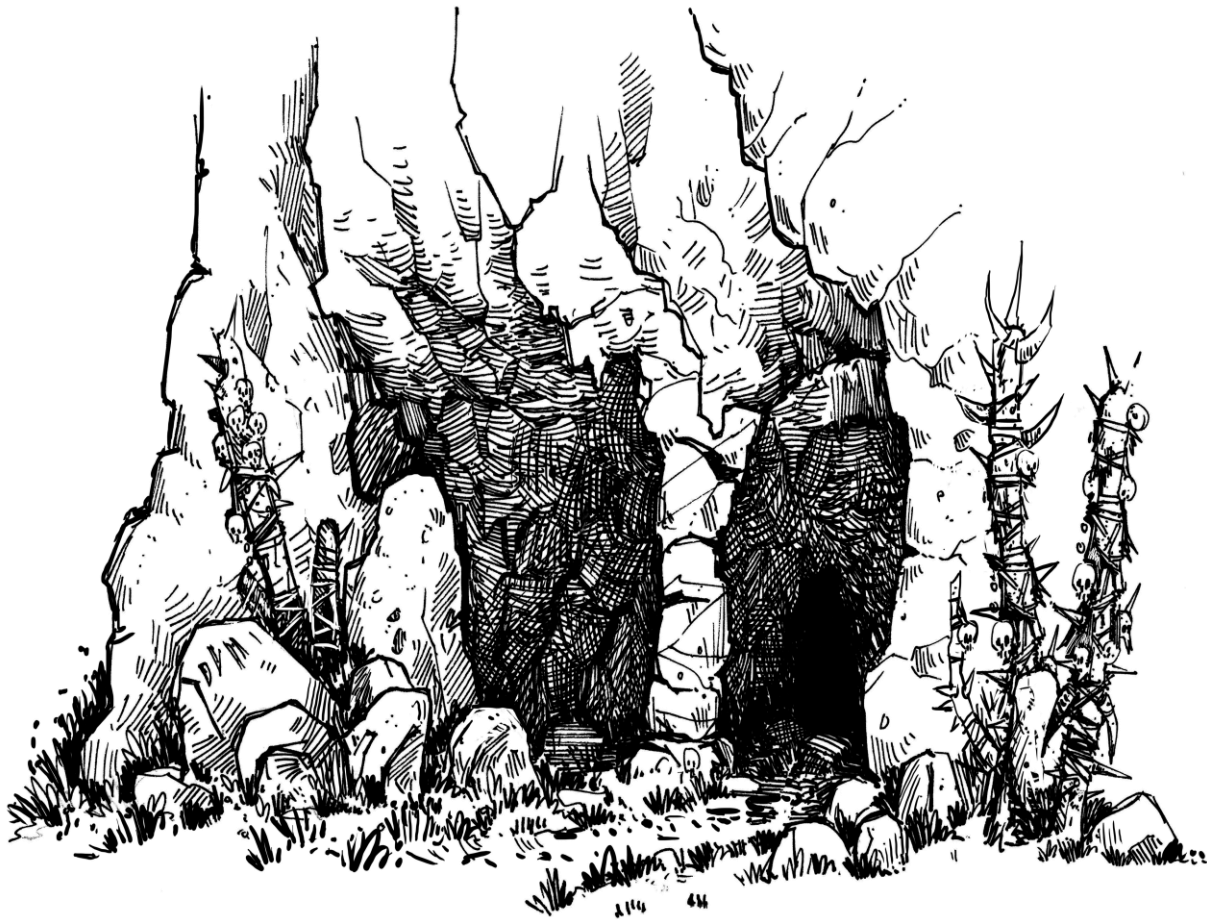


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# CAVERNS OF MELUSIAH



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# CAVERNS OF MELUSIAH

## *Rumours & Hooks:*

There are reports of a band of brigands camping in a large cave complex in the mountains, preying on traders and other travellers.

A historian named *Ebernook*, a resident of *Dol-Karok* is seeking the *Sceptre of Melusiah*, said to be buried in a shallow grave in a cave complex in the northern mountains. Ebernook is willing to pay generously for the sceptre's retrieval.

## Overview

The *Caverns of Melusiah* are currently occupied by two distinct groups; a band of brigands and a colony of giant ants.

The brigands live in the western part of the complex, and have done so for years. They generally keep the western side of Areas 7 & 8 (Map p.3) covered in a unique herbal sludge (mostly glue, salt and vinegar), including on the walls and ceiling, which the ants find highly repugnant and stay away from. From time to time however, when the bandits wish to dissuade authorities, bounty hunters or other creatures from exploring too closely, they draw the barrier back to the southernmost passages of Areas 3 & 6, allowing the ants to scavenge outside and scare off any unwanted visitors.

The 3d10+20 brigands are led by *Brin Pentegast*, a long time outlaw and charismatic leader, negotiator and thief.

Pentegast is always on the lookout for a good mark, fully aware that her men will follow her only as long as she keeps providing opportunities for gold. Over the years she has amassed a small fortune, robbing traders, explorers and anyone else she can get her grimy mitts on.

The giant ant colony is comprised of workers, soldiers and a single queen. Only the tip of the hive is visible on the eastern map, the vast majority of its twisting tunnels can only be

reached via the large tunnel in Area 12. For the most part, the ants forage using openings spread further across the mountains, or hunt for food below ground.

Area 12 however is favoured by the queen as a place to rest and lay her eggs, untroubled by the bustle of her hive.

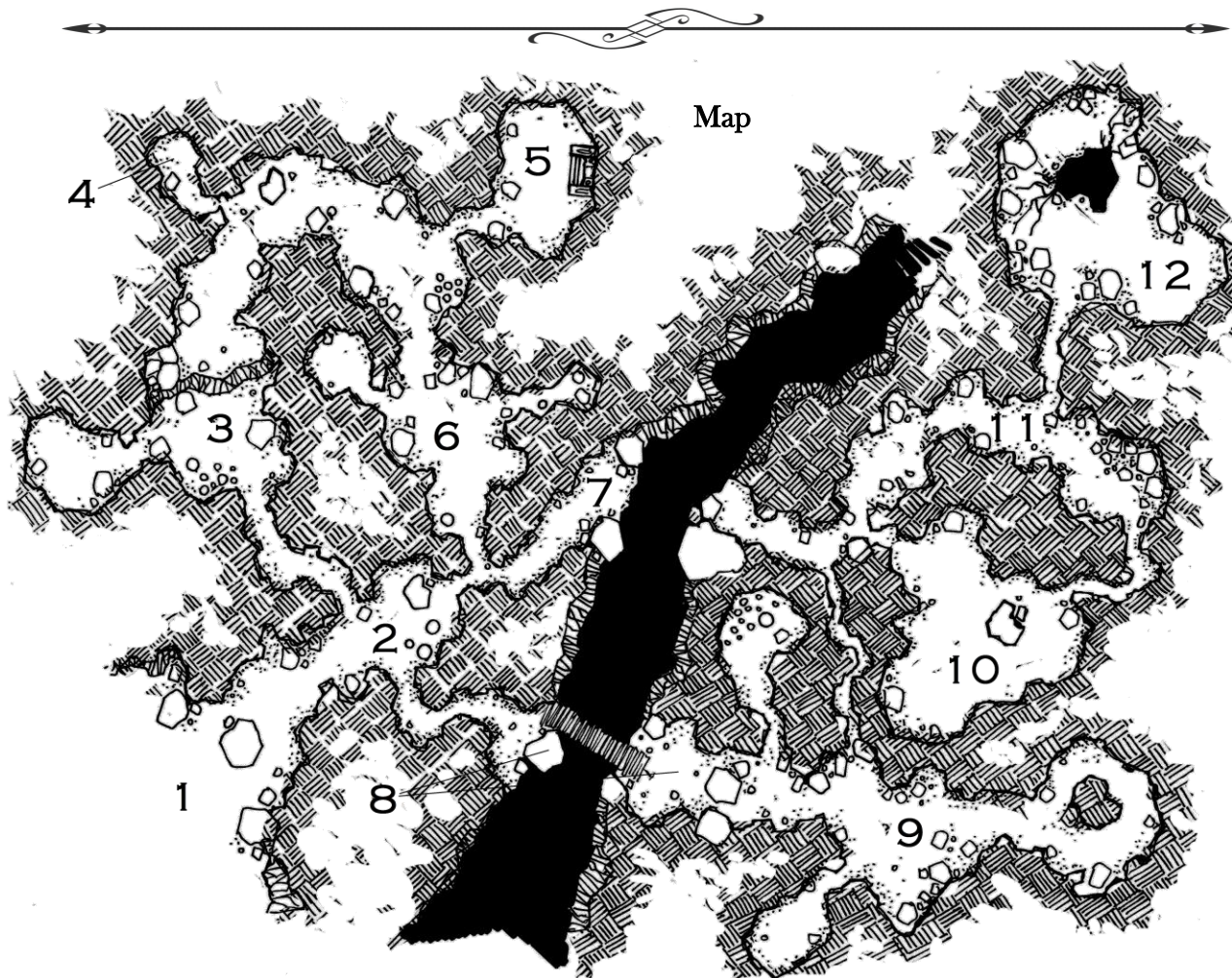
## Random Encounters (Western Caves)

While the party is exploring the western caverns, there is a 20% chance of a random encounter every 15 minutes (or other time period as determined by the GM). If an encounter occurs, roll 1d6:

- (1) 2d6 bandits from Area 6 can be heard joking and jostling, about to emerge from a nearby corridor.
- (2) A strong wind suddenly blows through the corridor. The adventurers feel the hair on the back of their necks stand up involuntarily, but as quickly as it appears, the howling wind vanishes.



- (3) 1d10+10 bandits return to base, carrying sacks of recent spoils! They are loud and cheerful, drinking stolen ale and feasting on stolen pies. They will take a very dim view of any adventurers slinking through their home.



- (4) 2d4 bandits are arguing over loot or women. They are distracted and in a foul mood, either way.
- (5) A heavily inebriated, snoring bandit, leaning up against a wall, empty flagon in his hand.
- (6) A low, menacing chittering and chirping noise echoes through the complex (a giant ant, testing out the barrier, to its horror).

### Area 1 - Cave Mouth

The cavern entrance is marked with a number of beastmen poles adorned with wooden spikes and the skulls of animals and people. Pentegast finds the warning poles tend to keep most curious beastmen or other folk away.

The interior of the cavern is dry but cool, loosely gravelled and mostly quiet. The occasional breeze filters through, but the air is mostly still.

Map

The entry is unlit and extends about 30 ft. Passages are generally 5 - 6 ft high, while the caverns are about 10 - 15 ft tall.

### Area 2 - Entry Chamber

This 20 ft natural cavern is decorated with dark stalagmites. In the north western corner are tucked three torches with flint and steel. Torchlight can be seen flickering in the northern passages. The narrow southern passage is completely dark and has a strange vinegar like smell. During the day, there is a 70% chance of a bandit sentry in the shadows beyond the daylight from Area 1. At night the bandits hole up in Area 3, 5 and 6.

### Area 3 - Living Area A

This oval chamber is approximately 20 ft wide, 35 ft long and 15 ft high. The middle is horizontally divided by a sharp 5 ft rise.

This living area is lit by lanterns placed on boulders, decorated with sleeping bags, crates of

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food (mostly salted fish, hard tack and other long lasting rations) and barrels of alcohol.

At least 10 bandits are here at any one time, sleeping, eating or socialising. They are wary of any well armed intruders, but bolstered by numbers, and will call for help from Area 6 if required. A charismatic adventurer might be able to persuade the bandits to trade or exchange information, rather than attack (at least temporarily).

### *Bandit*

Armor Class: 11 (leather)

Hit Dice: 1

Attacks: Weapon

Nat 19: as weapon

S:12 D:11 C:11 I:10 P: 10 W:10 Ch:10

*Luck*: 4

Move: 30 ft

The bandits are armed with a mix of shortswords, maces and axes. All possess short or long bows, 15 arrows, a firepot and a barrier flask (to scare off any rogue giant ants). They will spread out, take cover behind barrels or boulders, and fire on intruders. Any loud disturbance brings help from Area 6.

A search of the sleeping bags and general camping gear in this area produces 1 x Carry Loot (LFG p.136).

### **Area 4 - Melusiah's Cairn**

This 10 ft by 5 ft niche is the ancient grave of a warlock named *Melusiah*, marked with a low, oblong shaped cairn of white rock. Inside the grave are fragile bones and a dirty elm sceptre with an orb at one end. The sceptre grants the user a *Stoneskin* effect once per week (no action), but the user suffers a minor madness (a Will check resists).



Anyone entering the chamber feels an immediate sense of unease; the hairs on their neck stand up and they shudder involuntarily. Pentegast's men

are under pain of death orders not to disturb the grave, which they hold cursed.

Removing a single stone causes the air temperature to drop. Removing any more releases Melusiah's spirit. The ghost attacks anyone in the complex, seeking to drain their life utterly or drive them out. It then haunts Areas 1-7.

### *Melusiah*

Armor Class: 12

Hit Dice: 8

Attacks: Touch (1d4 + special)

Nat 19: the target ages twice as much as usual.

S:- D:15 C:- I:10 P: 13 W:17 Ch:3

*Luck*: 9

Move: 30 ft



Ghosts are *Incorporeal*, able to pass through objects, and are harmed only by magic or cold iron weapons. A ghost's awful caress instantly ages the target 3d10 years (no *Luck* save permitted) and requires a *Luck* (Will) save to resist gaining a serious madness trait. If a target is aged more than its expected lifespan, it dies a desiccated husk.

Melusiah is bound to the world by eternal hatred for his long dead son, who betrayed him to witch hunters. If the bones of his son (buried elsewhere

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in the mountains) are presented to him, he vanishes forever.

### Area 5 – Pentegast’s Quarters

This 15 ft wide by 20 ft long cavern has a high 20 ft ceiling. The cave is furnished with a table, chairs, a low bunk and three 5 ft strongboxes. There is a 50% chance that Pentegast is in her quarters with 1d3 bandits.

The bandit leader is a canny, brave and formidable warrior. She is greedy at heart however, and would rather put her men on the line than herself. She is currently plotting to convert their loot to gemstones (or some other easily transported valuable), and steal away, leaving her men high and dry.

#### *Brin Pentegast*

Armor Class: 14 (leather)

Hit Dice: 4+2

Attacks: Shortbow/Arrow (1d6+3)

Nat 19: as weapon

S:13 D:18 C:11 I:14 P: 13 W:14 Ch:16

*Luck:* 7

Move: 30 ft

Pentegast has Backstab, Skirmisher and Finisher like a 4<sup>th</sup> level rogue, and may use the following Tricks & Techniques (up to twice per combat): *Hidden Blade*, *Quick Reflexes*, *Smoke Bomb* and *Unseen Whip*.

The bandit leader is armed with a short bow, 24 arrows and a hidden boot blade. She wields her bow like a club, and stabs with her arrows like knives, as if they were melee weapons at no penalty.

Pentegast might be willing to hire the PCs to do some work for her, particularly caravan scouting or beastman clearing. If her life is in danger, she is not above bargaining for it, offering for example the combination codes for the strongboxes, or *Gunter’s* story (see Area 10).

The three steel strongboxes have combination locks which only Pentegast knows the codes to. Failing to open or pick the lock activates a potent poison needle (*Luck* (Con) save, or suffer 1d6

damage each round for 1d6 rounds). The strongboxes can be broken open with sufficient time and the right tools. The boxes contain 1 x 4 HD Lair Treasure (LFG p.140), 1 x Potion (LFG p.150) and 1 x Valuables (LFG p.147).

### Area 6 – Living Area B

This 20 ft wide by 30 ft long cavern has a high 15ft ceiling. The cave is furnished similarly to Area 3, with sleeping bags, food, etc, but also some tables, chairs and even a bookshelf with some tattered looking tomes (various mundane topics, including languages, cooking and jewellery).

At least 3d6 bandits are here at any one time, socialising or sleeping. A search of the room turns up 1 x Carry Loot (LFG p.136).

### Area 7 – Chasm

This 5 ft wide by 30 ft long passage is unlit, and ends in a 15 ft wide chasm. The entire passage is lined with barrier sludge, which repels the ants.

The chasm is pitch black and descends more than 200 ft. Whether the chasm joins up with the ant hive, or extends elsewhere, is a matter for the GM.



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### Area 8 – Chasm Bridge

This 5 ft wide by 25 ft long twisting passage is unlit, and ends in a 20 ft wide chasm. The entire passage is lined with sticky barrier sludge, which repels the ants.

A rickety looking, 5 ft wide wooden bridge spans the chasm. The bandits have not destroyed the bridge because they sometimes lure the ants across to deal with curious authorities or other inconveniences (the ants can of course climb up the walls and ceiling, but also use the bridge). See Area 7 for the chasm details.

If the party cross the chasm, they find the eastern complex completely unlit. Strange clicking, scrabbling and chirping noises can be heard echoing further east, emanating from the darkness.

### Random Encounters (Eastern Caves)

While the party is exploring the eastern caverns, there is a 50% chance of a random encounter every 15 minutes (or as the GM determines). If an encounter occurs, roll 1d4:

- (1) 1d4+2 *Worker Ants* (p.7) appear from the darkness, skittering about with food or on the way to check on the hatchery. They have detected the adventurers' scent, and they smell delicious.
- (2) 1d3+1 *Soldier Ants* (p.7) charge out of the darkness, intent on killing the adventurers by ambush! They have hard, shiny carapaces, and their hooked mandibles drip with green, unhealthy looking fluid.
- (3) A small *Flesh Eating Fungoid* (p.7) slides into the torchlight, wobbling side to side as if being jostled by an invisible wind. The fungoid knows it is slow, and needs to lure prey to it, and will act accordingly.
- (4) A deep, tunnel reverberating chittering echoes through the tunnels, then abruptly stops (the queen voicing a command, or warning, to some of her drones).

### Area 9 – Main Hatchery

The entire southern part of the eastern complex, consisting of four large caves, are lined with 2 ft long, yellowy white giant ant eggs. Some of the more developed antlings can be seen wriggling beneath the skin of the translucent eggs.

There is no easy way (save climbing on the walls or ceiling, like giant ants do) to navigate through this area without risking disturbing a few of the eggs (a Dex check at -2 is required).

Disturbing the eggs has a 50% chance of hatching 1d3 antlings, which are very hungry and try to eat the party, all the while making cute clicking and chirping noises.



*Antling*

Armor Class: 10

Hit Dice: 1 hit point

Attacks: Bite (1d3)

Nat 19: The antling trips the target over by accident, but is squashed in the process

S:12 D:10 C:8 I:1 P:7 W:6 Ch:4

*Luck:* 3

Move 20 ft and may climb walls, ceilings etc

2 ft antlings are yet to grow into full adulthood, whether that is as a worker or soldier. They are born with an instinctive understanding of their role in the hive, and the chemical signals of other ants.

If any antlings are triggered, or the party otherwise draws attention to itself, 1d4 worker ants emerge from behind the large pillar in the eastern most corner to investigate (they are otherwise sleeping/resting in the warmest corner).

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*Ant, Giant (Worker)*

Armor Class: 13

Hit Dice: 2

Attacks: Bite (1d6)

Nat 19: The worker knocks the target prone.

S:16 D:10 C:16 I:1 P: 10 W:10 Ch:4

*Luck: 5*

Move 40 ft and may climb walls, ceilings etc

Workers may swarm a target, gaining +1 to hit for each additional ant beyond the first (maximum +4).

**Area 10 – New Egg Hatchery**

This 30 ft by 30 ft cavern houses the most recent batch of new eggs (only 1 ft long), 1d4+2 worker ants, and 1d4 soldier ant guards.

*Ant, Giant (Soldier)*

Armor Class: 15

Hit Dice: 3+3

Attacks: Bite (2d4 + poison)

Nat 19: the soldier spits acid on the target, causing 2d4 damage.

S:19 D:12 C:16 I:1 P:12 W:12 Ch:8

*Luck: 6*

Move: 40 ft and may climb walls, ceilings, etc

Soldier ants have a venomous bite that requires a *Luck* (Con) save or the target loses 1d4 Con. Soldiers may swarm a target, gaining +1 to hit for each additional ant beyond the first (maximum +4).

**Area 11 – Flesh Eating Fungoids**

This 35 ft long oblong chamber has a tall 20 ft ceiling. In the north eastern corner are 2d3 *Flesh Eating Fungoids*, sentient toadstools with teeth and jaws, that prefer meat to absorbing nutrients from the soil or other plants. There is a mix of adult and juvenile fungoids present (GM determines the mix).

The ants and the fungoids have formed a symbiotic relationship. The ants bring the fungoids food, and the fungoids shed viscous, brown spore that the insects find delicious.

In recent weeks, a rogue ant managed to cross the barrier and snatched *Gunter*, the unlucky bandit on sentry duty in Area 2 at the time. Gunter was delivered to the fungoids and swiftly devoured. All that remains is his chainmail shirt, a shield and a *cold iron hammer* (bearing the sigil of *House Lorca*, one of the five great trading houses of *Dol-Karok*, the mountain fortress).

The fungoids are pretty much always hungry, and will attack any humans entering this area.

*Flesh Eating Fungoid (Adult)*

No. Appearing: 2d4

Armor Class: 10

Hit Dice: 7

Attacks: Bite (2d6+2)

Nat 19: special

S:19 D:5 C:16 I:1 P:10 W:14 Ch:4

*Luck: 9*

Move 20 ft and may climb walls, ceilings etc

These 15 ft giant toadstools have jaws and teeth, and are able to uproot and move across the ground, walls and ceiling with sticky appendages. They grow underground or in dark, wet places, out of direct sunlight. Fungoids prefer flesh to absorbing nutrients via the soil or other plants, but are slow moving, and either need to trap or catch prey unawares. On a natural 19, the toadstool blasts the target with toxic spores, causing the target to lose 1 HD every 1d12 hours for 1d4 days. An apothecary with the right healing herbs may be able to neutralise the poison.

*Flesh Eating Fungoid (Juvenile)*

No. Appearing: 1d6

Armor Class: 10

Hit Dice: 1

Attacks: Bite (1d6)

Nat 19: the fungoid attaches a sticky appendage to the target, preventing it from withdrawing.

S:12 D:5 C:10 I:1 P:6 W:10 Ch:4

*Luck: 4*

Move 10 ft and may climb walls, ceilings etc

The small fungoid is 4 ft tall, but otherwise similar to the giant version. A small fungoid will

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grow into a giant one over about five years, assuming conditions are favourable.

### Area 12 – Queen’s Chamber

This 35 ft by 30 ft cavern has a 25 ft ceiling. The 10 ft hole to the north is a long tunnel to the hive proper, where 2d100 giant ants (not including larvae) live.

The Queen rests here from time to time, favouring the occasional surface breeze and relative quiet. Eggs that are laid here are carried to Areas 9 and 10 by workers (the queen cannot squeeze through the southern tunnel).

There is a 80% chance the queen is present. If so, there is a 50% chance she is asleep or resting, unless the party has made their presence known. The queen will not hesitate to exterminate any human intruders in her domain, issuing a deafening chittering noise to summon 2d10 soldiers to aid her (appearing in 1d4 rounds).

#### *Ant, Giant (Queen)*

No. Appearing: 1

Armor Class: 16

Hit Dice: 6

Attacks: Bite (3d4 + special) and Stinger (poison)

Nat 19: special.

S:19 D:8 C:19 I:1 P:15 W:15 Ch:16

*Luck*: 8

Move: 30 ft and may climb walls, ceilings, etc

On an 18+ attack roll, the victim is crushed in the queen’s mandibles, suffering 3d6 damage each turn until freed (the victim may spend their action to make an opposed Str check to escape). The Queen’s stinger carries a potent poison causing 1d4 Con loss (*Luck* (Con) save for half).

The queen has no treasure as such, but adventurers able to gather up most of the live giant ant eggs, or antlings, might find buyers trading in exotic insects, foodstuffs or potion makers (to the value of 1d6 x 100 gp + 700 gp).

#### Aftermath

If the bandits are cleared, the any colony eventually takes over (if Melusiah remains, his ghost haunts Areas 3-6, which the ants stay clear of).

If Pentegast survives, she quickly puts her final plans into action, converting most of the loot to gems and jewellery before fleeing. Her men fight over whatever baubles are left before disbanding shortly thereafter. One or more brigands might stick together in an attempt to track down the party, and/or Pentegast, seeking revenge.



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