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Dungeon Crawl Classics #51.5

The Sinister Secret of Whiterock

by Harley Stroh
A LEVEL 1-3 ADVENTURE

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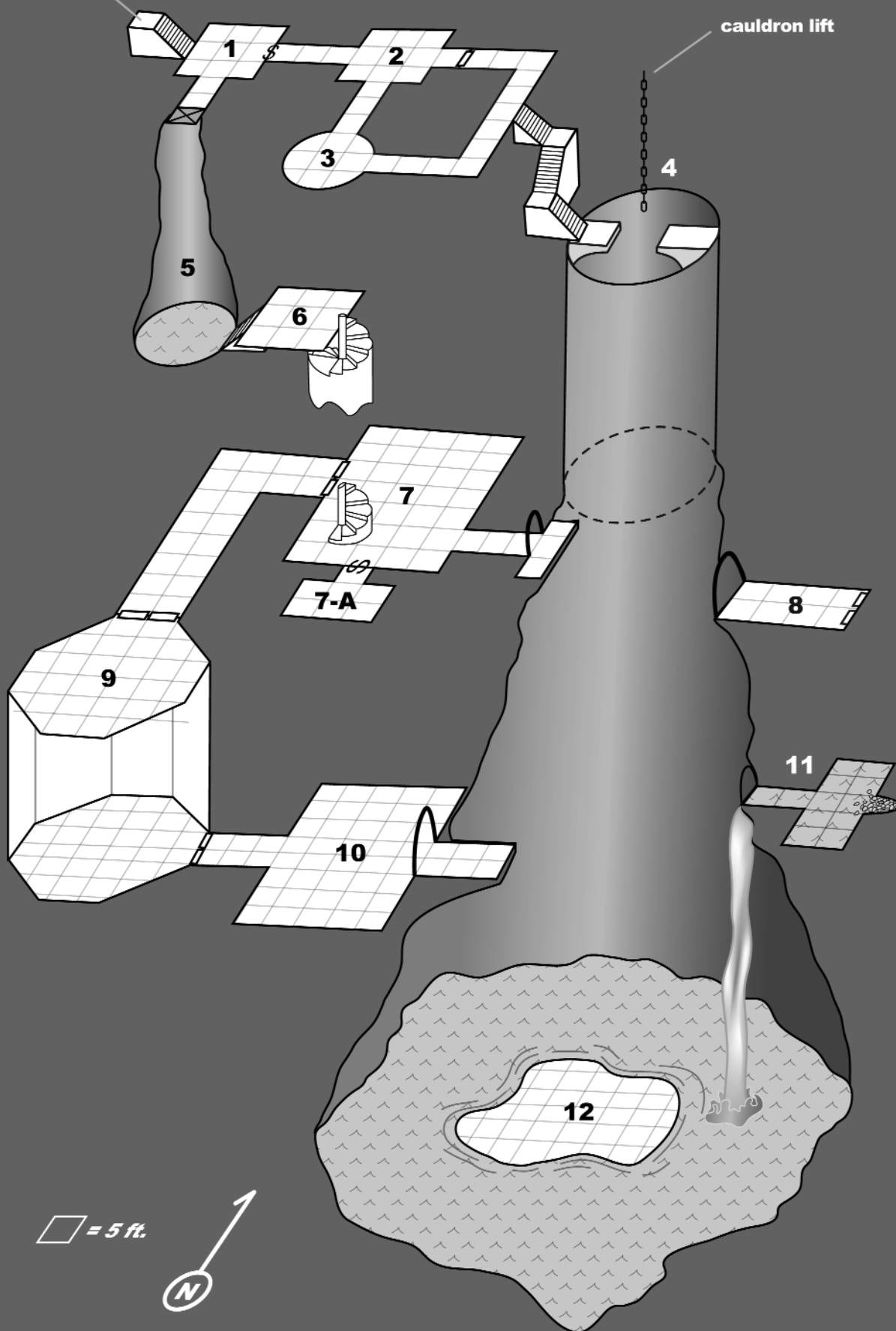
Just outside of the border city of Cillamar lies a hidden ruin, once home to a clan of gnomes, now the lair of twisted aberrations that shun the surface world and its people. The heroes are called to explore this ruin. They pick their way through subterranean byways and galleries, past deadly traps and ancient caverns, to discover the eldritch source of the aberrations: a malevolent crystal monolith hidden atop an island in the center of an underground lake. But ending the crystal's curse carries its own repercussions...

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Player Start

cauldron lift



NOVICE

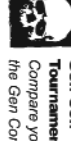
VETERAN

LEVEL	#	ADVENTURE								
Varies	DCC #46	Book of Treasure Maps	✓							
0	DCC #0	Legends are Made, not Born					✓			
	DCC #35A	Halls of the Minotaur					✓			
1	DCC #2	Lost Vault of Tsathzar Rho								✓
	DCC #29	The Adventure Begins	✓	✓	✓	✓				
	DCC #39	Ruins of Castle Churo								
	DCC #51	Castle Whiterock								
	WFF #0	Temple of Blood				✓				
	WFF #1	Rumble in the Wizard's Tower				✓				
1-3	DCC #1	Idylls of the Rat King						✓		
	DCC #24	Legend of the Ripper				✓	✓			
	DCC #28	Into the Wilds								
	DCC #41	Lost Arrows of Aristemis					✓			
	DCC #44	Dreaming Caverns of the Duergar					✓			
	DCC #45	Malice of the Medusa			✓					
	DCC #51.5	Sinister Secret of Whiterock								
1-13	DCC #14	Dungeon Interludes								
2	DCC #11	The Dragonfiend Pact						✓		
	DCC #31	The Transmuter's Last Touch								
	WFF #2	Against the Iron Giant				✓				
2-3	DCC #42	Secret of the Stonearm				✓				
3-5	DCC #3	The Mysterious Tower								
	DCC #36	Talons of the Horned King		✓						
	DCC #43	Curse of the Barrens		✓						
4-6	DCC #17	Legacy of the Savage Kings					✓			✓
	DCC #26	The Scaly God					✓			
	DCC #27	Revenge of the Rat King				✓				
	DCC #35B	Thief Lord's Vault				✓				
	DCC #37	The Slithering Overlord								
	DCC #48	The Adventure Continues	✓		✓	✓				
5-7	DCC #7	Secret of Smuggler's Cove	✓							
	DCC #23	The Sunken Ziggurat								
6-7	DCC #49	Palace in the Wastes			✓		✓		✓	
6-8	DCC #10	The Sunless Garden								✓
	DCC #16	Curse of the Emerald Cobra					✓			
	DCC #20	Shadows in Freeport				✓	✓	✓		
	DCC #34	Cage of Delirium				✓				
	DCC #47	The Genie's Tears			✓		✓	✓		
7-8	DCC #5	Aerie of the Crow God						✓		
7-9	DCC #8	Mysteries of the Drow					✓			
	DCC #19	The Volcano Caves					✓			
	DCC #38	Escape from the Forest of Lanterns								
	DCC #40	Devil in the Mists	✓				✓			
	DCC #50	Vault of the Iron Overlord				✓				
8-10	DCC #6	Temple of the Dragon Cult								✓
	JG #3	The Dark Tower								
9-11	DCC #12	The Blackguard's Revenge		✓						
	DCC #25	Dread Crypt of Srihoz								
10	DCC #30	Vault of the Dragon Kings		✓			✓		✓	
10-12	DCC #4	Bloody Jack's Gold	✓							
	JG #1	Thieves of Fortress Badabaskor								
11-13	DCC #12.5	The Iron Crypt of the Heretics		✓			✓	✓		
12-13	DCC #18	Citadel of the Demon Prince								
12-14	DCC #21	Assault on Stormbringer Castle					✓			
	JG #2	Citadel of Fire								
14-15	DCC #15	Lost Tomb of the Sphinx Queen			✓		✓			
14-16	DCC #22	The Stormbringer Juggernaut	✓				✓			
	DCC #32	Golden Palace of Zahadran			✓		✓			
15	DCC #13	Crypt of the Devil Lich					✓	✓	✓	
21-24	DCC #33	Belly of the Great Beast					✓			

Current as of September 2007, up through DCC #51.5



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Dungeon Crawl Classics #51.5

The Sinister Secret of Whiterock

By Harley Stroh
AN ADVENTURE FOR CHARACTER LEVELS 1-3



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If you like this adventure, be sure to look for the rest of the Dungeon Crawl Classics series at your local game store.

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Introduction

Remember the golden days of role playing, when adventures were underground, NPCs were there to be killed, and the finale of every dungeon was the dragon on the 20th level? Well, those days are back. Dungeon Crawl Classics feature bloody combat, intriguing dungeons, and no NPCs who aren't meant to be killed. Each adventure is 100% good, solid dungeon crawl, with the monsters you know, the traps you fear, and the secret doors you know must be there somewhere.

The Sinister Secret of Whiterock is designed for four to six characters of 1st to 3rd level, with a total of 6-12 total character levels between party members. While characters can be of any basic character class, parties without a skilled rogue and strong fighters might find themselves particularly challenged. See the "Scaling Information" section for ways to tailor this adventure to your group's unique style of play.

The Sinister Secret of Whiterock is a complete, stand-alone adventure, but can also be played as a prequel to *DCC #51: Castle Whiterock*. While an abundance of lost treasure waits to be claimed by courageous and cunning heroes, the dungeon's greatest reward might very well be its best-hidden secret: a passageway leading to the lower levels of Castle Whiterock!

Adventure Summary

Many legends are told of the windswept tundra and high moors of northern Morrain, but even more secrets never find their way into worm-eaten myth and shadowed legend. Just outside of the border city of Cillamar lies a hidden ruin, once home to clan of gnomes, now the lair of twisted aberrations that shun the surface world and its people.

Descending into the ruins the explorers pick their way through subterranean byways and galleries, past deadly traps and ancient caverns, to discover the eldritch source of the aberrations: a malevolent crystal monolith hidden atop an island in the center of an underground lake. But ending the crystal's curse carries its own repercussions – in order to survive the heroes will need courage and composure in the face of certain doom.

Game Master's Section

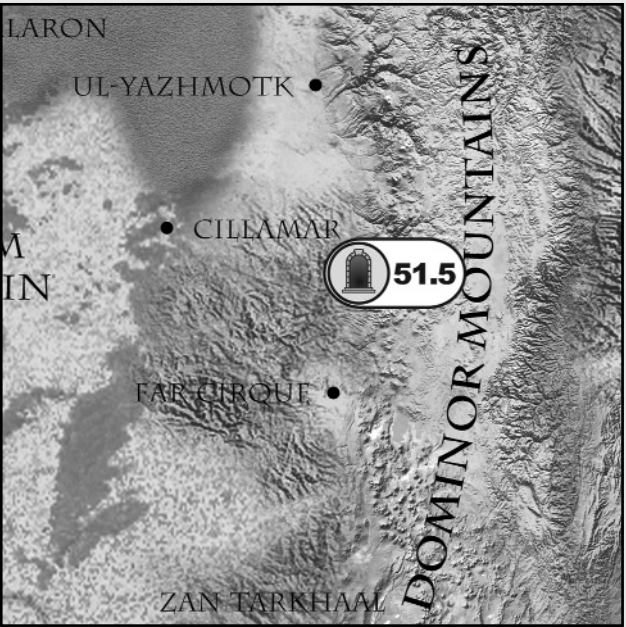
Encounter Table

To help the GM prepare, we have included a quick reference table showing all encounters at a glance. The abbreviations used are: **Loc** – the location number keyed to the map for the encounter. **Pg** – the module page number that the encounter can be found on. **Type** – this indicates if the encounter is a trap (T), puzzle (P), combat (C), or hazard (H). **Encounter** – the key monsters, traps or NPCs that can be found in the encounter. **EL** – the encounter level.

Loc	Pg	Type	Encounter	EL
1-1	6	C	3 orc skeletons	1
		T	Pit trap	2
1-2	6	C	3 sih'hel, War1	2
1-3	7	T	Swinging block-and-tackle	1
1-4	7	P	Descent puzzle	1
1-5	8	C	3 dire rats	1
1-6	8	C	Young owlbear	2
1-7	8	C	Assassin vine	3
		T	Puzzle lock trap	2
1-7a	9	T	Crushing room trap	4
1-8	10	T	Furious wind/portcullis trap	2
1-9	10	T	<i>Fear</i> trap	3
1-10	11	C	6 sih'hel, War1	3
1-12	12	C	<i>The Oracle</i> , sih'hel Clr2/Sor2 3 sih'hel, War3	5
Wrap Up	13	H	Cavern's collapse	3

DCC World

If you are using the world of Áereth from *DCC #35: Gazetteer of the Known Realms*, Castle Whiterock can be found east of Cillamar in the Kingdom of Morrain, on the western slope of the mighty Ul Dominor mountains.



Scaling Information

The Sinister Secret of Whiterock is designed for four to six characters of 1st-3rd level, but it can be easily modified for parties of larger sizes or higher levels. (Because of the danger created by the crystal's power and the cavern's collapse, this adventure would be difficult to run with a party of lesser strength.) The expedition is sure to be a perilous one, and the sih'hel fight desperately to hold their caverns.

With this in mind, consider the following suggestions:

Stronger parties (7 or more characters, or higher than 3rd level): Use the second table for all random encounters; double the number of sih'hel encountered in areas 1-2, 1-10 and 1-12; raise the Oracle's cleric and sorcerer levels by +2; advance the young owlbear in area 1-6; increase the Search and Disable Device DCs of all the traps by +3.

Getting the Players Involved

The adventure begins with the characters at the foot of the craggy ridges outside of the town of Cillamar, with the ruins of Castle Whiterock shimmering in the distance. GMs should take advantage of the PCs' background to craft specific ties to the Caverns of the Sih'hel or take inspiration from the following plot hooks:

- The son of Michal the tavernmaster has gone missing for the last week. He was last seen playing on the high heather above Cillamar. Desperate, the tavernmaster has scraped together a few dozen gold pieces to hire the adventurers to track down his lost son.
- A relative of one of the PCs (either a gnome or a dwarf) was lost when the dungeon fell to the orcs of the Broken Tusk. The PC has come to Cillamar to solve the mystery of his or her missing ancestor, and to reclaim a family heirloom that fell into the gnarled hands of the marauding orcs.
- The town is abuzz with rumors of a strange, black-maned owlbear that has been sighted on the slopes above Cillamar. The town watch has neither the men nor the courage necessary to investigate the rumors. Instead, Captain Yenon approaches the heroes to see whether they would be willing to investigate the rumors on the town's behalf...

Background Story

Nearly a thousand years ago, a nation of gnomes, assisted by dwarven miners and architects, founded the Clockwork Academy, a collection of mines, galleries, and tunnels beneath the western slope of the Ul Dominor mountains. A mere 150 years later, the gnomes were butchered when the orcs of the Broken Tusk tribe, bolstered by giant allies, sacked Castle Whiterock and its dungeons. The heart of the Clockwork Academy stood directly beneath Whiterock Castle, and fell first (see sub-level 4A, in *DCC #51: Castle Whiterock*). The academy's defenders fought valiantly against the onslaught of orcish axes and demonic magic, buying the smaller, outlying galleries time to mount a defense.



The invasion slowed as the orcs were forced to advance tunnel by tunnel, the gnomes utilizing the tight quarters and their knowledge of the mines to exact a price in blood from the orc marauders. The last to fall were the valiant Silverheel gnomes, who whisked parents and their children off through hidden tunnels, and collapsed the remaining tunnels on the invaders.

The surviving gnomes fled into the mountains, and thus for the last 800 years the outlying tunnels of the Silverheel tunnels have lain silent.

Or so it is believed.

Unknown to the surface world, a handful of Silverheel warriors were trapped in the final defense of the mines. Fighting free of the rubble, the survivors retreated through the fallen corridors, only to discover that the collapse of the tunnels also caused some of the galleries to cave in, revealing hitherto unknown caves. Trapped in a prison on their own making and running low on supplies, the gnome warriors rappelled down into the caves.

There they found a great underground lake that offered fresh water, food, and an escape ... of sorts.

Growing out the center of the lake's sole island was a great, multifaceted crystal. Nearly 12 feet in height, the black crystal pulsed with ancient, terrible power. Drawn by their fascination with gems, the gnomes were overwhelmed by the crystal's mind-altering dweomer. The last defenders of Silverheel settled on the island, to worship the crystal in all its forbidden majesty, forever forsaking the world above.

After dozens of generations spent living in the crystal's cavern, the descendants of the Silverheel warriors are gnomes no longer, but horrid pale aberrations, terrible of aspect and

twisted in body and soul. The Silverheel gnomes had become the sih'hel.

The centuries of inbreeding wore on the sih'hel, until only a handful of their original number remained. When an earthquake cracked open their shadowed prison, the aberrations slipped into the surface world under the cover of night, kidnapping the children and youths of Cillamar to raise as their own in the darksome caverns. Attempts to track the kidnappers have been futile, the tracks seemingly vanishing into the high, grassy moors that surround Cillamar.

The terrified farmers and herdsmen have turned to the adventurers for aid. Will the heroes search out the fiends that lurk beneath the heather and end the reign of terror hanging over the people of Cillamar?

Dark Crystal of the Sih'hel

The ominous crystal that governs the degenerate sih'hel is a thing of mystery and strange powers. It had no name before it came to be worshipped by the Silverheel gnomes, and even sages would be hard put to ascribe a purpose to the crystal's plots. And yet it does seem to exert a form of alien

intelligence upon the warped sih'hel, directing them toward some sinister, unfathomable end.

In addition to directing the sih'hel priestess through prophetic dreams, the crystal also exhibits the following powers:

Any dwarf, drow, or gnome coming within 20 feet of the crystal must succeed on DC 14 Will save or behave as if under the effects of a *charm person* spell. At the GM's discretion, this can apply to other non-surface dwelling races. While an affected PC will not attack his friends, he will certainly defend the crystal and the crystal's servants from attacks. Characters succeeding on the save are immune to the crystal's mind-altering effects for 24 hours.

Corpses placed before the crystal are stripped of all flesh and meat by glowing purple beetles that crack their way free of the earth at the base of the crystal. If left undisturbed, the corpses rise as skeletons after 24 hours, as per the *animate dead* spell, and obey the commands of the sih'hel priestess. Up to another 4 Hit Dice in creatures can be animated in this way – including the heroes, should the corpses of their comrades fall into the hands of the sih'hel!

Player Beginning

Start the adventure by reading the following:

The ancient menhir, carved with spiraling runes and raised by unknown hands, stands half-buried atop the high, grassy moor. Below you sits the town of Cillamar, surrounded by outlying farmsteads. Against the backdrop of towering snow-capped peaks and thick coniferous forests, dark and foreboding, your home seems isolated and precarious.

A shout from your companions breaks your reverie. They've discovered something unusual about the standing stone! The runes sparkle and glow, then a section of the standing stone slides aside, stone grating on stone, revealing a small

staircase descending into the hillside.

Attempts to decipher the runes of the menhir (Decipher Script DC 15) reveal that the symbols are a form of ancient Gnomish. Crudely translated into modern tongue, the runes warn away intruders, and praise the benevolence of Poderon, the Deep Delver.

A cursory Search (DC 10) of the ground around the menhir turns up matted grass and trodden ground. A DC 15 Survival (Track) check confirms what the heroes likely already suspect – that some sort of creature regularly uses the hidden menhir portal.

Level 1: Forgotten Caverns of the Sih'hel

The Caverns of the Sih'hel are split between the elaborate stonework of the Silverheel gnomes and the natural caverns of the dark crystal. Where the original stonework remains, the floor is smooth, and the walls show several engraved artistic embellishments – typically pastoral scenes of gently sloping hills or lightly wooded areas, complete with the burrowing mammals gnomes are famous for having befriended. The elaborate artwork makes these walls easier to climb (Climb DC 20) than the walls of the natural caverns, which are smooth and slick with moisture (Climb DC 25). The air of the dungeon smells of stagnant water and algae.

Except where noted, the galleries and caverns have a gloomy, violet light. In the absence of any other light source, creatures lacking special vision treat all enemies as having concealment (20% miss chance).

A cursory inspection of the dungeon's walls and ceiling reveals that they all seem to be covered in a dark mold or soot. A closer look reveals that the "mold" is really thousands of tiny black crystals that coat the dungeon like a fine layer of dust. The crystals are too small to have any worth, but if crushed, they release a greasy liquid that glows brightly before fading in 1d3 rounds.

Unless otherwise stated, all passages are 5 feet high, and all doors are made of unadorned iron, weak with rust.

Reinforced Iron Door: 3 in. thick; hardness 10; hp 30; Break DC 15.

Worked Stone Wall: 1 ft. thick; hardness 8; 90 hp per 5 ft. section; Break DC 35.

Random Encounters

Once every hour, or as the GM deems appropriate, roll 1d5 to check for a random encounter.

On a result of 1-3, roll again on Random Encounter Table 1.

On a result of 4-5, roll again on Random Encounter Table 2.

Random Encounter Table 1

1d5	Result
1	A strange, fog-like luminescence rises from the floor and hovers just out of reach of the PCs, then disappears after 1d12 rounds.
2	The PCs hear a chaotic, insane gibbering in the distance.
3	A large chunk of stone tears free of the ceiling and falls to the floor, narrowly missing one of the adventurers.
4	The PCs hear a skittering and see glowing eyes in the distance.
5	A portion of the floor gives way just before a PC, revealing a narrow, 5-foot-deep hole, ending in a pool of dark water.

Random Encounter Table 2

1d5	Result
1-2	Monstrous spider, small
3	Rat swarm
4	Monstrous centipede, medium
5	1d3 stirges

Monstrous Spider, Small: CR 1/2; Small vermin; HD 1d8; hp 4; Init +3; Spd 30 ft., climb 20 ft.; AC 14, touch 14, flat-footed 11; Base Atk +0; Grp -6; Atk bite +4 melee (1d4-2 plus poison); Full Atk bite +4 melee (1d4-2 plus poison); SA Poison, web; SQ Darkvision 60 ft., tremorsense 60 ft., vermin traits; AL N; SV Fort +2, Ref +3, Will +0; Str 7, Dex 17, Con 10, Int -, Wis 10, Cha 2.

Skills and Feats: Climb +11, Hide +11, Jump -2, Spot +4*; Weapon Finesse.

SA – Poison (Ex): A monstrous spider has a poisonous bite. Fortitude DC 10, 1d3 Str initial and secondary.

Web (Ex): Web-spinning spiders can throw a web eight times per day. This is similar to an attack with a net but has a maximum range of 50 feet, with a range increment of 10

feet, and is effective against targets up to Medium size.

An entangled creature can escape with a successful DC 10 Escape Artist check or burst it with a DC 14 Strength check. Both are standard actions.

Web-spinners often create sheets of sticky webbing from 5 to 60 feet square, depending on the size of the spider. They usually position these sheets to snare flying creatures but can also try to trap prey on the ground. Approaching creatures must succeed on a DC 20 Spot check to notice a web; otherwise they stumble into it and become trapped as though by a successful web attack. Attempts to escape or burst the webbing gain a +5 bonus if the trapped creature has something to walk on or grab while pulling free. Each 5-foot section has 4 hp, and sheet webs have damage reduction 5/–.

A monstrous spider can move across its own web at its climb speed and can pinpoint the location of any creature touching its web.

Tremorsense (Ex): A monstrous spider can detect and pinpoint any creature or object within 60 feet in contact with the ground, or within any range in contact with the spider's webs.

Rat Swarm: CR 2; Tiny animal (swarm); HD 4d8; hp 13; Init +2; Spd 15 ft., climb 15 ft.; AC 14, touch 14, flat-footed 12; Base Atk +3; Grp -; Atk swarm (1d6 plus disease); Full Atk swarm (1d6 plus disease); Space/Reach 10 ft./0 ft.; SA Disease, distraction; SQ Half damage from slashing and piercing, low-light vision, scent, swarm traits; AL N; SV Fort +4, Ref +6, Will +2; Str 2, Dex 15, Con 10, Int 2, Wis 12, Cha 2.

Skills and Feats: Balance +10, Climb +10, Hide +14, Listen +6, Spot +7, Swim +10; Alertness, Weapon Finesse

SA – Disease (Ex): Filth fever – swarm attack, Fortitude DC 12, incubation period 1d3 days, damage 1d3 Dex and 1d3 Con.

Distraction (Ex): Any living creature that begins its turn with a swarm in its square must succeed on a DC 12 Fortitude save or be nauseated for 1 round.

Monstrous Centipede, Medium: CR 1/2; Medium vermin; HD 1d8; hp 4; Init +2; Spd 40 ft., climb 40 ft.; AC 14, touch 12, flat-footed 12; Base Atk +0; Grp -1; Atk bite +2 melee (1d6-1 plus poison); Full Atk bite +2 melee (1d6-1 plus poison); SA Poison; SQ Darkvision 60 ft., vermin traits; AL N; SV Fort +2, Ref +2, Will +0; Str 9, Dex 15, Con 10, Int -, Wis 10, Cha 2.

Skills and Feats: Climb +10, Hide +10, Spot +4; Weapon Finesse.

Poison (Ex): A monstrous centipede has a poisonous bite. Fortitude DC 10, 1d3 Dex initial and secondary.

Stirge: CR 1/2; Tiny Magical Beast; HD 1d10; hp 5; Init +4; Spd 10 ft, fly 40 ft. (average); AC 16, touch 16, flat-footed 12;

Gamescience Dice

The wandering monster tables in this adventure utilize the unique dice manufactured by Gamescience. Gamescience is a pioneer in the development of new polyhedrons. After all, they invented the 100-sided die – what could be cooler than that? Their product line also includes the 1d3, 1d5, 1d7, 1d14, 1d16, 1d24, and 1d30. If you don't have the appropriate dice for the wandering monster tables in this adventure, you can substitute other dice as appropriate: for 1d3, divide 1d6 by 2; for 1d5, divide 1d10 by 2; for 1d7, roll 1d6+1; and so on. To acquire some of these amazing dice for yourself (yes, they're real), ask for Gamescience dice by name at your local game store, or visit www.goodmangames.com.

Base Atk +1; Grp –11 (+1 when attached); Atk/Full Atk touch +7 melee (attach); Space/Reach 2-1/2 ft./0 ft.; SA Attach, blood drain; SQ Darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; AL N; SV Fort +2, Ref +6, Will +1; Str 3, Dex 19, Con 10, Int 1, Wis 12, Cha 6.

Skills and Feats: Hide +14, Listen +4, Spot +4; Alertness, Weapon Finesse.

SA – Attach (Ex): If a stirge hits with a touch attack, it uses its eight pincers to latch onto the opponent's body. An attached stirge is effectively grappling its prey. The stirge loses its Dexterity bonus to AC and has an AC of 12, but holds on with great tenacity. Stirges have a +12 racial bonus on grapple checks (already figured into the Base Attack/Grapple entry above).

An attached stirge can be struck with a weapon or grappled itself. To remove an attached stirge through grappling, the opponent must achieve a pin against the stirge.

Blood Drain (Ex): A stirge drains blood, dealing 1d4 points of Constitution damage in any round when it begins its turn attached to a victim. Once it has dealt 4 points of Constitution damage, it detaches and flies off to digest the meal. If its victim dies before the stirge's appetite has been sated, the stirge detaches and seeks a new target.

Areas of the Map

Area 1-1 – Beneath the Menhir (EL 1, 2): Read or paraphrase the following:

Shallow stone stairs descend into small, darkened chamber. Thick, dusty cobwebs cover the ceiling and corners, and the air is stale with age. In the far corner of the room is a battered husk of an old crate.

The wooden crate is covered in dust and crushed beneath a fallen ceiling beam. A visual inspection of the crate shows a skull hidden amid the broken planks. The skull cannot be reached without disturbing the wreckage, causing a portion of the ceiling to fall, choking the air with dust and dropping a trio of orc skeletons into the chamber. The skeletons, placed by the sih'hel, attack anything living in the room.

The skull once belonged to a dwarf, and has a small ruby embedded in the left eye socket. Worth 150 gp, if the gem is placed in the empty eye socket of a living creature, it grants the wearer ability to *detect magic* once per day.

A secret door is cleverly hidden in the east wall of the chamber. Fashioned by gnome master craftsmen, it is nearly impossible to Spot (DC 27), but a DC 15 Search of the chamber reveals that the section of the wall concealing the door is colder than the surrounding walls, and slightly damp with condensation. The stonework above the door depicts a gnome rune ("secret"). The door can be opened by pressing the rune or by prying against the stone carvings.

The corridor to the south dead-ends before a false door. The square directly before the false door conceals a pit trap. Adventurers falling into the pit tumble down 40 feet

to area 1-5, taking in 4d3 points of nonlethal damage as the plummet into the dark inky below, and must make an immediate Swim check (DC 15) to avoid drowning. Note that most non-magical light sources are extinguished in the waters, complicating rescue attempts. See area 1-5 for more information on the horrors lurking in the cistern.

Orc Skeletons (3): CR 1/3; Medium undead; HD 1d12; hp 6; Init +5; Spd 30 ft.; AC 19, touch 11, flat-footed 18; Base Atk +0; Grp +1; Atk battleaxe +2 melee (1d8+2/x3) or claw +2 melee (1d4+2); Full Atk battleaxe +2 melee (1d8+2/x3) or 2 claws +2 melee (1d4+2); SA –; SQ Damage reduction 5/bludgeoning, darkvision 60 ft., immunity to cold, undead traits; AL NE; SV Fort +0, Ref +1, Will +2; Str 15, Dex 13, Con –, Int –, Wis 10, Cha 1.

Skills and Feats: None; Improved Initiative.

Possessions: Battleaxe, scalemail armor, heavy steel shield (all rusted).

Camouflaged Pit Trap: CR 2; mechanical; location trigger; manual reset; DC 20 Reflex save avoids; 40 ft. deep (4d3, nonlethal); all targets in 5-ft. square; Search DC 24; Disable Device DC 19.

Secret Door: 3 in. thick; hardness 10; hp 20; Break DC 15.

Area 1-2 – Watch Room (EL 2): Read or paraphrase the following:

The air here is thick with the smell of cooking meat and wood smoke. In the center of the chamber is a large iron cauldron, blackened with age and soot. A pair of small, pale humanoids, with fierce fangs and oversized pads on their fingers, kneel near the cauldron, adding sticks to the fire, while a third pulls squirming rats from a bag and tosses them into the stew.

If the adventurers avoided the skeletons in area 1-1, the sih'hel are entirely preoccupied with preparing their meal, and do not notice their approach unless the heroes cause a great deal of noise entering the chamber. If the adventurers take adequate precautions to hide themselves and enter quietly, they receive a surprise round.

If there was a battle in area 1-1, the sih'hel are prepared for the intruders and are only going through the motions of cooking. They immediately launch an attack, potentially surprising the heroes if they fell for the sih'hel's ruse.

Once the sih'hel are aware of the PCs, they spring into action. One hurls a javelin at the adventurers, while the other two overturn the cauldron, spilling its seething contents toward the heroes. The boiling stew covers three adjacent 5-foot squares, forcing PCs in the squares to make a DC 15 Reflex save or take 1d4 points of heat damage.

In the chaos that follows, the three flee south to area 1-3, where they spring an ambush on any pursuers.

Sih'hel, War1 (3): CR 1/2; Small humanoid; HD 1d8+2; hp 6 each; Init +2; Spd 20 ft., climb 20 ft.; AC 17, touch

12, flat-footed 15; Base Atk +1; Grp -2; Atk/Full Atk Hooksword +4 melee (1d6+1/x2) or javelin +4 ranged (1d4+1/x2); SA Chill touch; SQ Darkvision 60 ft., sih'hel traits, spell resistance 6; AL CE; SV Fort +2, Ref +2, Will -1; Str 13, Dex 14, Con 10, Int 10, Wis 9, Cha 8.

Skills and Feats: Climb +9, Hide +12, Listen +1, Spot +6; Weapon Focus (hooksword).

SA – Chill Touch (Su): A sih'hel's suckers drain the strength from a grabbed opponent, dealing 1 point of Strength damage each round it maintains the hold, and leaving a waxy patch on the victim's skin.

Possessions: Chain shirt, hooksword, 3 javelins, loincloth, bag of rats.

Area 1-3 – Gear Room (EL 1): Read or paraphrase the following:

The chamber before you is a maze of oversized gears, pulleys, rusting chains, and rotten rope. Everything in the room is coated in dust and black mold. The air is still, but in the distance you can hear a low thundering.

If the sih'hel from area 1-2 succeed in fleeing here, they conceal themselves among the pulleys and chains. A thin tripwire has been stretched over the doorway, so that any Medium-sized or larger creature passing through the door snags the wire, causing a massive block-and-tackle to carom through the chamber, attacking anyone standing in the doorway with +10 to hit. Any surviving sih'hel hurl themselves at the adventurers, attacking with the ferocity of animals.

If the block-and-tackle trap is spun, or if any of the gearworks is disturbed, the room comes alive as long-frozen gears begin to spin and whirl, turning the chamber into a death trap of toothed gears, swinging pendulums, and whirling counterweights. A character can take a full-round action to make a 5-foot step. Otherwise every round, a creature must make a DC 15 Reflex save every round or be struck for 1d4 points of damage. Alternately, the entire room can be temporarily disabled with a well-placed piton or other hard object (Disable Device DC 20).

Once the room has been activated, the lift chain and levers in area 1-4 is activated.

Swinging Block-and-Tackle: CR 1; mechanical; touch trigger; manual reset; Atk +10 melee (3d4, wooden block and tackle); Search DC 20; Disable Device DC 20.

Area 1-4 – Lift Chain (EL 1): Read or paraphrase the following:

The stone stairs descend to a platform that reaches out over a dark crevasse. The walls of the cavern fall away to either side, vanishing into inky gloom. Across a roughly six-foot gap stands another platform. A massive chain descends from the ceiling down the center of the chamber, between the platforms. From below can be heard the rumble of a thundering waterfall.

Show players Player Handout A. The chain once operated a lift that ran between two levels of the Silverheel complex. The galleries and the lift cage have since been destroyed; the chain still runs between the levels, but there is no lift to ride in. Also, there is no apparent means of operating the chain. At the time the adventurers enter the chamber, the chain ends 40 feet short of the platform to area 1-7.

A close inspection of the eastern platform (Search DC 15) turns up a series of holes bored into the east wall. There are eight holes, set in two vertical rows of four that climb up the east wall. Each hole is 2 inches across and over 4 inches deep. If the heroes dig into the holes with a knife or poniard, they find rotten wood chips.

The holes once supported a wooden ladder and platform. The wall can be scaled with a DC 15 Climb check. Fifteen feet above the eastern platform are 3 levers set into an alcove. The operation of the lift is simple. Pulling on the right lever causes the chain to raise; pulling on the center lever causes the chain to stop; pulling on the left lever causes the chain to descend. The chain can rise up to the level of the platform in area 1-4, or descend to the level of the platform in area 1-7.

There are several ways for the adventurers to descend to areas 1-7 and 1-8. Creative PCs are likely to come up with their own strategies; use the following guidelines to help determine challenge ratings.

Rappel down (Rope Use DC 15, and 130 ft. of rope).

Climb down the cavern wall (Climb DC 25).

Climb down the chain (Climb DC 20).

Cling to the chain while the chain descends (Strength check DC 10).

New Equipment: Hooksword

Hooksword	Dmg (S)	Dmg (M)	Critical	Weight	Type
Exotic, Light melee weapon	1d6	1d8	x2	3 lb.	Slashing

The hooksword is shaped similarly to a sickle, with a curved blade that nearly doubles back on itself. An awkward weapon, the hooksword is heavy and unwieldy for its size, and is seldom found among surface races.

You can use a hooksword to make trip attacks. If you are tripped during your own trip attempt, you can drop the hooksword to avoid being tripped.

Sih'hel treat hookswords as martial weapons.

Attach the cauldron in area 1-2 to the chain and ride in the cauldron (Intelligence check DC 10).

It is 120 feet from area 1-4 to 1-7, and another 250 feet to area 1-12.

Area 1-5 – Cistern (EL 1): The pit trap in area 1-1 drops adventurers into a lightless cistern. The icy water is 15 feet deep, and those falling into it must make immediate Swim checks or risk drowning. A trio of dire rats lurk in the water, attacking anything falling into the cistern.

The walls of the cistern are inverted, but pocked with hand and footholds, and can be climbed with a DC 20 Climb check.

Treasure: The rats lair on the east steps, in a pile of sticks, broken tile, and debris. An intensive search of the nest (Search DC 18) uncovers a waterlogged *wand of magic missiles* (CL 3rd, 4 charges) crafted from the rib bone of an ogre mage.

Dire Rats (3): CR 1/3; Small animal; HD 1d8+1; hp 5; Init +3; Spd 40 ft., climb 20 ft.; AC 15, touch 14, flat-footed 12; Base Atk +0; Grp –4; Atk bite +4 melee (1d4 plus disease); Full Atk bite +4 melee (1d4 plus disease); SA Disease; SQ Low-light vision, scent; AL N; SV Fort +3, Ref +5, Will +3; Str 10, Dex 17, Con 12, Int 1, Wis 12, Cha 4.

Skills and Feats: Climb +11, Hide +8, Listen +4, Move Silently +4, Spot +4, Swim +11; Alertness, Weapon Finesse.

SA – Disease (Ex): Filth fever – bite, Fortitude DC 11, incubation period 1d3 days, damage 1d3 Dex and 1d3 Con.

Area 1-6 – Champion of the Sih’hel (EL 2): Read or paraphrase the following:

The stairs lead to a small chamber that stinks of a butcher’s slaughterhouse, the air thick with the smell of bloody feathers. A hulking shape looms in the darkness, massive and ominously silent.

The chamber is home to a young owlbear. Captured and trained by the sih’hel when it was but a cub, the owlbear attacks ferociously, and though it has no sense of tactics, the PCs are forced to contend with fighting their way up the stairs. Unless the heroes aggressively force their way into the chamber, the owlbear receives a +1 bonus for attacking from high ground.

At the back of the platform, the party will find the top of a shadowy spiral staircase that descends to the southwestern corner of area 1-7.

Combat: After years of living in the crystal’s cavern, the owlbear’s feathers are covered in the same dark crystals that coat the walls. Each time a PC hits the owlbear, that attack crushes the crystals, causing them to flare brightly before slowly fading.

Treasure: The owlbear’s heavy, feathered pelt can serve as armor when worn by Medium or Large-sized PCs. Worn as a cloak, the pelt grants a non-magical +1 armor bonus and a +2 circumstance bonus on Fortitude saves

made against exposure to cold weather. Such a cloak has a –1 armor check penalty, a 5% arcane spell failure chance, and weighs a hefty 16 pounds. Intact, the skin is worth 50 gp, less if it was damaged during combat.

Young Owlbear: Medium magical beast; CR 2; HD 3d10+15; hp 33; Init +1; Spd 30 ft.; AC 16, touch 10, flat-footed 14; Base Atk +3; Grp +7; Atk claw +7 melee (1d4+4); Full Atk 2 claws +7 melee (1d4+4) and bite +2 melee (1d4+2); SA Improved grab; SQ Scent; AL N; SV Fort +8, Ref +4, Will +2; Str 18, Dex 12, Con 21, Int 2, Wis 12, Cha 10

Skills and Feats: Listen +6, Spot +6; Alertness, Track.

SA – Improved Grab (Ex): To use this ability, an owlbear must hit with a claw attack. It can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity.

Area 1-7 – Forbidden Fane (EL 3, 2): Read or paraphrase the following:

The chamber is lit with a soft, gloomy light, radiating from overgrown, giant mushrooms. The floor is covered in a thick carpet of rotting humus, and the air stinks of stagnant water and decay. Near the southwest corner is a stone spiral staircase that ascends into darkness. At the far end of the room, you see a pair of golden doors, overgrown with thick roots.

A dozen large mushrooms dominate the chamber, with hundreds of smaller specimens littering the floor. All of the larger mushrooms glow with a faint luminescence. Together, they shed light equivalent to a clear, moonless night. Every spongy step releases the stench of decaying bodies, and a DC 15 Spot check allows adventurers to note the bones of humanoids (primarily orcs and sih’hel) half-buried in the humus.

The superstitious sih’hel are right to fear this chamber, usually approaching no closer than the platform.

The stairs go up to area 1-6. The “roots” over the western doors are actually the tentacles of a subterranean assassin vine. The vine lashes out at anything that comes within reach, devouring its prey, then casting the remains out into the chamber. When the heroes approach the door, shows the players Player Handout B.

The doors are secured by a gnomish puzzle lock cast in the shape of a roaring frost giant head. Instantly recognizable to any gnome or dwarf, a puzzle lock employs a complex series of tumblers to confound and confuse thieves. To open the lock, a person must place his hands inside the mouth of the giant and manipulate the tumblers using only his sense of touch.

Open Lock check	Result
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14 or less	No result
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15-17	The giant exhales a blast of brown mold powder, inflicting 2d6 points of cold, nonlethal damage to anyone within 10 ft. of the door (Fort DC 15 for half).
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- 18-20 The giant's mouth closes on the person's hands, inflicting 2d4 points of crushing damage (Ref DC 20 to avoid). The thief has a -5 injury modifier to all Open Lock and Disable Device checks until the damage is healed.
- 21-25 The western doors open.
- 26+ The western doors open and the southern secret door opens.

Treasure: The doors are decorated in a sheet of hammered gold depicting traditional enemies of gnomes – dragons, giants, ogres, and kobolds. The pair of hammered sheets are examples of remarkable craftsmanship and worth 500 gp each, if delivered intact. Each thin sheet is 6 feet by 6 feet and extremely fragile (hardness 0, 5 hp, fail every saving throw), making transportation extremely difficult. If folded, bent, or otherwise damaged, their value is reduced to a fraction of their original worth; if sold for the gold, each sheet is worth a mere 50 gp.

Secret Door: The secret door in the south wall can be discovered with a DC 20 Search check. The door can be opened by carefully manipulation of the puzzle lock (as listed above) or it can be battered down (hardness 5, hp 25) or pried open (Break DC 25).

Assassin Vine: CR 3; Large plant; HD 4d8+12; hp 30; Init +0; Spd 5 ft.; AC 15, touch 9, flat-footed 15; Base Atk +3; Grp +12; Atk slam +7 melee (1d6+7); Full Atk slam +7 melee (1d6+7); Space/Reach 10 ft./10 ft. (20 ft. with vine); SA Constrict 1d6+7, entangle, improved grab; SQ Blindsight 30 ft., camouflage, immunity to electricity, low-light vision, plant traits, resistance to cold 10 and fire 10; AL N; SV Fort +7, Ref +1, Will +2; Str 20, Dex 10, Con 16, Int –, Wis 13, Cha 9.

Skills and Feats: None.

Constrict (Ex): An assassin vine deals 1d6+7 points of damage with a successful grapple check.

Entangle (Su): An assassin vine can animate plants within 30 feet of itself as a free action (Reflex DC 13 partial). The effect lasts until the vine dies or decides to end it (also a free action).

Improved Grab (Ex): To use this ability, an assassin vine must hit with its slam attack. It can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If it wins the grapple check, it establishes a hold and can constrict.

SQ – Blindsight (Ex): Assassin vines have no visual organs but can ascertain all foes within 30 feet using sound, scent, and vibration.

Camouflage (Ex): Since an assassin vine looks like a normal plant when at rest, it takes a DC 20 Spot check to notice it before it attacks. Anyone with ranks in Survival or Knowledge (nature) can use one of those skills instead of Spot to notice the plant. Dwarves can use stonecunning to notice the subterranean version.

Area 1-7a – Lost Treasures of the Underfolk (EL 4): Read or paraphrase the following:

The hidden doors grinds aside, revealing a small,



dark alcove. A low moan escapes the chamber, and the stench of death and untold antiquity assaults your senses. Peering inside the darkened alcove you can see a dusty wooden altar, covered in cobwebs.

When the Silverheel gnomes fled the dungeon complex before the orcish assault, they secreted their clan treasure here, planning to reclaim their heirlooms once the orcs were defeated. The gnomes never returned and the chamber has been undisturbed ever since.

Adventurers entering the room find that the rotting wooden altar stands before a small alcove set into the wall. Placed inside the alcove are two silver-plated coffers – the legendary heirlooms of the Silverheel clan.

The gnome heirlooms are guarded by a deadly trap. Heroes coming within 5 feet of the coffers feel the stone floor shift beneath them and hear a loud click. GMs should call for actions and count aloud to 3. On the end of the countdown, a portcullis falls over the entrance, trapping anyone inside the room. (PCs standing in the entrance to the chamber risk being struck by the portcullis: Atk +10, 3d6 points of damage.)

The following round, the east wall begins to move, crushing everything in its path. The adventurers have 5 rounds to act before they are caught in the deathtrap. Note that once the trap has been activated, Disable Device checks are useless – the heroes will have to think (not roll) their way out of the trap.

There are a number of ways to escape the deathtrap; here are a few:

- Break/batter down the portcullis (hardness 10; hp 60; Break DC 25).
- Lift the portcullis. A DC 20 Strength check will allow an adventurer to raise the portcullis high enough to allow allies to slip through. Up to one other Medium-sized creature may aid the attempt. Note that lifting the portcullis does not cause it to stay raised – the heroes will have to find a way to wedge the portcullis so that their strongman can escape.
- Brace the wall (Option 1). Adventurers can use their weapons to brace the crushing wall against the west wall. Success is not a given, since weapons are not built to withstand crushing along the long axis. The weapon must succeed on a DC 20 Fortitude save or be sundered. If a weapon is destroyed, the wall marches on.
- Brace the wall (Option 2). Each coffer is 1 foot wide, 1 foot, deep, and 3 feet long. PCs can pull the coffers from the alcove, and use them to stop the crushing wall. Square, and crafted of silver-plated iron, the coffers stop the crushing wall without fail.

Regardless of the adventurers' actions, after 10 rounds the wall retreats and the portcullis rises, allowing any surviving heroes to exit.

Treasure: Plated with silver and inlaid with ivory, each coffer is worth 35 gp. The coffers are neither locked nor trapped.

Coffer 1: A teak case containing two *pearls of power* (1st-level spell), a +1 *warhammer*, and 3 gold ingots (worth 100 gp each).

Coffer 2: A *cloak of elvenkind*, a mithral shirt, the magical heads to five +1 *crossbow bolts* (can be fixed atop bolts with a DC 15 Profession [fletcher] check), and a single large emerald (worth 350 gp) wrapped in silk.

The *warhammer*, *bolt heads*, and mithral shirt all bear the sigil of the Silverheel clan and will be immediately recognized by any gnome or dwarf spying the heroes' loot. Suspicious gnomes and dwarves are quick to assume that the adventurers are in league with the wicked forces of Whiterock, even attacking the heroes to reclaim the treasures of the Silverheel gnomes!

Crushing Wall Trap: CR 4; mechanical; location trigger; repair reset; ceiling moves down (10d6, crush); multiple targets (all targets in room); never miss; onset delay (5 rounds); Search DC 20; Disable Device DC 25.

Portcullis Trap: CR 1; mechanical; location trigger; manual reset; Atk +10 melee (3d6); Search DC 20; Disable Device DC 20. Note: Damage applies only to those underneath the portcullis. Portcullis blocks exit.

Portcullis: 3 in. thick; hardness 10; hp 60; Lift DC 20; Break DC 25.

Area 1-8 – False Door (EL 2): Read or paraphrase the following:

The short corridor ends before a peculiar portal cast of silvery metal. Each of the paired doors sports the face of an enraged giant, maw open wide, as if in a barbaric howl. A raised keyhole is placed at the seam between the two doors.

This corridor was once part of a larger gallery that has since collapsed. The silvery doors are made of adamantine-plated iron, and are nigh indestructible. The portal opens with the magical key found with the *sih'hel* shaman in area 1-12.

The keyhole is a red herring. Any attempt to pick the lock triggers the corridor's trap. A portcullis, arrayed with spikes facing east, rises to block off the corridor's exit. The following round, the giant heads placed in the door exhale a hurricane-force gust of wind. Medium-sized creatures are blown back 1d4x5 feet; Small-sized creatures are blown back 1d6x5 feet; Large-sized or larger creatures are not blown back at all. Anyone blown back to the entrance of the corridor (20 feet from the door) is impaled on the spiked portcullis (Atk +10 melee, 1d4 spikes per target for 1d4+2 each).

Note that if the adventurers discover and disable the portcullis, they are in danger of being blown out of the corridor and into the chasm. Heroes blown out past the corridor's entrance can make DC 15 Strength checks to catch themselves. A PC can also attempt to catch an ally with a DC 15 Reflex save.

If a GM is using this adventure in conjunction with *DCC #51: Castle Whiterock*, the doors open to a long tunnel, 2 feet square, and laid with mine cart track that loops 4 miles northeast to the collapsed tunnel in area 4A-6, the storeroom in the Clockwork Academy.

If the module is being played as a standalone adventure, the doors are false, opening to a blank stone wall.

Furious Wind/Spiked Portcullis Trap: CR 2; mechanical; location trigger; automatic reset; DC 15 Strength check avoids; multiple targets (first two targets closest to spiked portcullis); pit spikes (Atk +10 melee, 1d4 spikes per target for 1d4+2 each); Search DC 18; Disable Device DC 15.

Adamantine-plated Iron Door: 18 in. thick; hardness 20; hp 170; Break DC 75.

Area 1-9 – Chamber of the Dark Seers (EL 3): Read or paraphrase the following:

The floor of the large octagonal room is marked with deep, spiraling runes. Eight tall crystals are set around the circumference of the room, glowing with a soft blue light.

This chamber was created to inure gnome defenders against the horrors that awaited the Clockwork Academy and Castle Whiterock, but even the seers of Silverheel failed to predict the true devastation that would beset the defenders.

Adventurers inspecting the crystals see that captured inside each crystal is a pastoral image depicting high mountains, windswept passes, and majestic glaciers. A DC 10 Spot or Search check allows the viewer to notice tiny towers and citadels hidden amongst the icy mountains and high moors. Bards succeeding on a DC 15 bardic knowledge check, as well as gnomes and dwarves, will recognize these tiny settlements as fabled gnome fastnesses.

Five rounds after entering the chamber, the floor begins to descend. As the floor falls away, it becomes apparent that the crystals aren't actually set into the floor, but are easily over 50 feet in length. The images captured in the top of the crystal slowly transform as the descending floor reveals more and more of each crystal, and depict the prophesized end of the Clockwork Academy. After 10 feet has been revealed, the crystals show internecine warfare amongst the gnome settlements. After 20 feet, the crystals show orc hordes descending from the mountains, laying siege to gnome citadels and pillaging the outlying settlements. After 30 feet, the adventurers will see terrible giants tearing down the walls and towers, and after 40 feet, terrible dragons settle over the gnome fastnesses, laying waste to the defenders and scattering the survivors to the seven winds.

As the lift descends, a terrible moaning echoes through the chamber, and each living creature in the area becomes panicked unless it succeeds on a DC 16 Will save. If cornered (likely in this confined space), a panicked creature cowers for 7 rounds. If the Will save succeeds, the creature is shaken for 1 round. The *fear* moaning can be countered with a bard's countersong. The moaning alerts the sih'hel in area 1-10; when the chamber reaches the elevation of that area 5 rounds later, the aberrations are girded and ready for battle.

The moaning is so loud, that even if opposed by a bard's countersong, it still drowns out all verbal communication. Players can declare their actions to the GM, but unless their *characters* communicate magically, or by reading each one another's' lips, players must observe the GM-enforced silence. The deafening moan continues for 1d8 rounds after the chamber reaches the elevation of area 1-10.

Fear Trap: CR 3; magic device; location trigger; automatic reset; spell effect (*fear*, 4th-level wizard, Will DC 16 partial); Search DC 29; Disable Device DC 29. The floor takes a total of 10 rounds to descend to the elevation of area 1-10.

Area 1-10 – Common Room (EL 3): Read or paraphrase the following:

The chamber before you has a strange gloom, giving the walls and floor a faint violet tint. Harvested mushrooms litter the floor, and the air is thick with the smell of smoke, though no fire is to be seen.

Six sih'hel make their home in this chamber, lair in small holes dug into the spongy, detritus-laden floor. The pale, wormy creatures lurk in their hovels (+5 circumstance bonus to Hide checks), springing out to launch surprise attacks on explorers. If the heroes enter through area 1-9, the sih'hel attack out of fear, hurling spears into the chamber.

If the sih'hel succeed in besting the adventurers, they tie up the survivors and deliver them to area 1-12 to be sacrificed to their crystal god.

A casual inspection of the chamber turns up a small fire pit filled with glowing embers and covered with mushroom stalks. Smoking atop the stalks are shanks of meat cut from disturbingly familiar body parts – predominantly dwarf and human, with a string of elf ear jerky.

On the eastern lip of the chamber is a 60-foot length of rope, woven from hair of the sih'hel's victims. The rope is anchored to the lip of area 1-10, and can be used to climb down into the lake below.

Treasure: A closer Search (DC 15) discovers a small hovel hidden along the north wall. Covered in dried mushroom cap, the holes conceals the aberrant's treasure: a mirrored, masterwork buckler; a moldy leather pouch containing 13 pp; 5 small, brightly colored gems (worth 15 gp each); and a hollow femur containing a divine scroll inscribed with the spells *cure serious wounds* and *silence*.

Sih'hel, War1 (6): CR 1/2; Small humanoid; HD 1d8+2; hp 6 each; Init +2; Spd 20 ft., climb 20 ft.; AC 17, touch 12, flat-footed 15; Base Atk +1; Grp –2; Atk/Full Atk hooksword +4 melee (1d6+1/x2) or javelin +4 ranged (1d4+1/x2); SA Chill touch; SQ Darkvision 60 ft., sih'hel traits, spell resistance 6; AL CE; SV Fort +2, Ref +2, Will –1; Str 13, Dex 14, Con 10, Int 10, Wis 9, Cha 8.

Skills and Feats: Climb +9, Hide +12, Listen +1, Spot +6; Weapon Focus (hooksword).

SA – Chill Touch (Su): A sih'hel's suckers drain the strength from a grabbed opponent, dealing 1 point of Strength damage each round it maintains the hold, and leaving a waxy patch on the victim's skin.

Possessions: Chain shirt, hooksword, 3 javelins, loincloth.

Area 1-11 – Waterfall: Read or paraphrase the following:

A torrent of water pours out this ruined corridor. Through the frothing stream, you can see that the farthest reach of the corridor has been buried in a cave-in.

When the galleries were collapsed by the Silverheel gnomes, they accidentally tapped a subterranean river. Though the original collapse took place centuries ago, the corridor is far from stable. The bulk of the river's force is diverted by the fallen boulders, but if any significant force shakes the lost caverns, it can upset the boulders, creating a cataclysmic flood. (For an example of such an event, and its results, see the Wrapping Up section.)

A DC 15 Search check uncovers the skeleton of a drow scout trapped in the rubble. The skeleton carries a suit of chainmail, a shortsword, and 3 daggers, all ruined by rust. It also has an oilskin scroll case that has survived the decades of punishment. Inside the scroll case is a stained scrap of parchment, the scout's depiction of Castle Whiterock's layout. Show players Player Handout C.

GM Note: The Castle Whiterock map can inspire hesitant heroes to take on the massive dungeon, but it can also spoil some of the mystery of the unplumbed depths. GMs should carefully consider the nature of their players before sharing the entire map. Hesitant GMs are encouraged to split the map into several sections, so that the PCs can acquire the entire map only after several adventures, as they slowly piece together the true scope of mighty Castle Whiterock.

Area 1-12 – Black Crystal of the Sih'hel (EL 5): Read or paraphrase the following:

Through the murky darkness, you can make out a small island in the center of the lake. Amid tall, pale mushrooms and quick, darting creatures stands an enormous dark crystal, rising 12 feet out of the center of the isle. The crystal radiates a pale, violet light that seems to pulse and throb inside your skull.

Past the island, a raging waterfall spills down into the lake, misting the cavern and its occupants with droplets of freezing water, and casting an eerie rainbow over the darkened chamber.

The icy subterranean lake is merely 3 feet deep; adventurers rappelling down from area 1-10 will have to wade their way to shore (–2 penalty on Move Silently checks, and tumbling is impossible).

Three pale, abberant sih'hel warriors lurk on the island. The warriors fight to the death to defend their mistress, the crystal's Oracle. The Oracle is a particularly foul specimen of sih'hel, with a crown of black crystals adorning her pale, waxy visage. The Oracle uses her spells to the best of her ability; given warning of the heroes' approach, the Oracle casts *mage armor*, *protection from good*, *entropic shield*, *bleed*, and *bane*, increasing her stats and aiding the attacks of her allies. Her revised AC is as follows:

AC 18, touch 14, flat-footed 16, 20% miss chance vs. ranged attacks; against good-aligned opponents, improve this to AC 19, touch 15, flat-footed 17, 20% miss chance vs. ranged attacks.

She casts *sleep* on the adventurers as they descend the rope, causing climbers to fall, and then again on the heroes as they approach the island, causing them to drown in the lake.

Meanwhile, the dark crystal exerts its influence over gnomes, dwarves, and drow, turning them against their companions and sowing confusion among the PCs. Characters who make the mistake of touching the pulsing, violet crystal must make immediate Will saves (DC 15) or have their minds filled with visions of slaughtering their companions and leading a terrible crusade against the upper world. Each adventurer who fails the save also incurs the crystal's curse; GMs should roll 1d12 or pick their favorite curse from the following table:

Result	Crystal's Curse
1-5	The PC's skin becomes waxy and pale.
6-7	The PC develops a palpable, feral aura that grants a +3 circumstance bonus to

Intimidate checks and a –5 penalty to all attempts to influence NPC attitudes through Diplomacy or Charisma checks.

8-9 The PC's irises dilate, granting darkvision (60 feet), but also light sensitivity, so that the PC is dazzled in bright sunlight or within the radius of a *daylight* spell.

10 The PC's hands grow large suckers, granting a +3 circumstance bonus to Climb checks and a –5 penalty to all attempts to influence NPC attitudes through Diplomacy or Charisma checks.

11 The PC becomes sickly and weak, but his mind is filled with a terrible cunning. Permanently trade 1 point of Constitution and Strength for Intelligence.

12 Roll twice, ignoring all 12s and duplicates.

All of the crystal's curses can be remedied with a *remove curse* spell cast by a good-aligned cleric, of 6th level or higher. Adventurers foolish enough to attack the crystal feel a flash of power as their weapons connect, *dazing* them as per the spell (DC 15 Will save to avoid) and shattering nonmagical weapons. Spells cast at the crystal also trigger the *daze* effect and do no apparent damage. (Simply put, low-level PCs lack the resources to harm it. If necessary, assign the crystal spell resistance 20. Returning one day with sufficient power to destroy the crystal could become a quest for some heroes, if they survive.)

Treasure: Buried at in the humus at the base of the crystal are the remnants of the Oracle's past sacrifices. The offerings can be found with a DC 15 Search check, but eager heroes will have to be careful to avoid touching the malevolent crystal. A total of 102 pp is buried around the crystal, along with 3 small rubies (worth 20 gp each) and a *ring of protection* +1 shaped like a serpent devouring itself.

If the adventurers came to the dungeon in search of kidnappers from Cillamar, the stolen children are here, tied up to the stalk of a mushroom – cold, frightened, but otherwise unhurt from their ordeal.

The Oracle, female sih'hel Sor2/Clr2: CR 4; Small humanoid; HD 2d4+2 plus 2d8+2; hp 23; Init +2; Spd 20 ft., climb 20 ft.; AC 14, touch 14, flat-footed 12; Base Atk +2; Grp –3; Atk/Full Atk *shard dagger* +4 melee (1d4 plus chill touch); SA Chill touch, command undead 5/day (+2, 2d6+4); SQ Darkvision 60 ft., sih'hel traits, summon familiar; AL CE; SV Fort +7, Ref +5, Will +9; Str 8, Dex 15, Con 12, Int 9, Wis 14, Cha 15.

Skills and Feats: Climb +10, Concentration +4, Hide +13, Spot +8; Great Fortitude, Lightning Reflexes.

SA – Chill Touch (Su): A sih'hel's suckers drain the strength from a grabbed opponent, dealing 1 point of Strength damage each round it maintains the hold, and leaving a waxy patch on the victim's skin.

Sorcerer Spells Known (6/5; DC 12 + spell level): 0-level – *acid splash*, *daze*, *mending*, *ray of frost*, *touch of*



fatigue; 1st – mage armor, sleep.

Cleric Spells Prepared (4/3+1; DC 12 + spell level; Chaos, Evil domains): 0-level – cure minor wounds, inflict minor wounds, guidance, resistance; 1st – bless, bane, entropic shield, protection from good.*

**Indicates a domain spell.*

Possessions: Shard dagger (formed from a shard of the Dark Crystal of the Sih'hel, the shard dagger functions as a +1 dagger that also transmits a sih'hel's chill touch), crystal crown (worth 65 gp), *ring of protection +1*, *cloak of resistance +1*, adamantine key (to area 1-8).

Sih'hel, war1 (3): CR 1/2; Small humanoid; HD 1d8+2; hp 6 each; Init +2; Spd 20 ft., climb 20 ft.; AC 17, touch 12, flat-footed 15; Base Atk +1; Grp -2; Atk/Full Atk hooksword +4 melee (1d6+1/x2) or javelin +4 ranged (1d4+1/x2); SA Chill touch; SQ Darkvision 60 ft., sih'hel traits, spell resistance 6; AL CE; SV Fort +2, Ref +2, Will -1; Str 13, Dex 14, Con 10, Int 10, Wis 9, Cha 8.

Skills and Feats: Climb +9, Hide +12, Listen +1, Spot +6; Weapon Focus (hooksword).

SA – Chill Touch (Su): A sih'hel's suckers drain the strength from a grabbed opponent, dealing 1 point of Strength damage each round it maintains the hold, and leaving a waxy patch on the victim's skin.

Possessions: Chain shirt, hooksword, 3 javelins, loincloth.

Wrapping Up (EL 3): The death of the Oracle triggers an immediate tremor that shakes the entire cavern and causes the waters of the lake to slosh over the island. The waves reach 2 feet in height, knocking prone any-

one who fails a DC 15 Balance check. The platform in area 1-10 breaks free, crashing down into the lake, taking with it any ropes that the heroes might have anchored to the chamber.

The following round, a terrible thundering fills the cavern. Anyone looking up sees that what had previously been a small waterfall splashing down has become a furious torrent. The boulders blocking the river in area 1-11 have shifted, permitting the entire subterranean river to rain down on the adventurers.

Immediately, the water level in the chamber begins to rise. In one round, it is lapping at the heroes' knees, and the next at their waists. They can climb atop the giant mushrooms to buy themselves time, but in 3 more rounds, the icy waters reach the top of the stalks. Enterprising heroes can cut the caps off the mushrooms, riding the overturned caps like boats. Otherwise the PCs will have to swim for their lives or come up with another means of staying afloat in the rising waters, not to mention keeping the just-rescued children alive. While the waters rise, the sides of the cavern continue to sheer off, throwing up mighty waves and making scaling the walls impossible.

After 15 rounds, the water reaches the base of the lift chain; the waters will climb no higher, but do not recede. Adventurers can easily escape up the chain, climbing out of the cavern and back to safety.

**THUS ENDS THE SINISTER SECRET
OF WHITEROCK**

Further Adventures

The death of the Oracle and the destruction of the Caverns of the Sih'hel need not be the end of the PCs' adventures. Creative (or cruel) GMs can continue the adventures by inflicting the PCs with the Crystal's Curse (see area 1-12). Even if none of them touched the crystal, it haunts their dreams during the night with visions of death and rapine, preventing natural healing and leaving them exhausted. Heroes hoping for a *remove curse* spell to end their night terrors are disappointed to find that the spell has no effect upon the alien crystal's will. Instead, the priest counsels, the PCs must seek out a cure hidden in one of the following locations:

DCC #3: The Mysterious Tower: The mysterious tower, and the knowledge of the Forgotten Mage, holds the secret

to the heroes' malady. Sages and seers alike aver that the cure to the crystal's curse can be found on Dewey's Bookshelf in area 33.

DCC #17: Legacy of the Savage Kings: Kyleth the Witch Queen is known to be in possession of the *Ars Maleficus*, a wicked tome of forbidden knowledge sure to detail the cure to the crystal's curse. The tome can be found in the Witch Queen's laboratory, area 1-11g.

DCC #36: Talons of the Horned King: The strange talon-like formations found on the top of the world have long been believed to have a curative effect for those without any other hope. There is some meager truth to the tales; adventurers who find their way to the laboratory (area 3-6) discover vials containing a noxious-tasting potion that cures them of the crystal's curse.

Appendix I: New Monsters

SIH'HEL

Sih'hel, 1st-level Warrior

Small Humanoid

Hit Dice:	HD 1d8+2 (6 hp)
Initiative:	+2
Speed:	20 ft. (4 squares), climb 20 ft.
AC:	AC 17 (+4 chain shirt, +2 Dex, +1 size), touch 13, flat-footed 15
Base Atk/Grapple:	+1/−2
Attack:	Hooksword +4 melee (1d6+1/x2) or javelin +4 ranged (1d4+1/x2)
Full Attack:	Hooksword +4 melee (1d6+1/x2) or javelin +4 ranged (1d4+1/x2);
Space/Reach:	5 ft./5 ft.
Special Attacks:	Chill touch
Special Qualities:	Darkvision 60 ft., light sensitivity, spell resistance 6
Saves:	Fort +2, Ref +2, Will −1
Abilities:	Str 13, Dex 14, Con 10, Int 10, Wis 9, Cha 8
Skills:	Climb +9, Hide +12, Listen +1, Spot +6
Feats:	Weapon Focus (hooksword)
Environment:	Underground
Organization:	Swarm (2-24)
Challenge Rating:	1/2
Treasure:	Standard
Alignment:	Usually chaotic evil
Advancement:	By character class
Level Adjustment:	+1

The pale, waxy-skinned humanoid is less than half the size of a human, with oversized pads on the ends of its fingers, stringy muscles, and large bulbous eyes. Its distended jaw works up and down of its own accord, and the foul creature giggles softly to itself as it advances.

Also called bar'wens or barrow ones, the worm-skinned sil'hel are the sole survivors of the Silverheel gnomes. After centuries of inbreeding under the crystal's malevolent light,

the sil'hel bear almost no resemblance to their gnome ancestors. Sil'hel shun light, venturing into the surface world only to kidnap children and maids to raise in the gloomy caverns as slaves, meals, and mates.

Combat

Sil'hel attack any surface creature that finds its way into their subterranean lairs. Cowards, they prefer to attack by ambush or with overwhelming numbers. They fight predominantly with hookswords of antiquated gnome design and simple spears and javelins.

Chill Touch (Su): A sih'hel's suckers drain the strength from a grabbed opponent, dealing 1 point of Strength damage each round it maintains the hold, and leaving a waxy patch on the victim's skin.

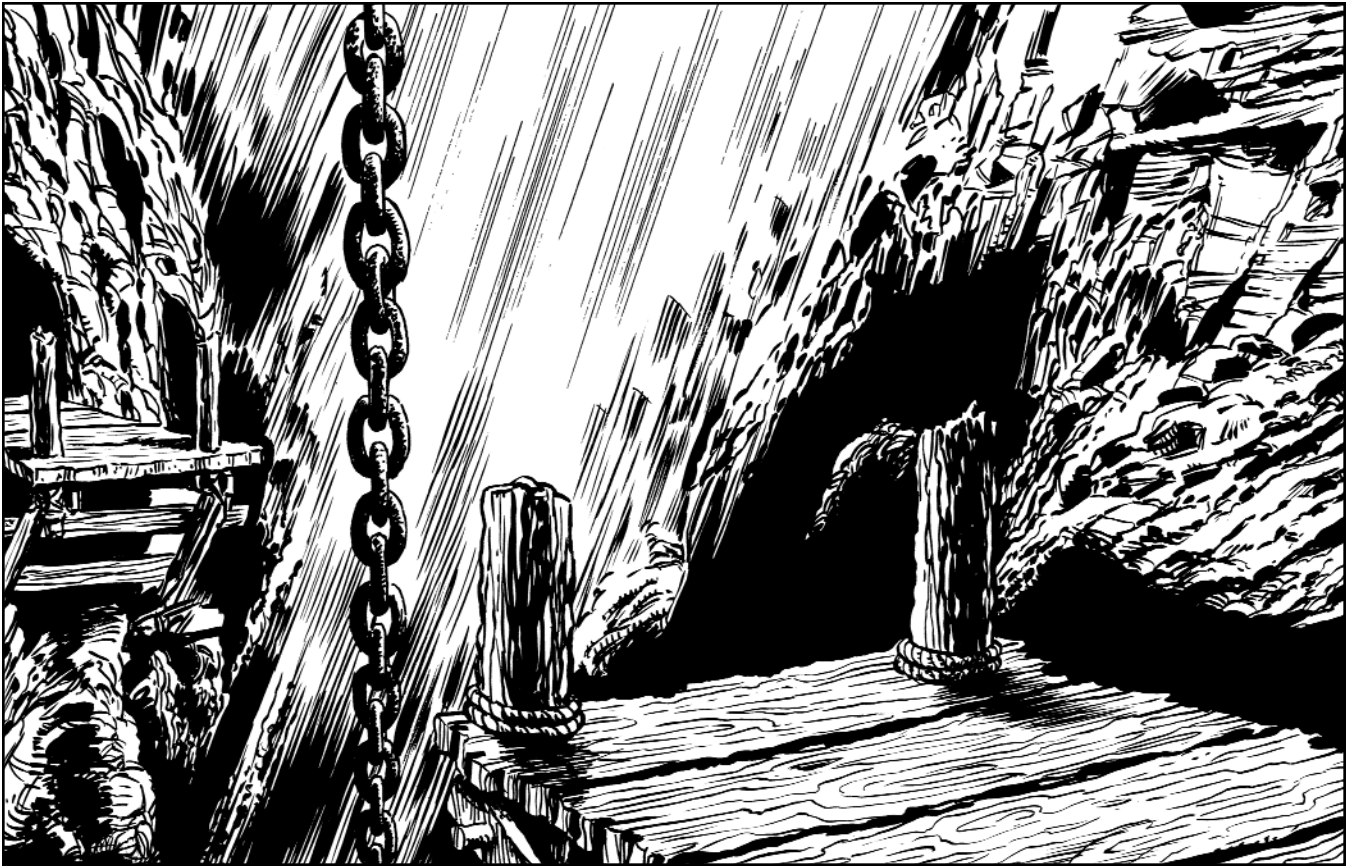
Light Sensitivity (Ex): Sih'hel are dazzled in bright sunlight or within the radius of a *daylight* spell.

Skills: Sih'hel have a +4 racial bonus on Hide and Spot checks and a +8 racial bonus on Climb checks. A sih'hel can always choose to take 10 on Climb checks, even if rushed or threatened. Sih'hel use their Dexterity modifier for Climb checks.

Sih'hel Society

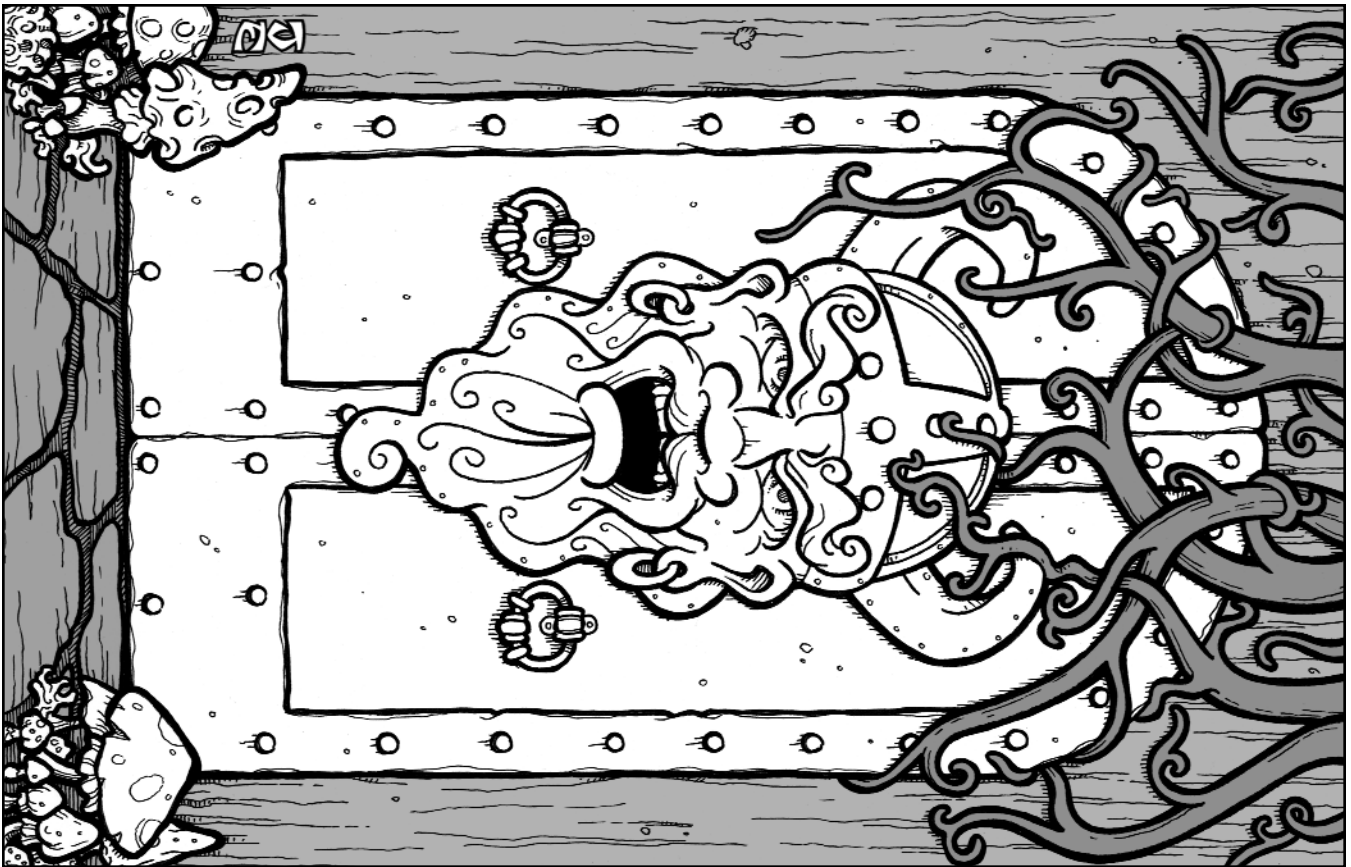
The sih'hel live their miserable lives in slavish devotion to the eldritch crystal that birthed their aberrant race. The crystal directs a tribe's shaman through visions and dreams, though the crystal's goals are utterly incomprehensible to anyone other than a sil'hel.

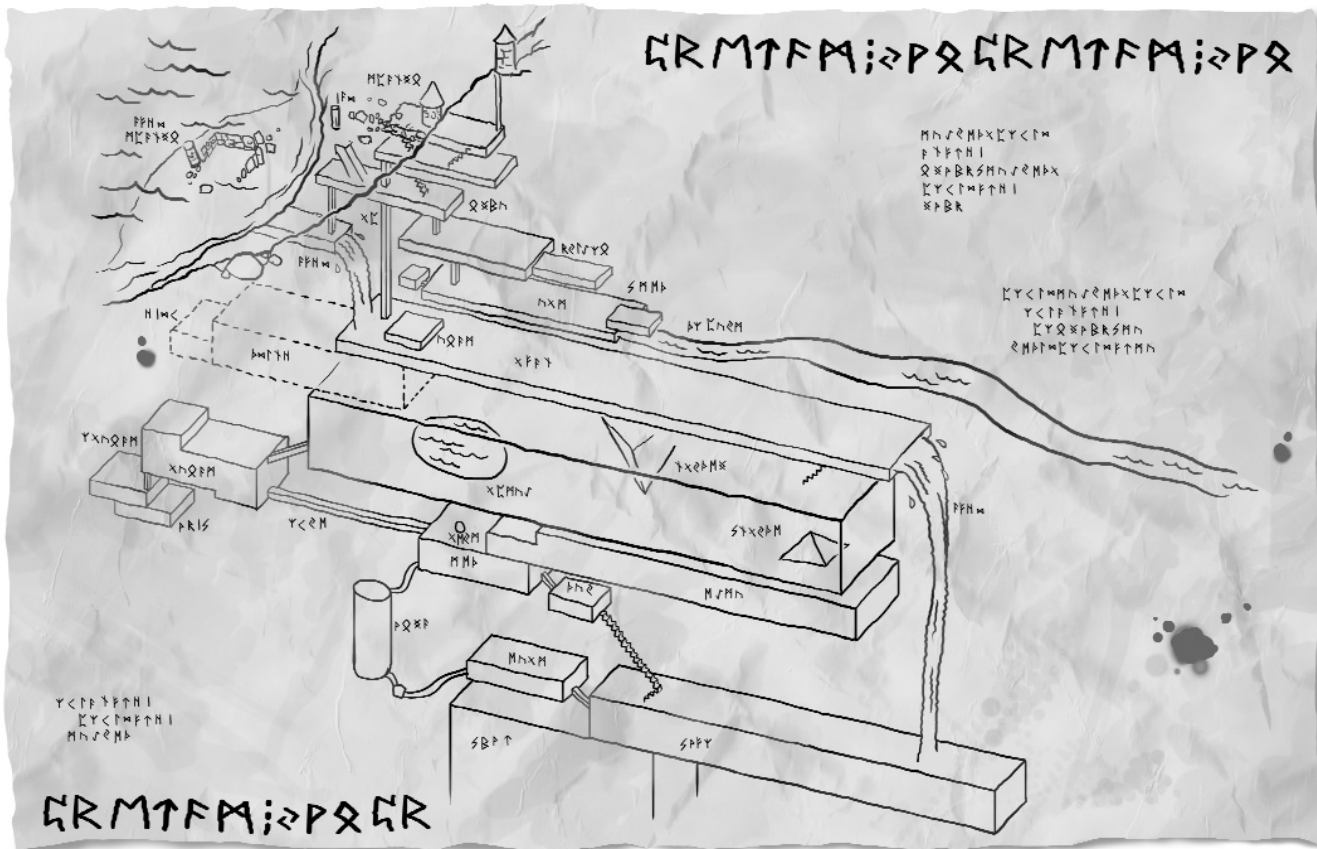
In the gloomy, violet light of their crystal god, the sih'hel lives are extended for extraordinarily long spans, sometimes up to 700 or more years. They propagate their kind by kidnapping children from the surface world. After a decade or so of imprisonment, the kidnapped children begin to show sih'hel traits, and after 20 years they are indistinguishable from their captors, in body, mind, and soul.



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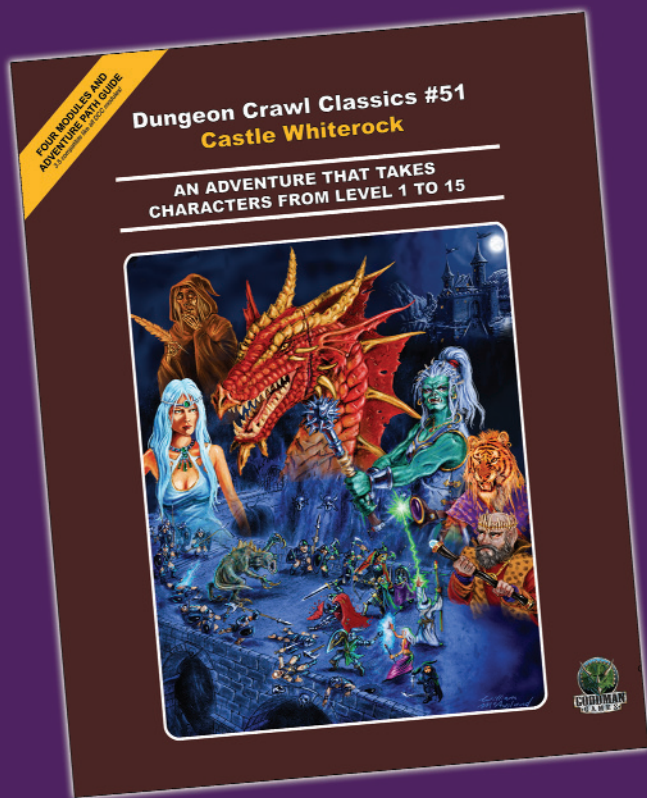
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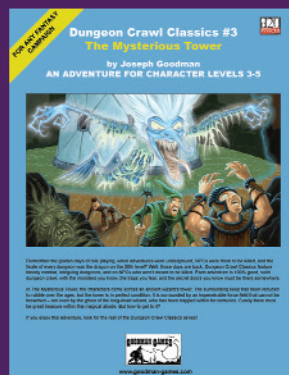
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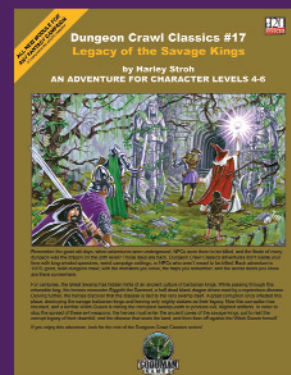
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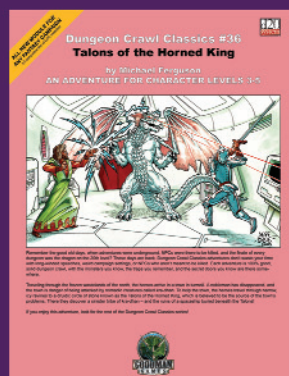
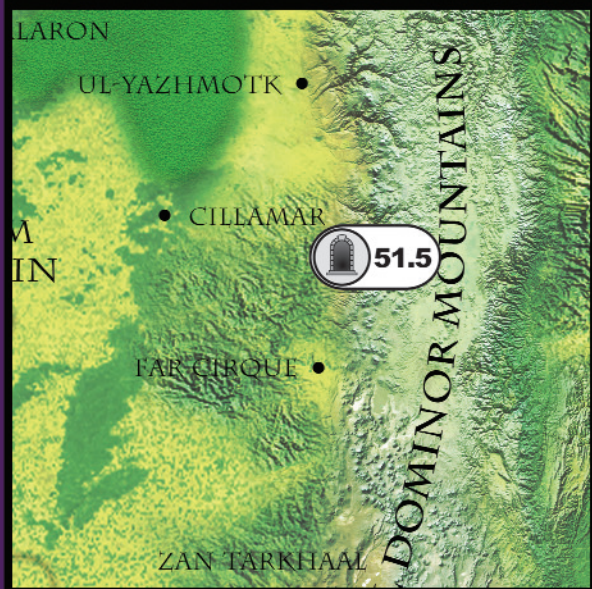


#3: The Mysterious Tower

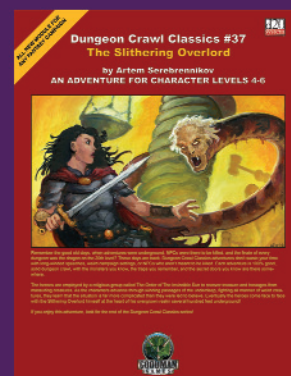


#17: Legacy of the Savage Kings

This world-neutral adventure is easy to set in the world of *Aereth*, as described in *Dungeon Crawl Classics #35: Gazetteer of the Known Realms*. See inside for full details.



#36: Talons of the Horned King



#37: The Slithering Overlord

Requires the use of the *Dungeons & Dragons Player's Handbook*, published by Wizards of the Coast, Inc. This product utilizes updated material from the v.3.5 revision.



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