

THE STONEHEART RUIN

AN ADVENTURE FOR THREE TO SIX CHARACTERS OF 2ND TO 4TH LEVEL
BY JONATHAN SWADLEY



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A 4-HOUR ADVENTURE FOR THREE - SIX CHARACTERS OF 2ND - 4TH LEVEL

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INTRODUCTION

“I have no explanation for any of these finds. We heard disturbing noises coming from further within the mountain; thunderous and growling.”

- Excerpt from a pamphlet, signed: “Koralia Meadring, Anthropologist Extraordinaire”

BACKGROUND

Koralia Meadring, a well-known druid anthropologist, needs the characters to investigate her most recent discovery: a ruined cavern deep in the mountains she believes contains evidence of a lost civilization. Her small team of academics did a cursory walk-through, but left in a hurry after being frightened by what they heard coming from deeper in the mountain. After escaping, they found one of their team was missing, a goliath named Marek.

The party must climb the mountains and locate the ruin, make certain that it is safe for study by Koralia’s team, and if possible, find and rescue Marek - who has been infected with an intellect devourer. The party may or may not learn about this, depending on their actions. There are also some other interested parties inside the ruin that the players can interact with.

Unbeknownst to the players or Koralia, she is incorrect in her hypothesis; the ruin was actually a mind flayer temple. The illithids gathered their grimlock servants here, living in a cult-like existence as they brought new brains and fresh hosts for their masters. The mind flayers kept intellect devourers to infiltrate aboveground societies and manipulate events to their liking. The illithids themselves are no longer here, but the impact of their actions remain, as will several questions about their current agenda and goals.

OVERVIEW

The adventure’s story is told over 3 parts and takes approximately 4.5 hours to play.

- **Part 1: The Orphan Ale Inn (30 mins).** The characters are recruited by Koralia in the town of Cauldwin to travel into the Stonehearts, (northern mountain range) secure the ruin that her team discovered, and find and return her colleague Marek.
- **Part 2: Journey to the Mountain Discovery (60 mins).** Once the characters find the research team’s base camp, they are attacked by a snowy bulette burrowing in the area. They can then follow Koralia’s crude map up the mountain to the ruin. This is a dangerous journey containing a skill challenge, as well as some random encounters.
- **Part 3: Confrontation in the Ruin (150-180 mins).** Having reached the huge doors carved into the mountain face, the party will need to enter and explore the caverns, making sure that any dangers inside are dealt with so Koralia’s team can safely return and study the site. They may optionally find a githyanki NPC inside, who has his own agenda. Marek is being held prisoner by a cult of grimlocks deep in the caverns, and has been taken over by an intellect devourer.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

The characters have seen Koralia’s pamphlet, as she has sent it to many neighboring towns, hoping for feedback and aid. Players should invent their own reasoning for taking on a job of this nature, such as invoking a patron or deity, or spying for an organization. They might hope to earn Koralia’s trust and wish to see her become a patron to the party.

PART 1: THE ORPHAN ALE INN

In this chapter, the party arrives at the town of Cauldwin, specifically at the Orphan Ale Inn, where they meet and are hired by the writer of an intriguing pamphlet that has been sent to many nearby towns and villages. When the party enter the inn, read the following passage aloud:

The sparse wooden building is fairly drab to look at, but is warm and welcoming once you set foot inside. A small band in the corner is playing happy music, and several miners are seated and carrying on conversations over drinks and food. A friendly looking half-elf woman notices you enter, finishes a flagon, and makes her way to introduce herself. She is short and thin, with bright green inquisitive eyes, and is quick to point out curiosities among the characters, sometimes without much social grace.

KORALIA'S STORY

Koralia has a mission for the characters. She and her team (all residing at the Inn) recently made a discovery in the Stoneheart mountains a few days north of town. She is an excited, curious woman with an easygoing attitude, until she starts talking about the events her team experienced. As they sit, she passes them a drawn map to her team's basecamp and the ruin they found on the mountain.

The half-elf describes a landing on the mountain, where they found a large set of stone doors. In actuality, they were simply plain stone that had been carved to give the appearance of doors. They found a crack in the stone and were able to crawl through and get inside.

She claims that her team made some intriguing discoveries she thinks are evidence of an ancient civilization. They explored the main cavern until they heard a low, guttural howl echo out from somewhere further in. Her team quickly fled, not realizing until they were outside that one of their team, a goliath archaeologist named Marek, was not with them. She is embarrassed and ashamed that they left him behind.

When they returned to their base camp they found it had been ransacked. They decided to leave and escape back to Cauldwin. Koralia and her team have been staying at the Orphan Ale Inn for the last two weeks, waiting for help.

If there are any characters without cold weather clothing, she makes a note that Benny's has some warm coats for sale, and anyone going up the mountain would do well to dress for extreme cold(see the rules for this in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*). Koralia offers 100gp to each character upon clearing the way through the caverns, and bringing back something to mark their progress. This could be books, an artifact, a map the characters make of the layout, or even a creature's remains. She will also offer an additional 100gp to each character should they rescue Marek.

CAULDWIN

Cauldwin is a fairly meager mining town, prosperous only due to its proximity to the mountains. Some fortune seekers occasionally come through on their way to try and dig up some supposed treasure, but it's not a place that would grace most people's journeys. Beyond the Orphan Ale Inn, the points of interest in the town are Benny's Goods (general store), The Dwarven Exchange (mining outpost/guild hall), and Church of the Frozen Flame.

PART 2: JOURNEY TO THE MOUNTAIN DISCOVERY

In this chapter, the party makes their way to the basecamp at the foot of the mountain, has a surprising encounter with a snowy bulette, and climbs into the Stoneheart mountains in search of the ruin.

THE RESEARCH TEAM BASECAMP

About two hours north of Cauldwin, the party finds Koralia's basecamp, situated just below the rise into the snowy mountains further north. There are a circle of tents set up here (about half of which have been torn and scattered), and in the center a large fire pit containing nothing but ashes. The surrounding ground has a couple of large holes in it, several feet wide.

SNOWY BULETTE

The players begin to ascend the mountain, but just outside the basecamp, a snowy bulette (see **Appendix A** for the stat block) is burrowing around the area, using its tremorsense to 'feel' for the party, waiting to strike. It is not trying to be stealthy, but it is underground, so they will likely feel the tremors, and hear a low rumble before seeing anything noticeable. This takes a DC 13 (Wisdom) Perception check to notice. Read the following to any players that pass (if no one passes the check, the bulette surprises the party):

You hear a low rumble nearby, about 50 feet away. You still yourself and feel a series of small tremors from the ground. They seem to ebb and flow like a tide, until you look up to see a pile of earth spewing upwards as a large creature bursts forth. It has a long and narrow shark-like head, short legs that end in powerful hooven claws, and a jaw that snaps and spits gravel as it draws its eyes down on you.

After the party defeats the bulette, they can follow the tunnels it has burrowed to find the remains of some of its earlier victims (a CR3 treasure hoard).



UP THE STONEHEART

After the bulette encounter, the party may wish to rest at the base camp to recover from the fight. The upcoming climb will be difficult, and it may be a good idea to take at least a short rest. The base camp has no provisions or anything to offer aside from the tents and the fire pit. After resting, or if they simply continue on, the players must decide on a travel pace up the mountain for the day. The team's site is approximately **15 miles** of difficult terrain away.

You can use the rules concerning travel pace and forced march from the *Player's Handbook*. The characters will be battling the elements while on the mountain. Characters without appropriate cold weather clothing will suffer the effects of extreme cold as detailed in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.

Skill Challenge. The party will need to make sure they're following Koralia's map. The map is only using loose geographical landmarks to point the way, so the characters may wind up going the wrong way and losing time. This will be a Wisdom (Survival) challenge, to see how well they can orient the party, read the map, and make progress. See below for what consequences this challenge entails.

Many factors might weigh in on this outcome. If a player makes a good argument for why their character could help contribute to this challenge by using a different skill, let them if it makes narrative sense. A strong character, for example, might suggest they use their Strength (Athletics) to climb ahead and make a path through the snow.

Survival Total	Outcome
5 or less	The party misreads the map and travels in the wrong direction for an entire day. Roll twice on the random encounter table.
10 or less	The party circle back inadvertently and lose a few hours of progress. Roll on the random encounter table.
15 or less	The party makes average progress up the mountain. Roll on the random encounter table.
20 or less	No ill effects are suffered as the party makes good time and expected progress.
21+	The party navigates and travels efficiently, finding a path not found on the map that saves them a few hours today.

A ranger in the party can help shave some time off the journey, as the party will be able to ignore difficult terrain and can't get lost. Another way the party can help make the journey easier is to use a climber's kit, which will lower the skill challenge Survival DC's by 5. The journey up the mountain is difficult and arduous no matter the challenge results. If the party camps for the night, have them roll on the random encounter table below. The party may try to ignore or sneak around these, offer aid, or attempt to engage and interact with them.

Random Encounter Table

D6	Encounter
1	A group of 1d4 ice mephits are cruelly pelting a lone wolf with snowballs and their frost breath ability.
2	A group of 1d4 orcs led by an orog are trying to make camp and build a fire, and are arguing loudly amongst themselves about how best to proceed.
3	You hear a distant, deep voice singing in Giant. Closer inspection reveals a frost giant . The party will need to bargain (or run) their way out of this if he spots them.
4	A group of 1d4 duergar . If this is rolled in daytime, the party finds them camped. If at night, they are wandering and may ambush the party's camp.
5	A winter wolf is wandering the mountain, and may try to ambush the party. The group may try to communicate with it and offer it food instead.
6	The party hears roars in the sky as 1d3 white dragon wyrmlings fly overhead. The party could hide and avoid them, or attempt to fight them.

As the party makes some progress up the Stoneheart, read the following:

After a few hours of travel, you notice you are breathing a bit harder, probably due to the thinner air at this altitude. The way ahead is a sheet of grey and white. After a quick break to regain your strength, you feel the wind thankfully subside, and you have a few moments of calm. You look around, seeing for miles the landscape stretching in every direction. It is a beautiful view, but you cannot stay to look. You must continue.

Once the party reaches Koralia's discovery, read the following:

You pull yourselves up onto a flat stone landing, the cold wind assaulting your face. As you stand and look up, you see where the face of the mountain has been hewn down to a flat wall, the plain stone carved to take on the appearance of two large, but nonfunctional, ornate doors. There is a crack on the bottom right, where natural erosion or some other force has caused the stone to crumble away.



PART 3: CONFRONTATION IN THE RUIN

In this chapter, the party will explore the ruined temple, attempt to make it safe for the researchers to return, and search for the missing goliath, Marek.

Outside, the giant stone doorway has crumbled and revealed an entryway that allows a Medium-sized creature or smaller access into the ruin. Once inside, use the provided map and key that follows as the players explore the ruin.

Location background. This temple was once a harvesting site for mind flayers. These illithids started a cult to gain controllable subjects to do their bidding - mostly bringing in fresh creatures for their masters to feast on their brains. The illithids would then give the hungry cultists the remaining body to eat, reinforcing a brutal cycle of cannibalism that eventually twisted them into the blind and greedy grimlocks they are now. The intellect devourers were bred as a plan to make people puppets and lure more subjects and brains to the mind flayers.

The remaining grimlock ranks have thinned in the absence of the mind flayers. They have subsisted on wildlife, the rare miner or adventurer who strays up here, and failing those, they fight amongst themselves to prove who is weak and who is strong. The weakest become the next meal.

NOTE: When the following map key references a creature in **bold** text, this refers to the stat block from the *Monster Manual*. Doors are unlocked unless otherwise specified.

M1. Main Chamber

The entryway opens to a massive circular cavern, with little natural light coming in from the gap in the door. There are several dark stone slabs on the ground, surrounding a circle. Closer inspection reveals these slabs to be big enough for a medium-sized humanoid to lie upon. They have no markings, but the ends closest to the center have a small depression, roughly the size of a melon, and are colored a rusty reddish-brown. Characters that make a DC 14 Medicine or Survival check can note this is from very old and very frequent bloodstains.

The circle in the center is a teleportation circle, with runes in Qualith (the language of the mind flayers; it typically requires tentacles and psionics to read) which *comprehend languages* will tell a player these roughly translate to: “Conquer from within. Control from without.” This circle needs the blood of 8 creatures, each placed on the slabs around it, as well as a great deal of focused psionic energy. The circle is “locked” to only allow transportation to and from a specific location, a mind flayer cabal deep in the Underdark.

The room has a large amount of rubble. Characters with a Passive Perception of 14 or higher will notice that among the rubble are some very old animal and human remains, picked down to the bone. To the west, a passage narrows to a closed wooden door. The north passage appears to have been blocked by a cave-in, which the party can clear by taking an hour of labor to move the larger rocks. The eastern passage goes down, rather steeply, but still walkable, for the entire snaking length of the passage until it opens into **M6**.

M2. Disused Crypt

The door to this room is unlocked, but shows signs where it has been forced open and pressed shut again. If the party tries to force their way in, the doors feel as though they have been blocked or barricaded from within. A voice from inside shouts at them to go away in Undercommon. If the group tries to communicate in Common the voice will switch to an accented, broken Common and tell them to leave. This voice belongs to a **githyanki warrior** named Oniram who is wounded and holed up here, and missing his greatsword. The party will need to succeed on a DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) check to get him to open up, but if they offer aid, this lowers the DC by 5. They will need to succeed on a DC 19 Strength check in order to break the door down, which will cause Oniram to stubbornly attack them (he starts this fight with 25 hit points). 700xp

Oniram has barricaded himself inside after a harrowing experience in the Underdark, and a narrow escape from the grimlocks in this ruin. He has no warm clothing to brave the elements, and is trapped here. He is on a quest to become a knight to his people and earn his silver sword. To do this, his people sent him into the Underdark from his home on the astral plane with a difficult objective: kill a mind flayer, and come back alive. He will recount a short version of these events if the players seem amenable to helping him, saying only that he barely escaped the illithid with his life, he lost his greatsword, and he feels immense shame from this. He feels compelled to go back into the Underdark and try again.

This room appears to be a crypt. It contains 6 coffins sitting on tall stone slabs with a brazier, amphora, and altar. The altar is simple, with an octopus carved into the stone relief, and has a large empty jar sitting on it. A DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check will reveal the jar has a small amount of foul smelling fluid in the bottom. A simple stone door leads out of this room to the southwest. Oniram will comment on the Octopus carving and the jar, noting that both are signs of the mind flayer's influence. He can tell the players a bit about illithids, grimlocks, and intellect devourers should they ask.

M3. Ruined Hallway

This cavernous hallway contains rubble, stalactites, and stalagmites. Two **darkmantles** are hidden here and will ambush the party. They require passive Perception 15 to find. 200xp

M4. Living Quarters

Some old beds and alchemical equipment. There are two tables, one containing a small stack of books, the other only a single tome. The stack is in Undercommon, and the other is in a language that the characters don't recognize - but looks intriguing. The mystery language is Qualith, the mind flayer language. They require tentacles to read, as well as a psionic component. The spell *comprehend languages* will let the caster read some Qualith, but at a cost. Reading the first page reveals a couple of details about a plan to install puppets and conquer the aboveground. A player reading in this manner must succeed on a DC 14 Intelligence saving throw, or take 1d6 psychic damage. Each subsequent page the player reads increases the DC of the saving throw by 2, and the psychic damage they take on a failed one by an additional 1d6.

The books in Undercommon are on agriculture, a history of Dwarven noble houses, human anatomy, and a book on interplanar travel and teleportation. They look to be quite old, but not falling apart. Characters will need to take at least an hour to study these books as well as make

a DC 20 Arcana or History check to learn they are over a hundred years old, the books in Undercommon are Drow in origin, and can identify the mystery language as Qualith.

M5. Forgotten Storage

This room looks to be a pantry or storage area. Once inside, they see this room contains old shelves, barrels, moldy sacks of grain, some bloody rags, and other rubble.

M6. Giant Cavern

Six **grimlocks** picking through rubbish and gnawing on bones and scattered remains. They attack anyone they see that aren't fellow grimlocks, but their blindsight and stone camouflage abilities should help them hear incoming characters and prepare an ambush. If the fight isn't going their way, they retreat into **M8** and warn their "King" of the intruders. Characters who speak Undercommon might try to reason with them, but they'll find they are extremely hungry, and the characters look like a meal to these zealous cannibals. 300xp

M7. Prison

This room has two cells, one to the north, and one to the south. On the west wall is a large chair facing the door, and above that, a shelf with a row of several large broken jars that look very similar to the one found in **M2**. In the north cell, at 1 hit point, is **Marek**. He is very weak, unable to walk on his own, and has scars of recent injuries from the grimlocks. His cell has a simple lock (the "King" grimlock in **M8** has the key) that can be picked by a character with thieves' tools and proficiency in their use, and succeeding on a DC 15 Dexterity check. Alternatively, a character can break the lock and open the cell by succeeding on a DC 19 Strength check.

M8. "King" Grimlock's Chambers

The grimlock leader is here, somewhat fatter and larger than the other grimlocks, and wears a crudely fashioned crown. There are five regular **grimlocks** eating in the west corner. The eastern corner has a huge crack in the stone with a mass of black tentacles growing out of it, wriggling and wet. This room appears very similar to **M6** as it contains mostly remains, rubble, and refuse. The grimlocks will act as those in **M6** did, fighting desperately for a meal. 700xp

The crack in the stone opening to the east leads to the Underdark, and will require Medium-sized creatures to squeeze through if they wish to proceed. This opening is covered in a mass of oily black tentacles, as the spell *black tentacles*. If a character tries to destroy the tentacles, they regrow after a few seconds. Anyone wishing to proceed must speak the command word, *elderak'nen* (Undercommon for "elder brain," which **Oniram** will come in and speak after the fight with the grimlocks has ended). This causes the tentacles to recede and allow passage through the crack. Oniram will collect his greatsword and might offer a terse word of thanks to the party, and promptly exit into the Underdark, unless Marek is with the party, then see the section "Marek?" below.

THE "KING"

The "King" grimlock (see **Appendix A** for stat block) has fought to stay the strongest of all the grimlocks and eat the weakest, and is only able to keep order by engaging in brutal combat. He sees the adventurers as a boon - a chance to prove to his subjects he is still powerful and can provide a bounty - after he has had his fill, of course.

MAREK?

Unbeknownst to the party, Marek has been taken over by an intellect devourer, per their Body Thief ability. If the party rescues Marek, this suits the intellect devourer's wishes, as it can begin the process of integrating into a humanoid society.

To strangers, Marek will seem battered and bruised, but alive and able to return to Cauldwin with the party. The creature knows everything Marek knew, so it will assimilate back into Marek's old life, while quietly trying to bring more creatures under the thrall of its illithid masters. This might be simply spurring his colleagues on to go back to the temple and explore it further. If Marek dies, the intellect devourer leaves his body and will attempt to escape back to the Underdark, unless cornered.

Oniram, if asked, does not trust Marek and believes him to be another thrall of the mind flayers. If they interact, Oniram will ask Marek about how he got caught and might even try to trap him in a lie or get the party to kill him.



AFTERMATH: MAREK AND KORALIA

After clearing out the cavern of monsters and generally making it safe for the research team to return and begin their study, the party will return to Koralia for payment. Things can end a few different ways here...

MAREK'S FATE

- If the party rescues Marek and returns him to Koralia, she is incredibly happy, and eagerly pays the characters the 100gp each that she promised. They continue their work, undeterred, and unknowing of the creature controlling what was once "Marek."
- If Marek somehow dies, they will see the intellect devourer leave his body. They must then decide what to do with this information. If they are forthcoming to Koralia, she is heartbroken but understands the party couldn't do much to save him. If the party brings Marek's body back, she may even throw in some of the promised bonus.
- If the players piece together that Marek is infected by the intellect devourer (potentially with Oniram's help), they might leave him at the ruin, bring him back and tell Koralia this news, or even kill him. He is not able to put up much of a fight, but he will plead for his life. The intellect devourer will do or say whatever he can to try and stay alive and keep his host, and barring that, secretly take over a different host.

MAPPING THE CAVERNS & PARTIAL SUCCESS

- The party must have cleared out all monsters from within the cavern and bring back at least some kind of rudimentary map or plunder from within in order to prove themselves to Koralia. Koralia will be unhappy but will understand if the party has been unable to clear all the creatures.
- If the party decides to leave without exploring the entirety of the cavern, they can return and try to haggle for a partial payment from Koralia, depending on what they find and bring back. They may even try to deceive her about how much of the job they completed. The books from **M4** will make for excellent research materials for her team, prompting her to give the party full payment, even if they haven't completed the job.

KORALIA'S TEAM

- Koralia will continue her efforts to understand what she has discovered, regardless of what the party does. She has a ceaseless curiosity, and even the death of a colleague and a run-in with some deceitful adventurers won't keep her from continuing to explore and draw patterns between cultures new and old. Koralia could even become a patron to the party, providing similar jobs and potentially selling some of her team's more martial acquisitions. They may grow to have questions about mind flayer society after learning more from this ruined temple.

REWARDS/XP

If the party defeats the snowy bulette, and all monsters within the caverns, they gain 1,900xp. If the group return Marek to Koralia in Cauldwin, they gain an additional 3,000xp, for a total of 4,900xp.

APPENDIX A: CREATURE STAT BLOCKS

SNOWY BULETTE

Large monstrosity, unaligned

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 65 (10d10+10)

Speed 30 ft., burrow 30 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 3 (700 XP)

Death Throes. When the bulette dies, it creates an icy burst, hitting all adjacent creatures. Each adjacent creature must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 14 (4d6) cold damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Enhanced Burrowing. The bulette can burrow through stone just as easily as earth. It does not provoke attacks of opportunity when burrowing.

Freezing Armor. The first time an enemy hits the bulette with a melee attack, they take 7 (2d6) cold damage.

Actions

Multiattack. The monster makes two attacks: one with its claw and one with its bite.

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

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) piercing damage plus 3 (1d6) cold damage.

“KING” GRIMLOCK

Medium humanoid (grimlock), neutral evil

Armor Class 15 (breastplate)

Hit Points 48 (8d8+8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18(+4)	13(+1)	12(+1)	9(-1)	8(-1)	6(-2)

Skills Athletics +6, Perception +3, Stealth +3

Condition Immunities blinded

Senses blindsight 30 ft. or 10 ft. while deafened (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 11

Languages Common (basic), Undercommon

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Blind Senses. The King can't use its blindsight while deafened and unable to smell.

Keen Hearing and Smell. The King has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing or smell.

“Me Grimlock! Me King!” The King has a basic understanding of Common, but is not fluent.

Stolen Greatsword. The King wields Oniram's greatsword, which clearly stands out among the grimlocks, with its silvery filigree and detailed githyanki craftsmanship.

Actions

Multiattack. The King makes two attacks: one with its greatsword, and one with its cannibalistic bite.

Greatsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) slashing damage.

Cannibalistic Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) piercing damage. If this attack hits a creature wearing light armor or no armor, the King tears away some bare flesh and eats it, regaining 1d4+1 hit points.

Terrifying Yowl (Recharge 6). The King's jaws distend as it bellows an ear-shattering roar in a 15ft cone. Each non-grimlock creature in that cone must succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or be deafened, taking 10 (3d6) psychic damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Reactions

Belch. When the King is hit by a melee weapon attack, it can use its reaction to let out a loud, odorous belch at the attacker. The attacker must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or be knocked prone. Once a creature succeeds on this saving throw, they are immune to the belch's effects for one hour.

APPENDIX B: MAPS



