that family themselves–it takes an order from a named NPC from the family to change that view.
- If a dwarf is *engaged*, and the party causes the death of another dwarf from their family, they immediately become *disengaged* until honor has been repaid.

As the disease spreads without cure the dwarves slowly turn on outsiders. Opinions shift down by one for each morning the disease progresses–the party must start again, in some cases, every day. Khundra and the guards start with a Cordial attitude. All others in the colony start with a Distrusting attitude.

Dwarven Attitude Table

Disengaged	Distrusting	Neutral	Cordial	Engaged
Avoids eye contact	Does not greet party, but responds to greeting	Greets party on sight	Greets enthusiastically	Greets as a family member
Answers in one or two words	Does not share information	Answers requests with brief outlines	Helps with requests	Shares information proactively
Ignores until directly spoken to		Needs permission to help party	Invites party to join in	Thinks of ways to help



Wooden Pavilion: Second Floor

From this second floor, you peer up at the disappearing roof beams that support the steep angled roof, ranging from 20 to 40 feet above your head. From here, you see more of the exposed facade. The beards of the great carved warrior forms are visible as are the top of their shields. Between them, the two noble figures hold up a steel box The stone carving here has been largely chipped away, to reveal a ten-foot square shiny steel surface underneath. There is a foot-long keyhole surrounded by Dwarven runes with occasional sparks of blue revolving around the lock. There are three dwarves at work on the carving's surface here, clearing the rock that will eventually expose the faces of the carved figures, and carefully studying the runes around the lock. The torches on the exposed rock cast flickering shadows over the features of the carvings, giving them a sense of quiet and watchful sentience.

Dotted around the floor are roped-off sections that contain piles of rock and rubble. These are being carefully sifted through by younger dwarves. There are also trestle tables with hammers, brushes, lenses, and tools used by the dwarves to carefully remove the outer layer of rock while maintaining the magnificent carving below.

The steel box represents the entrance to the vault itself. This is not going to be opened in the course of the adventure but represents a long-term challenge or resource for the party.

Wooden Pavilion: Third Floor and Balconies

The party can climb to the space underneath the roof. There the dwarves have placed beams that hold it up and are set closely together, just enough for a medium sized creature to walk between them. There are various scaffolding towers with internal ladders running inside them. Some are set up against the rock face and some the tower. On inspecting the facade, they see the carving is made from pure marble and is threaded with an unidentified sparkling material. The craftsmanship is beyond any current civilization.





Wooden Pavilion: Ground Floor

Underneath the entrance level is another open space. The ceiling is 20 feet above the cavern floor. You see three long tables in the center of the large room, and a kitchen counter to your left. By the earthen wall are fire pits, rock surfaces, and huge barrels of liquid. Over the fire are metal grates holding meat and vegetables. The sides of this floor open to the rest of the cavern, and you see various dwarves coming and going, in groups and singly, on their way to the rock face, talking the day away, and carrying supplies to and fro. They argue, joke, and work together. A stream runs through the middle of the floor, in which dwarves wash clothes and clean their tools.

Behind the kitchen counter is a taller dwarf, with bald head and red beard plaited into three braids. He is sweating profusely. This is **Traubon** of Amber's family. He has no shirt underneath his apron and gives orders to the dwarves around him. He is attended by five close-bearded young dwarves who help him in the kitchen.

At the end of one of the tables sits an older dwarf with a black beard and long hair ribboned with grey. He is breathing heavily and mopping his brow with the sleeve of a dirty white tunic.

In the corner are three younger dwarves. A male with dark hair and loose beard leans against a pillar. A female dwarf with a high topknot and wide leather belt is talking animatedly to him and another female, using her hands to highlight and exaggerate the tale as she tells it. This is **Diesa** who is talking to **Ghert**. The steel from the row of daggers in Diesa's belt glint in the torch light. **Gardain** is with them. She is slightly detached. A young dwarf, she wears an iron headband.

The Vault Entrance Facade

From the bottom of the facade, you can see the exquisite craftsmanship of the carving above. The dwarves have exposed an area about 60 by 40 feet, but it is clear the carving is vastly bigger than that. The detail includes the filigree on the shield, the chains in the armor, and the smooth faces and angles of the carving. The closed eyes give the form a sense of mystery, and the runic language inscribed along the rim of the shield, the edge of the axe and the hem of the stone-chain tunics resonate an ancient and mighty culture.

Oskar can often be found at the bottom of the facade. Members of Amber's family carry debris that has fallen to the bottom of the facade to the third floor of the pavilion.

Around the Pavilion

Just to the north of the pavilion is where the common store is kept. The guards here act as quartermasters. There is a desk and shelving set up where they keep track of the allocation of supplies, which are behind a wooden fence.

There are two scaffolding towers in the yard. Children play on the lower floors, treating them as climbing frames.

The younger male and female dwarves have near constant games of lugstone, a traditional dwarven sport. They lay out two hoops of rope at either end of an open stretch of earth. They divide into two teams of five. Each player carries a rock heavy enough to need to be held in two hands. The aim is for each team to throw as many rocks in the opposition team's hoop. The party are invited to join in the game. As the two teams set up, they closely mark each member of the opposition. A whistle signals the start of a match. The players and dwarves role for initiative, and the match proceeds as below, following the standard rules for combat.

Players try and tackle their opponent using the grapple action. Players who move within 5 feet of an opponent may be subject to a tackle as the player's reaction for the round. Success against a tackle gives you a chance to take a run and try to evade the opposition during your turn. After every round, the number of stones in the hoop is added up. The game takes place over three rounds. The dwarves play "friendly" matches and they play "serious" matches–for serious matches, teams are drawn exclusively from one of the three families and their honor is at stake. When the disease strikes, some dwarves continue to play in order to forget their worries.

Lugstone Actions

Action	Test	Effect
Reaction - Tackle	Opposed Strength	Success gives you a chance to run at goal on your turn. Failure means you fall prone and cannot act this round, except for a dirty trick
Reaction - Evade	DC 10 Dex (Acrobatics) check	Evade markers and run to the goal. Failure allows an opposition tackle
Action - Shoot	Ranged attack vs AC15	Throw a stone into the hoop

Any roll of 5 or below means the player has dropped his or her stone and is out for the round.

For a random match, use this array of Strength and Dex scores for each group:

Str: 10 **Dex:** 10; **Str:** 10 **Dex:** 12; **Str:** 12 **Dex:** 10; **Str:** 14 **Dex:** 10; **Str:** 14 **Dex:** 14

Serious matches may have more family champions with higher scores. In serious matches, prone players may try the following dirty tricks:

Bonus Actions - Prone Player Dirty Tricks

Action	Description	Effect
Dust Throw	A handful of dust is thrown by an opposition member	**DC 15 Constitution check** to avoid stopping or disadvantage on roll to shoot
Trip	A leg is stuck in the way of a runner	**DC 15 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check** to avoid falling prone
Hold	An opponent grabs your shirt or trousers	**DC 15 Strength (Acrobatics) check** to avoid falling prone.
Jeer	A verbal barrage of dwarven insults	**DC 15 Wisdom check** to avoid taking disadvantage on all checks

The DM is free to raise or lower **DC** numbers to match the tension and stakes of the match. Taking part in lugstone can affect how you are perceived by the others in the colony. Winning enhances your status. Playing for a family raises your status for the family you play for but committing a dirty trick against a family in a serious match lowers your status in the eyes of that family.





The Compounds

Following are descriptions of the four compounds. A small description is given, and a brief overview of the relationships of the people that live here. After that, a few key notes are presented, which will help the DM decide which actions curry favor for which dwarves in the mine.

Fingal's Compound

Fingal's family live in a wooden longhouse with a sloping roof. There are windows carved in along the way, and a balconied entrance on the short side. Children play by breaking stones in the yard outside. A line of washing is set, and a young male is taking it down. Four dwarves remain seated outside the balcony.

Outside the longhouse four dwarves sit in silence. Three of them are watching the activity on the rockface. One older dwarf circles his stick in the ground, turning up the loose earth like sand. They go silent as they see you walk towards them. The older dwarf is **Fingal**, the leader of the family. His beard is long, wispy and white. He wears a grey cloth cap to hide his bald head. He has two thin plaits that hang in front of his ears, and a gold ring clasps the end of his beard. He is blind and carries a white stick. Fingal does not trust outsiders. He thinks his family is being held responsible for the death of **Rhin "Shortbeard," Gardain's** brother. His son **Allberich** is with him. **Allberich** has a thick brown beard, in the style of his father. His hair is cropped very short. He wears a brown vest that reveals the extensive runes and symbols tattooed on his well-muscled arms; images of suns, mountains and gold, with strings of dwarven runes. He watches any interactions with his father with interest.

Priorities

- Earn respect for Fingal's family.
- Take our place amongst dwarven nobility, where we deserve to be.
- Be recognized as better than the other families of the compound.

As the Events Progress

- Find the cause of the disease.
- Help a family member affected by the disease.
- Find someone to blame for the disease.

Negative Actions

- Visibly ally with another family.
- Imply Fingals are to blame for the death of Harton.
- Imply Fingals are to blame for the spread of the disease.

Oskar's Compound

Oskar's longhouse is the same as Fingal's, but on the south side of the pavilion. During the day the compound is empty. In the morning and evening, **Oskar** stands outside his verandah and takes petitions from his family members. He dresses plainly and wears his beard straight to the edge of his neck. His deep brown eyes seem to hold memories he would rather not speak about. **Gardain** is by his side, occasionally giving her view. She wears a green tunic that brings out her swarthier skin. When the conversation becomes serious, she stands upright, revealing her military bearing. During the day, the dwarves work at the facade, Oskar operating the pulley.

Priorities

- Secure safety for the clan
- Bring dwarves together
- Find the source of the disease

As the Events Progress

- Honor the dead
- Bring Fingal down to size
- Obey Khundra's decree

Negative Actions

- Support for Allberich
- Behaving with anger towards a dwarf
- Breaking the rules.



Amber's Compound

Amber comes back to her compound for a few hours in the afternoon and into the evening. Amber has orange hair plaited in a circlet round her head. She wears a fine leather apron at all times. Her eyes are a rare green. She and her family oversee the stocking and unloading of supplies and the work clearing the rubble from the site. In the morning, she can be found on the second floor of the pavilion.

Priorities

- Support Amber's leadership
- Prove the disease was not caused by carelessness
- Praise the beauty of the facade

As the Disease Progresses

- Measures taken to stop it spreading
- Deal with Gardain with mercy

Negative Actions

- Inflexibly following rules
- Intentional attempts to trick dwarves

Guard Compound

Behind a fenced off area is a drill yard, mess hall, and a lodging. A scaffolding tower is in the corner of the fenced area. The party will be staying in the very basic guards' dormitory in this compound. **Khundra** can be found in the mess hall, except when she does her guard round. At any time, pairs of **guards** walk around the compound. They actively help the other dwarves as they go about their business. They see their role to help the colony where needed.

Priorities

- Keeping dwarves safe
- Avoiding conflict among dwarves
- Defend dwarven life

As the Disease Progresses

- Enforce quarantine
- Avoid contact with diseased dwarves
- Stop rumors

Negative Actions

- Threatening dwarves
- Being careless about spreading the disease

Rough or ill-mannered speech against dwarves

Stream

A stream runs from the north-eastern corner of the cavern, under the pavilion, and through the south wall. Dwarven children play in its upper part. Clothes are washed in the lower part. Every evening, the dwarves who have been working make their way to the edge of the stream to wash themselves. During the day, the occasional dwarf tries to catch fish; Traubon and his crew can be found there before lunch.

Part 3: Events and People

The Spread of the Disease

The timeline below gives an outline of the diseases' spread without intervention by the PCs. Their actions can stem the advance of the sickness or could also unintentionally accelerate it. Doing so influences how the dwarves perceive them, as below.

Finding the source

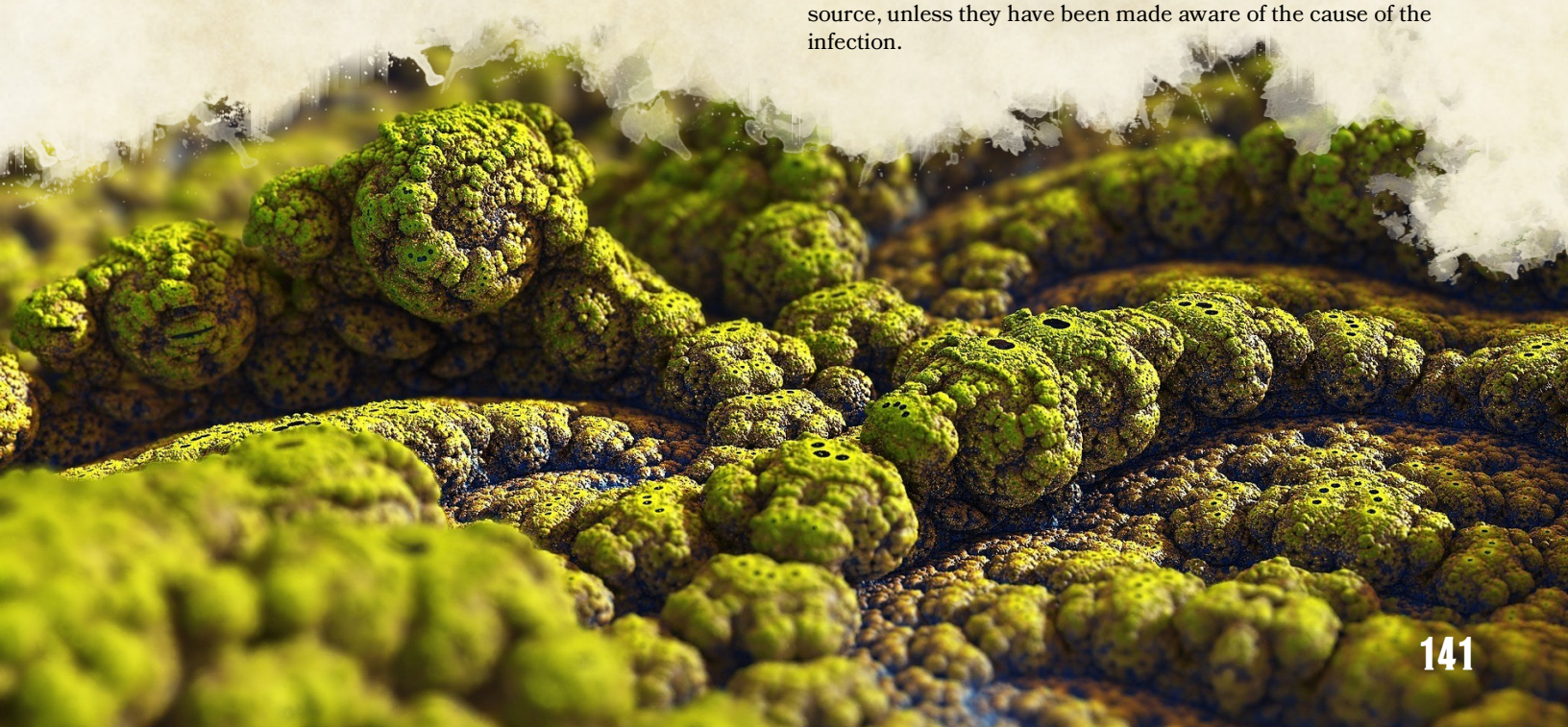
The disease stems from apples in the supply cart. The dwarves who unload the cart are the first infected–when they unloaded the apples into the storage, the spores are dispersed and a cloud of green mist appears. On inspection, they find the bottom corner of the cart is covered in mold, the bright green fuzz easily visible. Their symptoms manifest the following morning.

PCs who learn this information from the dwarves must succeed on a **DC 15 Wisdom (Medicine) check** to know that this kind of disease is carried by fungus and does not pass from person to person. However, in acute stages of the disease the fungus can appear on the infected body and the spores can be triggered by contact. A success of 20 or higher reveals that the mold can be easily destroyed, but there is a risk of agitating the spores when this is done.

There are two other locations the apples have spread the fungus to. One of them is the earthen ramp leading from the pavilion and the tunnel shaft itself.

Gardain triggers the spores on the ramp in the morning of Day 2 as she clears the damage from the **umber hulk** attack. If she has been made aware of the fungus and its effects, she identifies the cause of the spore explosion.

Bollo's crew triggers the mold in the tunnel as they clear the area. They are not sure that their coughing is caused by the same source, unless they have been made aware of the cause of the infection.



Timeline

Before the adventure

The party finds their way to the supply caravan and travel to the mine.

Day 1

Morning

The party arrives at the mine with the supply carts. They are shown the site while the supplies are distributed to the dwarves of the colony.

Afternoon

Ghert and Numa of Fingal's family become infected when they unload the supplies in their quarters. Trying to help, Heetha, Jhonna and Firhal of Amber's family try to burn the mold and become infected.

Evening

The party participates in a welcome feast. They meet the heads of the families, and notable senior guards. They find differing views on the purpose of the vault.

Night

3 **umber hulks** (*MM* p292) raid at night. They attempt to destroy the pavilion. They are driven away, but the entrance shaft has caved in.



Day 2

The disease runs its course for the first sufferers, who upon waking, cough uncontrollably. Jhonna's coughing is severe and she dies. The mold spreads to the room Ghert and Numa are in. News of their condition spreads, and Gardain and Rhogrim see to the wounded. When they do, the spores are triggered again and Gardain is infected.

Afternoon

Under Bollo's command, a squad of dwarves head down the passageway to clear a path to the outside.

Evening

Traubon finds mold in the kitchen. At this point, quarantine is declared.

Day 3

Morning

A brawl breaks out between two factions–Fingal's and Oskar's families. As they work at the rock face, Diesa loudly provokes the Fingals, saying they are the source of the disease. She is challenged by one of the Fingals, and the fight soon swells to include most of each family.

Ghert, Numa, and Firhal proceed to stage II. Gardain is weakened and at stage I, as is Firhal.

Fingal proposes each family to restrict itself to their own quarters, and to organize their own watch to make sure they stick to the curfew. The others have shown they can't be relied on to help Fingal dwarves when they need it.

Night

Gardain is found outside her quarters. The Fingals believe she should be punished and drag him to the great hall.

Day 4

Morning

The Fingals summon the other dwarves to put Gardain on trial. One of Amber's dwarves coughs a green cloud and weapons are drawn. The dwarves realize they do not know the full extent of the infection in the colony.

Firhal and Numa proceed to stage III. Gardain and Ghert are at stage II. Firhal is at stage I.

We find that Feltar and Braenich of Amber's family are also at stage I.

Day 5

Morning

Firhal and Numa proceed to stage IV. Those tending to them fear they will die soon. Gardain proceeds to stage III. Ghert, Feltar and Firhal are at stage II. Braenich is at stage I.

Afternoon

Bollo comes back from the shaft. Two of the dwarves helping clear the tunnel, Kathra and Harbeck, are already weakened and at stage II. They are both from Oskar's family. His work will slow if he does not have extra help.

Day 6

Morning

Firhal and Numa both die–one in the night and the other late in the morning. As their skin turns green, they suffocate. Their bodies become sources of the mold; if they are touched or moved, the spores erupt again in a 5-foot cloud, and if they are destroyed the spores spread to 30 feet. The mood is somber.

Gardain, Ghert, Firhal, Kathra and Feltar are at stage III. Braenich is at stage II. Harbeck is at stage I.

By the night, Gardain, Firhal and Kathra move on to stage IV.

Day 7

The dwarves at stage IV are in acute distress.

Before the afternoon, Fallanta arrives– his two gorgons bore through the earth and arrive in the center of the cavern floor.

Events

The Welcome Feast



The PCs return to the ground floor section of the pavilion to find a great feast has been prepared. The three families sit on separate long tables with the guards and PCs at a table at the head of them all. Each family head makes a short speech welcoming them to the site. They mention the honor of their ancestors and the glory of the vault they open, and the pride of the Kierhammers and Hellander himself. Fingal adds a few lines about how the Kierhammers never turn on each other–to audible mumbles of disapproval. The atmosphere sours.

The party will be expected to say a few words in response. They should praise the hospitality and honor of their hosts.

Umber Hulk Attack

During the night, a deep rumbling wakes the party from their beds. A deep series of booms is heard and then a burst of earth and rock explodes through the entrance shaft. The tunnel has been caved in and a **purple worm** (*MM* p255) emerges. The worm shoots through the ground floor of the pavilion and into the yard. It squirms itself up the face of the vault, making its way to the metal box. It can be attacked from the floors of the pavilion, or PCs could use the harnesses and pulleys to be pulled up to its head. The worm has caused the cave-in of the tunnel behind.

As dwarves emerge from their longhouses, Jhonna, Gardain, Diesa and Bollo attack the **purple worm**.

After three rounds of combat, two **umber hulks** (*MM* p292) spring from the earth in the yard. One of them proceeds to the pillars of the pavilion, which it tries to destroy. Each pillar has **AC 15** and **200 hit points**. The other proceeds to destroy a scaffolding tower.

Dwarves have emerged from their longhouses and join the defense against the umber hulks. A squad of four dwarves inflicts 10 points of damage against an **umber hulk**. Describe how some fall victim to its gaze, attacking each other or the pillars themselves.

In the fourth round, a scaffolding tower has been destroyed and falls, injuring four dwarves in the process.

This monster is significantly stronger than most parties of this level can handle. That doesn't mean they are unable to defeat it. Powerful spells, smart tactics, or even straight up good luck can go a long way. However, if it turns out to be too hard, keep in mind that there are two solutions to this. The first is to lower the Purple Worm's HP or AC, whichever seems more important at the time. The other is to inflict 25 damage per round to the worm, which represents the collective efforts the dwarves make in the battle against the monstrosity.

By the end of the battle, Jhonna and Bollo have been badly injured. Two young dwarves named Helda and Tunk were killed when the scaffolding fell. Two guards were killed attacking the hulks on the pavilion. You may decide to narrate these deaths during the combat. If the **umber hulks** managed to damage a pillar or even bring down the pavilion, you may decide the number of deaths was much higher.

Two dwarves from Amber's family have inspected the shaft and they can confirm that it has caved in. Realization sinks in that the colony is trapped. Bollo proposes to lead a team to clear it out again.

The PCs will raise their status in the eyes of the dwarves if they acquit themselves well in battle and are decisive in responding to the cave-in. They can raise it more by direct acts of heroism to save dwarves.

Diesa s Brawl

On the rock face, Diesa has been mouthing off about Fingal's family. She hints that they are cursed. One of Fingal's dwarves takes exception and curses her. She responds by throwing him from the scaffold. A brawl breaks out–chiefly between Oskar's and Fingal's families, but anyone who gets in the way is a fair target. The guards try to break it up.

The brawlers cause non-lethal damage. Much of the fight consists of grapples and pushes as dwarves throw each other off the scaffolding and push each other into the stream. Dwarves in harnesses swing down from the rock face to knock each other off their feet. Dwarves will use their *Clan Unity* ability to gang up and overcome opponents. Once they grapple, they pile on or hold each other in headlocks. They don't wish to kill each other, but vent long-held frustrations. Allberich (**rogue**, 10th level) and Diesa (**barbarian**, 9th level) are at the heart of it and contrary to everyone else, fight each other with lethal force. When they are both subdued, the brawl can be brought to an end.

Khundra manages to force the peace when this happens, and Fingal is soon lead out, declaring his family have finally exposed the hatred towards them. Khundra finally proposes each family to quarantine itself until the disease is brought under control.

The PCs can raise their status by subduing the main players without serious damage and by calming the emotions of others after the brawl.



Gardain Breaks Quarantine

A shout is heard in the night. The PCs emerge from their quarters to hear a heated argument coming from the pavilion. Two of Fingal's dwarves followed by Fingal himself, are restraining Gardain, who has been caught outside, breaking the curfew. They want to imprison her there and then but are persuaded to hold trial.

The PCs can raise their status by insisting on due process, but they are in danger of lowering their status in Fingal's family's eyes by being perceived to undermine their wishes.

Gardain's Trial

The ground floor of the pavilion is set up for a trial. An elder from each family sits as jury. Fingal makes a long speech about the persecution of his family, for the brawl and the spread of the disease, and proposes this has been deliberately created by Oskar's family who seek the treasure of the vault for themselves. He claims Gardain was trying to infect the rest of his family to see them all off, and hints that perhaps they are the cause of the disease.

This is met with barely restrained anger from Gardain, who claims Bollo is a murderer. Arguments break out between the jury members who cannot agree on a course of action.

Khundra speaks up and declares her role as guard gives her control over the colony, which is swiftly descending into chaos. She says Gardain must be imprisoned and sent into exile once the shaft is cleared. Oskar speaks up and says he refuses to do so until Bollo, too is sent away. Khundra declares Oskar, Gardain, Bollo and Fingal are under guard supervision until order can be re-imposed.

The PCs can decrease their status by making a judgment or a proclamation. The argument here is about the strength of dwarven tradition or dwarven law and outsiders are not welcome.

Bollo's Return

From the shaft, Bollo's team returns unexpectedly early. Two of the dwarves who were with him are being carried to safety. They are coughing violently, their beards and faces speckled with blood. He fears they have caught the disease. On interview, the PCs can find what happened. Bollo has been reckless in not dealing with the symptoms when they first appeared. He confides his guilt to the party. When he hears about the events of Gardain's trial, he is further plunged into guilt. He could be persuaded to take up leadership of his family and the folly of hiding from responsibility. He would be able to successfully challenge Fingal's authority.

Bollo is sympathetic to ideas which would restore harmony to the clan and bring his family back into the fold. His sense of honor needs to overcome his sense of guilt.





Part 4: Fallanta Appears

After six days read the following:

> As you walk, a rumble is again felt through the complex. You run out of the buildings to see a quiver through the walls and rock face. Debris falls from the cavern walls as the rumble deepens and intensifies. Rough earth is suddenly thrown up from the middle of the yard, and a fountain of rocks issues from the earth. Emerging from the shower comes the nose and horns of a huge bronze bull, whose forelegs pull itself up and out, followed by another pair of horns. Two metallic beasts stand around the hole in the ground, snorting and shaking the rubble away. A hand appears in the hole, and then a wooden staff topped with a crescent circlet. A bedraggled dwarf pulls himself out and looks about him. His grey hair is long and matted and his pupils are orbs of black. He goes to each of his pets and strokes their muzzles. Dwarves start to approach him as he turns to the assembling company and grins, revealing black and rotten teeth.
>
> *"Greetings, cousins. Greetings. I have something you may find important."* He holds up a potion bottle with a green liquid within. *"Behold the cure to the curse of Dol Donnon, kept by me, the descendant of the ancient dwarf lords."*

Fallanta proposes to give the cure to dwarves who swear allegiance to him. The party and the guards are his declared enemies. Fingal's family will join him, as well as any others who are distrustful of the PCs—even breaking family loyalty to do so. Any dwarves who are engaged with the PCs will fight with them; those who are cordial or neutral do not join either side.

Fingal wants to swear allegiance to Fallanta. Oskar does not. Amber can be persuaded either way. The party's previous activity can influence the decision–they may have shown clear leadership and gained influence, or they may have had to isolate or sacrifice members of family to contain the spread of the disease.

Khundra is loyal to Lord Hellander and will order the guards against those who decide to follow Fallanta. The numbers on each side will dictate what happens. If Khundra makes an outward move against Fallanta, he will use his scroll of *power word kill* to snuff out the threat as fast as possible before setting the **gorgons** (*MM* p171) on her. He will order them not to attack anyone else.

Fallanta sees the party members as enemies, and if he controls the colony, will order their execution. At all times he is accompanied by his **gorgons**. He will administer the cure to any who have sworn allegiance to him.

Eventually the two sides will come into conflict. The party must try to engineer a situation where Fallanta is outnumbered. A final battle will ensue between two factions of dwarves, or Fallanta, his gorgons, and the PCs. Fallanta is a 15th level Transmuter with many spells for manipulating the earth. He will teleport to safety before being killed, taking the cure with him.

If Fallanta manages to win some of the dwarves over, a big fight is certain to break out between all the Kierhammers, the Guards and the Gorgons. As with the previous encounter, the dwarves will assist in any way they can. You can choose how to handle the encounter - you may simply decide how it will play out, using the suggested scenarios, or you may select dwarves to play as NPC combatants - perhaps giving players control of NPCs they have managed to 'engage'. Generally, it would be best to focus the heroes' efforts on the gorgons and Fallanta, leaving the warring dwarves do their thing. If the spellcaster and his minions prove to be too much for the party, the dwarves can be used to help the party out of a dire situation, but that is up to you as a DM. Here are some possible match ups:

Scenario 1
- Fingal's Family vs Oskar and Amber's family
- Guards vs Gorgons
- Party vs Fallanta

Scenario 2
- Allberich vs Bollo
- Fingals family vs Oskars family
- Ambers family neutral
- Party vs Gorgons

Scenario 3
- Fallanta vs Guards
- All families vs Gorgons
- PCs and Guards vs Fallanta

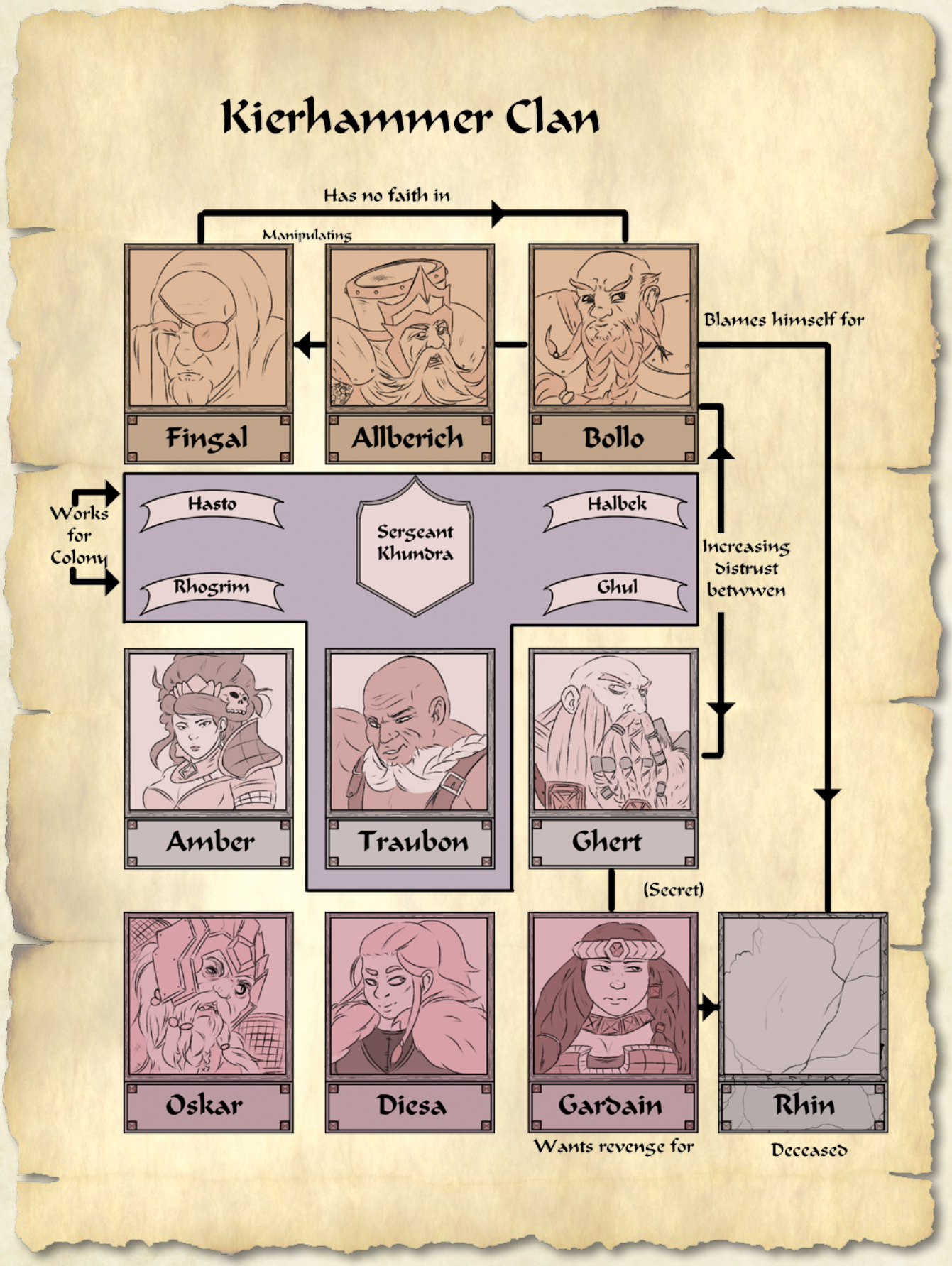
Resolving the Adventure

If the cure is taken and Fallanta is defeated, Bollo and his men soon clear the mine shaft and the party can return to the outside. Hellander makes an official announcement about the mine and declares it under his control. The Kierhammers are feted as heroes for clearing the site.

If Fallanta escapes with the cure, the passageway is still cleared, but it takes longer and the disease spreads. The Kierhammer clan is hopelessly broken and the family splits.

If the Kierhammers pledge allegiance to Fallanta and defeat the guards, the vault is under his and Biothocax's control. The ancient weapons and armor within can be used to create a powerful force in the mountains. Fingal and Allberich gain powerful positions in this new order. It is up to the DM as to what the vault contains, but as well as items, there may be secrets to the powerful transmutation magic the ancient lords used to carve their mountain domains.




Kierhammer Clan
Has no faith in
Manipulating
Blames himself for
Fingal
Allberich
Bollo
Works for Colony
Hasto
Rhogrim
Sergeant Khundra
Halbek
Ghul
Increasing distrust betwwen
Amber
Traubon
Ghert
(Secret)
Oskar
Diesa
Gardain
Rhin
Wants revenge for
Deceased

Appendix B: Creatures

The Guards

Sergeant Khundra

Use **knight** (*MM* p347) for Sergeant Khundra (CR3).

Ideal: Nation: My city, nation or people are all that matter.

Trait: I'm always polite and respectful.

Flaw: I obey the law, even if the law causes misery.

Bond: I fight for those who cannot fight for themselves.

Khundra knows that keeping the Kierhammer's together is difficult, and that it will only be a matter of time before trouble starts. She knows that once it does, she will lose her authority, and relies on acting as a go-between for all factions of the clan. As the disease spreads, she does her best to maintain quarantine, but the limits of her authority are exposed.

Guards

Use **knight** (*MM* p347) for Sergeant Khundra (CR3).

Use **veteran** (*MM* p350) for Hasto and Rhogrim (CR3).

Nominally in charge of the mine, the guards report directly to Lord Hellander. They have two main stations: one above ground, where they maintain the sealed entrance to the mine, and one below. Sergeant Khundra is the highest-ranking guard. She is served by Hasto, her quartermaster, and Rhogrim, her Field Sergeant. Their is a deployment of 40 dwarves in total - 10 of these at any time are below ground.

Fallanta

Level 15 Mountain Dwarf Transmuter

Armor Class 12
Hit Points 90 (15d6 + 30)
Speed 30ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Int +7, Wis +5
Senses passive Perception 12, darkvision 60 ft.
Languages Undercommon, Common, Dwarven, Ancient Dwarven, Deep Speech
Challenge 10 (5900 XP)

Stoneskin. Fallanta has resistance to nonmagical bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage.

Spellcasting. Fallanta is a 15th level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 17. Spell attack modifier = 9). He has a scroll of Power Word

Prepared Spells

Cantrips (5 slots): *control flames", mold earth", thunderclap", shape water"*
1st level (4 slots): *magic missile, thunderwave, catapult", earth tremor"*
2nd level (3 slots): *enlarge/reduce, hold person, invisibility, ray of enfeeblement, earthbind"*
3d level (3 slots): *fear, fireball, fly, stinking cloud, erupting earth"*
4th level (3 slots): *stone skin, wall of fire, ice storm*
5th level (2 slots): *animate objects, cone of cold, passwall, transmute rock"*
6th level (1 slots): *flesh to stone, disintegrate, bones of the earth"*
7th level (1 slots): *teleport*

The Dwarves of the Kierhammer Clan

The Kierhammer clan have the reputation for loyalty and discretion. For generations, Kierhammers have been famous stonemasons, engineers, rock cutters and smiths–dependable, solid and dour, the Kierhammers like to work with their hands and the rock. They are noble in lineage and have many ancestors who have won acclaim as soldiers, craftsmen and engineers. Kierhammers are also known as mercenaries who ask perhaps too few questions about their paymasters and their motivation. They are also, like all dwarves, known to harbor grudges, perhaps over generations. There are three families of Kierhammers in Dovla, with 15 - 20 dwarves in each family. This number constitutes not just the men and women who work in the mine, but their children, servants and hirelings. The heads of the family and notable members are listed on the following pages. Kierhammer dwarves all have the stats of Dwarf: Clan Member or Dwarf: Clan Child, while listed NPCs have the stats of Dwarf: Clan Elder or Dwarf: Clan Leader.

Dwarven Mountain Clansman

The dwarves in the adventure are dwarven clan males and females. They are mountain dwarves with the following special ability:

Special Ability: Clan Unity

If a Dwarven Clansman takes the dodge action, it can move on subsequent rounds on the same initiative count as any ally they choose. They can use this to act simultaneously or immediately before or after an ally.

For NPCs, roll initiative for each clansman in combat. Any dwarf that dodges in the first action in combat will act on the same initiative count as their fastest ally for all subsequent rounds.



Fingal

Level 8 Mountain Dwarf Bard (College of Valor), neutral good

Armor Class 14 (leather, shield)
Hit Points 59
Speed 25ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	8 (-1)	18 (+4)

Proficiency bonus +3
Saving Throws Dex +5, Cha +7
Skills Acrobatics +5, Animal Handling +2, Performance +10, Persuasion +10, Stealth +5
Senses passive Perception 10, darkvision 60 ft.

Class Features. *Bardic Inspiration (d8) - 4/short rest, Jack of All Trades, Song of Rest, Countercharm, Font of Inspiration, Combat Inspiration*

Racial Traits. *Dwarven Resilience, Dwarven Combat Training, Stonecunning, Dwarven Armor Training, Clan Unity"*

Weapon. *Dagger (1d4+2), to hit +5.*

Ideal: Blood is thicker than water.

Trait: My favor, once lost, is lost forever.

Flaw: I too often hear veiled insults and threats in every word addressed to me, and I'm quick to anger.

Bond: Nothing is more important than the other members of my family.

The blind Fingal is the head of the family. He lost his eyes defending the homestead from orcs. He is suspicious of non-family members, and believes the clan is full of enemies. In his eyes, greed has taken over many of the Kierhammers who look down on Fingal and his family.



Bollo

Level 7 Mountain Dwarf Fighter (Champion), chaotic good

Armor Class 16 (chain mail)
Hit Points 67
Speed 25ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	14 (+2)	17 (+3)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	8 (-1)

Proficiency bonus +3
Saving Throws Str +7, Con +6
Skills Acrobatics +4, Athletics +7, Intimidation +2, Perception +4, Sleight of Hand +4, Stealth +4, Survival +4
Senses passive Perception 10

Class Features. *Great Weapon Fighting, Second Wind (1/short rest), Action Surge (1/short rest), Improved Critical, Extra Attack (attack twice per attack action), Remarkable Athlete*

Racial Traits. *Dwarven Resilience, Dwarven Combat Training, Stonecunning, Dwarven Armor Training, Clan Unity"*

Weapon. *Greatclub (1d8+4), to hit +7.*

Ideal: I do what I must and obey just authority.

Trait: I judge people by actions, not words.

Flaw: I made a terrible mistake in battle that cost many lives—and I would do anything to keep that mistake secret.

Bond: My honor is my life.

Bollo is in line to take over running the family. He is revered by all for his leadership. He focuses instead on his work, starting on the rock face early and finishing late. He does not want the inevitable clash with his father, and often goes along with decisions he knows are wrong for the sake of a quiet life. He is noble and just. Bollo found the body at the rockface. He alerted Oskar to the accident and his son's death. For that, Fingal believes Bollo is being blamed. Bollo thinks if he had inspected the ropes earlier, he could have prevented the death.



Allberich

Level 10 Mountain Dwarf Rogue (Assassin), lawful neutral

Armor Class 18 (studded leather, shield)
Hit Points 83
Speed 25ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)	9 (-1)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)

Proficiency bonus +3
Saving Throws Str +7, Con +6
Skills Acrobatics +4, Athletics +7, Intimidation +2, Perception +4, Sleight of Hand +4, Stealth +4, Survival +4
Senses passive Perception 10

Class Features. *Sneak Attack (5d6), Theives' Cant, Cunning Action, Assassinate, Uncanny Dodge, Evasion, Infiltration Expertise*

Racial Traits. *Dwarven Resilience, Dwarven Combat Training, Stonecunning, Dwarven Armor Training, Clan Unity"*

Weapon. *Longbow (1d8+4), to hit +4, range 150(600). Shortsword (1d6+4),to hit +8.*

Ideal: *Power*. If I can attain more power, no one will tell me what to do.

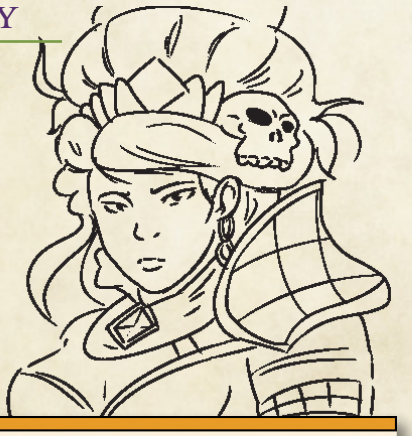
Trait: I don't like to get my hands dirty, and I won't be caught dead in unsuitable accommodations.

Flaw: I secretly believe that everyone is beneath me.

Bond: My loyalty to Fingal is unwavering.

Allberich knows that Fingal does not trust Bollo, so he stays close to the old dwarf, stoking his paranoia and making himself useful. He considers himself the real power behind the family.

Amber's Family



Amber

Level 9 Mountain Dwarf Fighter (Champion), lawful good

Armor Class 16 (chain mail)
Hit Points 76
Speed 25ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	15 (+2)

Proficiency bonus +4
Saving Throws Str +6, Con +6
Skills Acrobatics +4, Athletics +6, Intimidation +6, Perception +5, Sleight of Hand +4, Stealth +4, Survival +5
Senses passive Perception 15, darkvision 60ft.

Class Features. *Great Weapon Fighting, Second Wind (1/short rest), Action Surge (1/short rest), Improved Critical, Extra Attack (attack twice per attack action), Remarkable Athlete, Indomitable (1/long rest)*

Racial Traits. *Dwarven Resilience, Dwarven Combat Training, Stonecunning, Dwarven Armor Training, Clan Unity"*

Weapon. *Greataxe (1d12+2), to hit +6. Handaxe (1d6+2), range 20(60), to hit +6.*

Ideal: *Respect*. People deserve to be treated with respect.

Trait: If someone is in trouble, I'm always ready to lend help.

Flaw: I have trouble trusting my allies.

Bond: Since my parent's death, I protect those who cannot protect themselves.

Amber is a young head-of-family. Both her parents died when she was young. As the fire that killed them raged through their clan house, Amber picked up the ancient axe and set to work cutting through the doors to rescue the rest of the family. She was given the responsibility soon after and has carried their legendary axe with her. She is popular and wise, though lacks confidence in her authority.



Traubon

Level 9 Mountain Dwarf Bard (College of Lore), chaotic good

Armor Class 14 (leather, shield)
Hit Points 59
Speed 25ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	15 (+2)	18 (+4)

Proficiency bonus +4
Saving Throws Dex +5, Cha +8
Skills History +5, Insight +10, Performance +11, Persuasion +10, Stealth +5
Senses passive Perception 12, darkvision 60ft.

Class Features. *Bardic Inspiration (d8) (4/short rest). Jack of All Trades. Cutting Words, Song of Rest, Expertise, Countercharm. Font of Inspiration.)*

Racial Traits. *Dwarven Resilience, Dwarven Combat Training, Stonecunning, Dwarven Armor Training, Clan Unity"*

Weapon. *Club (1d6+2), to hit +5.*

Ideal: *Information*. The contact that I make and the secrets that I learn are more valuable than goods that I sell.

Trait: I never lie outright, but I often frame the truth to my advantage.

Flaw: I am quick to assume that everyone is trying to swindle me.

Bond: I once prepared a feast that went bad, and my clan blames me for it.

A cook and butcher, Traubon runs his family's kitchen with an iron fist. He sees feeding and looking after the miners as an honorable role. He has his ear out for a story and knows the gossip of the complex.



Ghert

Level 5 Mountain Dwarf Fighter (Battle Master), lawful good

Armor Class 19 (chainmail, shield, defense fighting style)
Hit Points 49
Speed 25ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	9 (-1)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)

Proficiency bonus +3
Saving Throws Str +7, Con +6
Skills Athletics +7, Intimidation +2, Perception +4, Survival +4
Senses passive Perception 12, darkvision 60ft.

Class Features. *Fighting Style: Defense, Second Wind (1/short rest), Action Surge (1/short rest), Combat Superiority (d8) - four uses per short rest, Maneuvers: Feinting Attack, Goading Attack, and Riposte, Extra Attack (attack twice per attack action)*

Racial Traits. *Dwarven Resilience, Dwarven Combat Training, Stonecunning, Dwarven Armor Training, Clan Unity"*

Weapon. *Longsword (1d8+4), to hit +7.*

Ideal: Our lot is to lay down our lives in defense of others.

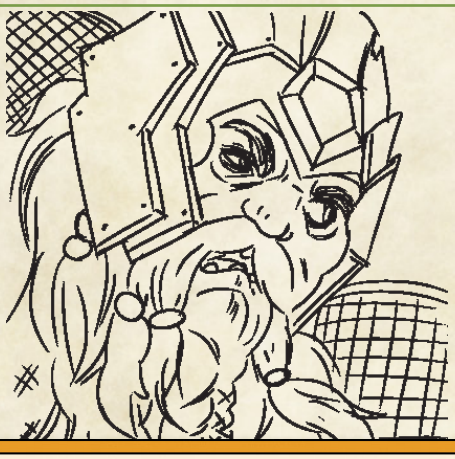
Trait: I'm full of inspiring and cautionary tales from my military experience relevant to almost any combat situation.

Flaw: I have little respect for anyone who is not a proven warrior.

Bond: I'll never forget the crushing defeat my company suffered or the enemies who dealt it.

A young warrior, Ghert is recuperating with the family between adventures. He has taken up the family trade of mining and is helping out as he stays at home. Ghert is in love with Gardain from Oskar's family.

Favorite Phrase: *"Er ma Ghert!"*



Oskar

Level 12 Mountain Dwarf Fighter (Champion), neutral good

Armor Class 18 (half plate, shield, defense fighting style)
Hit Points 112
Speed 25ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	10 (+0)	17 (+3)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)

Proficiency bonus +5
Saving Throws Str +10, Con +8
Skills Athletics +10, History +6, Intimidation +5, Perception +7
Senses passive Perception 18, darkvision 60ft.

Class Features. * : Protection, Second Wind (1/short rest), Action Surge (1/short rest), Improved Critical, Extra Attack (attack three times per attack action), Remarkable Athlete, Indomitable, Defense.

Racial Traits. *Dwarven Resilience, Dwarven Combat Training, Stonecunning, Dwarven Armor Training, Clan Unity"*

Weapon. *Battleaxe +10 (1d8+5)*

Ideal: *Live and let live*. Ideals aren't worth killing over or going to war for.

Trait: I have a crude sense of humor.

Flaw: The monstrous enemy we faced in battle still leaves me quivering with fear.

Bond: My honor is my life.

Oskar is a grizzled old veteran of the guard in Minrabar. He is full of tales from his time there, from dawn raids to staunch defenses of the walls. Oskar knows his family's days are numbered. His son's body was found on the ground. He knows Allberich is lazy and feckless, but also that it is not the right time rock the boat. He respects the sergeant's office and need to keep peace.



Gardain

Level 9 Mountain Dwarf Cleric (Tempest Domain), lawful good

Armor Class 15 (half plate)
Hit Points 66
Speed 25ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	8 (-1)	17 (+3)	14 (+2)

Proficiency bonus +4
Saving Throws Wis +7, Cha +6
Skills History +3, Insight +7, Persuasion +6
Senses passive Perception 13, darkvision 60ft.

Class Features. *Wrath of the Storm (3 times/long rest) Channel Divinity (Destructive Wrath), Channel Divinity (Destroy Undead), Thunderbolt Strike, Divine Strike*

Racial Traits. *Dwarven Resilience, Dwarven Combat Training, Stonecunning, Dwarven Armor Training, Clan Unity"*

Weapon. *Greataxe (1d12+3) +7 to hit .*

Ideal: Respect is due to me because of my position, but all people regardless of station deserve to be treated with dignity.

Trait: If you do me an injury, I will crush you, ruin your name, and salt your fields.

Flaw: By my words and actions, I often bring shame to my family.

Bond: Someone I loved died because of a mistake I made. This will never happen again.

Gardain is shocked by her brother's death. She has long suspected the traditions of honor and work have been corrupted by other families in the clan and sees her brother's death as a part of this. Oskar made her swear to not seek blood revenge after the death, but she waits, and broods her loss. She does not directly blame Bollo but has long seen Fingal's family as self-serving and bringing the clan down. She knows she could declare a feud over her brother's death.



Diesa

Level 9 Mountain Dwarf Barbarian(Battle Master), neutral

Armor Class 15 (unarmored)
Hit Points 104
Speed 35ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	13 (+1)	18 (+4)	8 (-1)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)

Proficiency bonus +4
Saving Throws Str +8, Con +8
Skills Animal Handling +4, Athletics +8, Intimidation +5, Survival (underground) +4
Senses passive Perception 10, darkvision 60ft.

Class Features. *Rage (4 times / long rest), Unarmored Defense, Reckless Attack, Danger Sense, Frenzy, Extra Attack, Fast Movement, Feral Instinct, Brutal Critical*

Racial Traits. *Dwarven Resilience, Dwarven Combat Training, Stonecunning, Dwarven Armor Training, Clan Unity"*

Weapon. *Maul (2d6+4), +8 to hit .*

Ideal: *Independence*. When people follow orders blindly, they embrace a kind of tyranny.

Trait: I can stare down a hell-hound without thinking.

Flaw: My hatred of my enemies is blind and unreasoning.

Bond: Those who fight beside me are those worth dying for.

Diesa is a notorious hell raiser in the camp. Famous for her drinking ability, she is best avoided as her short temper makes drunken arguments explosive. There are many rumours and stories around her fighting prowess, including the time she took on four members of the city guard, and the time when she got an ogre in a headlock.

Appendix C: Disease

Beholder Spores

Lethal, Magical

A priest in the Necromanteion always said that if you have to make an enemy of someone, make sure it's not a giant eye with other eyes for hair. Vicious creatures, these Beholders.

The spores Biathocax the Beholder has spread all over the world, in an ingenious ploy to spy on many underworld merchants and other shady figures. These are inspired by the spores in the Dungeons and Dragons 5th edition adventure Tomb of Annihilation, but there is no need to read it to understand the disease.

Loosely based on Fungal Infections, and mainly influences by Aspergillosis, which can be caused by mold in common places.

Origins

Biathocax was a Beholder with no purpose. Having no interests and no particular way to spend time, boredom took the better of his brilliant mind. In this time of madness, he came across the legend of Belchorzh, the invisible beholder that made one of Acererak's infamous tombs his home. Rumours have it that Belchorzh filled an entire level of the tomb with a magical fungus, that grew and created mold in the walls and floor of the tomb. Biathocax knew he had to try this, and so he did. He managed to create a living organism, a fungus he named A. Biathocax, and sold to many underworld merchants. Now it can be found in many dark places all over the world.

Little did the merchants know, the fungus is a living part of Biathocax. He can see from the eyes that sprout from it, and thus has established an immense network of surveillance, giving him the edge he needed to finally find his place in the world.

Causes

This green mold can be found in dark rooms, smells like rotting corpses, and feels very soft but moist. It grows on the floor, the ceiling and the walls, but especially in cracks and nooks. At random times, or when a creatures comes within a few inches of the mold, a small opening forms in the green mold, from which a cloud of purple spores erupt. Each creature within 5 ft of the mold must succeed in a **DC 13 Constitution saving throw**, or become infected. The spores accumulate in the lungs of the infected creature, and slowly start to multiply.

It is worth noting here that as characters move through areas with this alien growth, tiny eyeballs emerge from the mold to scrutinize them. If they attack them and inflict fire, ice, necrotic, radiant, slashing, bludgeoning or piercing, the mold will die but a cloud of spores will spread to anyone within 30 ft of the destroyed batch. Any creature in this area must make the saving throw or become infected.

Symptoms

After the initial infection, the next time a creature falls asleep, the fungal infection takes its toll. When they wake up, they must make a successful **DC 13 Constitution saving throw**, or the infection stage increases by one. Every time the creature wakes up from a long rest, they must make the same saving throw, or have the disease stage increase.

The symptoms themselves depend on the stage. Note that each stage symptoms include the previous stage as well, but are not written in the table for efficiency's sake.

Stage I

The infected creature, upon waking up, suffers 1d8 poison damage, as they cough violently for a minute. They then feel normal until Stage II.

Stage II

Dyspnea, tiredness and a slight burning feeling in the chest. The infected creature has disadvantage on Constitution checks.

Stage III

Heavy dyspnea and a feeling of lungs burning with every breath. The infected creature gains one point of exhaustion.

Stage IV

Waves of violent trembling, blood coughing and disorientation. The infected creature gains 4 points of exhaustion, reaching 5.

If you want to cripple your players with this malady, you can also use this additional rule: After Stage II, the creature does not gain regain hit points from a long rest. This is because the sleep is constantly disrupted by the symptoms.

If a creature spends 24 hours in Stage IV without receiving any help, they die either of organ failure or from suffocation. The bodies of Biathocax' victims become sources that spread the fungus, and as they slowly rot, turn green. Their very skin becomes the mold, and if left unattended for a whole month, they completely turn into a mass of the green mold.

Diagnosis

Diagnosis should be easy, considering that the only way to contract this disease is to inhale the spores from the cloud released by the mold. It should be fairly easy to connect the incident to the symptoms, but if a creature is having trouble discerning the cause, a successful **DC 12 Wisdom (Medicine) check** will illuminate the situation.

Cure

Biathocax realized early on in the development process that the spores could become lethal, even for their owners, and to make sure it was safe to sell, created an antidote. Every mold owner has an antidote, which means that in every dungeon, hideout or house that the mold is found, a vial of its antidote is safely hidden. Just one small drop of the antidote mixed with water is enough to cure the disease.

Any spell or character class ability that protects from diseases or makes a creature immune to them completely protects the creature from the fungus, but a spell or ability that removes diseases only halts the progression of the spore infection to Stage I.



The Passenger



For Levels 10-11

by Tal Aviezer

"I am the passenger

and I ride and I ride

I ride through the city's backsides

I see the stars come out in the sky

Yeah the bright and hollow sky

And everything looks good tonight"

–Iggy Pop

Introduction

The Passenger is a Dungeons & Dragons adventure for four to five 10th-11th level characters. It's approximately four hours in length, designed for one session of play. It is set in the city of Waterdeep on the Sword Coast of Faerun, but with some minor adjustments it can be used in any major city in your campaign.

You should read the whole adventure before running it.

Creatures from the *Monster Manual* (*MM*) or *Volo's Guide to Monsters* (*VGtM*) appear in bold with the appropriate page number listed. Page numbers are also listed for certain references to the *Dungeon Master's Guide* (*DMG*).

If you prefer, feel free to paraphrase the boxed read-aloud text.

This is your adventure. You can change anything to fit your needs and preferences. And your players may try something unexpected, so be prepared for a little improvisation.

Adventure Background

Tharceri Rises

A powerful ulitharid mind flayer named Tharceri was recently attacked by githzerai hunters, deep in the Dungeons of the Mad Mage Halaster below the City of Waterdeep. Tharceri and two of his illithid followers were forced to make a desperate escape to the surface to avoid annihilation. They were able to salvage a deadly weapon from their subterranean laboratory as they fled: a mind flayer disease which Tharceri calls the Passenger Virus.

Beef and Brine

Unfortunately for its owners and employees, Tharceri and his followers emerged from the labyrinthine dungeons below Waterdeep by breaking into the cellar of Beef and Brine, a popular and exclusive restaurant in the Trade Ward. They promptly devoured the brains of the owners and made the staff into thralls.

Tharceri and his fellow mind flayers are paranoid creatures who live in constant fear of attack by gith, or by others of their own kind. Operating secretly from the restaurant, the mind flayers hope to establish a grip on Waterdeep's high society – acquiring wealth, power, and secrets to insulate themselves from harm. They lure the elite with lavish banquets, serving meat tainted by the Passenger Virus, which allows Tharceri to use infected victims as unwitting spies.

Using intelligence gathered through the infected, Tharceri has begun the second phase of his plan: orchestrating a series of baffling robberies to amass a foundation of wealth.

Brainstealer is Watching

Tharceri believes his presence in the city has gone completely undetected, and he is correct – with one exception. Brainstealer, a dragon with terrifying mental powers and his own designs on Waterdeep, has noted the tell-tale signs of the mind flayer virus and suspects that he has a rival somewhere in the city – a rival that adventurers can destroy for him.

The Passenger Virus

The Passenger Virus is a strain of the Mind Flayer Network, a disease that hijacks the senses and connects creatures to a hivemind (in this case, the ulitharid Tharceri). Victims infected by the Passenger Virus unknowingly become extra sets of eyes and ears for Tharceri until cured.

Tharceri and any mind flayer that is part of his network have the following additional ability:

Infect. *Melee weapon attack.* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one incapacitated humanoid grappled by the mindflayer. Hit: the target takes 44 (8d10) piercing damage, then must make a **DC 15 Constitution saving throw** or become infected with the Passenger Virus.

Creatures that devour the dead body of an infected host must make a **DC 17 Intelligence saving throw** to avoid becoming infected.

Symptoms

1-3 days post-infection: mild but persistent headache

1 week post-infection: victim experiences a bizarre vision defect, viewing the world as if through a purple lens. The effect fades after 1d8 minutes.

2 weeks post-infection: victim frequently experiences horrible nightmares while sleeping. Victim experiences confusion, lethargy, and loss of focus resulting in short-term madness (see *DMG* chapter 8: Madness Effects). Victim's speech patterns and behavior change (victim may occasionally refer to itself as "we" rather than "I" and may manifest a subconscious dislike for non-illithid creatures).

Diagnosis

The Passenger Virus cannot be detected by a detect magic spell, but a detect poison and disease spell accurately diagnoses the infection.

Treatment

The *lesser restoration* spell removes any short-term madness from the victim but does not cure the disease. *Greater restoration* or *heal* spells cure it completely.

Adventure Hooks

You could use any and all of the following hooks to draw the adventurers into the story:

Only a Paper Bird

A tiny paper bird flies up to a member of the party and hovers in the air in front of them. When touched, the paper unfolds and becomes a non-magical sheet of parchment, on which is written an invitation to meet at the Pink Flumph theater during a matinee performance of *Kiss of the Lamia* for a lucrative job offer. Give a player *Handout A: Paper Bird* (see Appendix B: Handouts).

Heartbroken

A character who is a member of the Bregan D'aerthe faction is contacted by Jarlaxle Baenre and asked to investigate the recent looting of one of his ships, the *Heartbreaker*, while it was at anchor in the Docks District. Another party interested in investigating the crime has expressed a desire to join forces; Jarlaxle requests the character meet this person in a private box at the Pink Flumph theater during today's performance of *Kiss of the Lamia*.

You Messed with the Wrong Bank

One or more of the party members keep some money at the Blackbanner Bank, a trusted establishment in the Castle Ward run by a shield dwarf clan. Unfortunately, the bank was recently robbed – it appears to have been an inside job, and the bankers are mortified. Another party interested in investigating the crime has expressed a desire to join forces. The bankers beg the adventurers to meet this person in a private box at the Pink Flumph theater during today's performance of *Kiss of the Lamia*.

Regardless of which hooks are used, the adventure begins in a private box at the Pink Flumph Theater during a performance.



Part One: A Matinée

"You common cry of curs!" decries the Mulhorandi prince from the stage. *"Whose breath I hate, as I do the reek o' the rotten fens. Despising you, despising the city, thus I turn my back. There is a world elsewhere."*

He swirls his purple cape as the ensemble gasps, and then a crescendo from the orchestra pit signals the end of the third act of *Kiss of the Lamia* at the Pink Flumph Theater.

The magical lanterns dim over your private box as the music swells and stage hands feverishly shift the scenery. The commotion almost masks the arrival of a newcomer, who slips into a seat directly behind you.

"Don't turn around," a voice hisses. *"We need to talk about the robberies."*

The newly-arrived contact is Pancible Poddlewink, a neutral evil gnome **conjurer** (*VGtM* p214). It was he who reached out to the heroes using one of the adventure hooks listed above.

Roleplaying Pancible Poddlewink

Pancible introduces himself as "Mr. P." He is past middle-age, dressed mostly in purple and blue crushed velvet (including a cape and a large tam o'shanter). He wears tights and carries opera glasses.

Pancible assumes the persona of a dandy who is clumsily playing at being a secret agent. He pretends to be in way over his head. At one point, he will "accidentally" reveal his real name: *"You have my word you'll be well-rewarded, or my name isn't Pancible Poddlewink. Er, I mean, Podcible Pandlewink-! I mean...damn it! Do you think you could pretend I didn't say my name just now?"*

In reality, Pancible is a sly and amoral mercenary in the employ of an evil dragon named Brainstealer. The adventurers have come to Brainstealer's attention due to their past exploits, and he has ordered Pancible to recruit them for what the dragon considers a pest control job: identifying and eliminating whoever is using the Passenger Virus in Waterdeep

Pancible pretends to be an enthusiastic amateur sleuth and peppers the adventurers with questions about their exploits: what monsters they've killed, what their favorite spells and weapons are, how one goes about becoming a famous adventurer, whether they have ever considered hiring a biographer, etc. As much as possible, he will try to encourage them to talk about themselves rather than focus on him.

He is an expert liar. A successful **Wisdom (Insight)** roll of 27 or higher is needed to detect any falsehoods he tells.

Developments

- Pancible explains that he has heard of the adventurers' impressive and noble accomplishments. For this reason, he is hoping they might be able to get to the bottom of a recent series of robberies in the city. He offers a reward of a wizard's spellbook and a magic staff that he recently inherited but has no idea how to use. In reality, these do not exist. Feel free to substitute this offer with anything you think would appeal to the characters; Pancible has done his homework and knows what will tempt them.
- Pancible stipulates that in order to claim the reward, the heroes must publicly credit him for solving the case (*"So I'll be known far and wide as Waterdeep's greatest detective!"*)
- During the past two weeks, three high-profile robberies have taken place: a merchant ship known as the *Heartbreaker* was looted overnight in the Docks Ward, a shipment of adamantine securities was stolen from the Blackbanner Bank in the Castle Ward, and the gallery of the famous tiefling artist Aspirant was ransacked right here in the Trade Ward.
- Pancible can provide directions to the scenes of all three robberies (none of which are hard to find).
- The City Watch is investigating the crimes but has failed to connect them to each other. Pancible believes that they are related and claims that he took his suspicions to the watch, but they laughed and told him to *"leave it to the professionals."* Pancible insists that all three crimes bear common traits: they all involved lucrative thefts from very secure targets, and were executed with no apparent witnesses.
- While the City Watch doesn't take Pancible seriously as a detective, one thing they do appreciate is his family's regular contributions to the fund for defending the peace in Waterdeep and maintaining the retirement of former Watch officers. If the adventurers themselves lack the status to ensure the cooperation of the Watch, then Pancible pulls strings to ensure that they receive unrestricted access to the three crime scenes.
- Pancible supplies the adventurers with four magic *paper birds*. The adventurers can use these to keep him updated, and to inform him when the case is closed. They can write messages to him addressed to "Mr. P." and each parchment will fold itself into a bird and deliver itself to him. If the players follow one of the birds through the city, a successful **DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check** is needed to keep sight of it; it eventually delivers itself to a booth in a coffee house in the Trade Ward where Pancible is relaxing and waiting.

If the adventurers accept the job, Pancible is delighted and shakes hands enthusiastically, "accidentally" revealing his full name if he hasn't already done so. He intends to stay and watch the end of *Kiss of the Lamia (*"*I can't wait to see how it all turns out!..I mean the play, and of course, your case as well!"*)* but the adventurers can begin their investigation immediately if they desire.





Part 2: The Investigation

In this section of the adventure, characters can visit three crime scenes in any order they choose:

- The ship *Heartbreaker*, anchored in the Dock Ward
- Blackbanner Bank, in the Castle Ward
- Aspirant's Gallery, in the Trade Ward

It is not necessary for the adventurers to visit all three locations. Once they collect enough clues to connect the crimes to the Beef and Brine restaurant, you can proceed to Part 3 of the adventure.

Travel between wards takes one hour. Traveling between different locations in the same ward (for example, between the Pink Flumph theater and Aspirant's Gallery, both in the Trade Ward) takes ten minutes.

Special Events

The following special events occur during the course of the investigation:

Sergeant Gumley on the Case

At whatever location the party visits first, they are met at the entrance by Sergeant Burn Gumley of the City Watch, a lawful good human **veteran** (*MM* p350). Gumley grudgingly grants access to the crime scene. He is a tough, by-the-book officer of the Watch who resents the fact that strings have been pulled to allow the adventurers access to the scene. He insists on tagging along to ensure that the characters do nothing illegal in the course of the investigation.

Gumley considers the heroes to be amateurs and dilettantes, but he is obliged to observe them to make sure they don't compromise an active investigation. In general, any deductions and inferences he makes should be incorrect. He is quick to point fingers at the Zhentarim or the Xanathar Guild as the culprits behind a robbery, and dismisses the idea that the crimes are related. However, if the players seem really stuck as to how to proceed, you can use him to offer hints.

Unbeknownst to him, Sergeant Gumley has been infected with the Passenger Virus. He was ambushed while on patrol in the Trade Ward, and his memory was later magically modified to erase any recollection of the incident. As a result, Tharceri sees and hears anything seen or heard by Gumley.

As the investigation progresses, it should gradually become clear to the adventurers that something is wrong with the officer. He complains of a headache, becomes increasingly fixated on the importance of rules and authority, is increasingly irritated by the adventurers, and, most oddly, occasionally refers to himself as *"we"* when he means *"I"*.

Attack of the Thralls

Tharceri spies on the adventurers through Sergeant Gumley during their exploration of the first crime scene they visit. The ulitharid quickly concludes that they represent a threat to his plans, and dispatches a team of thralls to eliminate them.

The thralls ambush the adventurers in the street as they are traveling from the first crime scene to their next destination. You can use *Battlemap A: City Street* (see Appendix A: Maps) for this encounter.

> As you make your way through the bustling streets of Waterdeep, you spot four armored men making their way purposefully toward you. They stride right down the middle of the avenue, ignoring anything in their way. The leader knocks a passing pedestrian to the ground without even a glance.
>
> The eyes of the armed men are fixed on you. The leader raises his arm and points his index finger at you as they surge forward without a word, drawing weapons.

The assailants are one human **gladiator** (*MM* p346) and three human **veterans** (*MM* p350). The gladiator is Rashaad Basha and his retainers are Jassan, Khalid, and Pashar. They are Calishite mercenaries and prize fighters who arrived in Waterdeep ten days ago on a pleasure trip to enjoy the city; unfortunately they went to dinner at Beef and Brine. Sensing their physical prowess, the mind flayers made them into thralls.

Note: A party of five 11th level characters will need a slightly tougher challenge in this encounter. Add one additional **veteran**.

The thralls have been ordered by Tharceri to kill the heroes, and will fight to the death in an attempt to do so, regardless of injury or threats. They will not speak or otherwise communicate with the adventurers.

The thralls carry nothing other than their weapons, clothing, and armor. There is nothing on them that would connect them with Beef and Brine or the mind flayers.

Saving the Thralls?

The adventurers may deduce that their opponents are under some kind of mind control, and may attempt to release them. Unfortunately, very little remains of the men these thralls once were. Per *Volo's Guide to Monsters*, restoring a mind flayer thrall to its former self requires the *regeneration*, *heal*, and *greater restoration* spells to be cast on the victim once per day for three consecutive days. Characters who make a successful **DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana) check** recall learning of this treatment - but this check is only possible if the characters know that the victim is a mind flayer thrall. In the unlikely event that a thrall is captured and restored, he can tell the party exactly what happened to him and can give them the location of Beef and Brine, though he refuses to return there.

Street Fight Complications

The fight with the thralls takes place in the middle of a busy street. Each round, a complication occurs during the fight:

Round 1. As the fight begins, panicked civilians race to escape from the melee. An elderly male halfling is knocked to the ground. If nobody intervenes by the end of round 1, he is trampled to death.

Round 2. Charging to attack a member of the party, one of the enemies (choose any you like) smashes through a street merchant's heavy barrel (location 2 on DM's map) - which turns out to contain briny water and live eels! All characters within 5 feet of that enemy must make a successful **DC 12 Dexterity saving throw** or slip on the slimy creatures and fall prone. The 10 feet around that enemy is difficult terrain for the rest of the fight.

Round 3. An **owlbear** (*MM* p249) being conveyed in a cage through the street is abandoned by its handlers (at location 1 on DM's map). The cage is covered by a tarp. Characters with a **passive Wisdom (Perception) of 13** or higher hear distressed hooting and scrabbling coming from under the tarp. The owlbear can be calmed with a successful **DC 14 Wisdom (Animal handling) check** or via magical means. If nobody tends to the owlbear, it bursts from its cage at the start of round 4 and attacks the nearest creature to location 1 on the battle map.





Crime Scene: Heartbreaker

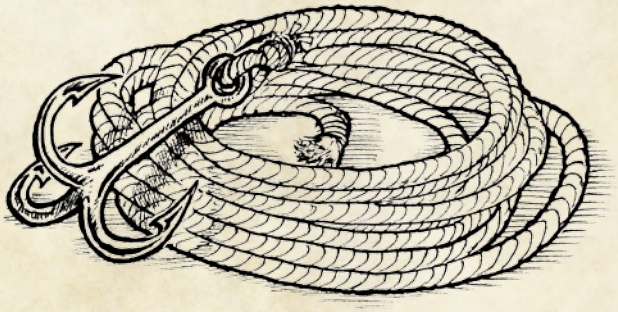
The Mistshore neighborhood in the Dock Ward smells of fish and scorched timber. A fire swept through this district last year, and recovery has been slow - several buildings are still little more than burnt out shells, with canvas sails used as improvised roofs. Fishing poles and nets line the docks.

The *Heartbreaker* sits calmly in the water at the end of a pier. The elegant red and black paint on her hull looks fresh. Her gangplank is lowered, and near its base stands a thin, grim-faced human man who squints at you as you approach. A large, hairy tarantula scuttles up his sleeve and rests on his left shoulder. He raises his right hand and pets it absently.

The man with the tarantula is Tylan Ilueph, a **drow mage** (*MM* p129). He is magically disguised, and introduces himself as Captain Klarr Besham. He is dour and humorless. The spider is his familiar.

Most of the crew is on shore leave, but present on the ship are three **drow elite warriors** (*MM* p128) and three human carnival performers (**commoners**, *MM* p345). All the drow are magically disguised as slender humans while aboard ship, thanks to an illusion generated by the ship's figurehead (a carving of a beautiful elf maiden). The figurehead radiates illusion magic if subjected to a detect magic spell. Casting *dispel magic* on a disguised drow causes the illusion around it to wink out only for a moment. An *antimagic field* suppresses the figurehead's magic within the field's area. Destroying the figurehead ends the effect throughout the ship. The figurehead has **AC 15, 50 hit points**, and immunity to poison and psychic damage. Despite their disguises, the drow still suffer the effects of *sunlight sensitivity* in daylight.

The *Heartbreaker* belongs to the drow mastermind Jarlaxle Baenre; it is primarily used to transport performers and strange creatures for Jarlaxle's carnival, The Sea Maidens Faire.



Who are the Bregan D'aerthe?

You can find a detailed description of the Bregan D'aerthe faction in the *Waterdeep: Dragon Heist* hardcover adventure. If you don't have that book, all you need to know is that the Bregan D'aerthe is a mercenary organization with a membership entirely composed of renegade drow who have escaped from the Underdark. The organization is led by Jarlaxle Baenre, a pirate, smuggler, and confidence artist. Jarlaxle's carnival, the Sea Maidens Faire, serves as a front for his unsavory enterprises in Waterdeep.

If an adventurer is a member of the Bregan D'aerthe, then they are already aware that the sailors are really drow.

The Crime

Captain Tylan was recently invited to dinner at Beef and Brine, compliments of the house. He was told the management was interested in booking a few Sea Maidens Faire performers as entertainment at the restaurant. He was fed swordfish that had been tainted with the Passenger Virus, and became infected.

Each evening at midnight, Tylan must deactivate the illusion spell generated by the *Heartbreaker's* figurehead, and allow its magic to recharge. This takes only a few minutes, after which he performs a ritual to reactivate the illusion. Due to Tylan's infection, Tharceri learned the deactivation ritual by proxy.

One evening earlier this week when Tylan was busy in the city on a mission for Jarlaxle, a mage enthralled by Tharceri snuck aboard the *Heartbreaker* and deactivated the illusion. The drow guards who were aboard suddenly found themselves bereft of their magical disguises and panicked. None of them could cast the activation spell, and they were forced to hide in their own quarters until Tylan returned. Tharceri's thralls then boarded *en masse*, locked the crew in their rooms, and stole three exotic and valuable circus creatures from the hold of the ship: a dimetrodon from Chult, and two death dogs from the Anauroch desert. Hours later, Tylan returned to discover his skeleton crew locked in their bunks, the illusion inactive, and the creatures stolen.

Investigating

- The Heartbreaker is a sailing ship (see chapter 5 of the Dungeon Master's Guide if you need statistics for the vessel).
- Characters with a **passive Perception of 14** or higher notice that the sailors and captain are squinting and trying to stay out of the sun as much as possible. A character who declares they are observing the captain or the sailors notices this automatically. If asked about it, Tylan claims they are hungover.
- Any drow or duergar adventurers, or characters who have spent significant time among the drow, notice the sailors communicating with each other using drow sign language.
- Any characters who speak elvish notice that the captain and crew of the Heartbreaker are all speaking Common with Elvish accents.
- If a character engages Tylan in conversation for any significant time, they notice that he occasionally pauses to close his eyes or rub his temples. If questioned, he sighs and says that he has had a dull headache for days.
- If none of the adventurers are members of the Bregan D'aerthe, Tylan is polite but reluctant to share details of the crime (though he will tell the heroes about the creatures that were stolen). A successful **DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check** is required to get him to open up (you can award advantage or disadvantage

if you feel the characters make a particularly compelling or unconvincing case). If the check succeeds, he asks them to follow him below deck and tells them about the illusion and how it was somehow deactivated. He reveals that he and the crew are drow. He never identifies Jarlaxle by name, and claims his ship is owned by a carnival master named Zardaz Zord. Nobody but Tylan knows how to activate and deactivate the illusion.

- Tylan doesn't think to mention Beef and Brine, as he has made no connection between the robbery and his dinner there. But if the characters ask about it (perhaps having learned about it elsewhere), he admits to having been there recently for a dinner meeting.
- The drow elite warriors are named Faen, Nim, and Traki. They politely refuse to discuss the robbery unless Tylan gives them permission to do so. If he does, they confirm his story. A few minutes after they retreated to their quarters, they heard their doors lock and found themselves trapped in their cabins. The thieves must have been highly skilled; the drow didn't hear them speak a word to each other during the robbery.
- The three human carnival workers are below decks when the adventurers arrive. The adventurers encounter them if they search the ship. Two of them, Ander and Bareris, are helping the third, Caladra, into an elaborate evening gown, dressing her hair, and helping to tune a harp for her. Ander and Bareris are complaining that Caladra has landed a special gig tonight; they say she must be the captain's favorite. None of them were on the ship during the robbery and can shed no light on it. If asked about Caladra's special gig, they explain that the captain has loaned her to the Beef and Brine restaurant tonight to provide dinner music; she is due there at six o'clock.
- If the characters wish to search the ship, a successful **DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check** is required to get Tylan's permission. He follows the characters around as they investigate, watching them like a hawk. Allow the adventurers to make one **Intelligence (Investigation) check** (with advantage if another character is helping) and consult the following table for results. Note that the results are cumulative.



DC 1	The hold contains several sturdy circus cages. There is a conspicuous space where at least two cages seem to have been removed; the stolen creatures must have been rolled away in their cages. Still caged in the hold are a **tiger** (*MM* p339), a **giant vulture** (*MM* p329), and an **axe beak** (*MM* p317).
DC 6	The ship's keys are all accounted for.
DC 11	In the captain's quarters, the adventurers find a locked trunk. Tylan is willing to open it with a key from his pocket if asked; he will not allow characters to take any of the items it contains. A successful **DC 20 Dexterity check** by a character using thieves' tools opens the padlock, or it can be broken off with a successful **DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check**. The trunk contains folded clothes, 250 gp in a sack, 3 pearls (worth 100 gp each) in a silk pouch, and a *potion of water breathing*.
DC 16	Behind a row of false books on a bookshelf in the captain's quarters, the adventurers find Tylan's spellbook, which contains all the spells he has prepared. Tylan fights to the death to prevent the theft of his spellbook if he catches the characters trying to take it.
DC 20	Stuck in the spellbook like a bookmark is a note inviting the captain to dinner at Beef and Brine. The restaurant's owners express interest in employing a few performers from the Sea Maidens Faire to provide entertainment; they'd like to discuss terms over dinner. If asked about the note, Tylan shrugs and says he indeed went to dinner. The food was mediocre but generous terms were offered and one of his people is playing there tonight.

Crime Scene: Blackbanner Bank

Magisters and merchants scurry around the bases of the great towers in the Castle Ward. The sturdy marble columns and gold-and-black flags of Blackbanner Bank convey an impression of permanence, stability, and dignity. The pale face and tired, nervous eyes of the dwarf waiting at the entrance tell a different story.

The bank's director, Dagnal Blackbanner (LG female dwarf **noble** - *MM* p348) greets the adventurers and ushers them quickly inside. She is a dark-haired, overworked shield dwarf in her first year as director of her family's bank and overseer of their affairs in Waterdeep. She has sent word to her clan leaders in Citadel Adbar about the robbery. She has not yet received a response from them but fears she will be removed from her position in disgrace.

The bank remains open to the public while the investigation is ongoing. The lobby area is crowded with angry and anxious citizens demanding answers from harried dwarf clerks about what the robbery means to their personal finances. Dagnal pushes through the chaos and leads the adventurers into her private office in the rear of the building, brushing aside pleading employees and howling customers until she can slam her office door closed and sigh heavily. *"This is a bloody mess."*

The Crime

Dagnal recently dined at Beef and Brine with the famous (and wealthy) tiefling artist Aspirant. The tiefling has rocketed to the top of Waterdeep's art world, and the dwarf is hoping to convince him that Blackbanner Bank is the best place to invest some of his sudden fortune. Both Dagnal and Aspirant were served beef tainted with the passenger virus, and both became infected.

In the past month, the bank was obliged to strengthen its resources and borrowed 30,000 gold pieces worth of adamantine bars from the Glibberfindle Consortium, a rock gnome firm.



However, the bank was never obliged to use the capital, and it has been sitting for weeks in the Blackbanner vault. The vault has a magical lock with a password that changes itself weekly and is known only to the director and a counterpart in Citadel Adbar. Once Dagnal was infected, Tharceri was able to learn about both the adamantine and the password. He dispatched thralls to break into the bank at night, open the vault, and steal the adamantine.

Investigating

- The thieves gained entry to the building by overcoming a complex but conventional lock on the front door. A character who examines the lock and makes a successful **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check** finds no tell-tale abrasions that would indicate that lockpicks were used. A character with proficiency in thieves' tools knows this automatically upon examining the lock. (The lock was bypassed with the aid of a *knock* spell.)
- The lock on the vault itself is a powerful magical ward, and is still active (has not been dispelled). The vault door can be opened only by using a password known only to Dagnal and a counterpart at Citadel Adbar. The current password is "obsidian."
- The robbers clearly knew in advance what they were coming for. Only the crates containing adamantine bars were removed from the vault. Gold and silver were left behind.
- If characters ask if there was a guard on duty, Dagnal introduces them to Korl Roundgrim, a lawful good dwarf **guard** (*MM* p347). Korl recalls being on patrol inside the building when he was suddenly overcome with a desire to sleep. He suspects he was ambushed by someone using a magical spell. When he woke, he was bound and gagged. Other employees found him still tied up when they arrived for work in the morning. He does not think he was unconscious for more than a few minutes at most.
- Dagnal is on the third week of her infection and suffers terrible nightmares that frequently rouse her from sleep. Be sure to play up her obvious exhaustion as she speaks with the heroes. She is also becoming paranoid, and is worried that she is surrounded by spies who plan to document any perceived failures on her part and report them to her superiors in Citadel Adbar. If the characters behave in any way that plays into this delusion (taking notes, asking to see her records, inquiring about business activity, etc.) then Dagnal's behavior becomes increasingly erratic - she alternately pleads with characters not to give her a bad report and then threatens retribution if they do, or promises rewards if they put in a good word. She struggles to grasp the idea that the adventurers have no connection to her superiors. She slips several times and refers to herself as *"we"* instead of *"I"* due to her connection to the mind flayer hivemind.
- If characters request to view recent expense records or other business documents, Dagnal complies, swearing that they'll find everything in order and above board. The most recently recorded business expense covers Dagnal's dinner at a restaurant called Beef and Brine with the annotation *"Business dinner w/ artist Aspirant at Beef & Brine. Potential high capacity investor."* Characters who ask to see the bank's books automatically find this entry. Otherwise, a general search of Dagnal's office turns it up with a successful **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check**.
- If asked about Beef and Brine (perhaps because the adventurers have previously turned up a connection with it due to visiting the *Heartbreaker* or Aspirant's Gallery), Dagnal readily admits to dining there a few weeks ago with Aspirant.



Crime Scene: Aspirant's Gallery

Aspirant's Gallery is a squat, windowless building with rounded onyx walls. A luminous band of amber encircles the structure a few feet below the roof, which rises into a single spiked minaret.

A drawbridge silently lowers open onto the cobblestone street as you approach. Crimson light spills forth from within.

There is a low chuckle from somewhere inside. Then a resonant voice with an audible grin says, *"Enter freely and of your own will."*

There are no other entrances to Aspirant's Gallery. Characters who make their way inside find themselves in a dark space illuminated only by reddish and gold light emanating from a circle of paintings.

The magical paintings each depict one of the layers of hell - the frozen wastes of Stygia, the twisted maze-like city of Dis, the blood-red sky and dark iron towers of Avernus. Aspirant's fiendish nature has given him a unique connection to these places, and the ability to depict them with unnerving accuracy.

Characters who examine a painting find a terrible beauty and a sense of uncomfortable recognition or familiarity in it. At your discretion, they may see distant figures depicted in some of the paintings - old enemies, dead loved ones - but the figures are not distinct enough for the character to identify them beyond question.

Aspirant's **imp** (*MM* p76) familiar, Circumstance, flaps with agitation from painting to painting, occasionally emerging from shadows to peer at the adventurers with glowing red eyes.

Aspirant, a chaotic neutral tiefling **warlock of the fiend** (*VGtM* p219), is sprawled on a chaise lounge with a glass of red wine. He has dark crimson skin and wears flowing black robes with white trim, open to the waist. A small marble table nearby holds a sketch pad and several bottles of ink and assorted quills.

The Crime

Aspirant's hellscapes are currently the most highly sought-after artworks being created in the city of Waterdeep. His paintings grace the walls of some of the city's wealthiest homes. His rise to success over the past few months has been meteoric, and has quickly made him very wealthy.

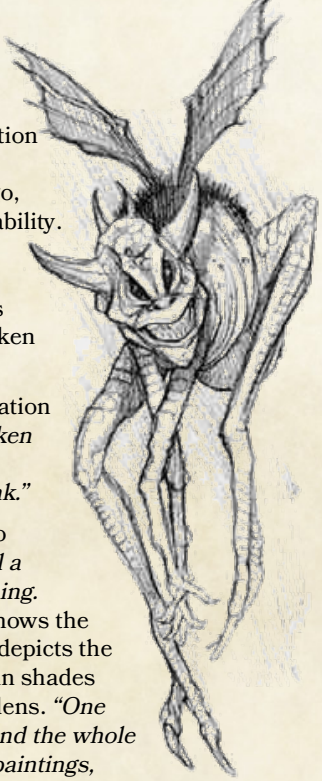
Weeks ago, Aspirant was taken to dinner at Beef and Brine by Director Dagnal Blackbanner of the Blackbanner Bank. Both Dagnal and Aspirant dined on beef tainted with the Passenger Virus, and both are now infected.

Tharceri spied through Aspirant's senses while the tiefling created his paintings, and while he sold them for huge sums, and while he celebrated those sales with wild, drunken costume parties in his gallery.

One of these costume parties made this robbery the easiest that Tharceri has executed. One of his mind flayers simply arrived at the gallery's open door, emerging from a closed carriage, and was complimented profusely by several guests on his incredible octopus-man monster costume. By dominating a few guests as the drunken evening wore on, the illithid had little difficulty departing with a painting entitled "Moment of Silence" which depicts a merregon war party sailing up the River Styx.

When a bleary-eyed Aspirant awoke late the following morning, he was greeted with the site of several unconscious guests, and one of his paintings was long gone.

Investigating



- Aspirant is in the third week of his infection with the Passenger Virus. The virus has exacerbated his already considerable ego, giving him a sense of euphoric invulnerability. He uses *"we"* in place of *"I"* constantly, but due to his egoism the adventurers may easily mistake this for a pretentious affectation unless they have already spoken with other infected characters.
- Aspirant can provide little useful information about the robbery. *"Our painting was taken during a costume party. By somebody wearing a costume. When we were drunk."*
- Aspirant is angry about the theft but also philosophical. *"Maybe it's a sign. We feel a new phase of our artistic journey beginning. We're entering our Purple Period."* He shows the adventurers his newest painting, which depicts the gallery in which they now stand, but all in shades of purple, as if viewed through a purple lens. *"One morning a few weeks ago, we woke up and the whole world was purple. Purple walls, purple paintings, purple wine, purple imp. The vision soon faded, but we feel it was a message from our muse."*
- If Sergeant Gumley is present during the discussion about the purple vision, any character with a **passive Perception of 14** or higher notices that he seems shaken by the story, and that he gazes at the painting for several moments as if transfixed. Gumley volunteers nothing about this, but if asked admits that he also experienced a similar purple flash recently. At first he was worried it was some sort of stroke, but it faded quickly and hasn't recurred. Any other infected character recalls a similar experience if questioned about it.
- During the conversation and inspection of the gallery, Aspirant becomes fascinated by the cranial structure of the character of your choice. He asks permission to run his fingers over the character's frontal and occipital bones (he shrugs if this is refused) and then asks if he can sketch the character's face and head *"We think you might be the perfect subject for our next masterpiece - a painting all in purple - no, no, a bust in purple marble! We will call it 'The Doomed Meatslave.'"*
- There is little more to discover at the gallery. Allow the characters to question Aspirant and inspect the premises for as long as they like. When they leave, Aspirant's imp, Circumstance, materializes next to them, just outside the gallery. *"Something wrong with master Aspirant,"* he croaks, *"Acting strange - well, more strange than usual. Circumstance know right away something wrong. Master not right ever since he went to dinner with nasty, fussy dwarf woman."* Circumstance does not know the name of this dwarf (it's Dagnal Blackbanner) and doesn't know where she and Aspirant went together.

The Investigation Concludes

By the end of Part 2, the adventurers should have visited at least one, and potentially two or three crime scenes, met Sergeant Gumley, been attacked by the thralls, and concluded that there is some link between the crimes and Beef and Brine. How much else they have surmised will depend on how many clues they uncovered and their own powers of deduction. If they have failed to at least determine that Beef and Brine likely holds the key to the mystery, you can use any of the NPCs to give them a nudge in the right direction and on to Part 3.

Part 3: Beef and Brine

In this section of the adventure, the heroes invade Beef and Brine to root out the source of the crimes they've investigated. It's very likely that Tharceri knows they're coming and has prepared a reception for them. If they still have Gumley or any other infected characters with them, then Tharceri is spying on them directly. In any case, due to his *creature sense* ability, the ulitharid knows that his lair is being approached and entered unless the intruders are protected by *mind blank*, *nondetection*, or similar magic.

The fact that the adventurers have traced Tharceri's operation to the Beef and Brine leads him to believe that the restaurant's usefulness is at an end. He fears that the adventures might be agents of rival mind flayers or gith. He has decided to allow them to come to Beef and Brine, dispose of them or make them his thralls, and then relocate before more enemies follow in their footsteps.

The adventurers can approach the restaurant in different ways. It's open for business and the staff will admit them, serve them, and then spring a trap. Alternatively, they could try to storm the place or gain access through either of two side entrances. Use *Battlemap B: Beef and Brine* as the players explore the restaurant (see Appendix A: Maps).

The staff of the Beef and Brine are all mind flayer thralls, unless otherwise noted. All of the patrons are innocent **commoners** (*MM* p345). If combat breaks out, the mind flayers have no intention of allowing a single non-thrall to leave the Beef and Brine alive.

Note: The two **mind flayers** in the Beef and Brine that serve Tharceri have only 40 hit points each. Tharceri himself lacks the plane shift ability.

Arcane Locks

Several of Beef and Brine's exterior and interior doors are warded by *arcane lock* spells. Each arcane lock has its own password, known only to Tharceri, the other two mind flayers, and the mage thrall Stellius Worngrund. All of these passwords are in Deep Speech. Doors protected by *arcane locks* have a **DC 25** for the purposes of lockpicking them or breaking them down.

As the party approaches the Beef and Brine, you can read the following description:

> Warm, cheery light pours out of the restaurant's mullioned front windows. The sounds of polite laughter and quiet conversation drift forth from within. A small chef's garden is visible just north of the main entrance. A glossy wooden sign above the front door depicts the smiling, stylized faces of a cow and a swordfish, flanking the words "Beef and Brine."

Area 1. Main Dining Room

> The restaurant is crowded but not rowdy. A tall, thin, white-haired human man in a dark cashmere suit stands near the front door. There is a blazing fireplace against the south wall. In the northeast corner, a small stage sits between two doors. A chandelier overhead, adorned with magically glowing glass bulbs, casts a warm, yellow-orange glow throughout the room. Waiters laden with platters and goblets stream between the tables.



There are 25 human **commoners** present enjoying their meals. They are an elegant, refined crowd. There are eight thrall **commoners** serving as waiters and other staff.

Unless the adventurers prevented her from being here, Caladra from the Sea Maidens Faire is on the stage playing her harp.

Safety Net?

The situation inside Beef and Brine can easily turn very deadly for the adventurers. If you'd like to offer them some help, then Caladra hides under the stage as soon as combat breaks out. At a key moment, she drops a magical disguise, revealing herself as a **drow mage** (*MM* p129) and pitches in to help the heroes. Otherwise, she remains a **commoner** at your discretion. If he is present, Gumley can also aid the party in combat at your discretion - he is infected but is not under Tharceri's control.

The man at the door is Stellius Worngrund, a human **mage** (*MM* p347) who is the only surviving former owner of the Beef and Brine. He is now a thrall and serves as maitre'd.

Developments

If the characters enter Area 1 as guests, Stellius greets them and shows them to the large, long table in the center of the room under the chandelier. They are offered a selection of dining options: segmented crawler, boiled eggs of griffon, the signature beefsteak, broiled swordfish, roasted suckling pig, giant crayfish stew.

Here She Is

While the adventurers are ordering, with great ceremony and musical accompaniment the table next to them is served a grilled dimetrodon (the unfortunate creature stolen from the *Heartbreaker*). If the characters inquire about it, they are told it was a one-of-a-kind dish offered at private auction to frequent diners - and it went for many hundreds of gold pieces.

Stay a While

Stellius surreptitiously casts arcane lock on the front door once the adventurers have been seated - the place is busy enough that the characters miss this unless they are actively observing him. If they are, roll a **Dexterity (Stealth)** check for him contested by a **Wisdom (Perception)** check by the observer.

Brains. It's What's for Dinner

If the adventurers wait for their meal to arrive, then, regardless of what they actually ordered, after one minute of waiting Stellius and two waiters arrive at the table and present the party with a massive silver serving tray with a domed cover. *"A special appetizer - compliments of the house."* A waiter lifts the dome to reveal an **intellect devourer** (*MM* p191) sitting on a bed of lettuce and carrots. It attacks the character of your choice. Stellius and all eight waiters also attack the adventurers. The waiters fight to the death using knives, cleavers, rolling pins, and frying pans.



One round after combat has begun, Tharceri (**ulitharid**, *VGtM* p175) and a **mind flayer** (*MM* p222) emerge from Area 3. During their first round of actions, they attempt to *mind blast* non-thrall patrons before turning their attention to the adventurers in subsequent rounds. You can roll saving throws for the commoners in groups of five. The monsters are unconcerned about hitting thralls with these attacks if the thralls are in the line of fire. Be sure to describe the chaos that ensues as screaming, panicking guests are struck down as they rush for the magically-locked front doors.

One round later, the **mind flayer** from Area 5 joins the fight.

The mind flayers consider this a desperate fight for their survival, and battle to the death.

Area 2. Chef's Garden

Behind a wooden fence is a small, well-maintained chef's garden. There is a section for herbs, small clusters of edible flowers, and plots of tomatoes, potatoes, peppers, and cabbages. To the east, a side door leads off the garden into the restaurant.

The garden fence has no gate - the garden is meant to be accessed via Area 3 only - but it can be climbed without difficulty. Unless creatures entering the garden have some magical protection that prevents detection, Tharceri is aware of their presence here.

Characters who look through the garden window have a view of cheerful and bustling activity in the dining room (Area 1). If they are not stealthy, patrons notice them and angrily wave them away.

The door to the east has arcane lock cast on it. It opens directly into the kitchen (Area 3).

Area 3. Kitchen

This spacious and well-appointed kitchen has been partially converted into a bizarre laboratory. Bubbling alembics and beakers filled with sickly orange gelatins crowd against an enormous brick oven and dangling pots and pans. Barrels of fresh vegetables rest side-by-side with a butcher's block covered with wicked tools of surgery and dissection.

Thaceri has partially converted this space into a laboratory for the purpose of cultivating and propagating the Passenger Virus.

Characters who search the space discover a dozen short, wide glass cylinders containing a sickly orange substance. A successful **DC 15 Intelligence (Medicine) check** reveals these to be preserved cultures of a bacteria or disease. An *identify* spell also reveals their nature and effects. If the glass cylinders are smashed, any creature who eats or is fed a culture must make a successful **DC 17 Intelligence saving throw** to avoid infection.

Creatures

Tharceri (**ulitharid** - *VGtM* p175) and a **mind flayer** (*MM* p222) are busily infecting food with the Passenger Virus, unless they have already entered Area 1 to attack the party. If Tharceri detects a character attempting to enter Beef and Brine from the side door in Area 2, he and the other mind flayer withdraw through the secret door to Area 4. They would prefer not to fight in this laboratory, for fear of destroying valuable equipment or virus samples.

Area 4. Storage Room

This storage room is clean and shows signs of frequent use. Empty barrels and beer kegs line one wall; sparkling glasses and tableware stand ready for use on shelves above rows of folded linen. There are doors in the west and south walls.

The door to the south has an *arcane lock*; it opens onto a loading dock behind the restaurant.

Characters who search the room or move the empty barrels discover a trapdoor hidden beneath a light, flimsy barrel. It is warded with an *arcane lock*. A stone staircase leads down from here to Area 5. A successful **DC 17 Wisdom (Perception) check** is needed to note faint seams in the north wall that conceal a secret door to Area 3.

If characters enter Area 4 from the loading dock, they hear the sounds of dining and conversation from Area 1. If they enter Area 1 from here, Stellius Worngrund intercepts them and tries to direct them to a table, behaving as if the characters must be confused patrons. If they comply, he proceeds with the planned ambush (see Area 1).

If characters linger in this room for more than three minutes, a waiter enters from Area 1 to retrieve tableware. He is startled to see the characters and asks them to return to the dining room (Area 1).

Area 5. Cellar

A single greasy oil lamp illuminates this cool stone cellar. Kegs of beer and ale line one wall, wine racks line another. A low growl followed by scuffling noises emanates from behind one of the racks.

Lighting in the cellar is Dim. Characters who search the room should make an **Intelligence (Investigation) check**, with the following cumulative results:

DC 1

Concealed behind the wine rack is an animal cage. Inside are two sad-looking **death dogs** (*MM* p321). These are well-trained circus animals stolen from the *Heartbreaker's* hold. Characters can temporarily befriend them with a successful **DC 15 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check**. The lock on their cage can be picked with a successful **DC 15 Dexterity (thieves' tools) check**.

DC 5

Behind the death dog cage, covered in grey cloth, is a beautiful but disturbing oil painting of a group of diabolical creatures crossing a black river in a boat made of bones. This painting was stolen from Aspirant's Gallery.

DC 10

Part of the cellar floor has been very recently repaired. It looks as if something broke through the stone floor from below, and then the hole was patched up. Note: a dwarf character who searches the room automatically notices this, regardless of the rolled result. If this passage is re-opened, it leads to the level of your choice in the official *Dungeon of the Mad Mage* adventure (or to a dungeon or Underdark location of your own devising).

DC 16 & higher

Four of the beer kegs are extremely heavy - much more than they should be if they were filled with beer. If one of the kegs is broken open, it is found to be filled with adamantine bars embossed with the label "Glibberfindle Consortium".

Treasure

Concealed in ale kegs are other treasures that the mind flayers either brought with them from the Dungeon of the Mad Mage, or stole from patrons of Beef and Brine. You can roll once on the "Treasure Horde: Challenge 11-16" table (*DMG* p138) to determine what treasure the adventurers find here.



Creature

Unless it has joined combat upstairs, a **mind flayer** (*MM* p222) is here surveying the patched hole in the floor (the creature is considering whether it might be safe to re-open the hole as a potential escape route). If combat breaks out in any of the rooms above, Tharceri summons this mind flayer to assist him. If characters enter Area 5 and attack this mind flayer, Tharceri is immediately aware of it, and he and the other mind flayer come from Area 3 to assist it, arriving in two rounds. If this mind flayer is killed before Tharceri and the other mind flayer reach Area 5, then if possible they withdraw back to Area 3 and send a waiter to Area 4 to try to lure the adventurers into Area 1.

Part 4: Aftermath

If the heroes prevail, then immediately after the fight at Beef and Brine concludes, dozens of officers and guards from Waterdeep's City Watch converge on the restaurant and cordon off the surrounding area. Griffon-riders circle overhead and alight on nearby rooftops. Sergeant Gumley, if he is still alive, helps explain to the Watch the role the heroes played in defeating the mind flayers.

The Watch takes control of the premises and assumes responsibility for the disposition of any recovered treasure. If the adventurers attempt to abscond with any of the stolen property, their success in doing so is up to you, their skills and ingenuity, and the efficacy of the watch in catching them.

If the players did not find the virus cultures and determine their nature and purpose, then a wizard investigator working with the City Watch, Barnibus Blastwind of the Watchful Order of Magists and Protectors, identifies the cultures and explains them to the adventurers.

Whether or not the adventurers report their success to Pancible using one of his *paper birds*, they never receive any response from him. The gnome seems to have disappeared from Waterdeep.

If the adamantine is returned to the Blackbanner Bank, Dagnal is effusive in her gratitude and bestows a reward of 3,000gp. If Aspirant's painting is returned, he offers to paint a portrait of the party, which is theirs to keep. If the death dogs are returned to the *Heartbreaker*, Tylan informs the party that his organization remembers its friends, and they now owe the heroes a favor.

The heroes receive a *paper bird* shortly after leaving Beef and Brine - give a player Handout B: Message from Izag from Appendix B: Handouts. It is from a mysterious stranger, and suggests that the adventurers may have been the unwitting pawns of a force even more malevolent than Tharceri. The adventure continues in SHADOW OVER WATERDEEP.

Defeated by Tharceri?

Characters who are defeated by Tharceri in this adventure might be transformed into his thralls. If this occurs, the githzerai Izag may be able to rescue them. He needs their help to defeat the dragon Brainstealer - and the adventurers would be in his debt. See SHADOW OVER WATERDEEP for more about Izag.

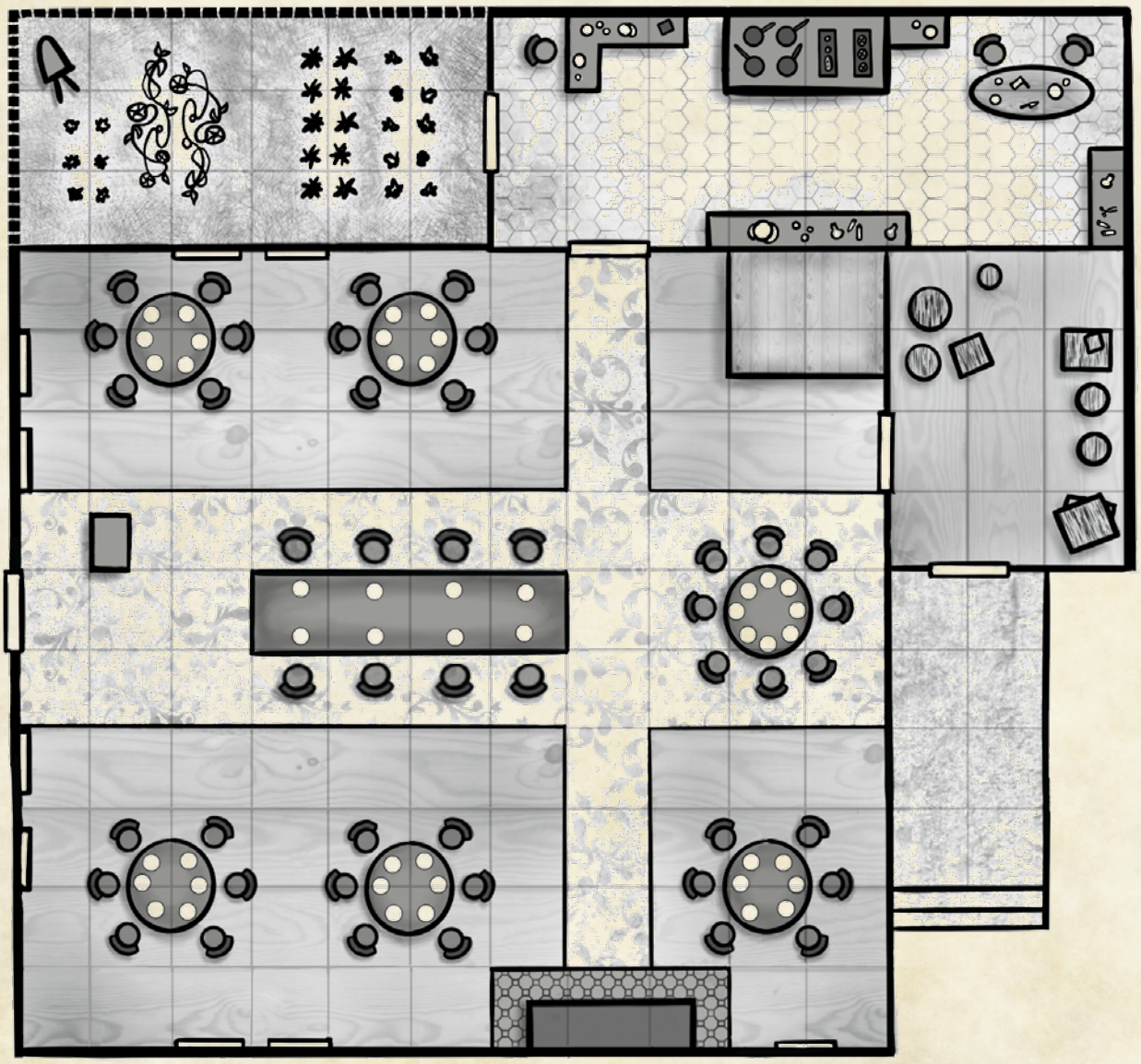

Waterdeep
City of Splendors
North Tower
North Gate
Heroes Garden
Sea Ward
Farwatch Tower
North Ward
West Gate
Fields of Triumph
Endcliff Tower
The Market
Castle Ward
City of the Dead
Fetlock Court
Piergeiron's Palace
Peaktop Aerie
Waterdeep Castle
The River Gate
Mount Waterdeep
Trade Ward
South Ward
Harborwatch Tower
Great Harbor
Dock Ward
Smuggler's Bane Tower
South Gate
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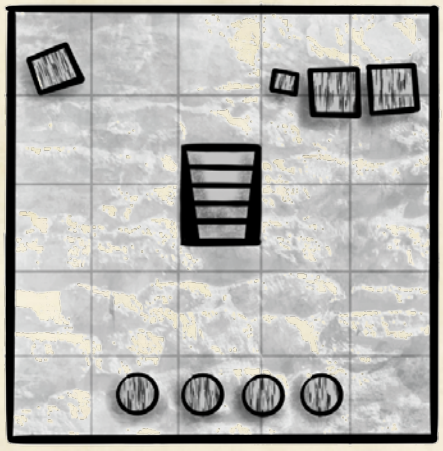


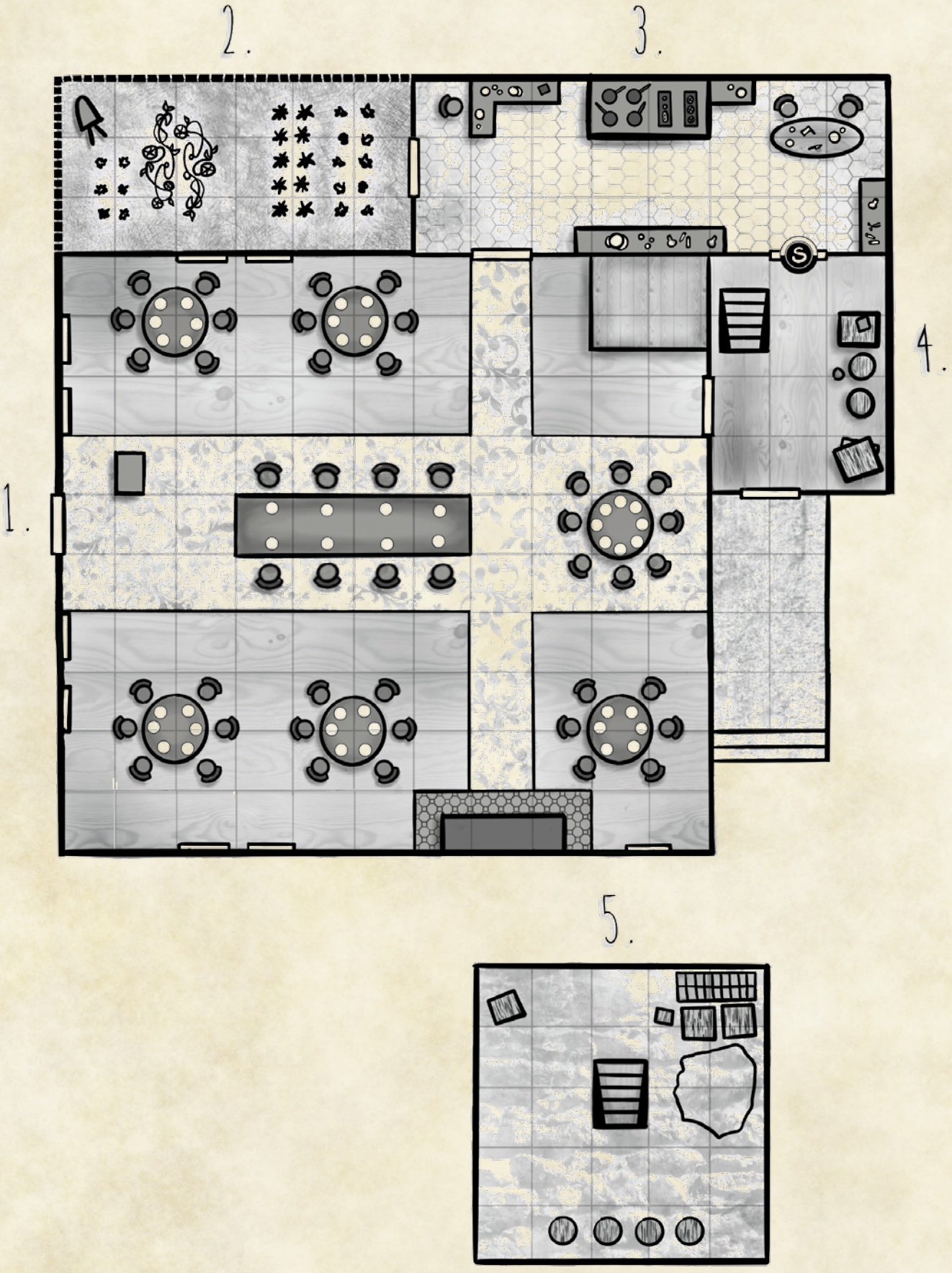
1 SQUARE = 5 FEET



1 SQUARE = 5 FEET






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Handout A: Paper Bird

Esteemed Adventurers,

Do me the honor of joining me at today's matinee performance of Kiss of the Lamia at the Pink Flumph Theatre in the Trade Ward.

I have a business proposal which you will find irresistable – it will bring you rich rewards in service to this great city, and offer you the opportunity to play a small but helpful part in the career of Waterdeep's Greatest Detective.

Private box tickets are being held at the theater under your names.

Very Sincerely Yours,

Mister P

The gnome is not who you think he is. I was hunting the creatures you dispatched in the Beef and Brine. I believe the gnome is a servant of something even more powerful than the illithid. Something that wanted those creatures out of the way.

If you will help me, meet me in Mouse Alley at sunset tomorrow. Move in shadows, my friends. I am not the only one watching you.

Appendix C: Disease

Mind Flayer Network

Non Lethal, Magical

I worry endlessly about Illithids. Those damn aliens brought us even more trouble than we could have imagined. If anyone you know sees purple, bring them to me.

The Mind Flayer Network is a virus that hijacks senses and connects creatures to the hivemind, but only as an extra set of eyes and ears. Basically: the mind flayers are always watching.

The Mind Flayer Network is loosely derived from Variant Creutzfeldt–Jakob, most commonly known as mad cow disease. It is caused by prions, which are proteins with abnormal structure that can also misfold normal proteins, creating pathogenetic proteins. It presents with symptoms of the central nervous system, such as psychiatric disorders.

Origins

Eons ago, an elder brain's whole network was brought almost to ruins at the hands of the githyanki. Struggling to survive, it had to adapt and find a way to expand its reach. In a moment of satanic brilliance, the elder brain reached a conclusion: information should be provided to it not only by illithids, but by all creatures in its sphere of influence. Soon, the surviving mind flayers connected with this elder brain were tasked with a mission of paramount importance: to spread a virus which would act as a trojan horse, an infiltrator that would hijack a creature's senses.

Causes

A mind flayer that is part of this elder brain's network can choose to use the Infect ability.

Infect. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one incapacitated humanoid grappled by the mind flayer. *Hit:* The target takes 44 (8d10) piercing damage. Then, it must make a **DC 15 Constitution saving throw**, or become infected with the Mind Flayer Virus.

The mind flayer might choose to infect a brain by changing its chemistry, instead of devouring it. It then leaves the victim to be eaten by other animals or creatures. When the host is eaten by another creature, it must make a successful **DC 18 Intelligence saving throw**, or become infected by the disease, also becoming a host. This means that one might contract the disease via the food chain. It is improbable for the disease to survive on a non-intelligent host for more than a month, as it needs to devour emotions and thoughts from beings of higher consciousness to thrive and survive.

Symptoms

In the first few days after a creature is infected with the disease, it only notices a slight yet consistent headache. This happens as the virus spreads all over their brain, hijacking all senses and preparing to transmit all signals to the elder brain.

One week after the unfortunate event, when the creature wakes up after a long rest, it views the whole world as if a purple filter was applied to its eyesight. Everything seems to some sort of shade of purple, but other than that, it's perfectly normal. After a few minutes, its eyesight is restored to normal.

Two weeks after the initial infection, the creature has horrible nightmares. Horrifically realistic and seemingly devoid of reason, these foul dreams are simply images the infected receive from other mind flayers. Having no psionic abilities and a totally different biological structure, most creature's conscious is unable to process the images, which result in confusion, lethargy, and loss of focus. Apply a short-term madness. (*DMG* p259). If this condition persists, without cure the inflicted creature gains an indefinite madness.

Diagnosis

The presence of the virus is difficult to locate without the use of magic. In fact, only a *detect good or evil* or a *detect poison or disease* spell can accurately diagnose the infection.

Cure

To get rid of the virus, potent magic must be used, as it is deeply rooted in the brain of the infected creature. A *calm emotions* spell can suppress the effects of madness, while a *lesser restoration* spell can rid a character of the short-term madness. The *remove curse* or *dispel evil* might also prove effective in removing the virus early on. If the virus has reached its final stages, a *greater restoration* spell is needed to cure the disease. Alternatively, the creature must seek the help of the gith, who have a simple medicine that cures the disease. They will not easily hand it over, however. The antidote could also be found in the hands of powerful scholars and knowledgeable mages.



A Shadow Over Waterdeep



For Levels 12-15

by Brian Istenes

Introduction

A terrible and unnatural fear has come over the people of Waterdeep. In a matter of weeks, dozens of people are missing, and more disappear each night. Rumors tell of curses, phantasms, demons, and possession. In truth, these are the victims of tiny parasitic brain maggots unleashed by the illithid-dragon called Brainstealer.

This adventure has strong horror themes. It is designed for three to five **12th-15th level characters** and is optimized for **four characters with an average party level (APL) of 13**. This adventure is set in Waterdeep and the mountains north of it, but with some alterations Brainstealer's lair could be placed deep underground near any large, well-populated city. Options are provided in each encounter for scaling the difficulty up or down.

Adventure Background

Mind flayers are vile and alien creatures who perform flesh-warping experiments to transform their captives into mindless slaves in the service of an elder brain. Many years ago, in a dark cavern beneath the Sword Mountains, an elder brain believed it could create the most powerful servant of all by inserting an illithid tadpole into the egg of a brown dragon just before it hatched. The experiment was successful, and the twisted illithid-dragon known as Brainstealer was created. As Brainstealer reached adolescence, however, its intellect grew too great for the elder brain to control, and the dragon began to rebel. To avoid being killed by its own warped progeny, the elder brain transported itself and most of the colony's inhabitants to another plane using a nautilus, leaving Brainstealer in the underground lair with a small number of mind flayers. These remaining mind flayers began to serve their new master by abducting humanoids from the surrounding countryside, but within a few years Brainstealer's hunger was too great to be sated by the few remaining mind flayers.

Within the library left behind by the elder brain, Brainstealer and its minions devised a tiny burrowing worm engineered from an illithid tadpole and a rot grub. These were the first brain maggots. The mind flayers spawned thousands of these wriggling parasites and began to set them loose upon the countryside surrounding the Sword Mountains. Humanoids affected by the parasite begin experiencing nightmares, headaches, and inexplicable fear. After several days, the affected creature's psyche breaks, as it enters a trance-like fugue state. In this trance, the creature begins sleepwalking without stopping or awakening, searching for the Brainstealer's lair.

One of Brainstealer's mind flayer servants has begun spawning tadpoles— an event which happens only once every few decades— and the dragon sees an opportunity to the south, in the streets of Waterdeep. Using the brain maggots, Brainstealer and its mind flayer minions have begun infecting and capturing humanoids around the city *en masse* to be transformed through ceremorphosis into new illithids, dominated into thralls, or experimented upon by the illithid flesh-sculpting scientists. Brainstealer plans to abduct people by the dozens each month, and use this new army of servants to conquer and enslave the weakened people of Waterdeep.

Adventure Summary

In part 1 of the adventure, the city of Waterdeep devolves into fear and madness from an invasion of brain-controlling parasites. The characters receive a letter from, and meet, a githzerai hunter named Izag. Following his advice, characters must locate and follow an infected NPC underneath the Sword Mountains to find their way to the Brainstealer's lair.

In part 2, the characters enter through an underground passage into a mind flayer colony, fighting their way through a vertical maze of chambers and alien technology. The characters must destroy the parasites and defeat the illithid dragon Brainstealer in his briny chamber to cure the madness in Waterdeep.

Adventure Hooks

A Cursed City

Nearly one hundred people have now gone missing from the streets of Waterdeep, and many citizens are plagued by a supernatural fear. Laeral Silverhand makes a desperate plea on behalf of the residents of Waterdeep for heroes of renown to find the missing citizens and remove the mysterious curse upon its people. The rewards offered publicly are sizable, amounting to over 3,500 gp and the city of Waterdeep may even grant the party a piece of land for their efforts.

Disappearance of the Noble's Betrothed

The son or daughter of a powerful Waterdhavian noble, perhaps one already familiar to the characters, was due to be married in the coming weeks. The disappearance of one of the betrothed leaves the engagement in question, and the two houses are quarreling. To avoid a war between the two great houses, the party is tasked with rescuing the betrothed before the day of the wedding. The characters are offered a rare magic item from the treasury of the noble's house if the betrothed is returned safely.

The betrothed can be found in the prison area (see Part 2, Area 4) of the lair. The abducted is afflicted by a brain maggot and paralyzed in the ooze, but still alive.

If the characters are not familiar with any nobles, use the following pair:

Arthius Haventree

A musician who studies music in Silverymoon. He is the son of Arthaghast Ulbrinter and Remallia Haventree. (see also, *Waterdeep Dragon Heist*, 214-215)

Mirra Amcathra

A young noblewoman known for her gallant dinner parties. She is the daughter of Galinda and Regnet Amcathra.

Close to Home

Some of the friends, family members, or favorite NPCs of the characters become afflicted with the brain maggots, and begin exhibiting strange behaviors as the days pass. When one or more of them goes missing, the characters are faced with a terrible loss, and may set out for answers.

Missing NPCs can be found paralyzed in the prison area of the lair. At the DM's discretion, one or more of the NPCs have been fed to the Brainstealer and its minions.

Part 1: A Shadow Over Waterdeep

Section 1. Phantoms in the Streets

Dozens of people have disappeared in a matter of weeks, and the residents of Waterdeep are uneasy. Signs of the brain maggot infestation are all around. While going through the city, the characters may encounter some of the following occurrences:

Signs of the Infected

Citizens in the early stages of the parasitic disease can be seen buying and eating large quantities of food. If asked to explain, they talk about aches and pain in their stomach, muscles, and head that won't go away unless they keep eating. These people can be seen messily gorging in and around taverns or other places where food is readily available.

People in the next stage break down with shaking at intervals throughout the day and see terrible visions. The visions depend on the memories and mental state of the infected person. These terrifying visions also haunt the dreams of the host, making it difficult for them to sleep. If asked about their vision, most citizens will babble incoherently about the object of their fear. These ravings are the source of most of the rumors floating around the city.

In the final stage after the psyche of the host is broken, it begins walking in a sleep-like daze through and away from the city in a generally northward direction. If the characters capture any of the "sleepwalkers," the citizen can make a **DC 25 Wisdom saving throw** to temporarily shake off the brain maggot's influence. They have no memory of their journey or recollection of how they got to where they are.



Rumors Abound

Most people assume the effects of the disease are the result of a magical curse or evil sorcery. Rumors are circulating around the city, and everyone seems to have their own take on the terror. Some examples of the rumors:

"It's an evil spirit, we just can't see it. You see the people just freeze, staring at the air."

"Maybe those missing folks got pulled into the world of the dead by ghosts."

"I hear that people are getting possessed by some kind of demon that enters their dreams and takes 'em over."

"My friend in the City Watch told me that he's seen people running away from the city at night."

"My son said his friend's brother started shaking all over. Said he could see an evil dragon, and the next day after that he's just disappeared."

"You aren't listening to me! It's the murderous wizard hypnotists that have put a link straight to your brain and control you unless you wear an iron helmet."

Section 2. A Mysterious Outsider

The Paper Bird

If you are progressing from the adventure *The Passenger*, the characters receive a note in the form of a *paper bird* from the githzerai Izag about one week after the events of the previous adventure (see Chapter 8: The Passenger, Appendix B: Paper Bird).

If you are not following the previous adventure, the characters receive this alternate note:

The influence of this evil is growing by the day. I believe we do not have much time before the city is lost.

If you will help me, meet me in Mouse Alley at sunset tomorrow. Move in shadows, my friends. I am not the only one watching you.

The Meeting

During the day between the note's arrival and the sunset meeting, more hysteria kicks up in the city, and most people stay off the streets, instead choosing to stay safe indoors. This makes travelling to the Southern Ward much quicker. The slums around Mouse Alley are filled with people who don't trust outsiders, and they shutter their doors and windows when approached or talked to.

Brainstealer and his minions are searching for Izag, and have learned that he is reaching out for aid. The dragon has hired assassins who are tracking the characters to locate the githzerai warrior. If the party tries to stay hidden while in the Southern Ward, and each character successfully makes a **DC 16 Dexterity (Stealth) check** when entering the alley, they avoid detection by the four **enthralled guards** who have been placed here by Brainstealer to alert two **assassins** hired by the illithid-dragon's minions.

> You walk through the dusty air and muddy streets of the southern ward, towards a secluded alley nested among the buildings. The streets are nearly empty, except for the occasional guardsman.
>
> As you enter the alley, you see a figure shrouded in a grey hood. Pulling back his hood, he reveals a face with bright yellow skin and a nose that is barely more than slits. A long scar, perhaps from a blade, runs across his cheek and under his left eye.

When Izag (a **githzerai zerth**, *MM* p161) reveals his face, it is obvious he is a githzerai to anyone who has encountered one previously. His battle scars and demeanor also make clear that he is a hunter. He speaks with calm but intense focus. Izag has come to the surface following the trail of mind flayers, and he believes that the supernatural fear is psionic in nature. He does not know that the Brainstealer is a dragon, nor that the curse is a result of becoming host to a parasite.

On himself and his people:
"Hello, my friends. We have not met, but know that my name is Izag"

"Know that I come from deep below in the underdark"

"Know that my people are hunters of evil, but our allies on the surface are few."

On the curse:
"I believe the curse that has come upon the city is the work of a powerful aberration."

"We need to track down these missing people."

"Or else we must learn who will go missing next."

Add the following if you are progressing from the adventure The Passenger:
"I was hunting the mind flayers you slew in the restaurant."

"There were others surveilling the area, and they were meeting with the gnome."

"He has left town in a hurry, and his room at the Tavern of the Flagon Dragon lies empty."

"If we can find him, he may lead us to his master."

Assassination Attempt
Unless each member of the party succeeded on their **DC 16 Dexterity (Stealth) check** when entering Mouse Alley, the assassins and guards learn of Izag's location and attack after a few minutes of conversation between Izag and the characters.

Foiled Assassination
If the characters all successfully made the stealth check, the assassins do not learn of Izag's exact location, but if the party chooses to meet Izag again, the assassins track down the meeting location and attack once more. (Use the following combat, but without any enthralled guardsmen)

In any case, if the fight is avoided, Izag is prevented from dying, or he is brought back to life by the characters, Izag says the following:

"You may have been followed here."

"It would be wise to go separately until we are out of the city."

"Keep your eyes open and your heads low."

Creatures
Two **assassins** (*MM* p345) and three **enthralled guards** (use **veteran**, *MM* p350). The guards enter through the alleyway, while the assassins wait on a rooftop nearby.

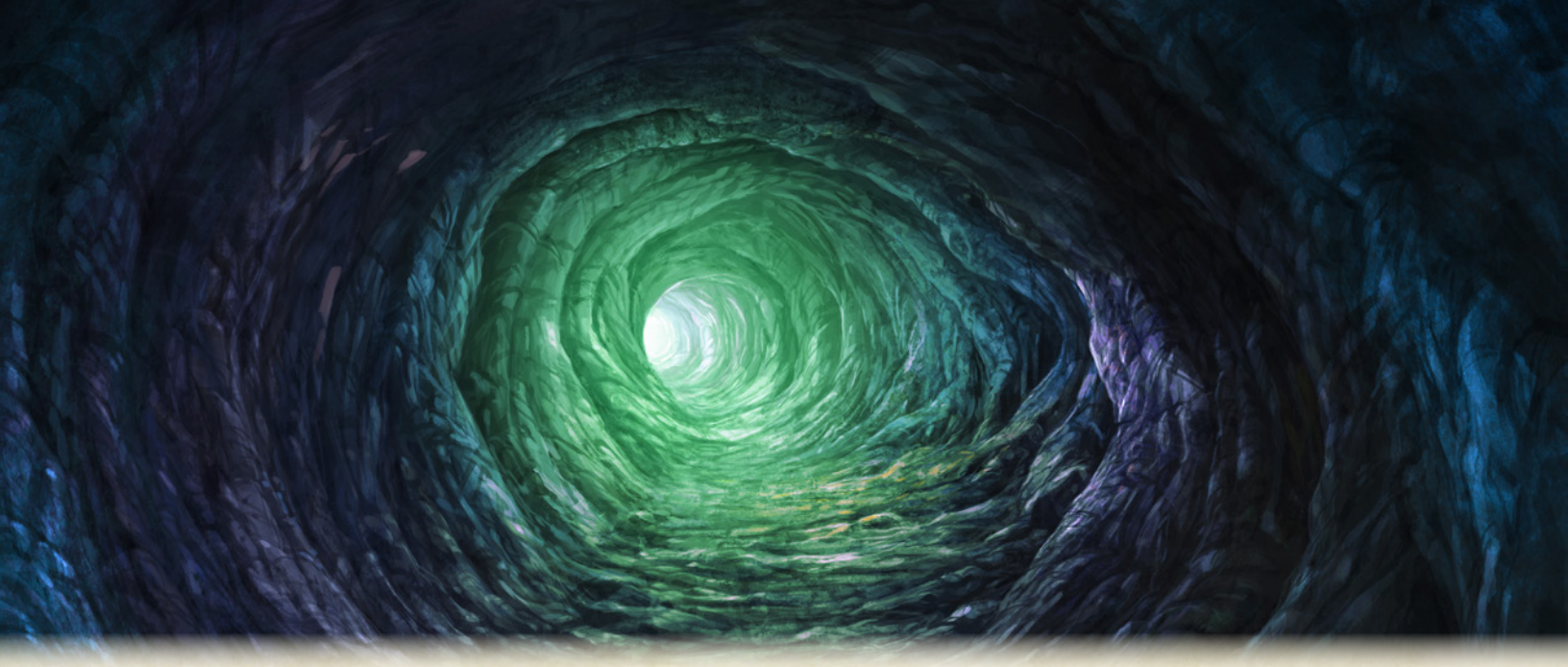


Adjusting this Encounter
Weak: Remove one **assassin**.

Strong: Add one **mage** (*MM* p346) who also starts the combat on top of a nearby roof. The mage begins the combat by casting fireball near Izag, trying to get both the gith and the characters within the spell's area of effect.

Tactics
The guards enter the alley in a group with weapons raised, trying to draw the party's attention. The assassins wait until the guards are positioned about 20 feet from the characters or combat has begun to drop behind Izag and assassinate him. The assassins enter combat by dropping down from the rooftop, making a **Dexterity (Stealth) check** contested by the characters' **passive Perception** to avoid detection. They focus on killing Izag, unless another character becomes an imminent threat.

Treasure
When Izag and the characters part ways, he gives the characters a blank *paper bird* (see *The Passenger*) to contact him, and two *potions of healing*. If Izag is killed by the assassins, these items are on his corpse.



Section 3. Hunt for the Brainstealer's Lair

There are several ways a party may go about locating the Brainstealer's lair, from divination magic to simple deduction. Two direct ways to find the lair of the Brainstealer are detailed below. (see "Finding Pancible" and "Finding the Walkers")

Travelling with Izag

If the party contacts Izag with the *paper bird*, and meets him outside the city, he offers to assist the characters in hunting the source of the curse. While travelling, he tells the party of his many previous hunts, and asks the characters about their deeds. Whenever the party stops, Izag meditates for an hour.

Finding Pancible

If the characters go to the Tavern of the Flagon Dragon in the Castle Ward, and ask about Pancible, they can gain access to his old room by paying 2 gp for a night's stay and making a successful **DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check** when speaking to the barkeeper. While inspecting Pancible's hastily abandoned room, the characters can discover a crumpled note underneath the bed with a successful **DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check**. The note lists several names and homes in Waterdeep. By cross referencing this note with a list of the missing persons, which can be obtained by looking on notice boards or by speaking to a ranking member of the city guard, the party discovers that every name is of a missing person, except for the last two names. These are Rolland Peridge, a human griffon knight whose home is in the castle ward, and Yarrow Tassila, a high elf who runs a fletchery out of her home in the trades ward. By finding either of the two named citizens, the characters can witness the descent from stage 2 symptoms into the stage 3 symptoms, and follow them out of town. See "Following the Trail."

Pancible placed one **brain maggot** (Appendix B) into a cup of water on the drawer of a side table. It tries to escape the glass when it senses motion in the room, slithering across the floor and making **Dexterity (Stealth) checks** against the characters' **passive Perception**, attempting to attack a character without being noticed.

Finding the Walkers

It is not difficult to find citizens afflicted by the brain maggots in the daytime; they make themselves obvious by their strange behaviors and overwhelming shaking. (see Section 1, "Signs of the Infected") A character who watches a particular citizen for multiple days sees the progression of the disease, culminating in the breaking of the citizen's psyche, and their escape from the city, heading north.

Because the parasites wait until the diseased creature is alone before forcing it to walk, finding a walking citizen at night is somewhat more difficult, requiring a character to spend 2 hours and make an active **Wisdom (Perception)** or **Intelligence (Investigation) check**. Depending on what district they look within, the check has the following **DC**:

DC 15: Field Ward, North Ward

DC 20: Castle Ward, Sea Ward, Trade Ward

DC 25: City of the Dead, Dock Ward, Southwestern Ward

Following the Trail

As soon as a diseased citizen begins walking north, they will not stop unless the citizen manages to overcome the brain maggot's influence. This makes it somewhat difficult to follow the creature over the course of their 2-day journey. They do not stop for food or drink, nor for sleep. The diseased creature walks at their race's standard movement speed for the entire journey. This pace of 25 or 30 feet per round means they travel about 3 to 3.5 miles per hour in normal terrain. If they are captured, they try to pry themselves free of their restraints with no regard to their own health or safety.

Divination magic like *hunter's mark* or *locate person* can help in tracking, but limitations in time and distance make maintaining such magic nearly impossible for the entire 2 days. Depending on how far behind the citizen the characters are, the **Wisdom (Survival) check** to track them has the following **DC**:

DC 10: less than 10 minutes

DC 13: 10 minutes – 1 hour

DC 15: 1.5 hours – 6 hours

DC 20: 1 day

DC 25: 2 days

If the citizen the party is tracking cannot be located again, the characters can make a **DC 14 Wisdom (Survival) check** and spend 2 hours searching for another diseased citizen following a similar trail. The parasites do not follow exactly the same path, and each citizen may have a unique route through the mountains.

Day 1

The journey takes the diseased from Waterdeep through the hills north of the city and into the Sword Mountains. The trek through the mountains is difficult terrain, slowing both the diseased and the party somewhat, unless they manage to fly for the journey. During the night, the party is attacked by two **swarms of brain maggots** (Appendix B), which approach stealthily, making **Dexterity (Stealth) checks** against the **passive Perception** of any party members who are awake.

Day 2

When the diseased finds one of many caves in the Sword Mountains that lead to a great underground network of tunnels. Traveling through the tunnels and caverns, they come to the lair of the Brainstealer. These tunnels branch and connect in myriad ways, making it necessary to follow the path of a diseased citizen closely to find the right path to the lair.

Paraphrase the following outside the cave:

> As the citizen clambers up the jagged mountain, stumbling and grasping for handholds, you see they are approaching a deep cavern whose entrance juts out of the mountain's face. As if being drawn inwards they step into the dark cavern, and are quickly swallowed up by the shadows.

Paraphrase the following while the characters follow the citizen into the cave:

> As they walk deeper into the darkness you can tell that the citizen appears to know their way through the cave despite the complete lack of light. When the underground path splits, the citizen takes no time in making sudden turns down tunnels and into smaller caverns.



Part 2: Terror Under the Mountain

Residents and Features of the Lair

The lair is inhabited by a small number of mind flayers who spend most of their days performing dark experiments to increase their numbers and bring about a new generation of servants for their draconic master. One of these servants, a creature called an **urophion** (Appendix B), guards the lair alongside several thralls. In the deepest part of the lair, in a briny underground pool resides the adult illithid-dragon called Brainstealer. The mind flayers who act as Brainstealer's minions bring him fresh humanoids to eat each hour, so he rarely leaves the water.

Segmented Membranes

These organic doors, which appear throughout the lair, are one-way, allowing any creature (generally a victim of the brain maggots) to enter the lair freely. Once a creature has passed through the doorway, however, the membrane seals itself tightly to anyone except a mind flayer. A creature can still force themselves through the door from inside the lair by making a successful **DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check**. On a failed check, a creature is restrained inside the door, taking 5 (1d8 + 2) bludgeoning damage and 8 (2d6 + 2) acid damage. A restrained creature can repeat the check as an action, taking damage at the end of its turn if it remains restrained.

The membrane can also be destroyed if it takes **25 or more points of damage** (it has AC 10 and resistance to poison, acid, and lightning damage). Whenever it takes damage, it releases a loud squealing noise that can be heard from up to 150 feet away.

Vertical Passages

Mind flayers can levitate effortlessly with their psionic powers, and their lairs forego the need for stairs, or the like. The two floors of the lair are connected by tubular vertical passageways, 10 feet long and 5 feet in diameter, which appear as holes in the floor and ceiling in many rooms. Adventurers can traverse these passages with ropes, or spells like *levitate* and *flight*. The ceilings of the lower floor of the lair are 20 feet high, making the distance between the two floors 30 feet including the vertical passage.

Illithid Glass

Mind flayers have the ability to make incredibly strong glass that is only permeable to psionic energy and the strongest of blows. In this lair, many objects like the tanks that hold mutated experiments and the jars that hold brains are made of this material. The glass has **50 hit points** and is **immune** to all types of damage except bludgeoning, piercing, thunder, and force. In addition, if the glass would be dealt less than 50 bludgeoning, piercing, thunder, or force damage in a single hit, it is dealt 0 damage instead.

Entryway. Hidden Pit Trap

As you descend deeper into the twisting underground passages, you start to notice a slimy residue on the walls. Your footsteps start to squish and splash with every step. Rounding the next turn, the path is blocked by a green, segmented membrane that stretches across the entire passageway. The membrane looks organic, and pulses slightly as you watch it. Between the crevices where the segments meet, you can see that it secretes a greenish liquid.

Any character can make a successful **DC 13 Arcana or Nature check** to know the liquid is acid.

When a character approaches within 5 feet of the membrane, it opens, allowing them to see into Area 1. Paraphrase the following:

The membrane opens like an expanding pupil, revealing a large open cavern behind it. Within the cavern, cloaked in darkness, you see a large stalagmite surrounded by several humanoid figures outfitted in heavy armor. They hold swords loosely in their hands.

The entrance to the abandoned colony that serves as Brainstealer's lair is sealed by a membrane-like doorway that traps victims within the lair. If the doorway is damaged, it makes a noise that alerts the enthralled guards and urophion in area 1 of a dangerous intruder.

Deviously, the mind flayers have placed this doorway immediately above a false piece of floor that hides a near-vertical drop leading to Area 4. Any creature that passes through the door, either in or out, must make a successful **DC 14 Dexterity saving throw** or fall into room 4 as a false piece of floor drops underfoot. The save is made after moving through the door when going into the lair and made prior to any attempt to force through the door when leaving the lair. After 1 round, on initiative count 20, a small mechanism activates, springing the false piece of floor back into place seamlessly.



Paraphrase the following if a character falls through the drop to Area 4:

> As you step forward, you hear a click as a section of the cave-floor drops out beneath you. You fall down a slippery sloping passage, landing about thirty feet below with a plop in a pile of freezing-cold goo. With another click, the floor above you closes again, and you are bathed in darkness. And goo.

Area 1. Guard Stalagmite

> Moving through the open membrane, you enter a circular stone chamber with a large stalagmite at its center. As you look at the shadowy figures standing around it, you can see they are in a sort of daze, and don't even look your direction. A gently pulsating purple light spills out of a passageway leading to the north.

To begin the combat, paraphrase the following:

> A great red eye appears on the stalagmite, and in a flurry of motion several tentacles lash out at you from its base. It opens its razor-toothed maw and releases a piercing screech that echoes through the stone chambers. The dazed humanoids are shaken into action, and hold their swords at the ready, pointed towards you.

The stalagmite at the center of this wide chamber is actually an **urophion** (Appendix B), an intelligent roper implanted with an illithid tadpole. The urophion has been instructed to allow stupefied and friendly creatures to enter the lair, but if the creatures try to escape, or manage to avoid the pit, it has been given permission to eat its fill of brains, which it does gladly. It uses its psionic ability to *detect thoughts* to determine if a creature is hostile. The urophion is nearly as intelligent as a normal mind flayer, but is treated poorly by the mind flayer scientists who created it and relegated to a guard role, leaving it bored with its simple duties.

Four **enthralled guards** (use **veteran**, *MM* p350) stand around the room. They stare inattentively around the room will not move or act until the urophion screeches or another mind flayer gives them directions. They have very limited intelligence and can be tricked into running into the pit trap by a cunning party.

Creatures

An **urophion** (Appendix B) surrounded by four **enthralled guards** (use **veteran**, *MM* p350), the guards stand stupefied and nearly motionless around the center of the room.

Adjusting this Encounter

Weak: The **urophion** has 102 HP (12d10 +36) and its tentacles deal 2d4 necrotic damage on a failed saving throw.

Strong: Add one **mind flayer** which starts the combat resting in a basin in Area 2 and enters the guard chamber after 1 round.

Tactics

If one or more characters avoid the pit trap and enter the chamber, the urophion uses its *lesser mind blast* to stun the intruding characters, and extends its tentacles to grapple them. It also makes a screeching sound that shakes the enthralled guards to action. Upon hearing this sound, the guards ready their weapons and try to attack restrained creatures, or otherwise strike at the closest hostile creature. The urophion tries to avoid hitting the thralls with its *lesser mind blast*, if possible.

If the urophion is killed, the characters can try to persuade the enthralled guards to stop attacking and slip back into their dazed stupor with a successful **DC 17 Charisma (Persuasion) check**.

Treasure

The incoming infected humanoids are stripped of their valuables, which are placed in a small metallic chest inset in the east wall for later perusal by the mind flayer scientists. Inside the chest is a set of *+1 studded leather armor*, 1d100 gp 1d20 pp and 250 gp worth of non-magical jewelry.

Area 2. Illithid Chambers

> Stepping through the dimly lit passage, you see that the large, stone chamber around you is covered with a luminescent, purple fungi. The pulsating violet light illuminates the edge of the cavern, which is lined with fleshy, organic basins filled with foul smelling, dark-green liquid. The center of the room is raised up like a table and has three humanoid corpses laid upon it, scalped and brainless. A circular hole in the ground on the north end of the room leads deeper downwards through a tube.

This is the area where the mind flayers eat, rest, and recuperate. It is currently empty, except for the remnants of their last meal. Mind flayers usually hate light, but the purple glow of the mushrooms rejuvenates their bodies and keeps them full of energy.

A successful **DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check** identifies the corpses as two young Waterdhavian nobles and a working man, perhaps a blacksmith or potter.

A successful **DC 17 Intelligence check** reveals the organic basins to be sleeping chambers for the mind flayers who reside in the lair.

A character who harvests a mushroom with a successful **DC 13 Intelligence (Nature)** or **Wisdom (Survival) check** can use it as a light source that casts bright light in a 5-foot radius, and dim light in a 15-foot radius. There are about 250 individual mushrooms that line the ceiling of the cavern. The light lasts for 6 hours after the mushroom is picked.

Treasure

Surrounding the wide chamber are resting pools for the mind flayers; within one of these basins is an iridescent key that can be used in the laboratory in Area 6.

Area 3. Brain Library

> You drop down the tube into a small chamber which holds six jars with brains floating inside. The jars are neatly set in a row, and are filled with a translucent blue liquid. Behind them sits a large, purple, squid-like creature immobilized inside a glass canister. Each of the creature's six tentacles extend out from the canister and are attached to the back of the jars by metal restraints. The north wall is covered with switches and levers. On the south end of the room is another green, segmented membrane, and beneath its opening you see a trail of greenish slime. On the west side of the room is a darkened hallway that twists out of sight.

The encased creature is a psionic squid which can detect brain waves with its suckers and send telepathic messages. The mind flayers use it as a cruel form of entertainment. Along the north wall are six levers which activate electric shocks through each of the creature's six remaining tentacles connecting one of the brains with the squid's mind. Each lever has a corresponding label to one of the brains.

The shock forces the squid to telepathically broadcast the last thought made by the corresponding brain to any creatures within 30 feet. If multiple levers are pulled simultaneously, the messages become merged into a maddening cacophony, and each creature within 30 feet must make a successful **DC 13 Constitution saving throw** or become afflicted with a random short term madness from the short term madness table (*DMG* p259).

A character who makes a successful **DC 16 Intelligence (Investigation) check** when inspecting the jars or the wall of switches and levers notices they are labelled with raised glyphs. By using the *comprehend languages* spell, or similar magic, a character can read the language by running their hands across it, like braille. The labels identify the creature's race and make clear which lever maps to which brain.

Listed below are the identities of each brain, as well as some examples of the thoughts of each brain. The levers are, from left to right:



Lever 1

Aldon Merriweather
Label: Halfling Male
- *"It ate Henrik's brain! I saw it take the top of his head clean off and I just stood there."*
- *"What in the nine hells were those things? Their mouths, the way they moved, oh gods why."*
- *"Why couldn't I act? I don't even know how we got in this place. I'm sorry Henrik."*

Lever 2

Johanna Lorias
Label: Human Female
- *"I wonder what I did to deserve this kind of afterlife. All dark. All cold."*
- *"Where are you Kelemvor? Was I not kind and gentle and faithful?"*

"• Are you not just, oh Lord of the Dead, oh Judge of the Damned?"

Lever 3

Haldric Lorehammer
Label: Dwarf Male
- *"Ah, that night at the tavern. All the mead. Give it to me lads!"*
- *"The taste of the stew, the beef pies, the hair from the cat getting caught in yer teeth."*
- *"Saw that lass in green onstage and was so hammered I thought I saw a land kraken."*

Lever 4

Binnis Olbran (Dead)
Label: Gnome Male
The squid shakes one of its tentacles from a shock as you pull the lever, but your mind doesn't sense anything telepathically.

Lever 5

Korlig Halfmane
Label: Half-Orc Male
- *"You cannot contain Korlig forever! Korlig is stronger than any dragon."*
- *"I'll smash this darkness to bits, and then I'll smash you! You'll never escape the axe of Korlig."*
- *"GRAAAAAAAH!"*

Lever 6

Irene Flamedancer
Label: Elf Female
- *"If only there were a spell I could cast just by thinking about it. Damned you lack of hands!"*
- *"That feeling. There's something outside listening to me isn't there? Uhm, tap on the glass if you can hear me."*
- *"Yes! If you could find some way to get me out of here? I can help you. I was a wizard once."*

If a character breaks open a jar and uses a 7th level or higher restoration spell such as *regenerate* or kills a brain then resurrects it through *reincarnate* or similar magic, a disembodied brain can be restored into a full humanoid form, but they lack clothes, equipment, and other gear. Most of these brains are from commoners, but Korlig and Irene will assist the characters if restored. Korlig uses the stat block of a **gladiator** (*MM* p346), and Irene uses the stat block of a **mage** (*MM* p347).

Area 4. Prison/Refrigeration Chamber

> The air becomes cold and damp as the segmented membrane opens up into a wide chamber with green, glistening walls and piles of greenish goo at its edges. As you step forward, you feel your feet slide a few inches on the ground, which you see is coated in a thick layer of slime. As you look around the chamber, you also notice that many humanoids are encased in the goo, and their limbs are sticking out of the walls and the piles irregularly.

A creature that falls into this room through the trapdoor one floor above may be stuck for several minutes unless they try to escape via one of the membrane-like doors. This problem is compounded by the fact that every 1d20 + 5 minutes, the mind flayer scientists in Area 5 take one of the humans out of the goo to act as an unwilling test subject, or to be fed directly to Brainstealer. To hint at their presence, paraphrase the following:

> Through another membrane on the west wall, you hear a scream, and a loud mechanical whirr, followed by a wet, cracking sound.

The membrane doors of this room let creatures in from either entrance, but both close off to trap victims inside this room while the ooze incapacitates them. If a creature tries to escape by damaging a door, it releases a squealing sound that alerts the mind flayers in room 5 of an escapee.



Paralyzing Ooze

After every minute a creature spends in this room, it must make a successful **DC 15 Constitution saving throw** or have its speed reduced by 5 feet until it finishes a short rest or receives the effects of a *lesser restoration* spell. Creatures in contact with the goo have disadvantage on this saving throw. If this reduction would reduce a creature's speed to 0, it is also paralyzed until its speed becomes greater than 0. The speed reduction is cumulative, but a single restoration spell will remove all the speed reducing effects. Paralyzed creatures stop breathing, but do not suffocate, allowing the goo to preserve human specimens for the mind flayer scientists.

There are thirteen commoners paralyzed by the ooze and placed by the mind flayers for storage in the walls. Their minds are broken by the maggot's influence and they cannot assist the party.

If using the hooks "Disappearance of the Noble's Betrothed" or "Close to Home," the NPCs that the characters are searching for lie paralyzed among the commoners.

A character who approaches the walls sees the following:

> The trapped humanoids are encased in a coating of slime several feet thick. They do not move when you approach, but you can see their open eyes looking towards you with a vacant gaze.

A character who succeeds on a **DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check** or has a **passive Perception of 15** also sees several other items trapped in the slime with the humans.

Treasure

The characters can spend 10 minutes gathering one *potion of greater healing* and 220 gp worth of coins from the slime.

Area 5. Illithid Library

> As you step through the dark hallway (or ooze-covered membrane) you smell a putrid stench and are faced with a grizzly sight–hanging from hooks on the walls and ceiling are human organs. In the center of the room are three surgical tables, and an unconscious humanoid is laying on the center table, his chest pried open by a small device. On a table in the southwest of the room are piles of human organs, notably lacking the brain. The organs do not show any signs of decay.

Three **mind flayer** scientists are performing surgery on a living, but unconscious humanoid in this room, removing his stomach with surgical instruments. They are assisted by a machine which holds his chest cavity open with four slender, metallic arms and stabilizes the wound with magic (similar to the cantrip *spare the dying*).

If the scientists hear an escaping creature in Area 4, they investigate the situation, and may attack the creature with *mind blasts* to forcibly paralyze it. If the scientists sense a group of enemies, they drop their surgical instruments and levitate through the ceiling to Area 6. If the mind flayers did not detect the characters' intrusion, they surround the center table and are performing an experiment on the unconscious man when the characters enter.

The humanoid is unconscious and has 0 hit points, but is being magically stabilized by the machine. He can be awoken by the characters, but is in so much pain that he is unable to communicate except by screaming.

A character with a **passive Perception of 16 or higher** notices that near the organs are detailed drawings of humanoids and their bodies in various states of surgery, with diagrams all around it. By making a successful **DC 22 Intelligence (Medicine) check**, a character learns from the diagrams that the mind flayers are adding multiple extra organs into humanoids while inserting a tadpole, doing something that causes tentacles to sprout from their bodies.

Creatures

Two **mind flayers** and one **mind flayer arcanist** (*MM* p222) who are operating on the humanoid. They may move between rooms, and this combat could occur in area 4, area 5, or area 6.

If progressing from the adventure *The Passenger*, the gnome the characters know as Pancible replaces the mind flayer arcanist. Pancible uses the stat block of a **mage** (*MM* p347) with the spells of a mind flayer arcanist. He is also able to cast *levitate* at will.

If Pancible is captured and a character makes a successful **DC 15 Charisma (Intimidation) check** to interrogate him, he tells the party the following:

> *"You would've done the same. He was in my head. He told me to do these things. I just listened. He said I would be a king of the new Waterdeep if I got him more people, always more people. More. More. I just listened."*

Adjusting this Encounter

Weak: Replace the **mind flayer arcanist** with one ordinary **mind flayer**.

Strong: Each **mind flayer** has 93 hit points (17d8 + 17).

Tactics

If the mind flayers are surprised in this room, and unable to levitate upwards, they engage combat with their *mind blasts*, and use their tentacles to attack when in melee range. The arcanist (or mage) uses *lightning bolt* and *confusion* spells for offense. If the battle is going poorly for the mind flayers, the arcanist casts *wall of force* to block the party from advancing while the surviving mind flayers retreat to Brainstealer's Chamber (Area 8).

If the mind flayers are able to levitate into area 6 before combat, the arcanist waits until a character ascends before casting a spell with a Ready action. The mind flayer scientists may also choose to release one of the experiments inside the holding tanks in area 6 to assist them in combat. (Note: this makes the encounter much more difficult and potentially deadly.)

Treasure

A character proficient in the Wisdom (Medicine) skill can use the illithids' surgical instruments as a *healer's kit* with unlimited uses. The machine on the center table is called an I*llithid Chestbreaker* (Appendix D).

Area 6. Transformation Chamber

You ascend through the ceiling into a cavernous room filled with two rows of person-sized glass tanks, one of which is glowing with blue light. All eight tanks are filled with a blue liquid, and floating motionlessly inside are strange, tentacle-covered creatures. Some are humanoid in shape; others are like animals. Metal tubes connect each of the tanks to each other, circulating the liquid and producing a loud whooshing sound like flowing water. Separated from the eight tanks on the north wall is a large, fleshy-looking vat filled with thousands of writhing, pinkish worms.

Any tank can be opened by inserting a key (found in a basin in Area 2) into the base of the mechanism. The tanks contain the following creatures:

Tank 1

Six **cranium rats** (*VGtM* p133) - This tank contains rats with glowing craniums, which cast bright light in a 5-foot radius, and dim light throughout the room. The light is blue from filtering through the liquid.

Tank 2-6

Partially transformed humanoids - As the characters inspect these tanks, they can see the process of ceremorphosis taking place. Tank 2 contains a recognizable human. In tanks 3 and 4, an elf and a half-elf have sprouted two small tentacles each, underneath their cheekbones. Tanks 5 and 6 contain nearly complete mind flayers, but their tentacles are small, and some of their features, like the hands and eyes still look identifiably human. If any of these humanoids are released from the tanks, they fall to the ground unconscious. They can be restored to their original form only through a *wish* spell.





Tank 7

Mind flayer (*MM* p222) - The final stage in the process of ceremorphosis, a fully-grown mind flayer. If the characters make too much noise or place their faces close to the glass, the mind flayer awakens, pressing its head to the glass. When awoken it menaces the party with *mind blasts* and moves the characters around with its *levitate* ability. It cannot escape the tank without it being opened or the glass being shattered.

Tank 8

Four **intellect devourers** (*MM* p191) - The intellect devourers are unconscious but can be awoken by shaking the tank or tapping it several times. The *Devour Intellect* ability is psionic and can pass through the glass, but they cannot use their *Body Thief* action while encased in the tank.

Large Basin

Six **swarms of brain maggots** (Appendix B) - These are the source of the great plague upon Waterdeep. By destroying this spawning pool and these parasites, the characters will have prevented the outbreak from extending further into the city. The organic-looking basin has 100 HP, 10 AC, and if it is attacked, two of the swarms pour out of it to attack the party.

Area 7. Spawning Pool

You enter a rocky chamber with a shallow pool of briny liquid at its center. Hundreds of tadpoles move away from your steps just under the surface of the liquid. Another hole on the north end of the room leads downwards, and through the hole you can see only empty darkness.

These tadpoles are the next generation of mind flayers waiting to be placed into the skull of an unwilling victim. The tadpoles do not pose any risk to the characters, unless a character is thrown into the pool while paralyzed. If the characters spill a *potion of poison* or another similar poison into the pool, the tadpoles die, and the threat of a resurgence of this colony will be eliminated. The tadpoles can also be killed by dealing 24 or more lightning damage to the pool of water.

Area 8. The Brainstealer's Rest

Lowering yourself through the vertical passage into the darkness, you find yourself in a vast chamber half-filled by a pool of brine. Several brainless corpses float in the water, some of them face down, others looking up with an expression of horror. Your feet splash as they touch the edges of solid ground, and the silence of the dark chamber is broken by a thunderous crashing sound coming from the dark liquid. The crashing grows louder and more intense as a huge dragon emerges from the depths of the brine. As its wings and neck stretch out, you see that this dragon's head is much like a mind flayer's, with long tentacles hanging down from a razor-toothed maw.

This rocky chamber is the heart of the mind flayer's lair, and the deep pool of liquid is where the brainstealer dragon rests and feeds. The remains of his meals float around the pool, their twisted faces a warning of the terror to come.

A magically gifted mind flayer guard waits in the back of the chamber, and any remaining mind flayers arrange themselves on the edge of the water to defend their master.

Monsters

One **brainstealer dragon** (Appendix B), one **mind flayer arcanist** (*MM* p222), and any remaining mind flayers who fled from areas 5 and 6.

Adjusting this Encounter

Weak: The brainstealer dragon is not joined by its allies, and rests alone in this chamber.

Strong: If any enemies from areas 5 or 6 survived, they can make this combat much harder than it would otherwise appear. This is especially the case if the characters are not joined by their own allies, such as Izag or Korlig. The wounded mind flayers start combat on the water's edge.

Tactics / Running the Final Combat

The brainstealer dragon begins combat hidden beneath the water, undetectable except by magical means. It waits for a creature to enter the chamber before revealing itself and attacking. A mind flayer arcanist concentrating on the *invisibility* spell waits in the back of the chamber for the dragon to emerge, then begins casting spells to support its master.

Once combat begins, the dragon and its minions use as many *mind blast* abilities as they have available to stun the characters. The brainstealer dragon uses its multiattack on most subsequent turns if its *mind blast* ability is not recharged. The arcanist uses spells like *confusion* and *ray of enfeeblement* to remain safely at a distance from the party's damage dealers. Any ordinary mind flayers remaining from previous rooms engage with the characters in melee, striking with their tentacles and aiming to devour the characters' brains.

If a character is dealing a significant amount of damage to the brainstealer dragon, it uses its legendary actions to cast *confusion* or *domination* on the threatening character. Otherwise it uses the legendary actions as tail sweeps to deal damage or *sympathy* to displace the characters.

You can paraphrase the following when the brainstealer dragon makes certain attacks.

Mind Blast
"A pulse of energy bursts from the top of the dragon's head, and you feel a pain in your skull like a spike being driven through the front of your brain."

"The wave of pain in your head shocks your system, and you find yourself unable to move a muscle."

Frightful Presence
"As the dragon looks your direction, your mind is assaulted with a wave of fear, like hundreds of people crying out all at once in your head."

Tentacle
"One of the dragon's tentacles wraps around you, restraining your movements, and it begins to curl towards the dragon's mouth."

Extract Brain Kills a Character
"With a grinding, and a burst of blood, the top of (character)'s head is torn off by the circular mouth of the dragon, and their brain devoured in an instant."

"The dragon tosses the lifeless corpse from its tentacle into the water below."

Aftermath. End of the Brainstealer

The dragon collapses into the water with a thunderous splash. You feel a great pressure relieved from your forehead, and the calm of the chamber returns.

Success

After Brainstealer is slain and the brain maggots destroyed, the infected begin to experience a gradual improvement in their symptoms over the course of the next six weeks, and the maggots die after that time. Without the psionic energy of Brainstealer fueling them, the maggots are also weakened, and their effects can be removed with a *lesser restoration* spell, or similar magic.

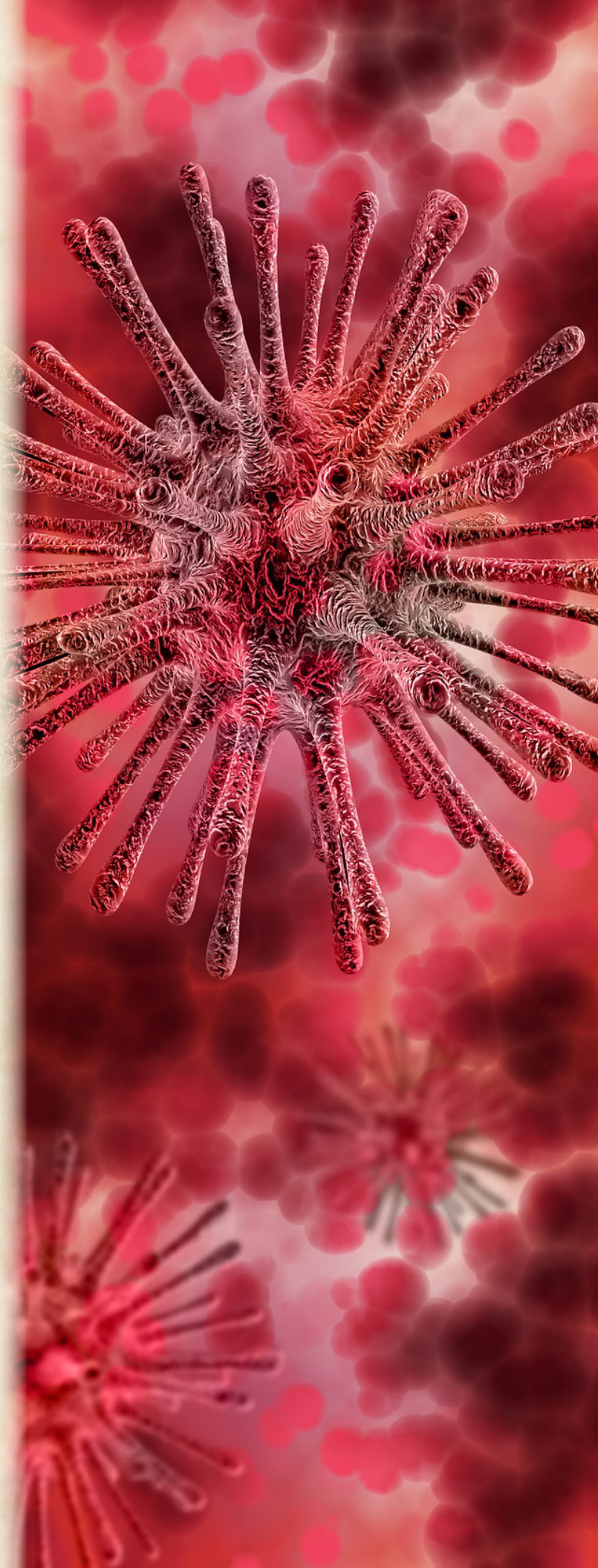
The city of Waterdeep is indebted to the party and grants them a grand sum of money (negotiable and varying based on the party) or the title to a plot of land in the Castle Ward. A particularly persuasive group of characters may be able to get both.

Failure

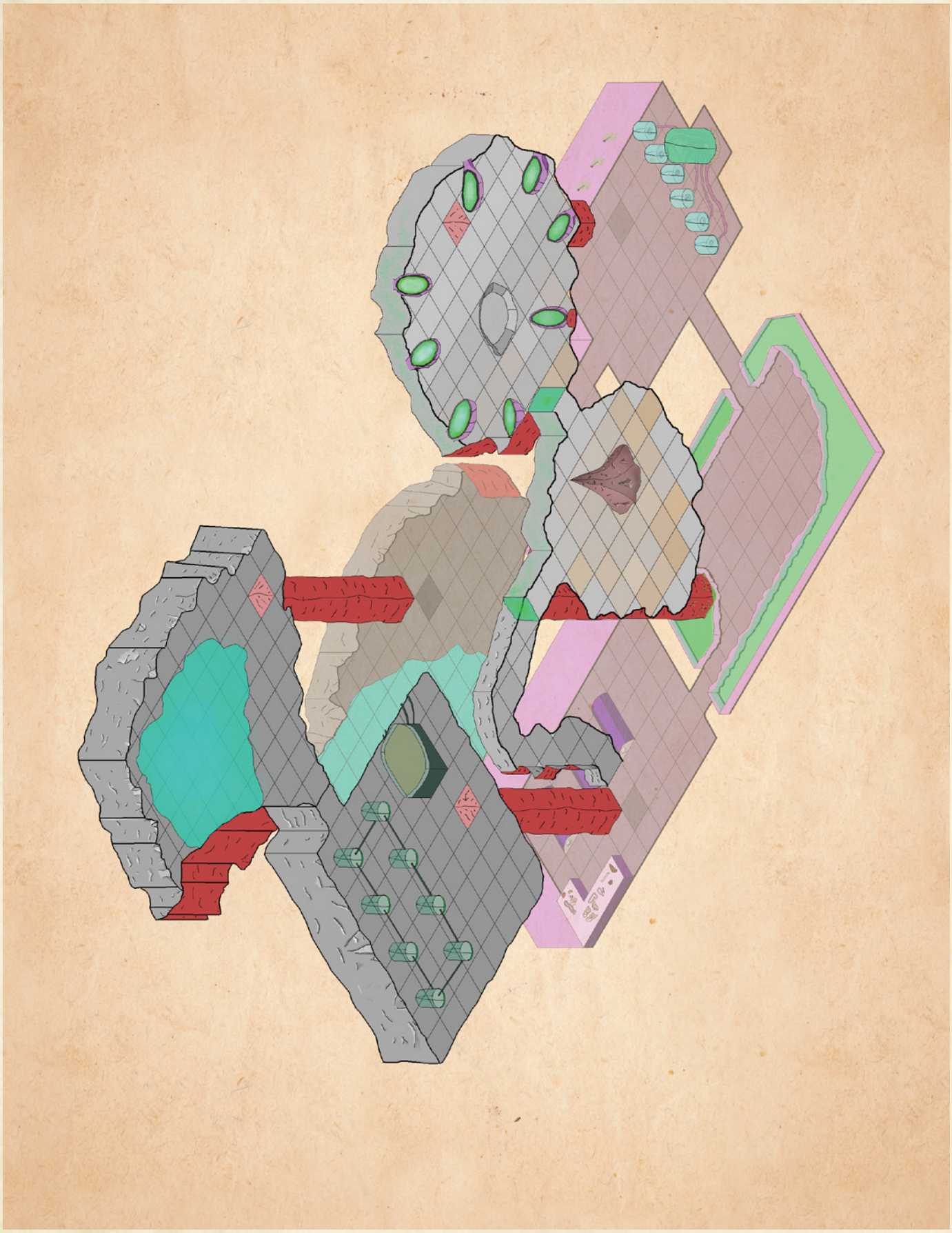
If the characters fail in their quest to destroy the Brainstealer, he may be able to kidnap enough citizens and exert enough influence in the coming months to take over the city with overwhelming force and psionic domination.

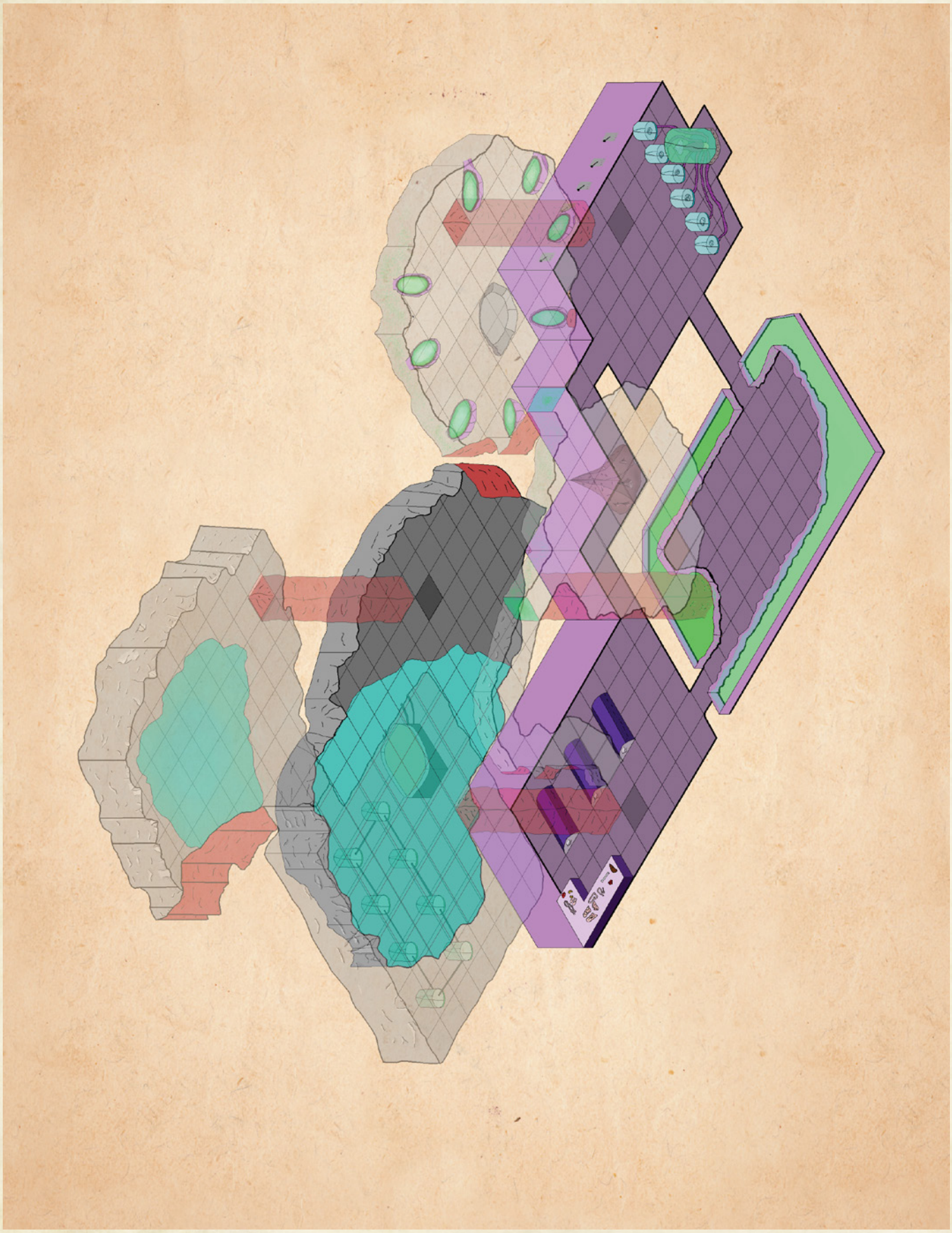
If the characters destroyed the basin of brain maggots, the Brainstealer's plan is set back by about two months while his minions continue to experiment and replenish the slain maggots.

If the characters destroyed the tadpoles in the briny pool, the Brainstealer's plan is set back by about six months, while he waits for another of his mind flayer minions to spawn tadpoles.



Brainstealer: Upper Levels





Urophion

Large monstrosity, neutral evil

Armor Class 20 (natural armor)
Hit Points 153(18d10 + 48)
Speed 10ft., climb 10ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	8 (- 1)	17 (+3)	17 (+3)	16 (+3)	6 (-2)

Condition Immunities weak-kneed
Senses passive Perception 16
Languages Deep Speech 120 ft.
Challenge 10 (5900 XP)

The urophion's melee attacks have +8 to hit.

Magic Resistance. The urophion has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

False Appearance. While the roper remains motionless, it is indistinguishable from a normal cave formation, such as a stalagmite.

Grasping Tendrils. The roper can have up to six tendrils at a time. Each tendril can be attacked (AC 20; 10 hit points; immunity to poison and psychic damage). Destroying a tendril cleals no damage to the roper, which <1an extrude a repla<1ement tendril on its next turn. A tendril can also be broken if a ' creature takes an action and succeeds on a DC 15 Strength check against it.

Spider Climb. The roper can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

Actions

Multiattack. The roper makes four attacks with its tendrils, uses Reel, and makes one attack with its bite.

Bite. Melee Weapon Attack: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 22 (4d8 + 4) piercing damage.

Tendril. Melee Weapon Attack: +7 to hit, reach 50 ft., one creature. Hit: The target is grappled (escape DC 15). Until the grapple ends, the target is restrained and has disadvantage on Strength checks and Strength saving throws, and the roper can't use the same tendril on another target.

Reel. The roper pulls each creature grappled by it up to 25 feet straight toward it.

Illithid Maggot Swarm

Medium swarm of Tiny llithids, lawful evil

Armor Class 8
Hit Points 22 (5d8)
Speed 5 ft. climb 5 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
2 (-4)	7 (-2)	10 (+0)	1 (-5)	2 (-4)	1 (-5)

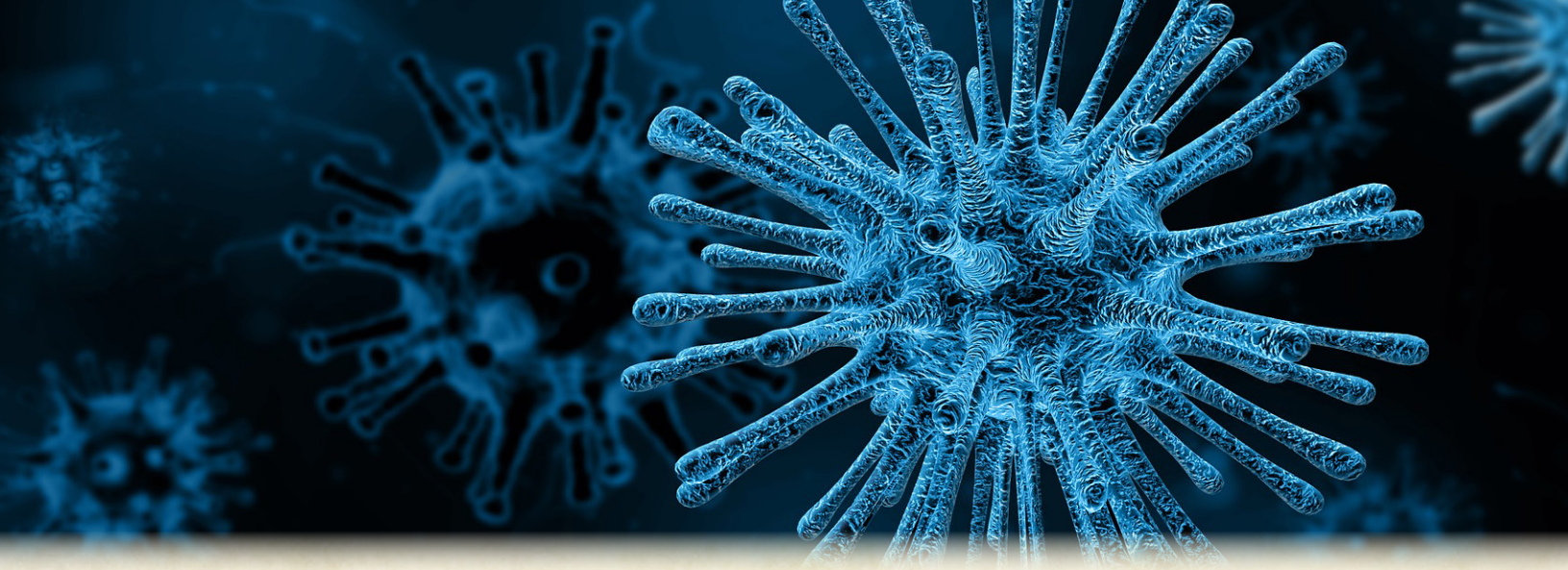
Damage Resistances Piercing, Slashing
Condition Immunities Charmed, Frightened, Grappled, Paralyzed, Petrified, Prone, Restrained Hand +6, Stealth +6
Senses Blindsight 10 ft. Passive Perception 6
Languages --
Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Swarm. The swarm can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and the swarm can move through any opening large enough for a tiny maggot. The swarm can't regain hit points or gain temporary hit points.

Actions

Bites. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +0 to hit, reach 0 ft., one creature in the swarm's space. *Hit:* The target must make a DC 18 Constitution saving throw or be infected by the Fugue State disease (see Chapter 2 - Maladies of the Mind).

Otherwise a single maggot may spend 10 minutes to attempt to slither into a creature's clothes and infect them. To insert into the target's body without being noticed, the creature must make a successful Dexterity (Stealth) check against the target's Passive Perception.



BRAINSTEALER DRAGON

Huge dragon (illithid), chaotic evil

Armor Class 19 (natural armor)
Hit Points 195 (17d12 + 85)
Speed 40 ft., fly 80 ft., swim 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
23 (+6)	14 (+2)	21 (+5)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	17 (+3)

Saving Throws Dex +7, Con +10, Wis +6, Cha +8
Skills Perception +11, Stealth +7
Damage Immunities Acid
Senses Blindsight 60 ft., Darkvision 120 ft., Passive Perception 21
Languages Common, Draconic
Challenge 14 (11,500 XP)

Harbinger. The dragon can breathe air and water.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If the dragon fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Actions

Multiattack. The dragon can use its Frightful Presence. Then it makes 2 Claw attacks and 2 Tentacle Attacks. If it has already grappled a creature, it may Extract its Brain instead of attacking with its Tentacle.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:*+ 12 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d6 + 7) slashing damage.

Tentacles. *Melee Weapon Attack:* + 12 to hit, reach 10 ft, one creature. *Hit:* 18 (2d10 + 7) lightning damage. psychic damage. If the target is Large or smaller, it is grappled (escape DC 15) and must succeed on a DC 15 Intelligence saving throw or be stunned until the grapple ends.

Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* + 11 to hit, reach 15ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (2d8 + 6) bludgeoning damage.

Extract Brain. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one stunned humanoid grappled by the dragon. *Hit:* The target takes 55 (10d10) piercing damage. If this damage reduces the target to 0 hit points, the dragon kills the target by extracting and devouring its brain.

Frightful Presence. Each creature of the dragon's choice that is within 120 feet of the dragon and aware of it must succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a creature's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the creature is immune to the dragon's Frightful Presence for the next 24 hours.

Mind Blast (Recharge 5-6). The dragon magically emits psychic energy in a 60-foot cone. Each creature in that area must succeed on a DC 18 Intelligence saving throw or take 56 (16d6) psychic damage and be stunned for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Legendary Actions

The dragon can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The dragon regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Sympathy (Costs 3 Actions). The dragon can cast the sympathy spell.

Confusion (Costs 1 Action). The dragon can cast the confusion spell.

Domination (Costs 2 Actions). The dragon can cast the domination spell.

Detect. The dragon makes a Wisdom (Perception) check.

Tail Attack. The Dragon makes a tail attack.

Appendix C: Disease

Fugue State

Penetrative, Magical, Non-Lethal, Internal, Crippling, Acute

"Brainstealer is his name. The culmination of Illithid experimentation. I have never, not once, met a creature more blessed by its nature, yet more corrupted by it. If you ever see folks running away massively, be wary, for his grasp extends far and cannot be easily held off."

Origins

Deep inside Mount Orikon, in a cavern with tunnels that spread and branch all across the land, resides an Ancient Dragon. The people call him Brainstealer. He did not hatch from an egg, like most do. He was the product of an Illithid experiment. Before the dragon could be even born, Illithid tadpole substance was combined with his own life force, creating this unique hybrid. He grew up feeding on the brains of animals and villagers. As the years passed, he created his lair and gathered his followers, an army of illithid maggots, swarms of flesh-burrowing creatures, working as his servants. The dragon is blessed with higher psionic abilities, but his signature move is using his tentacles to suck the brain of his victims. Although he rarely leaves his cave, his maggot swarm provides him with prey by entering a creature's brain and leading it through the tunnels into the dragon's lair.

Causes

This disease begins when an illithid maggot enters the creature's body. The maggots travel the lands, trying to find new prey. They crawl in the ground, covering up to a few miles worth of distance at a time, and surface when they think they've found a suitable victim. The way they choose their new hosts is currently unknown and there's a good chance that humanoid brains cannot even fathom the way these organisms work. Once they surface, the small maggots creep into the victims clothes and silently, painlessly insert themselves into the skin.

Symptoms

Once the Illithid Maggot enters a creature's body, it takes 3 days for it to reach the brain. Once it does, it takes roots, producing specific chemicals that lead to the wide array of symptoms. Specifically, this disease unveils in three phases:

At first, the creature only develops headaches and other types of pain all over its body. The pains come and go throughout the day and become worse during the night. Up to 5 times per day, at irregular periods, the creature must make a **DC 15 Wisdom saving throw**. On a failed save it suffers 4(1d8) psychic damage and is stunned until the end of its next turn. On a success it only takes half the damage.

After 2 days, the pain is replaced by incurable and inexplicable fear. The creature trembles, being scared of anything even mildly unsettling, and its everyday life grinds to a halt as it becomes dysfunctional, paralyzed by terror. The shaking makes it impossible to even sit down properly, let alone enjoy sleep. Up to 5 times a day, it must succeed on a **DC 20 Wisdom saving throw** or become frightened. The source of its fear is subject to storyline purposes, the creature's background and the DMs discretion.

Finally, the creature breaks. Its psyche has been destroyed by the dragon's mind-numbing influence. Suddenly, without any warning, usually when it's alone, it takes off. It starts walking, and it walks, it walks, and it walks. It doesn't stop to rest. It travels the lands like a lost lamb, looking for its sacrificial altar. In due time, it finds it, at the face of Brainstealer. It arrives at the Ancient Dragon's lair, and offers itself as sustenance to the illithid mutant. About 5 days after its exposure to the Illithid Maggots, the creature must make a **DC 25 saving throw**. On a fail it is prone to the Fugue State, resulting in it travelling towards the Dragon's Lair without having conscience of its actions. Every 12 hours it can repeat the saving throw and break free from the Illithid Maggot's influence. If it succeeds, it has no memory of deeds it made (including travel routes) during the Fugue State. If it is attacked during the Fugue State, it will try to defend itself. There are some people, the most strong willed of us all, who can overcome the death sentence that the fugue state comes with. They suddenly break out of it, coming to their senses, and at that moment the Illithid Maggot's influence permanently ends.

Diagnosis

This malady is one of the toughest to diagnose for two reasons. First of all, its cause, the intrusion of the maggot, only leaves a single tiny mark on the skin. Secondly, to fully understand the disease, one must be aware of Brainstealer, a tall task, as the Dragon has taken every step possible to cloak his existence in a veil of doubt. To understand something is off about the fugue state, a creature must make a successful **DC 18 Wisdom (Investigation)** or **Intelligence (Arcana) check**. To diagnose the medical problems, a creature must make a successful **DC 20 Wisdom (Medicine) check**. To fully diagnose the disease, the **DC for the Medicine check is 25** and it must be aware of Brainstealer's existence.

Cure

This disease is not curable by spells or healing items as the swarmers are resistant to those means of curing. To kill them, one must digest increasing amounts of poison. The infected creature's body changes the way the poison interacts with the swarmers. According to the physical and mental health of a creature, the required dose and lethality of the poison increases. A commoner might need 2 doses of Assassin's Blood (*DMG* p258), while a high level adventurer might need 5 doses of Purple Worm Poison (*DMG* p258). The poisons should be administered by a medical professional and doses must have a 12 hour interval between them. Ingested and inhaled poisons are the most commonly used as treatment. Be liberal when deciding on the dose and type of poison to use when treating this as a DM, and just get a feel for it.

Appendix D: Other Information

Illithid Chestbreaker

Wondrous Item, rare

This alien machine is for holding open the chest cavity of a living humanoid while mind flayers perform surgery or vile experiments.

As an action, a creature can press a button to activate the device. The device opens itself on activation, and can pry open up to 500 lbs of weight with its mechanical arms. While the device's arms are open, it also creates an aura of stabilizing magic. The closest unconscious creature within 10 feet of the active device becomes stable automatically, and only automatically fails saving throws when taking more than 10 points of damage in a single hit.

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