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PILLARS OF GLASS

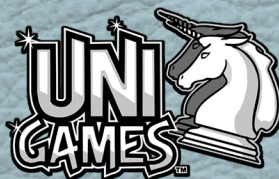
An Underworld Adventure For
Béthorm
The Plane of Tékumel®

The site dates from at least the Bednálljan period, and may be connected with the Pariah God known as the One Other. It consists of a circle of crystalline spires, some of which have fallen (similar to Stonehenge on Earth, but with columns of natural crystal rather than crude stone monoliths). The opening to the underworld beneath reveals a circular stairway leading down into a labyrinth. It is said that at the bottom of the labyrinth is a great cavern that is filled with molten lava...

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The Pillars of Glass

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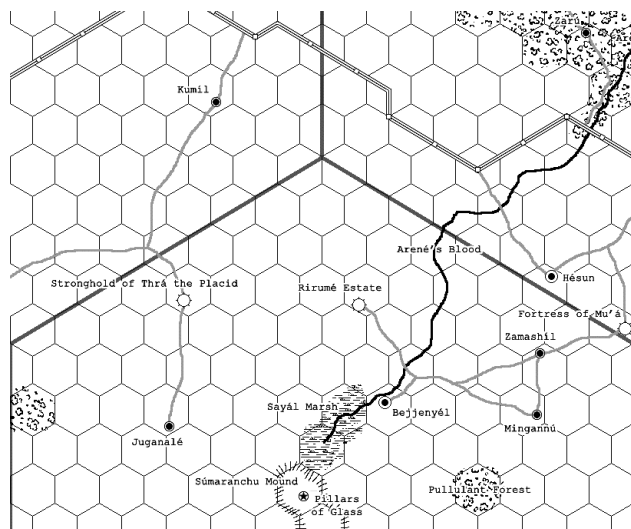
1.0 GM's Introduction

Pillars of Glass is an Adventure for Béthorm: the Plane of Téकुमел, suitable for 4-6 player characters with approximately 16 earned experience and 1 earned Advantage Point apiece.

In order to ensure a worthy challenge for the players, increase the total danger rating of all encounters by approximately 20% for each additional PC. Increase it further (by approximately 5% per experience point above 16 which has been earned by the average party member) to reflect a more advanced group's experience. These are only suggested guidelines; GMs are free to fine-tune the encounters in this adventure more precisely based on their familiarity with the actual capabilities of their group's PCs.

1.1 Background

This adventure is set just south of the Kúrt Hills in the Empire of Tsolyánu, from M.A.R. Barker's world of Téकुमел (hex 3512).



The Súmaranchu Mound Region

The fief of land on which the Pillars of Glass stand is managed by Thrá hiThrá of the Medium status Ripened Sheaf clan.

The hill on which the Pillars of Glass are found, Súmaranchu Mound, was formed by a series of lava bubbles.

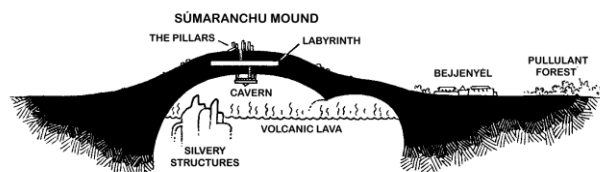
The underground labyrinth was a religious site for the followers of an early form of the worship of Vimúhla, the Tsolyáni deity concerned with fiery violence and destruction, from the time of the Dragon Warriors.

The rooms in the labyrinth were set up as tools to educate new priests, but they can be hazardous to uninitiated visitors. Different rooms subject visitors to different flame-related hazards: fire, heat, dryness, smoke, steam, light, and pain – aspects of this proto-Vimúhla god of the ancient Dragon Warriors of N'lüss.

As a result, the creatures in this adventure don't reside in the rooms, which are just too inhospitable. They live in the corridors. The 'outer' parts of the labyrinth are inhabited by wild, natural creatures who have taken up residence there. The 'inner' parts of the labyrinth are patrolled by ancient guardians.

The site has been discovered, explored, and forgotten again several times during its long existence. No scholarly study has taken place since the early days of the Tsolyáni imperium, and the records of that study were kept in the library of a temple in Katalál. These records were badly damaged during the Mu'ugalavyáni occupation of Katalál in 2020 AS. Since that last study the site has fallen into obscurity again due to its relatively remote location.

An inner ritual administration office (room 7) holds the big treasure... but not the site's greatest secret!



2.0 Players' Introduction

The way this adventure begins depends on the type of campaign being played. The following entries offer some typical examples. The GM may choose the one that fits best, or tailor a different introduction to better fit their particular group of PCs if needed.

2.1 Clan Business

Use this introduction if the PCs are primarily bound together by their shared loyalty to a particular clan. Which clan the PCs serve, and the identity of their patron within that clan, is left open-ended so the GM can more easily adapt this adventure to their campaign.

Read to the PCs:

The fief of land on which the Pillars of Glass stand is managed by Thrá hiThrá of the Medium status Ripened Sheaf clan. You have been sent to negotiate a trade deal with Thrá on behalf of your own clan. The terms you've been authorized to offer are a bit aggressive, but Thrá seems eager to reach an agreement. Changing the subject to

lighten the mood, Thrá remarks upon your impressive professional ranks and equipment, and then has a sudden inspiration. "Perhaps I could meet your clan's terms in exchange for a small favor. The peasants in the south of my fief have been complaining about wild animal attacks. I can't spare the men, but if you fine people would deign to clear these creatures out from their nests, then I see no reason why we could not reach an agreement on the deal your clan proposes".

The specifics of the trade deal must be established by the GM, depending on the PCs' particular clan's business interests.

2.2 Temple Business

Use this introduction if the PCs are primarily united by their shared loyalty to a particular god. Which temple the PCs serve is unspecified, for ease of adapting this adventure to each particular campaign.

Read to the PCs:

The head of your temple's library, Proctor Tíkuru hiMirkétme, requests your group's assistance on an interesting research project. Documents have been uncovered which chronicle an investigation into an ancient site a few Tsán east of Katalál called the Pillars of Glass, but the documents are damaged and incomplete. According to the fragments which can be read, the site dates from at least the Bednálljan period and may be connected with the Pariah God known as the One Other. It consists of a circle of crystalline spires, some of which have fallen down. The opening to the underworld beneath the Pillars reveals a circular stairway leading down into a labyrinth. At the bottom of the labyrinth is a great cavern... and there the surviving records end.

The Proctor needs your group to travel to the site, discover the contents of the cavern, and report back to him so that he may update the library's records.

The fief of land on which the Pillars of Glass stand is managed by Thrá hiThrá of the Medium status Ripened Sheaf clan.

The One Other is one of the 'Pariah Gods' – beings so antithetical to human existence that their worship has been outlawed by the Tsolyáni Imperium.

Note that the speculation about this site being connected with the One Other is inaccurate. But don't tell the players this, they'll have to figure it out for themselves!

2.3 Legion Business

Use this introduction if the PCs are members of a particular imperial Legion. Which legion the PCs serve is unstated, to make it easy for the GM to fit the adventure to their campaign.

Read to the PCs:

Your unit has been assigned to police a fief east of Katalál. You've been stationed in the town of Bejjenyél. The local fiefholder, Thrá hiThrá, sent over a few locals to tell you stories about creature attacks near Súmaranchu Mound. You've dutifully reported these stories to your superiors, not expecting much of a response. This morning you received new orders. The Empire is concerned about a rise in the influence of the Temple of Sárku in this region since certain lands farther east were assigned to followers of the Lord of Worms during the reign of the Usurper, Dhich'uné. You are to investigate Súmaranchu Mound.

2.4 Typical Adventurers

Use this introduction if the PCs are a mixed group of characters with no particular shared social, religious, or professional ties.

Read to the PCs:

Your party has been exploring the lands east of Katalál. The local fief is managed by Thrá hiThrá of the Medium status Ripened Sheaf clan.

In the town of Bejjenyél, locals told you stories about creature attacks near Súmaranchu Mound. It is said that Thrá hiThrá has offered a bounty to whoever can put a stop to these attacks. This sounds like an interesting and noble challenge for a party of hardy adventurers!

2.5 Heroes of the Age

Use this introduction if the GM is running a Heroes of the Age campaign (whether the PCs yet realize they've been chosen by the gods, or not). The GM should choose which PC has the vision, and use their name in the intro text.

Read to the PCs:

[PC's name] has had a vision. In it, they saw a glowing bolt of fire drop from Vimúhla's red moon Káshi and strike the ground. Behind the point of impact, the sun rose – illuminating a cluster of translucent spires atop a hill. Inquiring about such a

feature to the east of Katalál (toward the rising sun), it doesn't take long to identify the Pillars of Glass. This must be something the Gods want you to go see! Your group has decided to investigate.

The gods want a united Tsolyánu, but the recent appointment of Sárku-worshippers as fiefholders in this region is causing tension. The Emperor has no cause to kick out the current Kurtáni fiefholder, Thrá hiThrá of the Ripened Sheaf clan. The recovery of a major Vimúhla-oriented site here would enable the Emperor to strengthen his influence against the Sárku clans, via his connections within the temple of Vimúhla, without seeming to take sides between Sárku and the stability-oriented Kurtáni.

2.6 Player Research

This information is available to any PCs who ask a few of the right questions:

The eponymous pillars stand atop Súmaranchu Mound in northwestern Tsolyánu, about 135 Tsán (180 km) east of Katalál. There are nine pillars in all.

The nearby town of Bejjenyél is the most logical place for a base of operations and supply during any extended expedition to the Pillars. Bejjenyél is notable for its clanhouse of the Devisors of Soft-clinging Beauty. Many of the fields around this town grow Thésun plants, from which fine sheer gauze is woven. On the west side of town is a plaza of stone slabs where the gauze-makers gather to work.

The moldy-smelling Sayál Marsh, mostly avoided by the locals, lies between Bejjenyél and Súmaranchu Mound. Sometimes the river of Arené's Blood flows into it, other times it flows away from it.

The locals are aware of the existence of the Pillars; they're something of a sightseeing attraction, or would be if travelers ever came to this area. They also know there's a cave or old tunnel entrance nearby, but nobody has been foolhardy enough to go inside.

3.0 The Adventure Begins

From a distance, Súmaranchu Mound looks like a low-rising inverted bowl. Unlike other hills of the area, this one is not the pale and porous karst, but granite. A few clumps of trees dot it. Upon closer approach, its bluish exterior appears to be flaking off in sheets as thick as a human is tall. Countless pieces of this have broken off and lie in little tumbled clumps. However, walking up to the top is not difficult because there are plenty of smooth stretches. There are a few drop-offs, several person-heights tall which can be dangerous if one is walking about by night, as the tops of trees can be mistaken for bushes, obscuring the hazard. If one is approaching directly from the east, one can see a trail to the top marked off with blackened boulders.

3.1 Atop Súmaranchu Mound

The GM should remind PCs with temple education (Béthorm section 3.10.1.2) or sorcery skill who succeed at a Rituals skill check that nine is Vimúhla's holy number. Those PCs who worship Vimúhla or his cohort Chiténg and have the Rituals skill succeed automatically.

The Pillars are clearly ancient, and look like a natural formation (though only a successful Geology skill check will verify that fact for sure). They stand in a circle, though only four are still relatively intact; the rest are all partially or completely toppled. This appears to be due simply to the passage of time.

The entrance stands open to the elements. What begins as an apparent natural cave entrance quickly reveals itself to be the top of an ancient, stone-walled staircase spiraling down into darkness.

3.2 Inside the Labyrinth

The walls throughout the labyrinth are covered in Ancient N'lüssa runes, accompanied by scenes of war and monsters. The language of the runes can be identified on a successful INTL check by anyone who can read or speak any ancient language, a critical INTL check by anyone with a temple education, or automatically by anyone who can read or speak Ancient N'lüssa. There is a recurring circular design, the significance of which is unclear. It represents the lava bubble beneath the site, but there'll be no way for the PCs to learn this until they reach the end of the adventure.

The labyrinth's walls are 3 meters tall, and its ceilings are arched to a maximum height of 4 meters. The doorways are 2 meters wide, arched to a maximum height of 3 meters, and open. There are no doors in any of the doorways.

Apart from rooms 1, 2, and 5 no illumination is provided, except for the magic torch found at location 9.

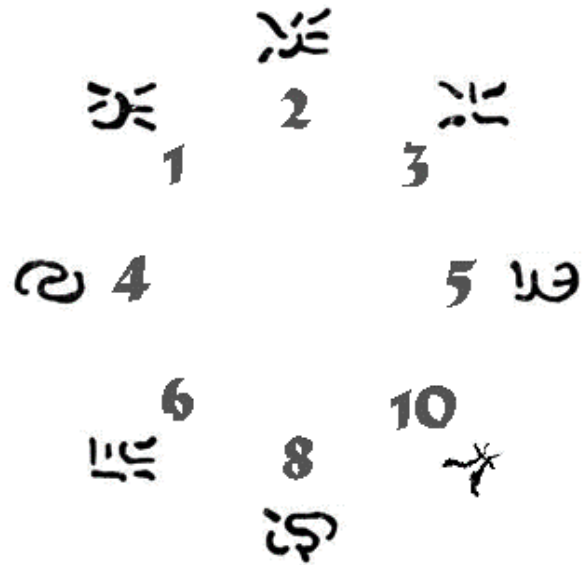
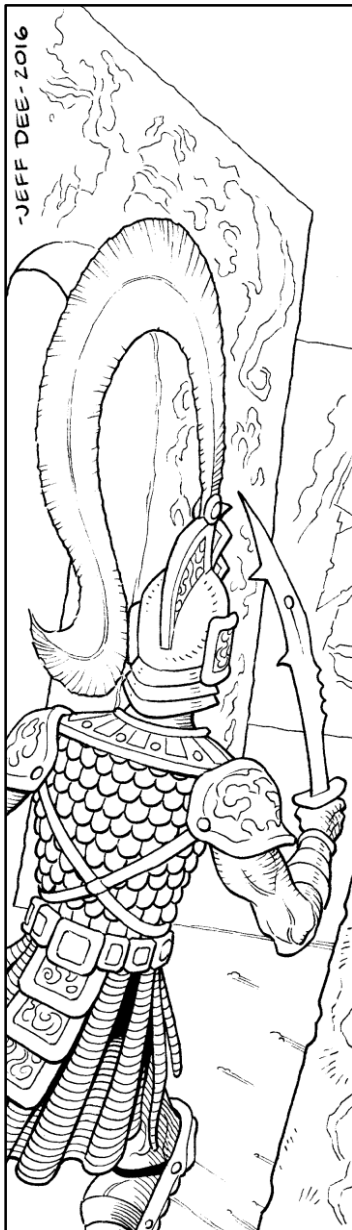
Each doorway is marked with a rune in the Tongue of the Dragon Lords (Ancient N'lüssa), carved into the floor just outside the archway into each room. Those who can read this language, or who are versed in the history of the Dragon Warriors period, and particularly those who worship Vimúhla or Chiténg, may be able to guess the proper chant to suppress that room's instructive effect if they succeed at a modified Rituals skill check. They'll also know it would be risky to abuse this knowledge, for example by looting all of the gold from Room 4. Such abuses would anger the god Vimúhla sufficiently to attract his wrath: offenders immediately suffer a fiery punishment ranging from severe burns to incineration or worse.

Characters with Vimúhla/Chiténg Rituals skill get an unmodified Rituals skill check. Those with any other

Rituals skill can check it at -2. Those with Dragon Warriors History can check that at -4 instead.

Anyone who figures out the chant can teach it to their companions, but their companions must make INT checks each Round to say it right (unless they can speak Ancient N'lüssa). If the check fails, then the room's effect remains active for that individual.

As each character exits one of the hazard rooms, they receive a tattoo-like mark on the inside of their left forearm. The mark stings a little and glows dully red at first, then quickly dims to black and the sting subsides. The mark exactly matches the rune at the exit of the completed room. The marks appear in a circular pattern. A character who collects all 8 marks gains the favor of Vimúhla and Chiténg: a +1 bonus on all future attempts to receive Divine Intervention from either of those gods.



Characters should have no particular objection to receiving these marks (or the favor of the flame gods) unless they have a Personal Trait which makes them fanatically opposed. Nevertheless, the marks can be removed (and the favor bonus lost) by cutting followed by a simple healing spell.

Map Key

0) Entrance

This is where the PCs first arrive, after descending the spiral stairway from the surface. There is an empty torch sconce here, in the middle of the western wall.

1) Firelight Room

This room appears empty and dark when the PCs first peer in from the hallway, but an aura of flickering red, orange, and yellow light surrounds, dazzles and disorients them the moment they step inside. They will have difficulty keeping their bearings unless or until they overcome this distraction. WILL checks at -2 are required each time they move, else their destination square 'scatters' (Bethorm, section 9.6).

Characters who shut out the light by blindfolding themselves (or other means) will have slightly less difficulty navigating the room (a DEFT check at no penalty), and won't have impaired vision upon leaving it.

Affected characters remain dazzled, suffering a -1 penalty on all checks, for 3 rounds after leaving this room.



2) Heat Room

This room's floors, walls, and pillars glow red-hot. This is obvious to anyone peering into the room from the hallway. There are nine unheated 'stepping stones' in the room, however.

PCs suffer 1/2/3 energy damage per Round if they touch a hot surface. They may attempt to leap from step-stone to step-stone to avoid this (Béthorm section 7.4). Light boots or sandals initially provide 2 points of protection, but they will 'ablate' like shields (Béthorm section 4.5) when taking damage from the heated surfaces.

3) Smoke Room

This room is full of vision-obscuring smoke. The PCs can see this smoke before entering the room, although it is contained within the room by an invisible and intangible barrier.

If the PCs don't hold their breath upon entering the room, they must make a WILL check each Round to resist coughing. A failed check results in a coughing fit, attracting the creatures from areas D or F. A fumbled check has the same effect, but the character also takes 1 point of damage (armor does not apply).

On any Round in the room where a PCs doesn't close their eyes, they must make a WILL check to avoid blindness. On a failed check the PC is temporarily blinded by tears (taking 3 rounds to recover). A fumbled check has the same effect, but the character also takes 1 point of damage to their eyes, resulting in an impaired vision penalty of -1 until that damage is healed.

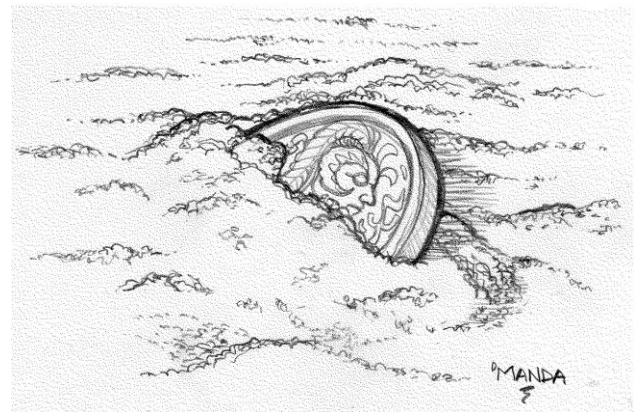
A character who closes their eyes must make a DEFT check each time they move. If the check fails, their destination square 'scatters' (Bethorm, section 9.6).

4) Desiccation Room

The sandy floor of this room partially hides many red-gold coins, several of which are visible when the PCs first peer into this room.

Each Round a PC remains in this room, they must make a general 2d10 check vs a difficulty of 10. On a failed check the dryness of the room leaves them extremely thirsty, resulting in a -1 penalty on all of their actions until they can take a drink. A fumbled check has the same effect, but the PC's skin also becomes badly dried and cracked causing 1 hit point of damage (ignoring armor). Furthermore, the character will take 1 extra point of damage from any physical injury until their skin is moisturized or healed.

If they pause for only one Action, a PC can grab a handful of 1d10 Káitars worth. If they pause for a full Turn, a PC can grab 1d10+10 Káitars worth.



5) Flame Room

Carvings decorating the walls of this room, some of which are visible before the PCs enter, depict tales of the torrid love-affair between the god Vimúhla and Dlamélísh, the goddess of sensuality.

PCs who step into the room are immediately engulfed in green flames, and suffer 0/1/2 magical (abstinence) damage.

Make a PERC check to notice that these flames have no effect upon their equipment, and thus may not be 'real'.

If a PC reacts by standing still, 'accepting the flames' embrace' as it were, the flames on that character go out and never harm them again. If a PC keeps moving, the flame damage recurs once per Round for as long as they continue moving about the room.



6) Steam Room

This room is full of steam. The PCs can see this steam before entering the room, although it is contained within the room by an invisible and intangible barrier. The PCs are engulfed in the steam the moment they step into the room; it feels like a sauna. Their clothing immediately begins to feel uncomfortably warm and heavy.

If a PC disrobes and relaxes for 15 minutes, they become invigorated – gaining the 'Strong' advantage (Bethorm, p. 35) for the rest of the adventure.

If a PC remains fully clothed while in this room, they must make a PHYS (CON) or suffer from risk heat exhaustion. Failure results in a -1 PHYS (STR) penalty for the next 15 minutes. A fumble results in an exhaustion penalty equal to the PC's worn physical protection +1, recovered at a rate of 1 point of penalty per 15 minutes of rest.

7) Office

This room was the office of the priestly ritual administrators of this site, and is conspicuously *not* marked by a N'lüssa rune. Peering inside, the PCs can see that it contains the remains of ancient furniture and tapestries, all rotted. Some treasure was left behind here by an ancient explorer, which the PCs easily find if they conduct a simple search: a copper jeweled necklace worth 8 Káitars, a 14 carat tourmaline, a 90 carat Nhá shell, a 4 carat chrysoberyl, a 11 carat amber, a 12 carat amber, a 1 carat Chet'ú shell, a 17 carat garnet, and a 9 carat glass coral plus 4950 gold Káitars in cash, and an Eye of Joyful Sitting Amongst Friends (#21, Bethorm p. 227) with a Bednálljan inscription and a dial showing 43 charges.

8) Pain Room

This room is dedicated to Vimúhla's cohort, the lesser god Chiténg – the patron of torturers, amongst other things. Upon peering into this room, the PCs can see that it is full of instruments of torture. When anyone enters, these 'tools' stand at attention (or open to admit a victim, etc. as appropriate for the given implement).

If a PC tortures one of their companions while both are in the room, that PC heals 1 hit point while their companion suffers 1 hit point of damage. Armor does not apply. This process can be repeated as many times as desired, for as long as both PCs remain in the room. Anyone who leaves the room without participating, either as a giver or receiver of pain, takes 2 damage (again, without armor protection) – and the tools rap again as if to remind the PCs of their duty to Chiténg.

9) Ever-Burning Torch

A burning torch lies on the floor here, at a spot that has become blackened and charred over the centuries or millennia since it fell. This astonishing item was once used for illumination by the priests who tended this site. The tiny nexus point contained within it admits heat and light from another plane, enabling it to burn with the strength of a typical torch. It will never burn out, and cannot be extinguished by any means short of closing the Nexus Point within it.

10) Stairway Down

This stairway is similar in construction to the one which brought the PCs down from above, only this one goes down. A hot breeze wafts up from below.

At the bottom of the stair is an observation deck, which hangs down from the ceiling above – supported by the four stout stanchions at its corners. The four sides of the observation deck are open but for a stone railing, and visitors can peer over the edge to see lava bubbling in a huge volcanic chamber below.

A strange rhythmic thrumming wafts up from a great silvery structure which protrudes from the lava sea. The

nature of this edifice is unclear. It could be a temple, the lair of a demon from another Plane, some mystical fortress of a mighty wizard, or machinery of the Great Ancients collecting energy to power other machinery elsewhere on the planet. There appear to be doors of some kind in its side, which may lead to a trove of treasures within...

Some of the lava is cooled and walkable, but there is no easy way to get down to it. As the PCs consider these extremely difficult obstacles, weighing them against their hope of breaching a trove of artifacts of incalculable value, a swarm of large reptilian creatures rise into the air on membranous wings, dripping lava. These are Flame Dragons (Bethorm, p. 106), servitors of Vimúhla and guardians of his secrets, and far beyond the capabilities of our brave heroes. The PCs have time to retreat safely to the stairway where the demons will not pursue them, but surely our heroes will return one day to claim this mighty prize!

A) Gíriku "the Flying Reptile" (Béthorm p. 179)

Three of these creatures have gotten lost in the maze, and have made an impromptu nest at this spot. They have collected a wooden club and a plain, medium suit of Tinaliya armor.



B) Nothing

C) Hyahyú'u "the Whooper" (Béthorm p. 187)

Twelve of these creatures are simply lost in the maze, and have made an impromptu nest here. They've collected some worthless junk, but nothing that remotely qualifies as 'treasure'.

D) Dnélu "the Concealed Leaper" (Béthorm p. 176)

Six Dnélu have made a permanent den here, which looks like a pile of dead grass and leaves propped up

against the wall of the passage. There is only a 15% chance that they will attack parties of 6 or more that they hear outside their den, but if so then when they leap out they automatically gain surprise. They will certainly attack if players disturb their lair. Inside their den they've collected a light axe, and a suit of regular heavy armor.

E) Hli'ir "the Unendurable Face" (Béthorm p. 181)

This is the lair of two Hli'ir. They have a copper jeweled hairpin, a copper jeweled armlet, an 8 carat malachite, 230 gold Káitars in cash, and an Amulet of Finding Treasure in the Underworld.

F) Kurukú "The Small Giggler" (Béthorm p. 190)

This is a lost raiding group of five of these creatures, without any den or nest. They carry nothing valuable, just a few odds and ends of useless junk.

G) Nothing

H) Thúnru'u "the Eater of Eyes" (Béthorm p. 213)

There is a lone wandering Thúnru'u here, carrying a large steel shield with 13 hits, a 6 carat tourmaline, a 13 carat tourmaline, and 800 gold Káitars in cash. It has developed a little skill with the shield, giving it a melee and missile defense of 4.

I) Sagún "the Fungus" (Béthorm p. 205)

This is the lair of three Sagún. They have 1 gold Káitar and a 6 carat Chrysoberyl between them.



Pillars of Glass Labyrinth Map

