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MISTS OF MADNESS

BY HARLEY STROH
AN ADVENTURE FOR CHARACTER LEVEL 1





THE MISTS OF MADNESS

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BY HARLEY STROH

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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 Mists of Madness is designed for five 1st-level characters. The adventure is designed to test both the characters' physical and mental resolve. Each of the 4 roles is called upon in equal measure, but success hinges upon a party's ability to function as a team while under threat. Attempting to turn character against character, the Mists of Madness work to destroy the adventuring company, before picking off the individual heroes, one at a time.

ADVENTURE SUMMARY

To the south of the city of Punjar, where the crumbling city walls meet the Great Black Salt Marsh is a nameless, muddy hamlet. The hamlet is home to wretched fishmongers and tanners, all characterized by strange abnormalities and wild superstitions. Of late, these superstitions have given over to even weirder rituals and blood sacrifices. Every full moon, the folk pole their rafts deep into the swamp, where they perform foul sacraments before a black stone spire.

On a quest to stop the foul rituals (see Adventure Hooks below) the PCs trek to the spire, facing the swamp's perils and uncovering clues hinting at the real power behind the nascent cult.

Arriving at the spire, the PCs discover a ruined keep, overgrown with thorny vines and poisonous plants. The keep, once a military outpost for Punjar, was abandoned decades ago as it slowly sank into the swamp. Turned to dire ends, the keep is being rebuilt to serve the cult. Exploring the ruined keep, the PCs interrupt a band of fanatical devotees in the midst of a performing a living sacrifice.

Scattering the cultists, the PCs press on to the maw-like cave at the base of the spire, known to the cultists as the Maw of Madness. Defended by ancient death traps and weird arcane seals, the caves conceal an antediluvian vault, the resting place of an archlich whose reign predates recorded history in the Known Realms. Undisturbed for untold eons, now the machinations of the cultists and their eladrin master threaten to awaken the archlich, to dire ends that none can predict.

The climax of the adventure pits the heroes against the cult's warlock master, in a race to foil his plot. Will the PCs emerge victorious, or will they succumb to the spire's curse and the fevered machinations of a mad priest bent on destruction?

GAMEMASTERS 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.

Location	Pg	Type	Encounter	EL
Player Start	6	C	Two Vicejaw crocodiles	1
S-2	7	C	Three Giant frogs	1
S-3	7	T	Block Deadfall	1
S-4	8	C	Ursula the Befouled	3
			Hiatha the Half-Ogre	
			Twelve human cultists	
S-5	10	C	Sagatha, Master of Scales	1
			Vicejaw war-mother	
S-6	11	C	Five Shades	varies
S-7	12	T/C	False Floor Pit	2
			Ochre jelly	
S-8	13	T/P	False Tomb	1
S-9a	13	T	Three Whirling Blade Traps	2
S-9b	14	T	Pendulum Scythes	1
		C	Two Rat swarms	1
S-10	16	T	The Greedy Maw	3
S-11	17	C	Ten Shambling Horrors	3
S-12	17	C	Malikai the Mad	5+
			Eight+ Decrepit skeletons	
			Skoulos the Undying (archlich)	

SCALING INFORMATION

The Mists of Madness is designed for 5 characters of 1st level, but it can be easily modified for parties of different sizes or levels.

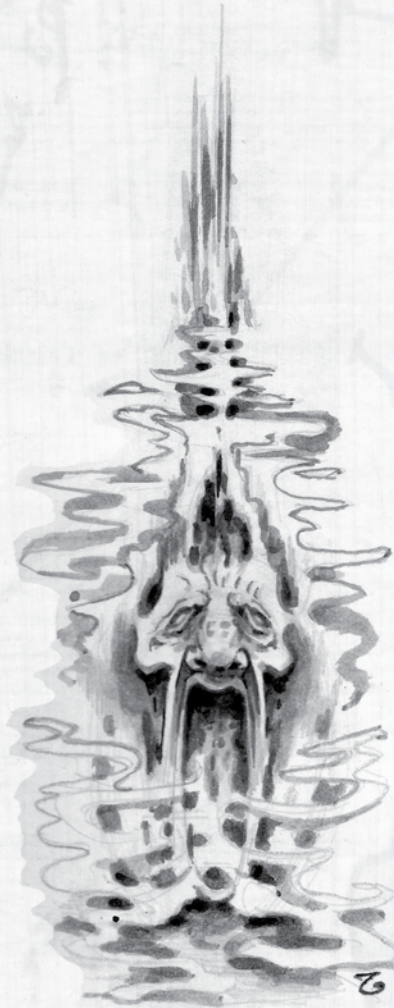
Weaker parties (4 or fewer characters): Remove 1 swamp crocodile from Player Start; remove 2 giant frogs from area S-2; reduce the number of cultists in area S-4 to 4 and Sagatha does not investigate the battle; remove both normal swamp crocodiles from area S-5; reduce the number of shambling horrors to 5 in area S-11; reduce the number of starting decrepit skeletons to 4 in area S-11.

Stronger parties (6 or more characters, or higher than 1st level): Add 2 swamp crocodiles to Player Start; add 5 giant frogs to area S-2; double the number of cultists in area S-4 and Sagatha investigates on the 3rd round; raise the level of the shambling horrors in area S-11 by 2; in area S-11, double the number of starting decrepit skeletons.

GETTING THE PLAYERS INVOLVED

GMs should tailor the adventure hooks to their own campaign and the PCs' backgrounds, ensuring that each PC has a driving motivation to thwart the rising cult. Following is a short list of sample adventure hooks to use for inspiration:

- Gambling in the Souk late into the night, the party's rogue wins a strange clay idol depicting a squat eight-eyed god, with one hand raised as if to cast a spell. In the morning after, the PC awakens to discover one of his hands is webbed like a frog, having grown fleshy tissue in the night. (See The Curse of Skoulos Below).
- Renes the Fiend-Breaker, the mentor of a PC paladin or fighter, is dying. In his youth, Renes came across a broken tablet referring to "Skoulos the Undying." After spending a fortune in gold and decades in search of legends and tales, Renes has come to believe that the undead creature lurks beneath a basalt spire hidden in the heart of the Black Salt Marsh. With his dying breath, Renes presses his fabled bastard sword into the PC's hands, begging to complete this final quest in his honor.
- A newly formed priesthood emerges in the temple district, winning devotees with promises of gold and everlasting life. None can explain the cult's source of wealth or unexpected rise to power, but the cult's popularity threatens to drive the PC's temple from the district. Summoned before the high priest, the adventuring companions are sent on a mission to investigate the home of the cult, deep within the heart of the Black Salt Marsh.
- One of the PCs is secretly a descendent of Skoulos; the same eldritch blood that once ran through the archlich courses through the hero's veins. The PC awakens one morning with a strong, unconscious yearning for Skoulos' phylactery, and with one malevolent effect from the Curse of Skoulos (see below). Drawn toward the heart of the Black Salt Marsh, the PC helplessly pursues his fate...



LEGENDS AND LORE

While a true history of Skoulos the Undying was lost ages past, stories and legends abound. The work of any adventurer is to sift through these tales, separating the gold from the dross. Their lives and the lives of their companions depend on it.

Before beginning the adventure, roll 1d12 for each PC and consult the following table of rumors. While none of the legends are entirely accurate, each contains at least a grain of truth.

1d12 Legends

1 Skoulos the Undying was a sorcerer-king that sold his soul in return for eternal life. He lurks within the Black Salt Marsh, feeding off the blood of sacrificed worshippers.

2 'Ware the Black Spire. There was a keep there once, but the swamp's done gobbled it up, and it will do the same to anyone foolish enough to go poking around.

3 The swamp folk ain't right. They've all been bred with the frog-things. Half are monstrously strong, and the rest are just demented and crazed. My brother had a run-in with one once; and it tore his arm off, clean at the socket!

4 The Maw, that's what they call the cave in the side of that stone tower in the heart of the swamp. Always been a strange place, home to cultists and worse. Word is that there are hidden caves, somewhere up in the Maw, but you'd have to be a fool or a madman to go in there!

5 Skoulos the Undying is just a story used to keep wee ones out of the swamp. The real threat is the swamp folk, with their war drums and unholy rites. They'll call up something wicked; just you wait!

6 There's a keep at the foot of a black stone tower in the heart of the swamp. Hasn't been occupied for longer than even my grandfather could remember. Probably sunk into the swamp decades ago.

7 If you're headed into the swamp, watch out for the crocs. The swamp folk have some sort of power over them, like a pact with the reptile god. Best to just steer clear. Good folk shun the swap, and you'd be smart to do the same.

8 Old Skoulos was an emperor of yore, cast down for daring to challenge the gods. Imprisoned beneath the Black Salt Marsh, woe to any that would free him, for eternal undeath will be their fate.

9 I've heard tale of a boy named Malikai poking around the spire. Handsome one he is; trained in the dark arts and with a heart as black as any devil. He's wrong in the head, too, worshipping things that ought not be spoken of.

10 There's a mad dwarf living somewhere in the swamp. He lairs with crocodiles, and they answer the call of his bone whistle. If you ever hear three high-pitched keenings, beware — your death is at hand.

11 Don't know much about Skoulos the Old, but I've heard stories about his minions. Every one that crossed him was stripped of flesh, and then their wounds were fed with maggots, eggs, and larva. When they rose up the next full moon, each was a shambling thing of vermin, worms and worse. There's an army of them beneath that black spire, waiting to march on their master's call.

12 If you're headed into the swamp, let me warn you of Malikai the Mad. He's a bad one, with the face of a cherub and a witch's curse for everyone he meets. Don't cross him unless you're willing to go to steel, because no one else has lived to tell the tale.

BACKGROUND STORY

Eons ago — before the fabled lands of Lirea sank beneath the blue seas, and fire rained down on the enchanters of Parhok — the archmage Skoulos ruled the West from his sapphire throne. A cruel and covetous master, Skoulos outlawed the practice of magic and methodically hunted down every known grimoire, tome, and scroll from the four corners of the world. These works were collected in the forbidden city-fortress known as the fabled Black Library, where they were walled off from the eyes of man for all time.

But even this was not enough to sate Skoulos. Recognizing the work of divine casters as a threat against his splendor, the archmage raised an army of shambling constructs — masses of worms, roaches, centipedes, and scorpions masquerading in form of men — and razed the temples of his land, casting down their sacred altars, despoiling their artifacts, and enslaving their priests.

The end came quickly. Angered by the archmage's cruelty and vainglorious pride, the gods laid the archmage low. For a decade, divine plagues, bitter luck, conspiring servitors, and covetous enemies from all sides vexed him. Skoulos summoned the last of his waning power, concentrating it into a single ritual that transferred his life force into a phylactery, transforming Skoulos' withered form into the most powerful undead of all: the archlich. Weakened by the ritual, and unable to summon forth his eldritch might, Skoulos bid his few remaining servants to conceal his body in a false crypt. To his most loyal liegeman, the warrior Marun the Eagle, Skoulos entrusted his phylactery. Legend records that Marun turned the sails of his ship into the heart of the Great Ocean (not yet named the Emphyrean) and vanished from the tales of scholars and seers alike.

Beset by foes eager to take advantage of his weakened state, Skoulos commanded that his physical shell be interred beneath the Black Spire, a towering basalt column set in

the heart of an endless waste. His servants did their best to fulfill their master's command, delving into the base of the spire's natural caves. There, surrounded by living rock, they constructed a crypt where their master could sleep away the ages and regain his former might. After the last of the death traps were complete, the servants sealed the tomb and sacrificed themselves to their master's glory.

Ages passed, kingdoms rose and fell, and the reign of Skoulos was forgotten. But if not for the vengeful schemes of the gods, he might have slept undisturbed throughout the ages.

INTRIGUES OF MALIKAI THE MAD

The Hidden Lord, god of shadows, forbidden lore and the madness that must always follow, was not so quick to forgive Skoulos. With a patience known only to gods, the Hidden Lord wove a plot through the ages, culminating in the birth of the child Malikai, direct descendent of Skoulos' general, Marun the Eagle. As a youth, Malikai hungered for esoteric wisdom and the power it brought. Studying damned texts late into the nights, he discovered a ritual for beseeching the Hidden Lord, and the course of the young man's life was changed forever.

Scant years later, Malikai has become little more than a pawn in the Hidden Lord's unfathomable schemes. Utterly consumed by madness, the handsome young man lives with a constant chorus of voices in his head, urging him on to ever more wicked deeds. Mistakenly believing he can bend the ancient archmage to his will, Malikai is driven to awaken Skoulos from his endless sleep.

THE CURSE OF SKOULOS

Incautious (or unlucky) adventurers may find themselves subjected to the wrath of the archlich. These unfortunate souls will quickly find that they have a personal reason for defeating Malikai and ensuring that the archlich does not waken from his restless slumber.

A cursed PC must make a saving throw every hour or extended rest. For every failed saving throw, the PC incurs a malevolent effect. GMs should roll on the following table, or select an effect at their leisure.

SYMBOLOLOGY

- ⚡ = Ranged attack/power
- ⚡ = Ranged basic power
- ↑ = Melee attack/power
- ↑ = Melee basic power
- ☀ = Close power
- ⚠ = Hazard/trap

1d12 Malevolent Effect

- 1 The character's hands and feet grow fleshy connective tissue, giving the PC's appendages a frog-like appearance.
- 2 The character's eyes grow large and bulbous, granting a +1 bonus to passive Perception checks, but making the character overly sensitive to bright light (−1 on attacks and skill checks).
- 3 Anytime an uncursed PC suffers a critical hit, the cursed PC gains 1d6 temporary hp.
- 4 A constant swarm of flies buzz about the PC, laying eggs within his wounds whenever the PC is injured. The eggs quickly hatch into maggots that leaving crawling tracks beneath the PC's skin, hatching into new flies the next day.
- 5 Every time an uncursed PC rolls a 1 on an attack, the PC gains +1 to hit on his next attack.
- 6 The character takes on a cruel, predatory aura that frightens most animals, driving horses, dogs, and cats away. (Creatures trained for war, and predators — such as crocodiles — are unaffected.)
- 7 Every time an uncursed PC falls unconscious in combat, the cursed character gains a healing surge and 1d12 temporary hp.
- 8 The character develops an insatiable desire for human blood; his maximum hit point total is reduced by 5 every day that he does not indulge the mad craving.
- 9 The hero gains +5 to any saving throw, but every uncursed PC within 20 feet suffers −5 on any saving throws.
- 10 Any time an ally within 100 feet uses his second wind in combat, the total hit points recovered is 1d8 hp less, which are applied to the cursed hero as temporary hp.
- 11 The character's skin takes on a dark, mottled texture (−2 penalty on Diplomacy checks).
- 12 Drawing upon the latent power of those around him, once per day, the PC can use an uncursed PC's daily power in addition to his own. The ally's power is spent.

Heroes suffering the curse are unconsciously drawn to Skoulos' phylactery, knowing that this artifact holds the cure to the curse. The destruction of the phylactery ends all the cursed effects. Healed heroes gain 1d12 permanent hp, a paltry remnant of the archlich's arcane power.

Heroes acquiring more than 6 effects begin suffering visions of slaying their adventuring companions and loved ones, and offering up their bodies as a tribute to Skoulos' might. Heroes acquiring 10 or more become chaotic evil, and become NPCs under the GM's control. (At the GM's discretion, such PCs can continue to be played by players, so long as they adhere to the nature of the curse and its sinister ends.)

Apart from their in-game effects, apt GMs can use the Curse of Skoulos to great effect, passing secret notes to players with cursed PCs, pulling them aside to whisper cryptic messages, and generally sowing dissent and suspicion amongst the adventuring party. Astute adventurers will eventually realize that this is Skoulos and the cursed dungeon conspiring against the PCs. Foolhardy parties that are less apt to catch on will suffer for it, but therein lies the lesson that separates a common sellsword from a true hero!

THE SPIRE AND ENVIRONS

A light, cold rain falls on the swamp, impairing tracking (–2 to Perception checks to find tracks) and generally making life miserable for the PCs. The thick banks of mist obscure sight beyond 20 feet. Creatures more than 20 feet away receive a +2 bonus to AC and are permitted Stealth checks as if obscured by shadow. Creatures more than 40 feet away cannot be seen, though faint silhouettes of taller objects (trees, the spire) can be made out above the mists.

Player Beginning (EL 1, XP 500)

The players begin at the location marked “Player Start” on the south side of the map. Begin the adventure by reading the following:

A grim pall hangs over the dismal swamp. Storm clouds and gray mists conspire to obscure the narrow path that wends its way between the fetid bogs. Twisted trees, with barren limbs and clawing roots, loom like skeletons standing watch over this forsaken place. A series of fallen trees serves as bridges into the accursed swamp.

From somewhere within the misty darkness you can hear the sound of drumbeats, like the echo of a heartbeat calling you deeper into the swamp.

Four crocodiles lurk just beneath the surface of the murky water (Perception, DC 20 to spot). The crocs wait for a PC to begin crossing the log bridge, then attack from hiding, dragging the PC beneath the water to drown. The crocodiles are giants of their species, with thick scales encrusted with slime and enormous fangs. Characters struck by a crocodile while standing atop the log must succeed on a DC 15 Acrobatics check or be knocked into the bog.

The sunken bogs range from 7 to 15 feet in depth (6+1d8), and are filled with cold, brackish water. Characters that fall into the bogs must begin making swim checks as per the DMG. Climbing unaided out of a sunken bog requires a DC 15 Athletics check.

Treasure: If the scaled belly of the first crocodile is cut open, the searchers discover a jewel-encrusted armlet inscribed with the word Rhiannon (worth 40 gp).

Swamp Crocodile (4)

Level 2 Soldier

Large natural beast (reptile) XP 125

Initiative +5

Senses Perception +2
low-light vision

HP 40; Bloodied 20

AC 18; Fortitude 16, Reflex 14, Will 13

Speed 6, swim 8

↑ Bite (standard; at-will)

+8 vs. AC; 1d6+4 damage, and the target is grabbed (until escape). The swamp crocodile cannot make bite attacks while grabbing a creature, but it can use crushing jaws.

↑ Crushing Jaws (standard; at will)

If a swamp crocodile begins its turn with a target grabbed in its jaws, it makes an attack against the grabbed creature: +8 vs. AC; 2d6+4 damage. Miss: Half damage.

Alignment Unaligned

Languages –

Skills Stealth +8

Str 18 (+5)

Dex 14 (+3)

Wis 13 (+2)

Con 16 (+4)

Int 2 (–3)

Cha 7 (–1)

Area S–1

The Ruined Moathouse

Read or paraphrase the following when the PCs come within 50 ft. of area S–2:

The mighty spire looms above you. Through the dense mists you discern the faint outlines of a ruined wall and moathouse, rising before a maw-like cave set into the wall of the spire. Mad, frenetic drumming echoes off the base of the spire, nearly drowning out all sounds, and a strange, luminescent blue mist swirls about your boots.

Once an outpost for the nascent city of Punjar, the moathouse was abandoned years ago. The rising of the Black Salt Marsh during the intervening years has caused the moathouse to sink into the mire, hastening its ruin. Now the moathouse is completely overgrown with thorny brambles, cruel briars, and the black moss that thrives in wet environs.

The cultists have begun rebuilding the moathouse, erecting crude scaffolding and hoisting some of the fallen blocks back into place, but there is much work that must be done before the fastness can serve any sort of defensive function. Heroes need not enter through the Gate (area S–2); indeed, this might be the deadliest way to assault the moathouse.

The cultists are too enthralled with their degenerate worship to easily notice the heroes’ approach. Once the cultists are alerted (see area S–4) the incessant drumming comes to an immediate halt as the cultists take up arms to defend their loathsome temple.



Area S-2 The Gate of Hopping Doom (EL 2, XP 625)

Read or paraphrase the following:

Canted to one side, overgrown with brambles, and sunken deep into the marshy ground, the keep's gatehouse is now a mere shadow of its former self. The great portcullis lies on the soggy ground, overgrown with grasses, while the iron-banded gates sit rotting to one side.

The gatehouse has sunken so far into the ground that Medium-sized or larger creatures must stoop in order to pass beneath its arches. While the structure offers little threat in its original role, it still poses a danger to inattentive explorers. A group of giant frogs has taken up residence inside the rotting "second floor" of the gatehouse, and attacks anyone passing beneath the murder holes that punctuate the ceiling of the gatehouse's ground floor.

Medium-sized heroes passing beneath the sunken gatehouse forgo any Dexterity bonus to their AC. Large-sized creatures are forced to crawl, and are considered prone.

Tactics: The giant frogs' tactics are motivated simply by hunger. The frogs try to snare Medium- or Small-sized PCs with their prehensile tongues, dragging their victims up into the second floor of the gatehouse, where frogs set upon the unfortunate souls from all sides. If it appears that other members of the party might escape, the frogs go hopping after their prey.

The frogs have learned to fear the Croc Master and his "lovelies," and do not pursue their prey into the courtyard (area S-4).

Treasure: The gatehouse was pillaged ages ago. The only treasure here is from the frog's former victims. A close search (Perception, DC 15) of the second floor turns up 22 silver arrows and a single *potion of healing*.

Giant Frog (5)

Level 2 Brute

Medium natural beast

XP 125

Initiative +3

Senses Perception +6
low-light vision

HP 46; **Bloodied** 23

AC 14; **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 12

Speed 4, swim 4; see also *leap*

↑ Bite (standard; at-will)

+5 vs. AC; 1d8+4 damage, or 1d8+8 against a grabbed target.

⚡ Tongue Lash (minor; at will)

Ranged 3; +3 vs. Reflex; the target is grabbed (until escape) and pulled adjacent to the giant frog.

Leap (move; at-will)

The giant frog shifts 4 squares.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –

Skills Athletics +10 (+15 jumping), Stealth +8

Str 18 (+5)

Dex 15 (+3)

Wis 11 (+1)

Con 16 (+4)

Int 2 (–3)

Cha 8 (+0)

Area S-3

Trapped Breach (EL 1, XP 200)

Read or paraphrase the following:

The sunken wall has collapsed here. The fallen stones are overgrown with marsh grasses, black mold, and thorny briars. Attempts at reconstruction have begun, in the form of a crude scaffold and block-and-tackle hoist, used to lift some of the fallen blocks back into place.

Just beyond the scaffold, hidden in blue mists, wild hoots and mad shouts combine with the ceaseless drumming, building to an insane cacophony.

While it is true that the cultists have begun to rebuild the keep, the scaffolding here is a ruse concealing a lethal deadfall trap. Crossing the breach triggers massive stone block deadfall, crushing any PC left standing in the breach.

A falling block alerts the cultists in area S-4. The drumming ceases and the cultists charge to the defense of their temple, reaching the breach in 1d4 rounds.

⚠ Block Deadfall

Level 5 Obstacle

Trap

XP 200

Perception

DC 20: The character notices that the scaffolding is concealing the trap

Trigger: When a creature enters one of the trap's squares (crosses the breach).

Attack

Immediate Reaction Melee

Target: All creatures in trapped squares

Attack: +8 vs. Reflex

Hit: 3d8+3 damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends).

Miss: Half damage, and the target is not immobilized.

COUNTERMEASURES

- Characters that notice the deadfall trap can simply go around the breach.
- The characters can trigger the trap from afar with missile weapons. The trap has an AC of 20 (all other defenses 10), and triggers if more than 10 points of damage are dealt to it.
- An adjacent character can disable the deadfall with a DC 22 Thievery check.
- A DC 20 Nature or Dungeoneering check grants the party a +2 bonus to Thievery checks to delay or disable the trap.



Area S-4 Overgrown Courtyard (EL 3, XP 722)

Read or paraphrase the following:

A crude altar is set at the base of the black stone spire, where a figure girded in black robes raises a ceremonial dagger above a prone elven maid. Glowing blue mists seep from above, trickling out of the maw-like cave, and filling the courtyard. A mighty half-ogre hammers on a kettledrum with a pair of femurs wrapped in leather, while a dozen half-naked dancers, slathered in mud and girded in the skins of reptiles, writhe and howl at the starless sky!

Ursula the Befouled, an acolyte of Malikai, is leading worshippers in a ritual sacrifice that she believes will allow her master to force his will upon Skoulos the Archlich. The ritual is largely meaningless, but that doesn't stop Ursula from carrying it out to its tragic conclusion. Unless interrupted by swift and decisive action, the witch kills the elf upon the altar, tearing her heart from her chest and raising it to the darksome sky.

The cultists are armed with improvised weapons: cleavers and gaffs secured to the ends of staves. The half-ogre Hiatha, Malikai's longsuffering companion and bodyguard, fights with a morningstar and shield, battering down his foes with ceaseless blows.

Tactics: Unless the PCs have alerted the cultists of their approach, the heroes receive a free surprise round. The following round, the cultists rush to the attack, swarming the PCs with mindless, animalistic rage. Hiatha and the cultists fight to the death.

Through it all, Ursula calmly goes about completing the ritual, giggling like a delighted child as she cuts arcane runes into the elf. If she is attacked, or if Hiatha and the cultists are in danger of losing the battle, Ursula reacts in rage, unleashing her *Curse of Skoulos*, then resorting to lesser powers. Hiatha does his best to defend Ursula in the flight, even giving his life in the defense of his master's revolting mistress.

With her dying breath, Ursula declares that, "You are too late, fools! Already my master has breached the vault! I give my life for Skoulos, so that I might live forever!" Cackling with delight, the mad witch dies.

Development: After 5 rounds of combat, Sagatha emerges from the sunken tower (area S-5) astride his giant crocodile. Sagatha fights to the death, knowing that if the PCs triumph, he has no hope for mercy.

If the PCs succeed in interrupting the ritual, they stand a chance of rescuing the elven maid. If the PCs were sent on a rescue mission, the sacrificial victim is object of their quest. Otherwise, the maid is a chance to introduce a new PC to the party, or an NPC as befitting the GM's sinister plots.

Ursula the Befouled

Level 4 Artillery (Leader)

Medium natural humanoid, human XP 175

Initiative +5

Senses Perception +10

HP 42; Bloodied 21

AC 17; Fortitude 14, Reflex 16, Will 17

Speed 5

↑ **Spear** (standard; at-will) ♦ **Weapon**
+9 vs.AC; 1d8 damage.

⚡ **Black Orb** (standard; at will) ♦ **Necrotic**
Ranged 10; +9 vs. Reflex; 1d10+4 necrotic damage.

✱ **Curse of Skoulos** (standard; encounter)

Close blast 3; +7 vs. Fortitude; 1d10+4 damage, and the target is cursed with the *Curse of Skoulos*. Miss: Half damage, and no curse.

✱ **Incite Fervor** (minor; encounter)

Close burst 10; all allies in burst gain 5 temporary hit points and a +2 power bonus to their next attack.

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Common

Skills Insight +11, Religion +7, Thievery +9

Str 10 (+2)

Dex 16 (+5)

Wis 18 (+5)

Con 12 (+3)

Int 11 (+2)

Cha 12 (+3)

Possessions chainmail, spear, ceremonial dagger in the shape of a serpent (worth 10 gp), and a *potion of healing*

Hiatha the Half-Ogre

Level 4 Brute

Large natural humanoid XP 175

Initiative +2

Senses Perception +3

HP 68; Bloodied 34

AC 17; Fortitude 18, Reflex 14, Will 15

Speed 7

↑ **Morning Star** (standard; at-will) ♦ **Weapon**
Reach 2; +7 vs.AC; 1d12+5 damage.

↑ **Shield Charge** (standard; recharge 5-6)
+5 vs. Fortitude; 1d8+5 damage, and the target is pushed 1 square and knocked prone.

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Common, Giant
Skills Endurance +10, Intimidate +5

Str 20 (+5)

Dex 10 (+4)

Wis 13 (+4)

Con 18 (+6)

Int 8 (+0)

Cha 6 (+2)

Possessions hide armor, spiked shield, morningstar

Human Cultist (12)

Level 2 Minion

Medium natural humanoid, human XP 31

Initiative +1

Senses Perception +1

HP 1; a missed attack never damages a human cultist

AC 14; Fortitude 14, Reflex 12, Will 12

Speed 6

↑ **Improvised Glaive** (standard; at-will) ♦ **Weapon**
Reach 2; +5 vs.AC; 4 damage.

Mob Rule

A human cultist gains a +2 power bonus to all defenses while at least 2 other human cultists are within 5 squares.

Alignment Evil

Languages Common

Str 14 (+3)

Int 9 (+0)

Wis 10 (+1)

Con 12 (+2)

Dex 10 (+1)

Cha 11 (+1)

Possessions improvised glaive



Area S-5 The Master of Scales (EL 2, XP 625)

Read or paraphrase the following:

The stout tower has sunk visibly into the marshy soil, so that its entrance, once a pair of grand double doors, is now half submerged in brackish water and marsh grasses. The foul stench of rotting flesh, mixed with the breath of reptiles, wafts from inside the dark tower.

The sunken tower is home to Sagatha, the dwarven ranger tasked with training the deadly crocodiles that patrol the swamp. The ranger makes his home in the rafters of the sunken tower, while his beloved “lovelies” make their home in the murky waters below.

The dwarf is eager and quick to fight. If battle erupts in area S-4, Sagatha drops down from the rafters, leaps onto the back of the war crocodile, and rides into battle, leading the charge with a barrage of crossbow bolts.

If the PCs succeed in defeating the cultists without alerting Sagatha, they encounter a much different scene within the sunken tower. The crocodiles, caught lazing on the surface of the pool, are easily mistaken for fallen rafters (Perception, DC 15 to notice). The crocs lunge at the first PC to enter, dragging the victim back into the pool to drown. As the party of heroes rushes in to save their comrade-in-arms, Sagatha flanks from *above*, stabbing down with his spear, and firing his crossbow from on high. As long as the PCs remain on the floor of the tower, Sagatha benefits from cover (–2 to attacks).

PCs can ascend the tower by making a DC 15 Athletics check. The rotten, crumbling rafters make a challenging fighting surface, and any time a character in the rafters is struck in combat he must succeed on a DC 15 Acrobatics check. Characters failing the check fall prone and must succeed on a saving throw or tumble into the pool below.

Treasure: Characters exploring the rafters discover Sagatha’s quarters, resembling nothing so much as a rat’s nest tucked amid the rafters with rope, fallen beams, rotting supports, and rusting chains. Sagatha sleeps atop a flea-infested pile of mangy furs. Slung nearby is a pair of bolt cases (holding 20 bolts each), a simple oil lantern used for heat, 3 full wine skins, and the carcass of a smoked warthog.

A close search of the rafters (Perception, DC 20) discovers a slender rope running from the rafters into the pool below. Easily mistaken for a tie or support, the far end of the rope is tied to chain, which in turn can be used to haul a waterlogged treasure chest out of the murky waters below. The chest is locked and must be picked (Thievery, DC 20), or can be broken open with a DC 22 Strength check. Inside the chest are 210 sp and 90 gp.

Sagatha, Dwarven Ranger

Level 4 Artillery

Medium natural humanoid, dwarf **XP 175**

Initiative +5

Senses Perception +8
low-light vision

HP 46; **Bloodied** 23

AC 17; **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 14

Speed 5

↑ **Longspear** (standard; at-will) ♦ **Weapon**
Reach 2; +9 vs.AC; 1d10+2 damage.

[R] **Crossbow** (standard; at-will) ♦ **Weapon**
Ranged 15/30; +11 vs.AC; 1d8+3 damage.

[c] **Scaled Warcry** (minor; recharge 5,6)
Close burst 5; allies in the burst shift 3 squares.

Sniper’s Shot

Sagatha gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls and deals an extra 1d6 damage with ranged attacks against creatures that don’t have cover.

Stand Your Ground

When an effect forces Sagatha to move—through a pull, a push, or a slide—he moves 1 square less than the effect specifies. When an attack would knock him prone, Sagatha can roll a saving throw to avoid falling prone.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common,
Dwarven

Skills Acrobatics +10, Dungeoneering +4,
Endurance +11

Str 14 (+4)

Dex 16 (+5)

Wis 12 (+3)

Con 16 (+5)

Int 11 (+2)

Cha 10 (+2)

Possessions chainmail, warhammer, crossbow, 20 bolts

Swamp Crocodile War Mother

Level 5 Soldier

Large natural beast (reptile) **XP 200**

Initiative +5

Senses Perception +4
low-light vision

HP 40; **Bloodied** 20

AC 21; **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 15

Speed 6, swim 8

↑ **Bite** (standard; at-will)
+12 vs.AC; 1d8+4 damage, and the target is grabbed (until escape). The swamp crocodile war mother cannot make bite attacks while grabbing a creature, but it can use *crushing jaws*.

↑ **Crushing Jaws** (standard; at will)

If the swamp crocodile war mother begins its turn with a target grabbed in its jaws, it makes an attack against the grabbed creature: +8 vs.AC; 2d8+4 damage. *Miss:* Half damage.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** —

Skills Stealth +8

Str 20 (+7)

Dex 12 (+3)

Wis 14 (+4)

Con 18 (+6)

Int 2 (–2)

Cha 7 (+0)

Swamp Crocodiles (2)

Level 2 Soldier

Large natural beast (reptile) XP 125

Initiative +5

Senses Perception +2
low-light vision

HP 40; **Bloodied** 20

AC 18; **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 13

Speed 6, swim 8

↑ **Bite** (standard; at-will)

+8 vs.AC; 1d6+4 damage, and the target is grabbed (until escape). The swamp crocodile cannot make bite attacks while grabbing a creature, but it can use *crushing jaws*.

↑ **Crushing Jaws** (standard; at will)

If a swamp crocodile begins its turn with a target grabbed in its jaws, it makes an attack against the grabbed creature: +8 vs.AC; 2d6+4 damage. Miss: Half damage.

Alignment Unaligned

Languages –

Skills Stealth +8

Str 18 (+5)

Dex 14 (+3)

Wis 13 (+2)

Con 16 (+4)

Int 2 (–3)

Cha 7 (–1)

Area S–6

Perilous Shades (EL varies, XP varies)

GM's Note: Prior to running this encounter, it is necessary for the GM to have a record of each PC's stats. Photocopying the entire character sheet is the easiest way, but a simple index card is sufficient if it includes all the character's relevant data.

Read or paraphrase the following:

A crude, makeshift scaffold rises to the maw of the cave above. A sickly blue miasma seeps down from above, cascading off the scaffold and spilling down into the fetid courtyard below.

Built of bound reeds, the scaffold is far sturdier than it appears. There is no danger to PCs climbing to the maw. While the glowing blue mist is acidic enough to irritate the skin and lungs, and discolor cloth, it also poses no threat to the heroes... yet.

Once the PCs ascend to the maw, read or paraphrase the following:

You pull yourself off the high scaffold and onto the rocky ledge above. Before you is a narrow cave, widening to a small natural cavern. Set in the center of the cavern is a large censor, glowing with an eerie inner light. Foul blue fumes pour from the censor, casting weird shadows along the walls, before cascading from the chamber.

Set alight by Malikai, the censor serves as a ward. Characters passing through the chamber cause the clouds of incense to swirl and twist about them. Alert PCs may notice (Perception, DC 20) that the eerie clouds seems to mix and bind with their shadows, and that a portion of each PC's shadow seems to detach, quickly vanishing among the mists. Extremely alert PCs might note that the shadows seem to bind the clouds of incense to them, like

spiders wrapping their prey in silken webs, but surely this is a trick of the eye.

Once a PC has passed through the area (roughly 1d12 minutes) the shadows emerge as shades — shadowy-gray mimics of the PCs that passed through the mists. Seemingly formed entirely of shadows and smoke, the shades receive a bonus template, but otherwise are identical twins of their shadow PC, including all powers and equipment. Once all the shades have formed, they go in pursuit of the PCs, intent on winning their place in the material world by slaying their shadow selves. (See **Appendix I: New Monsters** for additional details on the shades.) GMs are encouraged to introduce the party of shades at their convenience — either at a lull in the action, or at the turning point of a climactic battle, turning the odds against the PCs and forcing them to rise.

Hidden Paths: Of the chamber's two original secret doors, one has already been revealed. A portal that once stood on the west wall has been broken open, leaving a pile of stone rubble crowding the doorway.

The other secret door remains to be discovered. The secret door hidden in the north wall is discovered with a DC 23 Perception check.

Treasure: A backpack rests against the wall in the southwest corner of the chamber. Inside are a weeks' worth of rations, a half-emptied wine skin, a pair of silvered daggers, a hand axe, a leather pouch (containing 12 gp, 2 pp, and a pair of small rubies worth 15 gp each) and a bone scroll case. Inside is a single sheet of ancient parchment. (Show the players Player Handout A.)



Area S-7 The Chute and the Slime (EL 3, XP 700)

Read or paraphrase the following:

A wide-mouthed pit trap blocks your way. Peering into the darkness below, you can see a series of gore-stained spikes lining the floor of the pit. Broken skeletons litter the base of the pit, the dusty remains of past victims.

While the pit is indeed a hazard, the *true* hazard is concealed just beyond the pit — a second, hidden pit trap.

A DC 11 Athletics check allows the PCs to leap the first pit, but PCs land atop the second pit trap, sending them sliding down a chute to their doom in area S-8 below. If the PCs succeed in coming within 5 feet without triggering the pit trap, the hidden pit can be detected with a DC 22 Perception check.

The instant a PC clears the mouth of the chute, the stone trap door returns to its original position, making the return trip all but impossible.

The chute is 120 feet in length, but has ruptured 40 feet down, permitting a mindless ochre jelly to drip into the chute. PCs sliding down the chute are immediately struck by the jelly's slam attack. Perceiving prey, the jelly begins to slip down the chute and arrives in area S-8 two rounds after the PCs.

⚠ Open Pit Trap

Level 1 Elite Warder
Hazard **XP 200**

Perception
DC 0: The hazard is obvious.

Trigger: There is no trigger for this hazard, although others could push characters into the pit.

Attack

Immediate Reaction **Melee**

Target: All creatures in trapped squares

Attack: +4 vs. Reflex

Hit: The target falls into the pit, takes 3d10 damage, falls prone, and takes 5 ongoing damage (save ends).

Miss: Target returns to the last square it occupied, and its move action ends.

COUNTERMEASURES

- A character can leap the pit with a DC 11 Athletics check (DC 21 without a running start).

⚠ False-Floor Pit Trap

Level 1 Elite Warder
Trap **XP 200**

Perception

DC 22: The character notices the false stonework.

Trigger: The trap attacks when a creature enters one of its four squares.

Attack

Immediate Reaction **Melee**

Target: All creatures in trapped squares

Attack: +4 vs. Reflex

Hit: The target falls into the pit, takes 2d10 damage, falls prone, and slides down a chute to area S-8.

Miss: Target returns to the last square it occupied, and its move action ends.

COUNTERMEASURES

- An adjacent character can trigger the trap with a DC 10 Thievery check (standard action). The floor falls into the pit.
- An adjacent character can disable the trap with a DC 22 Thievery check (standard action). The floor becomes safe.

Ochre Jelly

Level 3 Elite Brute
Large natural beast (blind, ooze) **XP 300**

Initiative +0 **Senses** Perception +2
blindsight 10, tremorsense 10

HP 102; **Bloodied** 51; see also *split*

AC 18; **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 14

Immune gaze; **Resist** 5 acid

Saving Throws +2

Speed 4; see also *malleable form*

Action Points 1



↑ Slam (standard; at-will): ♦ Acid

+8 vs.AC; 2d6+1 damage, and ongoing 5 acid damage (save ends).

Malleable Form (move; at will)

The ochre jelly shifts 4 squares.

Split (when first bloodied; encounter)

The ochre jelly splits into two, each with hit points equal to one-half its current hit points. Effects applied to the original ochre jelly do not apply to the second one. An ochre jelly can't split if reduced to 0 hit points by the attack that bloodied it. Left alone, the two halves recombine into a single creature at the end of the encounter.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** —

Skills Stealth +8

Str 13 (+2)

Dex 8 (+0)

Wis 12 (+2)

Con 11 (+1)

Int 1 (–4)

Cha 1 (–4)

Area S–8

Hidden Door

Halfway down the stairs is a secret door that can be discovered with a DC 20 Perception check. The hidden door is locked, requiring a DC 15 Thievery check to unlock.

Area S–9

False Tomb (EL 1, XP 500)

After the PCs enter the chamber, a stone trapdoor closes over both the chute and the stairway, ending any hope of egress. The stone trapdoor only rises if another character tumbles down the chute. The trap door does not seal closely enough to impede the ochre jelly from descending from above (see area S–7 for stats).

Read or paraphrase the following:

The low ceiling of the narrow chamber looms above you, as if several tons of rocks were waiting to come crashing down from above. The air is thick with dust and the stench of ancient herbs.

At the far end of the chamber are two low portals of hammered bronze, each depicting a demonic head and sealed with a lock. Above the portals is a large bronze sheet, stamped with the letters S K O U L O S.

The ceiling here is a mere 4 feet high, forcing Medium-sized characters to crouch, and Large-sized characters to crawl.

Characters examining the hammered bas-reliefs will notice key differences. The left portal depicts a howling monkey-headed demon, maw thrown open wide, exposing wicked, bloodied fangs. The right portal depicts the head of a somber hawk-beaked demon, with a pair of tiny rubies for eyes, embedded in the bronze.

Both of the portals lead to murderous death traps. Characters with access to the scrap of parchment found in area S–6 may note that Skoulos is referred to, time and again, as “he who shall not be named.” Therefore, astute PCs can reason that the stamped bronze sheet is a warning — by naming the archlich, the builders call upon the wrath of death itself.

Any of the two portals can be easily unlocked with a DC 20 Thievery check. PCs taking the time to examine the room note a small, circular alcove directly above the entrance chute. Inside the alcove are two jeweled keys that open the locked portals: an emerald key for the left portal, and a ruby key for the right portal.

As soon as any of the keys are tried in any of the locks (or the PCs attempt to pick any of the locks) the ceiling begins to descend. With a thunderous grating, and a sifting of sand from above, the crushing trap descends upon the PCs. It takes the ceiling block a total of 4 rounds to reach the floor, slaying anyone (and crushing anything) still in the chamber. Simply, the PCs must choose one of the portals, and flee the chamber ere they are slain.

Area S–9a

Path of Blood (EL 2, XP 600+)

Read or paraphrase the following:

The bronze portal opens to reveal a corridor, roughly 15 feet in width, and stretching 30 or so paces. The walls, floor, and ceiling of the corridor are lined with hundreds of monstrous bronze heads, each with its maw thrown wide revealing rows of fanged teeth.

The corridor conceals a series of whirling blade traps that activate when PCs cross into the marked square.



Traversing the hall is complicated, as the monstrous, fanged maws snap shut on anything crossing the jaws. Heroes proceeding carefully down the hall (one square per round) have nothing to fear, but PCs attempting to move any more quickly must succeed on a DC 15 Acrobatics check for each square crossed, or accidentally trigger a maw. PCs caught in a maw are unable to move or be moved until they can pull free of the monstrous jaw.

⚠ Whirling Blade Trap (3)

Level 5 Obstacle

Trap XP 200

Perception

DC 22: The character notices that trigger plates around the chamber.

DC 27: The character notices the hidden control panel.

Initiative +7 Speed 4

Trigger: When a character moves into a trigger square, the whirling blades contraption emerges and attacks.

Attack

Standard Action Close burst 1

Target: All creatures in burst

Attack: +10 vs.AC

Hit: 3d8+3 damage.

COUNTERMEASURES

- A character can engage in a skill challenge to deactivate the control panel. DC 22 Thievery. Complexity 2 (6 successes before 3 failures). Success disables the trap. Failure causes the whirling blades to act twice in the round (roll a second initiative for the trap).
- A character can attack the whirling blades contraption (AC 16, other defenses 13; hp 55; resist 5 all) or the control panel (AC 14, other defenses 11; hp 35; resist 5 all). Destroying either disables the entire trap.

⚠ Bronze Maw Traps

Level 1 Obstacle

Trap XP 100

Perception

DC 0: The bronze maws are in plain sight.

Trigger: When a character moves into a trigger square at more than half his or her normal speed, and fails a DC 15 Acrobatics check, the trap attacks.

Attack

Immediate Reaction Melee

Target: Creature that triggered the trap

Attack: +6 vs.AC

Hit: 1d8+3 damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends).

COUNTERMEASURES

- A character can avoid triggering a bronze maw by simply moving at half speed. Moving faster than this requires a DC 15 Acrobatics check to avoid the trap.

- A character can attack the bronze maw contraption (AC 15, other defenses 11; hp 25; resist 5 all) or pry it open with a DC 20 Strength check.

Area S-9b

Path of Air

(EL 1, XP 175 & EL 1, XP 250)

Read or paraphrase the following:

The bronze portal opens to reveal a short corridor that terminates before a yawning black gulf. A series of slender stalagmites, topped at the level of the ledge, form a haphazard path across the chamber. On the far side of the chasm you can make out another ledge.

The Path of Air is a dangerous one. Above, in the darkness, hang a series of large pendulum scythes. As soon as the PCs enter the area, the pendulums begin to swing, cutting the darkness with razor sharp blades.

Crossing the cavern can be accomplished in two ways: either by beating each pendulum on initiative as the PC crosses from one stalagmite to the next, or by successfully predicting the swing of the pendulums and destroying the blade as it slices across the chamber.

PCs struck by a pendulum while crossing are knocked from the stalagmite, and fall to the rocky ground below (2d10 falling damage), where a pair of ravenous rat swarms wait to devour the scythes' victims.

The Low Road: Heroes might rightly reason that there is no reason to risk the scythes when it is just as easy to drop to the ground below and cross *beneath* the scythes. Heroes taking this route must still contend with 2 of 4 scythes (at the chasm's entrance and exit) as well as the 2 rat swarms dwelling on the cavern's floor.

Treasure: The PCs are not the first to suffer the test of the scythes. In the far corner of the chasm floor, nearly shorn in two, is the skeletal corpse of a once mighty dragonborn paladin. While the paladin's elaborate armor was ruined from the blow of the scythe, two *potions of healing* (in steel vials) remain, and the paladin's *+1 flaming greatsword* is as deadly as the day it was forged. The blade's pommel is forged in the shape of twin wyverns, and its pommel bears Draconic runes that translate to the Common words "Strongheart."

⚠ Pendulum Scythes

Level 4 Lurker

Trap

XP 175

Perception

DC 17: The character notices thin, shallow cuts running across the dungeon floor at 5-foot intervals.

DC 22: The character notices thin slots across the ceiling of the room, corresponding with the cuts across the floor. A character who makes a DC 15 Dungeoneering check recognizes these as signs of a scything blades trap.

Initiative +6

Trigger

The trap rolls initiative when a creature enters the chamber.

Attack

Standard Action Melee

Targets: All creatures in a row of squares. Roll randomly each round to determine the row the trap attacks.

Attack: +9 vs.AC

Hit: 2d8 + 4 damage and secondary attack

Secondary Attack: +7 vs. Fortitude

Hit: The target is pushed 1 square (in the direction of the blade's movement), knocked prone, and takes ongoing 5 damage (save ends).

COUNTERMEASURES

- A character who makes a DC 22 Dungeoneering check as a minor action can determine the row of squares the trap will attack on its next turn.
- A character can ready an action to attack a pendulum blade (AC 15, other defenses 12; hp 48). Destroying a blade renders that row of squares safe from attack.

Rat Swarm (2)

Level 2 Skirmisher

Medium natural beast (swarm)

XP 125

Initiative +6

Senses Perception +6

low-light vision

Swarm Attack aura 1; the rat swarm makes a basic attack as a free action against each enemy that begins its square in the aura

HP 36; Bloodied 18

AC 15; Fortitude 12, Reflex 14, Will 11

Resist half damage from melee and ranged attacks;

Vulnerable 5 against close and area attacks

Speed 4, climb 2

↑ **Swarm of Teeth** (standard; at-will)

+6 vs.AC; 1d6+3 damage, and ongoing 3 damage (save ends).

Alignment Unaligned

Languages —

Str 12 (+2)

Dex 17 (+4)

Wis 10 (+1)

Con 12 (+2)

Int 2 (-3)

Cha 9 (+0)



Area S-10

The Greedy Maw (EL 3, XP 750)

Read or paraphrase the following:

This worked-stone chamber is unremarkable save for two features: the mosaic of a snarling demon set into the floor, and a scintillating sapphire suspended in the air directly above the gaping maw.

Inside the fiend's open maw is a black void, utterly featureless, as if it were devouring the very light cast off by the fiercely glowing gem.

Heroes that have pressed this far are in dire straits indeed. The foreboding maw was created to divest tomb robbers of their equipment before presenting the repentant tomb robbers before Skoulos the Undying. There is very little good that can come of this encounter.

Show the players Player Handout B; excepting the player whose PC has acquired the greatest number of malevolent effects from the *Curse of Skoulos*. If none of the PCs have acquired the *Curse*, select the PC with the lowest Will defense. To this player, show Player Handout C. This PC hears a soft voice whisper, "Chosen One, behold the Blade of Skoulos: bane of archmages, slayer of liches and doom to dweomercasters. Only those with the true sight can wield the spellbreaker."

A DC 20 Arcana check affirms that the blade hanging in the air matches the description of the legendary Blade of Skoulos. But only foolish heroes would assume that an archlich of Skoulos' power would keep a weapon capable of destroying him in his own lair!

Rather, both the gem and the sword are bait, designed to lure greedy tomb robbers within 5 feet of the demon mosaic. Once triggered, the maw becomes a roaring void, drawing at anything and everything within the chamber. The sucking void continues for 1d12 rounds.

Each round, any character within 20 feet of the void must succeed on DC 25 Strength check to avoid being drawn into the demon maw. Additional characters can hold onto the PC, making their own Strength checks to preserve the endangered PC. Any character drawn into the demon maw vanishes into seeming nothingness. In truth, characters drawn through the maw reappear in area S-11b, divested of all equipment and weapons (which are instead transported to Skoulos' throne in area S-12).





Area S-11a Temple of Skolous the Undying (EL 3, XP 800)

Read or paraphrase the following:

An enormous idol, holding aloft a massive basin filled with smoking oil, dominates the rough, natural cave. Canted forward, the idol's foundation shifted sometime in eons past, and now seems about to pitch over.

The hot air here is choked with smoke; the high ceiling is scorched black with the soot from the centuries-old flame. Ten narrow stone portals ring the chamber, adorned with carved runes to long-forgotten gods. Lying loose before the idol, a horde of glittering coins and jewels flash in the firelight.

Each of the stone portals conceals a shambling horror, sworn to defend Skolous for all eternity. Once human priests and clerics, the horrors are now seething vermin swarms, in the form of humanoids. (See **Appendix I: New Monsters** for more information on shambling horrors.)

As the PCs descend to the lower chamber, the shambling horrors erupt from behind the sealed portals, immediately leaping to the attack, using their scythes and hooked staves to disarm the PCs, before closing to attack with their *grave breath*.

Any PC succeeding on a DC 15 Dungeoneering check can confirm that the idol is indeed about to pitch forward. Heroes climbing up the back of the idol, and kicking off from the cavern wall, can attempt to topple the idol (requiring 3 successful DC 20 Strength checks). The falling stone idol crushes anything in the 4 squares directly before the idol (Attack +10 vs. Ref, 4d12 damage) and spills flaming oil throughout the southernmost row of the chamber (Attack +15 vs. Ref, 1d8 points of fire damage, persistent 5, saving throw ends).

Development: Behind the statue, 20 feet off the floor is a concealed passage (DC 15 Perception to spot).

Shambling Horror (8)

Level 1 Skirmisher

Medium natural animate (construct) XP 100

Initiative +5 **Senses Perception +0**
darkvision

HP 27; Bloodied 13

AC 15; Fortitude 13, Reflex 15, Will 13

Speed 7

↑ **Hooked Glaive** (standard; at-will) ♦ **Weapon**
+6 vs.AC; 1d8+3 damage.

↑ **Disarm** (immediate reaction, when an enemy misses the horror with a melee attack; at-will) ♦ **Weapon**

Requires hooked glaive; +4 vs. Reflex; the target's weapon is ripped from its grasp and lands 1d6 squares away in a random direction.

Vermin Rebuke (immediate reaction, the horror is hit with a melee attack, encounter) ♦ **Poison**

The target takes 1d6+2 poison damage.

Swift Withdraw (minor; at-will)

The horror shifts 1 square.

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Old Common

Skills Acrobatics +8, Stealth +8

Str 16 (+3) **Dex** 16 (+3) **Wis** 10 (+0)

Con 14 (+2) **Int** 6 (–2) **Cha** 15 (+2)

Possessions hooked glaive

Area S-11b Treachery's Revenge:

Read or paraphrase the following:

A strange corridor extends before you. The walls, ceiling, and floor are all covered in a chaotic mosaic depicting an emperor leading an army to war, defeating city after city, and laying all to waste. On close inspection, the emperor seems to be a skeleton, wearing a high crown and wielding terrible spells that rain death down upon his foes, while the armies are composed entirely of humanoids covered in crawling vermin.

At the far end of the corridor, some 100 paces distant, you can make out what appears to be a miniature city set into the wall, illuminated by a soft, golden glow.

To the casual observer, the corridor appears over 250 feet in length, but inspection (DC 15 Perception) shows that the corridor is much shorter, only 75 feet in length, with the remainder of the corridor's "depth" created by a cunningly painted relief.

The corridor's ceiling is support by a series of decorated stone archways. The archway set 35 feet down the corridor functions a portal, *teleporting* anyone that steps beneath the arch. The first character through the portal appears at location A in area S-12. The next character through appears at location B, the third at location C, and so on. If there are more than 5 characters, the sixth also appears at location A, and the cycle begins anew.

Area S-12 The Undying Throne (EL 5+, XP Variable):

Read or paraphrase the following:

Before you stretches an enormous ruin. Once an ornate tomb, now the cavern is dotted with broken pillars, fallen rubble, and the whisper of fallen heroes. Split into a series of tiers separated by steep slopes of loose scree, the cavern is lit by a number of braziers, each lit with flaming oil, casting a hellish, flickering light across the musty treasures littering the ruined chamber.

In the center of the chamber, atop a stone pyramid, you can spy a throne fit for a giant. Before the throne is an enormous stone sarcophagus, emblazoned with jewels and gilt with gold. Scrambling up the stairs towards the sarcophagus, phylactery clenched in one hand, is a black robed figure that could be none other than Malikai the Mad!

Show the players Player Handout D. This chamber is the resting place for Skoulos the Undying, a retreat where the archlich could sleep away the centuries and regain his powers. Malikai, mistakenly believing in his ability to master the archlich, intends to wake him from his deathless slumber, and turn the archmage's powers to his own dire ends.

Tactics: Noticing the PCs, Malikai raises the phylactery high into the chalky air and shouts a command in a long-forgotten tongue. An instant later, dozens of skeletons crawl from behind the rubble, shake off the dust of the ages, and step forward to obey their master's command. The GM should place 8 skeletons on the battlemat, adding an additional 1d6 per round. There can never be more than 15 skeletons on the map at any one time, and no more than 30 skeletons encountered in total.

While the skeletons delay the PCs, Malikai ascends the stairs, raises the phylactery, and utters the dread phrases to awaken the power of Skoulos the Undying (see below). If the PCs can prove a threat, they distract Malikai from his ritual, instead causing the warlock to turn his considerable powers against them, raining down spells from afar.

Terrain Features: Once a chamber fit for a king, the cavern has suffered in the passage of centuries. The weakened ceiling and walls have permitted sand and loose stone to sift into the chamber, creating steep scree slopes. The shifting floor has caused many of the pillars to fall, further weakening the ceiling, and all of the standing pillars are in danger of collapse.

- **Scree Slopes:** The steep scree slopes constantly shift and slide underfoot. Characters attempting to reach the bottom of the slope can add 2 squares to their movement by succeeding on a DC 15 Acrobatics check, whereas characters trying to cross the slope must succeed on a similar check to avoid sliding 1 square closer to the base of the slope. Characters failing the check fall prone, and climbing the slope is treated as rough terrain.
- **Toppling Pillars:** A DC 20 Strength check (or 2 successful DC 15 Strength checks) topples the pillar. Each pillar is 30 feet in height and 5 feet wide, and a falling pillar targets all creatures in its path (+7 vs. Ref, 2d12 damage). Each pillar that collapses brings down a rain of rubble from above. With every pillar toppled, there is a cumulative 13% chance that the entire ceiling collapses. See **Collapsing the Chamber** below for more information.
- **Portals:** The portals that *teleported* the PCs to the chamber can also be used to flee the area. "Heroes" stepping back through any of the 5 portals reappear in area S-6.
- **Loose Treasure:** PCs entering from area S-9 will be in dire need of equipment. Heroes seeking to pick up impromptu weapons can take up the arms from fallen skeletons, or loot the hundreds of caches littering the room. Heroes spending a move action, and succeeding on a DC 15 Perception check, roll 1d20 and consult the following table. Each magical item can only be found once.

1d20	Result
1	Rotting longspear*
2	Rusted bronze greatsword*
3	Large shield
4	A pile of loose coins (2d100 gp)
5	Rusted scimitar*
6	+2 magic wand
7	Rusted glaive*
8	Quiver of 6 javelins
9	Shattered ceramic urn containing 3d100sp
10	Fur-tipped +1 magic shortbow
11	Falchion
12	A single large ruby (worth 100 gp)
13	+1 rod of dark reward
14	+1 vicious javelin
15	Spear
16	A bronze vase containing 2d20 pp
17	+1 heavy flail
18	Iron coffer with 2d100 gp
19	+1 glaive
20	Roll twice.

*Weakened items break on any blow inflicting 6 or more hp of damage.

Skoulos the Undying: Once he reaches the sarcophagus, it takes Malikai 5 rounds to complete the ritual that awakens Skoulos the Undying. While locked in the trance, Malikai doesn't take any damage from missed attacks, but any successful attacks delay the completion of the rite for 1 round. Once the ritual is completed, read or paraphrase the following:

The massive stone lid of the sarcophagus falls to the floor with a thunderous crash. A rush of frigid air fills the chamber, causing the braziers to flicker and dim. In the dying light you see a skeletal giant emerge from the sarcophagus. Draped in blackened linen bandages, with a high crown perched on his bony forehead, and a skull-tipped rod gripped in his left hand, the towering corpse crackles with arcane might.

If Malikai succeeds in awakening Skoulos the encounter takes a dramatic turn. While still in a weakened state, Skoulos is more than a match for both the party and Malikai. In order to survive, the PCs need to take decisive and immediate action.

Malikai immediately begins to cackle and howl, mistakenly believing that he controls the archlich. Skoulos, in turn, takes 3 rounds to kill Malikai, drawing out his very soul with shadow ray, before rending Malikai limb from limb. On the fourth round, Skoulos turns his attention to the PCs. If the heroes haven't collapsed the chamber or fled by this point, Skoulos most likely slaughters them.

Defeating Malikai the Mad: If Malikai is permitted to awaken Skoulos, the encounter will almost certainly end in a bloody slaughter. However, cunning PCs can always find a way to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat.



- **Destroy the Phylactery:** Malikai carries Skoulos' phylactery, a small clay holy symbol. If the phylactery is destroyed, Skoulos cannot be awakened. (AC 20, hp 12). With the destruction of the phylactery, the magic that supports the arched ceiling is ended, and the chamber begins to collapse (see below).
- **Collapse the Chamber:** With every toppled pillar there is a cumulative 13% chance of collapsing the chamber. The GM should roll at the top of every round, and every time a new pillar is collapsed. Once the chamber begins to collapse, the ceiling begins to crumble away, targeting every creature in the chamber (+10 vs. Reflex; 1d12 damage) for 6 rounds. On the fifth round, the entire ceiling — several thousand tons of rock — comes crashing down, killing everything remaining in the chamber. (Note that collapsing the chamber does not award PCs XP for the defeat of Skoulos; that feat, and its subsequent rewards, is an adventure for another day.)

Treasure: The bulk of Skoulos' wealth is hidden in the Black Library — the various caches found around the chamber and atop the throne are simply petty offerings made by devotees of the archlich. Resting atop the throne are an obsidian bladed +1 *lifedrinker bastard sword*, a ruby +1 *magic orb*, and a +1 *amulet of protection*.

Finally, any equipment lost to the Greedy Maw in area S-10 can be found resting atop the throne.

Malikai the Mad

Level 6 Artillery

Medium natural humanoid, human XP 250

Initiative +8 Senses Perception +6

HP 60; Bloodied 30

AC 20; Fortitude 17, Reflex 18, Will 18

Speed 6

↑ +2 **Dagger** (standard; at-will) ♦ **Weapon**
+11 vs. AC; 1d4+3 damage (crit 2d6+7).

[R] **Blackfire** (standard; at-will) ♦ **Fire**
Ranged 10; +11 vs. Reflex; 1d8+5 fire damage, and ongoing 5 fire damage (save ends).

[r] **Scarab Curse** (standard; encounter) ♦ **Illusion, Psychic**

Ranged 10; illusory scarabs appear and attack the target; +11 vs. Will; 1d6+5 psychic damage, and ongoing 5 psychic damage (save ends).

Coward's Escape (immediate reaction, when Malikai is hit by a melee attack; at-will) ♦ **Teleportation**
Malikai teleports 5 squares.

Demented Wrath (minor; encounter)

Malikai gains a +1 power bonus to his next attack roll against an enemy that hit him since his last turn. If the attack hits and deals damage, Malikai deals an extra 5 points of damage.

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Common

Skills Bluff +13, Insight +11, Stealth +13

Str 15 (+5) **Dex** 20 (+8) **Wis** 16 (+6)

Con 18 (+7) **Int** 13 (+4) **Cha** 20 (+8)

Possessions +2 dagger, wand

Skoulos the Undying, Nascent Archlich

Level 14 Elite Controller

Medium natural humanoid (undead)

XP 2,000

Initiative +8

Senses Perception +13

darkvision

Deathly Aura (Necrotic)

aura 5; any living creature that enters or starts its turn in the aura takes 5 necrotic damage

HP 218, Bloodied 109

Regeneration 10 (if the lich takes radiant damage, regeneration doesn't function on its next turn)

AC 28; Fortitude 24, Reflex 28, Will 26

Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic

Saving Throws +2

Speed 6

Action Points 1

[R] **Black Ray** (standard; at-will) ♦ **Necrotic**
Ranged 20; +18 vs. Reflex; 2d8 + 6 necrotic damage.

[a] **Deathly Chill** (standard; sustain minor; recharge 5-6) ♦ **Cold, Necrotic, Zone**

Area burst 2 within 20; +18 vs. Fortitude; 3d8 + 6 cold and necrotic damage. The burst creates a zone that lasts until the end of the archlich's next turn. The zone is considered difficult terrain. Any creature that starts its turn within the zone takes 10 cold and necrotic damage. Skoulos can sustain or dismiss the zone as a minor action.

Indestructible

When Skoulos is reduced to 0 hit points, its body and possessions crumble into dust, but it is not destroyed. It reappears (along with its possessions) in 1d10 days within 1 square of its phylactery, unless the phylactery is also found and destroyed.

Second Wind (standard; encounter) ♦ **Healing**

Skoulos spends a HP surge and regains 54 hit points. Skoulos gains a +2 bonus to all defenses until the start of its next turn.

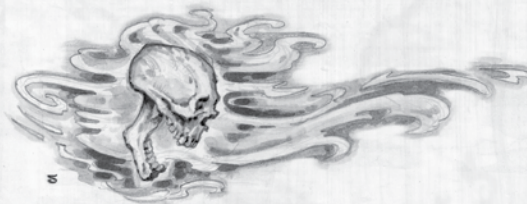
Alignment Evil

Languages Abyssal, Common

Skills Arcana +18, History +18, Insight +13

Str 11 (+7) **Dex** 12 (+8) **Wis** 13 (+8)

Con 14 (+9) **Int** 22 (+13) **Cha** 18 (+11)



Decrepit Skeleton (8+)

Level 1 Minion

Medium natural animate (undead) XP 25

Initiative +3

Senses Perception +2
darkvision

HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.

AC 16; **Fortitude** 13, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 13

Immune disease, poison

Speed 6

↑ **Longsword** (standard; at-will) ♦ **Weapon**
+6 vs.AC; 4 damage.

[R] **Shortbow** (standard; at-will) ♦ **Weapon**
Ranged 15/30; +6 vs.AC; 3 damage.

Alignment Unaligned

Languages –

Str 15 (+2)

Dex 17 (+3)

Wis 14 (+2)

Con 13 (+1)

Int 3 (–4)

Cha 3 (–4)

Possessions longsword, shortbow, heavy shield, quiver of 20 arrows

CONCLUSION

Read or paraphrase the following if the PCs succeed in escaping Skoulos' throne chamber:

A thunderous roar fills your ears as the spire begins to collapse around you. Fleeing the cavern, your companions leap and tumble down the reed scaffold to the marshy courtyard below. A fierce tremor shakes the earth, and you watch in disbelief as the entire spire collapses behind you, sinking into the Black Salt Marsh.

As the dust begins to settle and the tremors slow, you help your companions to their feet. Your triumphant trek back to Punjar will be a short one, but you cannot help wondering if the legacy of Skoulos is ended, or is only just beginning.

**THUS ENDS THE PLOTS
OF MALIKAI THE MAD**



APPENDIX I NEW MONSTERS

SHAMBLING HORROR

Shambling horrors are terrible undead-like constructs composed of thousands upon thousands of living insects, worms, and other crawling vermin. Although not particularly clever, they possess a fell intellect and a cruel and twisted disposition.

SHAMBLING HORROR LORE

A character knows the following with a successful Arcana check.

DC 15: The eldritch minions of Skoulos the Undying, shambling horrors were once archpriests that led a rebellion against the archlich. Tortured for a score of years, each was eventually transformed into its current form: a walking, seething mass of vermin. Tortured by their existence, shambling horrors exact their sole relief by inflicting pain on Skoulos' enemies.

Shambling Horror

Level 1 Skirmisher

Medium natural animate (construct) XP 100

Initiative +5

Senses Perception +0
darkvision

HP 27; **Bloodied** 13

AC 15; **Fortitude** 13, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 13

Speed 7

↑ **Hooked Glaive** (standard; at-will) ♦ **Weapon**
+6 vs. AC; 1d8+3 damage.

↑ **Disarm** (immediate reaction, when a enemy misses the horror with a melee attack; at-will) ♦ **Weapon**
Requires hooked glaive; +4 vs. Reflex; the target's weapon is ripped from its grasp and lands 1d6 squares away in a random direction.

Vermin Rebuke (immediate reaction, the horror is hit with a melee attack, encounter) ♦ **Poison**
The target takes 1d6+2 poison damage.

Swift Withdraw (minor; at-will)
The horror shifts 1 square.

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Old Common

Skills Acrobatics +8, Stealth +8

Str 16 (+3) **Dex** 16 (+3) **Wis** 10 (+0)

Con 14 (+2) **Int** 6 (–2) **Cha** 15 (+2)

Possessions hooked glaive

Description: *The masked figure moves towards with unnatural swiftness. Its entire being seems to shift and crawl beneath the thick robes and linen wraps, leaving a trail of skittering spiders, ants, and wasps in its wake!*

SHAMBLING HORROR TACTICS

A shambling horror attacks with its hooked glaive, and attempts to keep opponents at bay with its extended reach. It uses the hooked end of its weapon to disarm its foes, especially when an enemy creates an opening after a failed melee attack.

ENCOUNTER GROUPS

Although not technically undead, shambling horrors are often encountered with the unliving. They are also frequently encountered with demented priests and wizards.

LEVEL 4 ENCOUNTER (XP 900)

- 2 skeletons (level 3 soldier)
- 4 shambling horrors (level 1 skirmisher)
- 8 decrepit Skeletons (level 1 minion)

SHADE TEMPLATE

Every creature existing on the prime material plane has a shadow-self, or shade. Most often these shadow-selves cannot free themselves from their masters' forms, but under certain conditions, shades can weave a physical form of shadowstuff, wickedness, and sin. These forms are replicas of their masters, including all equipment, woven from gray shadows.

Once freed, a shade exists only to slay its double. Once this is done, the shade inherits its master's place on the Prime Material Plane, ensuring its freedom. If a shade cannot slay its double within a month's time, it fades from existence. A creature slain by its shade cannot be raised from the dead, as its soul has been consumed by its shadow-self.

"Shade" is a template that can be applied to any humanoid creature born to the Prime Material Plane.

Prerequisites: Humanoid

Shade

Elite Lurker

Humanoid

XP Elite

Senses Darkvision

Defenses +2 AC; +1 Reflex, +1 Will

Saving Throws +2

Action Points 1

Hit Points 6 per level + Constitution score

Powers

Shadow Walk (minor; encounter) ♦ **Illusion, Teleportation**

The shade shifts 3 and is invisible until the end of its next turn.

Dark Challenge

When a shade strikes its master in melee, its master is marked until the end of the shade's next turn.

The appointed hour drew nigh, when the Unhappy One will bend to my will, and the mystery of the unknown will at last be revealed. We shall not invoke his name, for fear of drawing his wrath, or worse, the envy of his age-old foes. Therefore, as in days of yore, he shall remain unnamed.

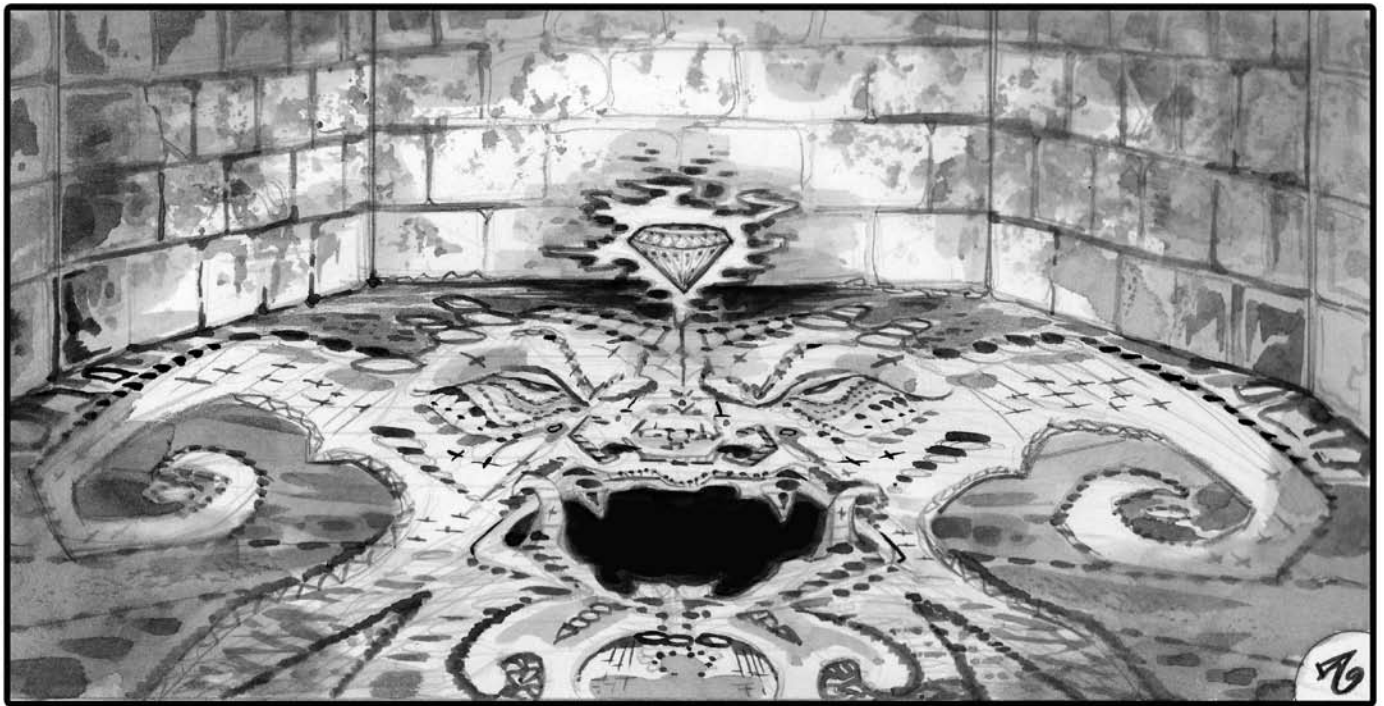
The Curse - long have I heard it whispered among the desperate swamp-folk, but now I see that it is much more than their foul breeding practices. It is borne by the Spire that impious Hui, and by those foolish enough to invoke His name. But the Curse also brings power, at obscene cost, but when was it ever not so? For those will rule must always rise from the earth.

The phylactery is mine now. It is a simple thing, of dried clay and mud, easily overlooked and forgotten. To think, Hui is like the power of destruction, mastery over the One.

Spide eggs and maggots, beneath my skin. It smells of rot, but to my senses it is the scent of triumph.

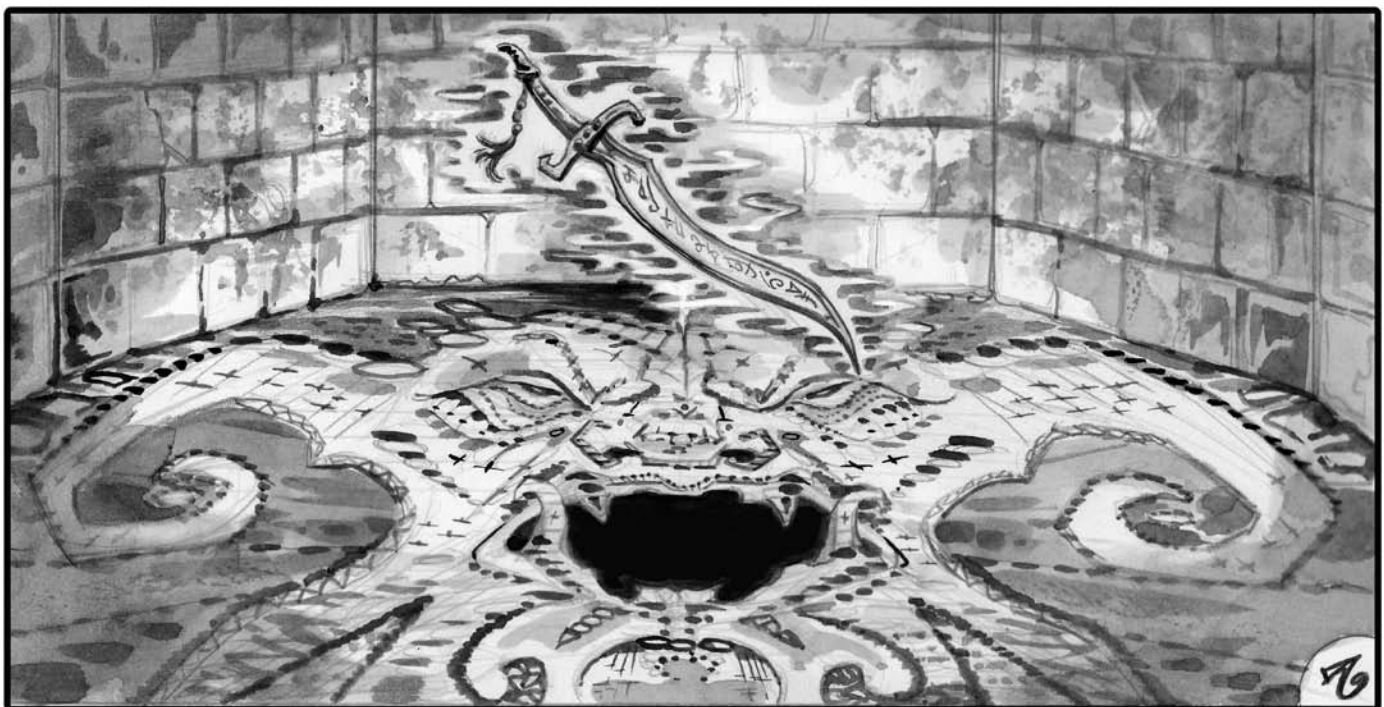
The time for ascension is upon me, when all will be right in the Heavens, and I shall make the world according to my will.

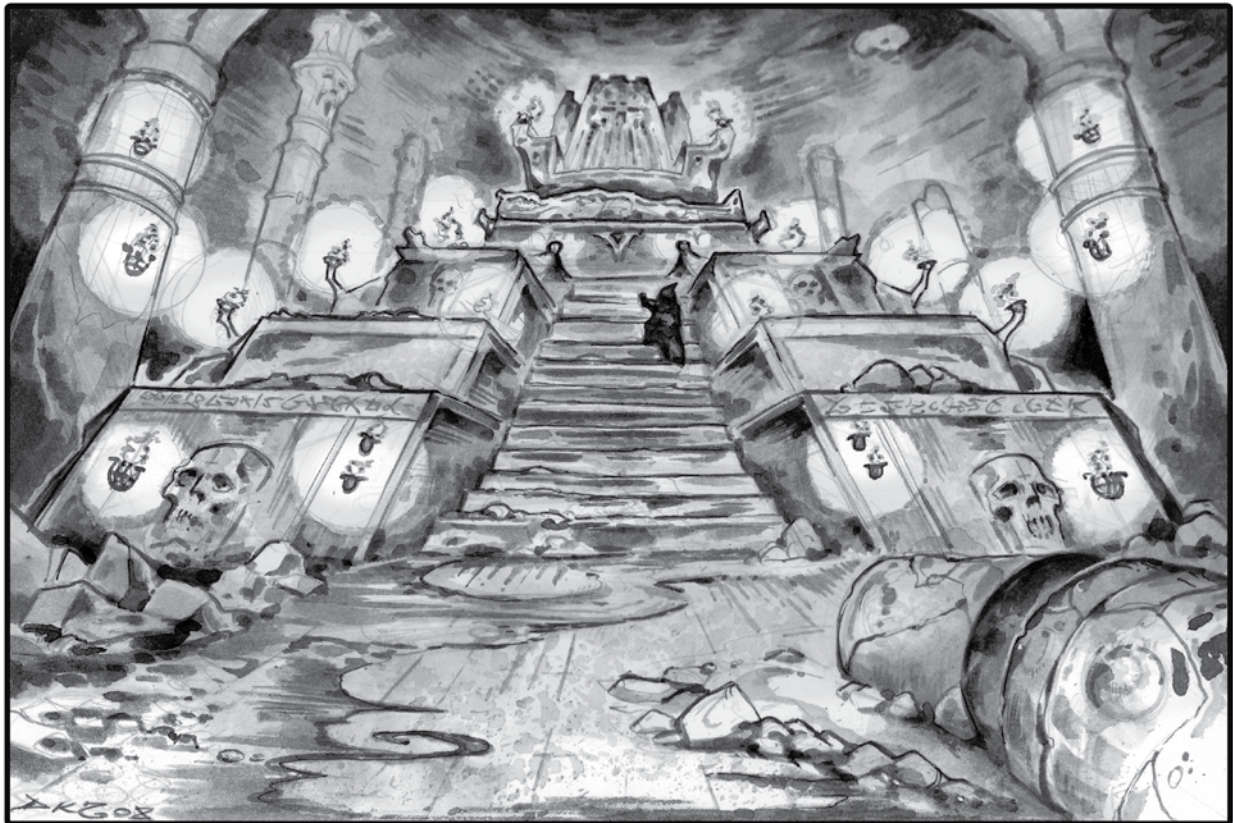
He calls out, I must answer. ~



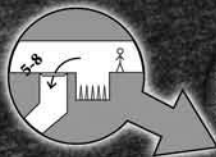
HANDOUT B

HANDOUT C





HANDOUT D



S-7

S

S-6

S-3

S-3

S-4

S-2

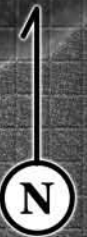
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S-5

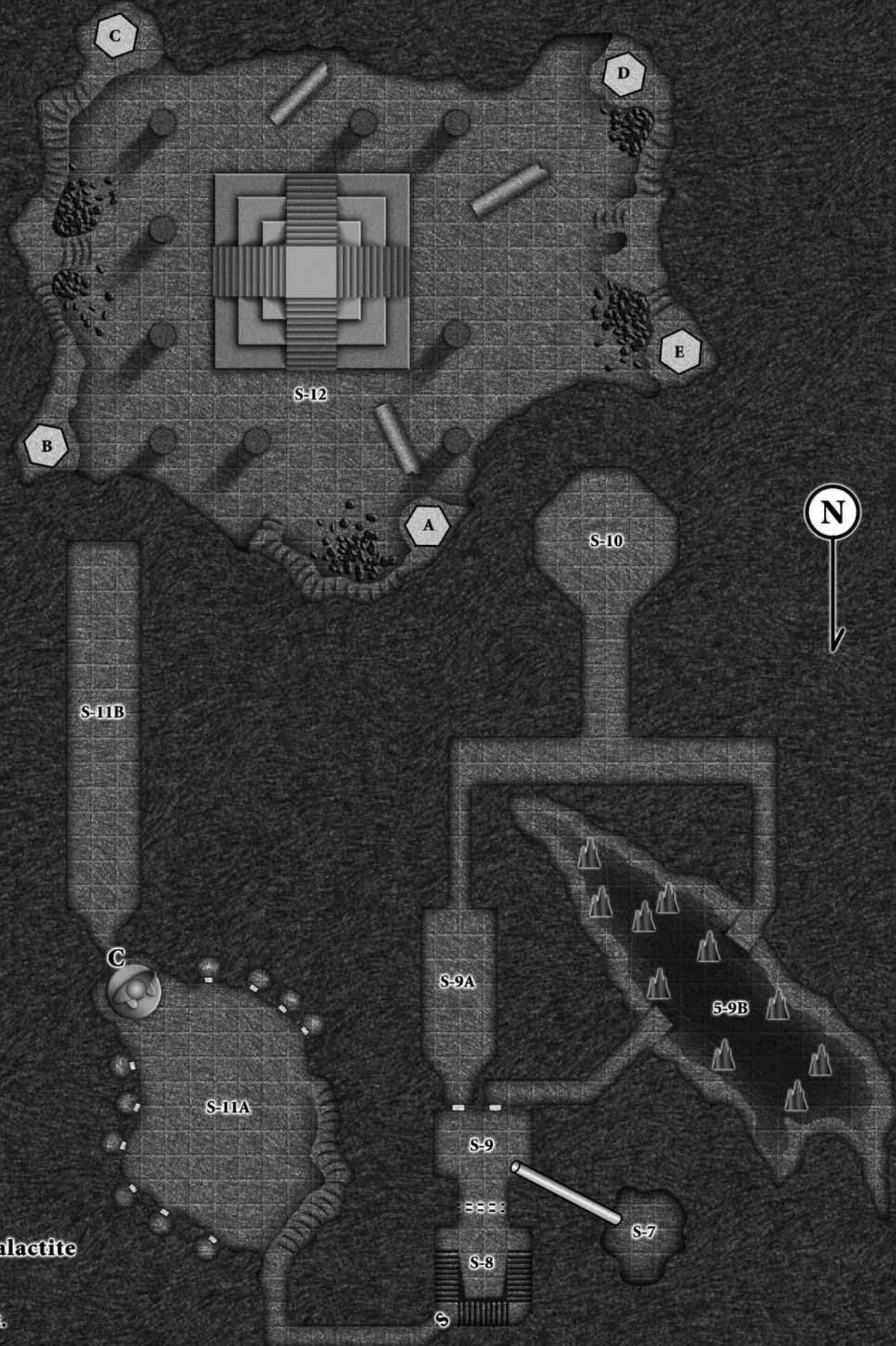
S-1


S-1


□ = 5 ft.



Player Start



 = stalactite

 = 5 ft.

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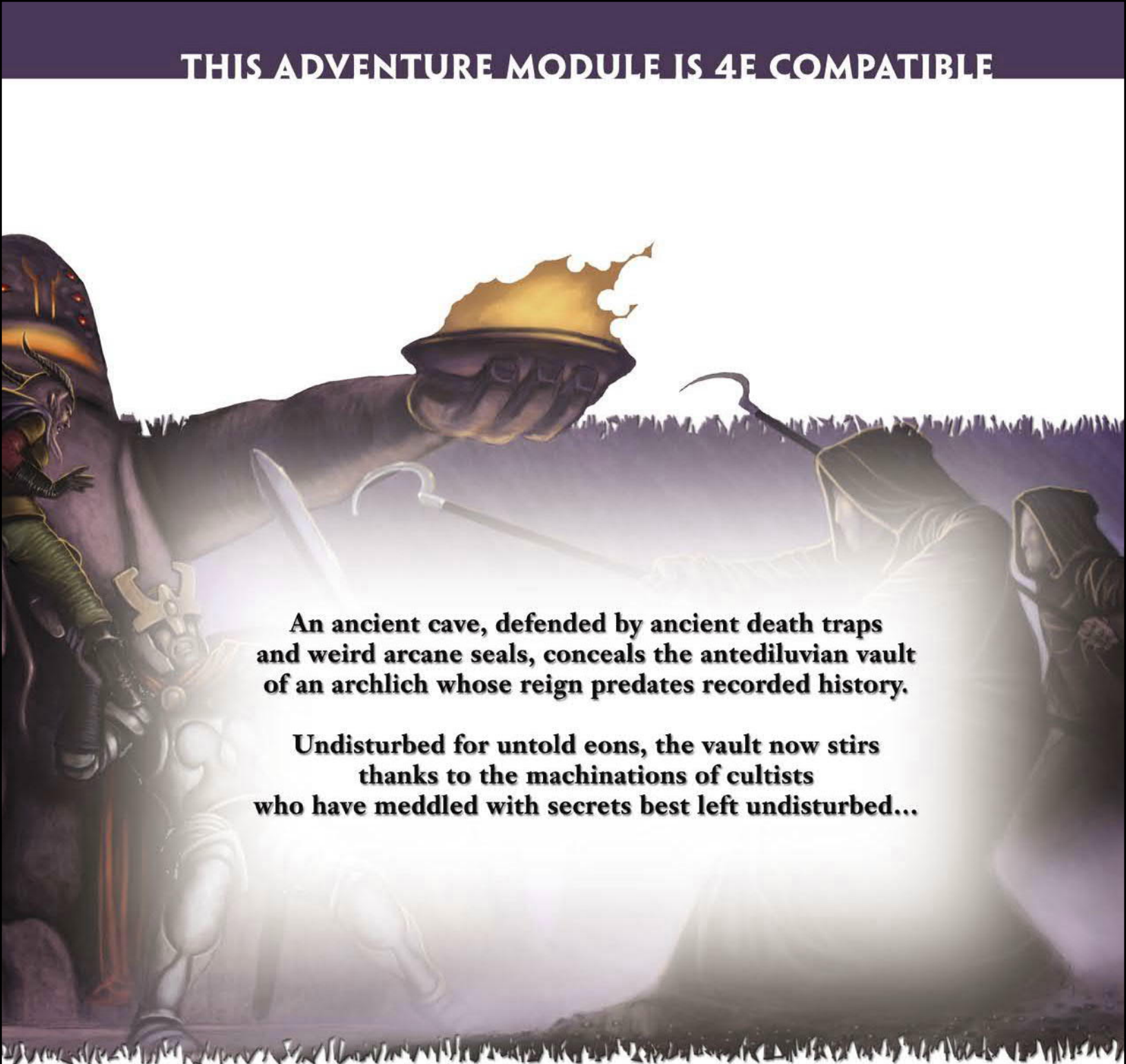
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