

Midden of the Deep

An adventure location by Michael Prescott

The Situation

In an underground cavern vast beyond measuring stands the Midden, a fossilized dung heap produced by a nest of dragons far above on the roof of the cavern. The nest now abandoned, the midden remains, picked over by scavengers of every stripe.

The outer cavern is completely dark, except for the odd glint of fire from beetles on the slopes.

Mining Camp

Wooden palisade, breached. Outer surface covered in jutting iron spikes (to ward off beetles). Shack contains two picks, a brass lantern (empty), and a rusted shield, all sized for dwarven hands. A kiln contains insect fragments, flecked with gold pinpricks.

Digging in the Midden

The stone of the midden is similar to limestone, but crumbling and extremely dusty. A miner of average strength with pick axe and shovel can excavate a 5' cube in an hour. Every 10', roll d20:

d20 Result

- 1-9 Endless coprolith, a little:
(d6) 1-2: dustier; 3-4 grainier; 5-6 harder.
- 10-12 Dust deposit, choking and temporary blindness likely
- 13 Collapsed former tunnel, d2 ghosts
- 14-15 Dormant isopod (confused and angry)
- 16 Eggshell (d6 pounds)
- 17 Bone (d10 feet long)
- 18 Scales
- 19 d3 Teeth
- 20 Liquid sputum deposit containing d6 gems and d100 coins, plus a smell you'll never forget.

30' below the waterline, the coprolith gives way to hard bedrock.

Midden Slopes

The midden rises 120' above the cavern floor. Every 10 minutes spent here attracts the attention of scavengers on a 1-2 on d6.

Roll d6 for type: 1 - d6 flying fire beetles; 2 - whip scorpion (8'); 3 - cave crickets; 4 - shower of acidic droplets; 5 - d3 midden ghosts; 6 - iridescent stag beetle from the dry cavern.

Scaffolded Gallery

A rickety scaffold rises 40' up into this tall, natural cavern, falling 10' short of the entrance to the dwarf-excavated tunnels above.

Barricade

A crude barricade of wooden beams and furniture once blocked the tunnel, but has been breached. Bones of five dwarves along with 2d6 usable helmets, breastplates, shields and melee weapons are scattered about its base.

Ghosts of the Midden

The miners of the midden were devoured, to the very last dwarf, by the Young Ones. The high concentration of dragon ichor in the coprolith preserved their spirits even as they were being eaten, though unfortunately this has only allowed them to relive their final moments of flight, terror and agony endlessly.

Dry Cavern

A greater iridescent stag beetle dwells here. It has the size and demeanor of a rhinoceros. Its carapace is unusually hard, and is streaked with precious metals the beast has absorbed from the midden. If smelted, the carapace will yield 4,000gp, 1000sp and 300pp.

Upper Gallery

Excavated tunnel 6' wide, supported by splintered wooden beams.

In the dead end lie loose heaps of bones and tattered fabric, the scattered remains of six dwarves. Among the debris and obscured by dust are three suits of dwarven chainmail, three swords, two pick axes, a brass lantern, 140 gold coins. One undisturbed corpse bears a scarab brooch of protection against insects.

d3 ghosts will arise if any of the belongings are touched.

Water-Filled Cavern

Accumulated drippings have softened the coprolith into a pungent slurry. The downward slope is extremely slippery 10' above the waterline. An ottyugh dwells here, believing itself to be lord of all creation.

A 2' wide shaft of soft, slippery earth vents putrid gases out into the air of the outer cavern.

"Duvalin's Moat"

A ring of putrid water encircles the midden, 40' wide, 20' deep at its deepest. An ammonia reek emerges if the surface scum is disturbed. Shouts or loud splashing will attract flying beetles from the midden slopes.

Paths of the Young Ones

A network of cramped tunnels, gnawed into the bedrock and smoothed by the passage of many generations of hulk larvae. Infused with dragon ichor, they are fearsome: 8' long larvae with garnet-encrusted mandibles. In confined tunnels they move with great speed.

Each can use one randomly chosen first-level spell as an innate ability, and will do so frequently regardless of effect.

The paths contain 8 in all; when encountered in the narrow paths, determine facing randomly.

Vault of the Hulk Mother

A deformed amalgam of over a dozen hulk larvae writhes here, the result of generations of larvae waylaid on their progress to maturity by ichor exposure.

Telepathically linked to the young ones, she wields innate magic as an 8th level spell caster.

Her bulk enfolds a sizeable cache of coins, jewellery, and d6 magical items.

Ghosts will be (roll d6):

- 1-2: distraught and violent
- 3-4: endlessly reliving mining tasks
- 5: looking for vengeance
- 6: lucid and looking to bargain

Lucid or otherwise, the ghosts know they have paid a terrible price for the riches they have accumulated, more than anything the adventurers have to offer.

