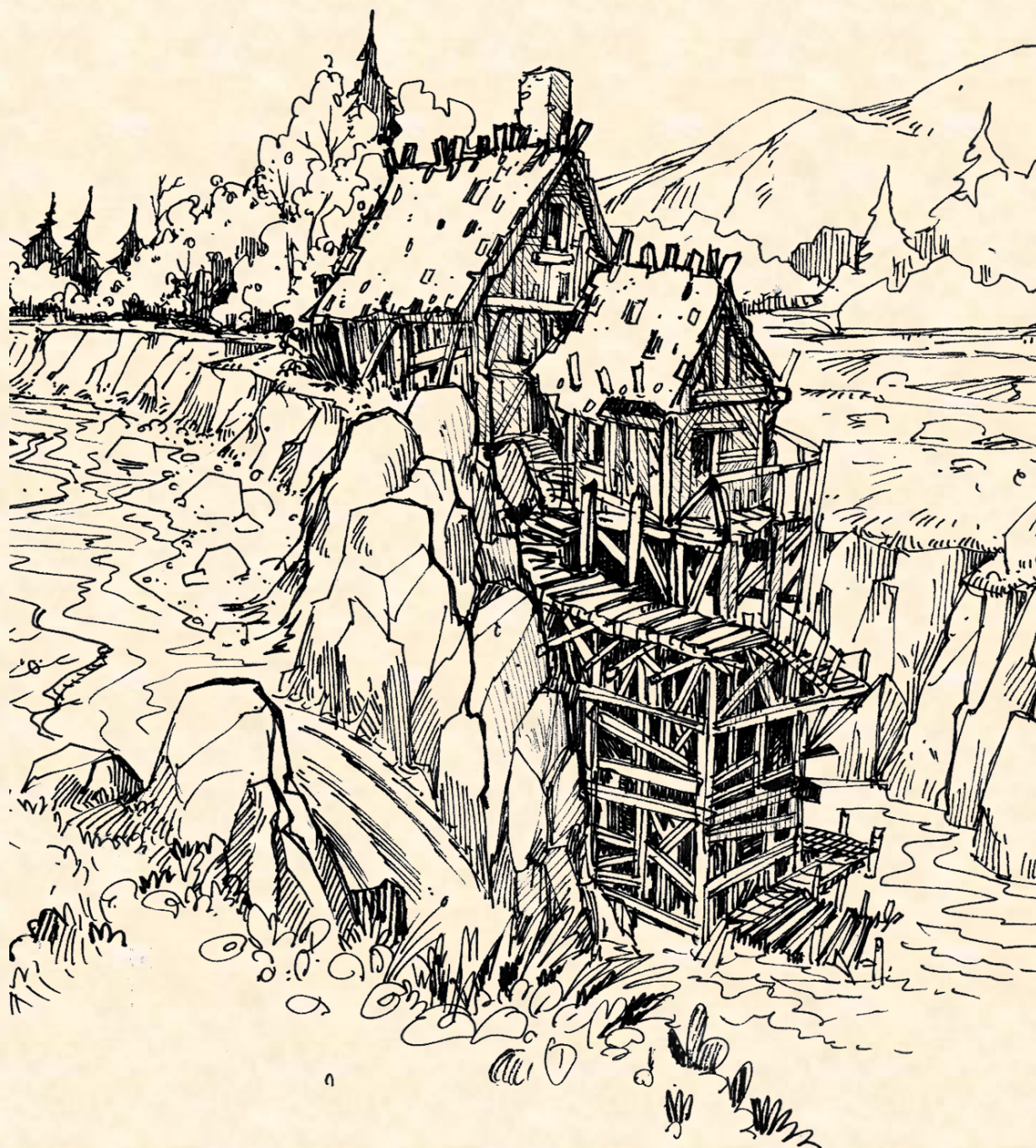

CURSE OF THE SALT QUEEN



Curse of the Salt Queen

Rumours & Hooks

House Vorrox is looking for capable warriors to scout and secure a lost electrum mine situated on the banks of the *Fennorn River*.

In the journal of a dead *Shenzu* explorer is reference to the *Xaolung* blade (Sun Dragon Sword), an enchanted scimitar of the *Wing Mai Dynasty*. The journal suggests the blade last belonged to *Aguera Zargor*, an exile said to be buried in *Fennorn's Run*.

Fennorn's Run

Two hundred years ago, *House Zargor* of the *Karoks* (a mountain people of great wealth and long age, slavers of the last remaining dwarves) abandoned a small but productive mine of rare *electrum*¹ known as *Fennorn's Run*, situated along the banks of the *Fennorn River*.

The mine was forsaken because *Agueda Zargor*, noble daughter of the House, was ousted as a witch, and fled into the deep shafts to escape the pyre. Despite *Agueda's* best efforts, bounty hunters eventually cornered her, and in desperation the sorceress locked herself in magical stasis forever. Or so she believed.

12 months ago, unwitting prospectors from *Crow's Keep* reopened the mine, clearing blocked passages and breaking the hidden rune seals maintaining the stasis.

¹ In this deposit, the alloy of gold, silver and copper exhibits a reddish-yellow hue; electrum weapons count as *silvered*, but not armour.

Agueda awoke, but where a striking female once slept, now emerged a twisted figment of blasphemous sorcery; a half serpent abomination, with writhing, reptilian hair, and a gaze that transforms flesh into salt!

Filled with anguish, and in the grip of unbridled horror, the *Medusa* reaped bloody vengeance upon all nearby; every miner, scout, guardsman, horse and hound were brutally and wantonly slaughtered, or transmuted into salt and scattered to the winds.

Now the *Morduke* family, overseers of the prospecting venture, want to know what has happened to their caravan. They are willing to pay 600 gp, or provide some rare information the party desires (the *Mordukes* are known for their trade in hard to get information and secrets), in return for securing the mine.



The PCs might become involved in this adventure by (i) being hired by *Arna Morduke* (40's, female, short brunette hair, piercing green eyes, fond of headscarves) to clear the complex as noted above, (ii) following up an old text about *Agueda the Accursed* and the *Xaolung* scimitar, which she was said to possess, or (iii) stumble across the mine in their travels.

Wilderness Encounters

The mine is located deep in the *Drelnor Forest*, nestled between a little known branch of the *Fennorn River*.

Drelnor Forest an ancient woodland, a prodigious mix of gigantic oak, yew and willow trees, its enormous canopy thick and lustrous with age. The occasional beam of sunlight stretches to the overgrown floor, but for the most part, the trees and nettled undergrowth are dim and shrouded in half-light. The air here is cool, loud with insect calls and strong with the scent of mouldering leaves.

Travel time on foot is approximately 8 days trek, or half that by ship or boat. There is a 30% chance of a random encounter every 12 hours. If an encounter occurs roll on the appropriate table below (add 2 during the last two days of travel if on foot)

Forest Travel (d8):

1. A series of 2d4 tree snares have been concealed nearby, rigged to hoist targets 10 ft into the air (Dex (Acrobatics) check negates). A trapped character must make a *Luck* (Con) save or lose 1 Con due to muscle strain.
2. A hunting party of 4d6 *Skorn* (Beastmen, Midlands p.104) are laying in ambush, hoping to pepper the PCs with javelins before moving in to brain them with clubs. After 1d6 rounds of fighting, a further 2d4 reinforcements appear from a random direction.
3. An injured *Griffon* (LFG p.113) is curled up by a large tree, a thuel (barbarian) arrow stuck between its shoulder blades. The beast is obviously in pain, but unable to remove the arrow itself.
4. Bones of ancient travellers are scattered in a thick grove, devoured by some monster of the distant past. The bones have already been picked over, but careful searching (Perc check) reveals something buried (1 x Trinkets & Curios LFG p.141).
5. Some of the trees in this area are truly enormous, trunks wider than huts and taller than can be seen, the canopy blocking out the sun entirely. PCs will need their own light source to see here. Lurking in the high branches are 3d6 hungry *Giant Spiders* (LFG p.125). There is a 50% chance of a *Broodmother* (HD 9, L10, 3d6 + poison, *Boss Monster*) dozing by her eggs. If the spiders are destroyed, web shrouded corpses conceal 1 x Carry Loot (LFG p.136).
6. Amongst cluttered trees an elder obelisk may be seen. Aged, grey crumbling steps descend to a small flagstoned courtyard, long overgrown. In the centre stands a stone door of glass like obsidian, covered in moss, lichen and creepers. If the moss is scraped clear, elvish script from antiquity is revealed (long dead and forgotten dialect). The writing might be a

warning, a blessing, a name, or instructions on how to open the door. There is a 50% chance of *Fey Creeper* guardians (Midlands p.98).

7. Grinding and snapping noises may be heard in nearby trees (Perc (Detection) check), along with quiet arguing. *Sugarth*, an *Ettin* (LFG p.108) is talking to itself while it sucks the marrow from a pair of dead *thuels*. The giant carries a sack of spoils (1 x Valuables LFG p.147).



8. 3d10 *Thuels* (*Berserkers* LFG p.114) of the *Stonetree* tribe are hunting in this area, and will not allow outsiders passage. Their leader, *Khugo* (female, Barb 4), might be persuaded otherwise with gems or other obvious valuables. If battle breaks out, the *thuels* sound their horns, drawing another 4d10

reinforcements with bows and axes. 2 x Carry Loot (LFG p.136) if defeated.

9. *Gorgarsa*, the *Witch of Drelnor* (Magic User 7, Midlands p.181) is nearby. On the ground by a pile of stacked stones is the bloody corpse of a small child, its throat cut. Detect Magic used in this area radiates abjuration and necromancy. The witch's tracks are about half a day old (Perc (Wilderness Lore) check to follow).
10. 1d3+1 human size pillars of salt are present in a sheltered grove, recent victims of *Agueda*. The once lifelike statues have been rained upon and greatly eroded. Careful examination (Perc (Detection) check) might reveal tell tale details however (an ear, a button, etc).

River Travel (d8):

1. Reroll if more than 1 day from a city, otherwise swift pirate ship the *Amarest* seeks to board (carrack, 2d10 + 40 crew, as *Bandit* LFG p.114). *Captain Hawker* (Rogue 5) will take prisoners if he thinks he can ransom or sell them, or flee is reduced to 50% crew. If the pirates are defeated, 1 x 4 HD Lair Treasure (LFG p.140, and perhaps the *Amarest*).
2. 2d4 canoes, each carrying 1d4 *Thuels* (*Berserker* LFG p.114) armed with bows and spears, appear from around a bend or launch from overgrown shore to intercept the PC vessel.
3. 2d6 *Argosan Stranglers* (Midlands p.96) swim beneath the water to latch onto the ship's hull. They strike at night or when an opportunity presents itself. If

the party vessel is small, they attack immediately instead.

1d6 Giant Sea Serpents inside (as Giant Serpent LFG p. 122 but Swim 120 ft).

4. 1d4 *Giant Eagles* (LFG p.106) appear from high overhead cloud. If there is a person in a crow's nest/rigging, they swoop down, hoping to grab him/her and fly back to their nest.
5. A rotting 18 ft *Giant Crocodile* corpse (LFG p.103) floats by, severed in two by something truly colossal.
6. In the darkest part of the night, an ink black form rises from the depths; the spirit of a drowned sailor. Slowly but surely, other spirits rise, humanoid shapes but lacking any identifying details. The accursed crew glide through the ship/vessel, as if searching for something, then depart. Passengers require a *Luck* (Will) save to avoid touching the shades, which cause 1d2 level loss until the adventure ends (striking at them with silvered or magical weapons only draws their ire). If the spirits are presented with a new map, they disappear immediately (gain 1 maximum *Luck* permanently).
7. The ship becomes caught on hidden rocks, tearing open the hull. Without the proper tools and supplies, there is no prospect of the ship continuing its journey. A Group *Luck* save reduces the damage to a manageable level, but doubles travel times.
8. An ancient wreck appears in the morning fog, the derelict remains of some ancient mariner. Searching the wreck turns up 1 x Valuables (LFG p. 147). 50% chance of

Fennorn's Run

The mine is located at a branch in the Fennorn River, a series of connected wooden structures perched beside a 50 ft waterfall.

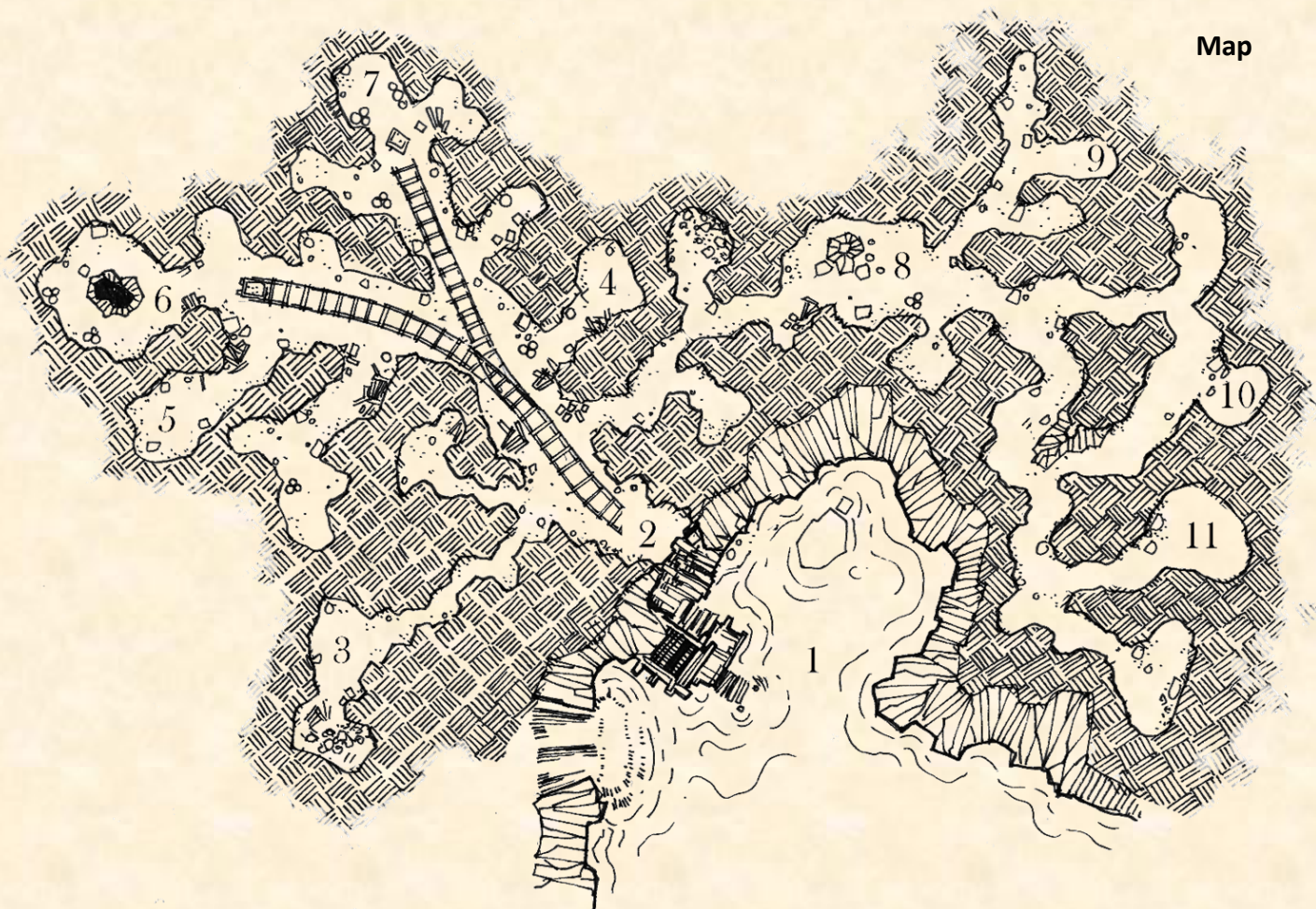
The buildings are now old, weather beaten and greatly decayed, although there are signs of recent repair (the Urgot have made some improvements over the last year, see below). Seeking to scale the outside, rather than use the climbing stairs and platforms is certainly possible, but requires a Str (Athletics) check (or fall 1d4 x 10 feet into the water). The river is fast and will swiftly carry away swimmers (Str (Athletics) check if against the current, and a Con check to avoid losing 1 Con).

The Salt Queen

Drawn as they are to all things dark and supernatural, Agueda's twisted form soon called to an Urgot tribe (mutant humans with cursed bloodlines, suffering under ancient pacts with dark forces) hiding in remote corners.

Emerging from the gloom, the accursed humans took to worshipping the medusa as their capricious goddess, offering tithes and sacrifices for her favour and protection. Over time, the urgots developed a taste for Agueda's salt, and now greedily imbibe it at every opportunity (the salt's eldritch composition somehow infuses the mutants with a manic like vigour).

In this instance, the urgots' mutation manifests as grey skinned, hairless humanoids, mouths filled with sharp canine teeth. A dull oil is exuded through their pores, giving off a unpleasant stench (Agueda is immune).



Urgot, AC 11, HD 1+4, Club 1d6+1 or Bite 1d6+1, 19: as weapon, S13 D13 C16 I7 P9 W12 Ch6, L5, Mv 30 ft. A group of urgot may issue a simultaneous howl or chitter once/day, causing creatures within 20 ft to suffer a minor madness (Luck (Will) save resists). Moving within 5 ft requires a *Luck* (Con) save or the urgot's stench imposes disad on the target's next roll (a successful save renders the target immune to urgot stench for ½ hour).

The urgot did have an Urgozer when they first encountered Agueda, but she was one of the first to be turned to salt, and devoured by the rest of the tribe.

Unmarked Chambers

If the party explores an unmarked chamber, the GM might wish to roll 2d6 to determine the contents:

2: *Electrum ore vein* worth 1d6 x 200 gp.

3-4: *Lurking monster* (1d4): (i) Giant spider, (ii) Giant Centipede, (iii) 1d4 Xornlings, (iv) Rock Grinder bursts out of a wall.

5: *Mushroom pod*. If ingested, 50% chance grants adv on Perc checks due to enhanced senses, otherwise imposes disad (clouded senses). The effect lasts 1d2 months.

6-8: *Dry Vein*. 30% chance of 2d4 Urgot.

9-10: *Lurking monster* (1d4): (i) Giant spider, (ii) Giant Centipede, (iii) 1d4 Xornlings, (iv) Rock Grinder bursts out of a wall.

11: A recent victim was turned to salt here traces of which remain on the floor (most of the salt has been eaten by urgots).

12: *Agueda*. The medusa is about to enter this area, or is already here, on an errand, looking for intruders, or on the way to Area 1, 5, or 10.

Area 1 – Wooden Cabins

Entry to the mine is via a tunnel at the top of the 50 ft wooden cabins structure (or Area 6 tunnel), made up of several connected buildings and walkways. Most of the stairs have been repaired by the urgots but the occasional plank is rotted through, and will fall away if stepped upon (noisy, but not dangerous).

Entering the cabins via the dock will almost certainly be noticed by 1d4 urgots sentries. At least one of these will alert others in the complex, while the remainder stay behind to observe the PCs' approach. If they get the chance, the sentries will drop heavy rocks on the PCs as they ascend (*Luck* (Dex) save or 2d6 damage). Concealed at the base of the dock are 2d4 canoes, which the urgots use to travel the river if they must.

Sunlight filters into the cabins well enough, but on a moonless night torches and fireplaces are used to create enough light for the urgots to see by. The cabins hold 3d6 urgots at any one time. They will come to assist any fighting on the river, nearby cliffs or tunnels. Clearing this area garners 1 x Carry Loot and 1 x Trinkets & Curios (LFG p.136, 141). The highest most cabin conceals stone cut steps that lead into the mine proper.

Area 2 – Entry Tunnel

A large iron grate operated by a winch on either side allows access to a 30 ft wide tunnel, excavated centuries before. The ore veins here are all dry, but flecks of electrum can be seen in the roughly hewn walls. Iron rails for (long unused) mine carts are set into the floor, which has a noticeable decline and runs northwest. The carts are operated by pushing, but will pick up speed on downhill runs. They might provide mobile cover in a firefight.

Area 3 – Living Area

This 30 ft by 60 ft cave is used by the urgots as one of two living areas (the other being Area 8), decorated with furs and straw mats. 3d6 urgots are here at any one time, sleeping, eating, socializing or fighting. There is a 50% chance of 1d4 wolf pets also present (see Area 9). If searched, this area turns up 1 x Carry Loot (LFG p.136).

Area 4 – Snake Nest

This 30 ft by 20 ft chamber is home to 2d4+2 *Giant Serpents* that have been charmed by Agueda, and semi-domesticated by the urgots. The serpents will be confused about ordinary humans, and uncertain whether to attack, or allow themselves to be petted.

Giant Serpent AC 13, HD 5, Bite 2d8 + poison, 19: special, S19 D16 C13 I3 P10 W12 Ch5, L8, 30 ft. Poison causes 1d6 damage and 1d4 Str loss (*Luck* (Con) save resists). On 19+ the target is constricted and helpless (spend action to make opposed Str test to break free).

Area 5 – Larder

The urgots larder includes barrels of briny water, salted meat cuts on bedrock shelves, and hanging carcasses.

Shackled to a rock pillar are 1d3 thuel captives (*Sudar, Gimock and Norwuc*), tortured to within an inch of their lives (indeed, 50% chance for each of dying before the party arrives). If freed, the emaciated prisoners will help fight if given weapons (if the urgot are not killed, they do not expect they can outrun any pursuit).

Area 6 – Alternate Entry/Bulette Den

This 50 ft cavern has a 20 ft sinkhole in the centre, the result of a hibernating bulette 80 ft below. A tunnel also extends 100ft upwards to the surface (difficult climb, Str (Athletics) check at disadvantage unless using gear). The monster has not risen in weeks and the urgot are careful not to disturb it (although they might, if forced into a situation of extreme desperation).

Bulette, AC 18, HD 9+4, Bite 3d6, 19: the target is dragged underground and begins asphyxiating. A Str check at disadvantage is required to dig free, S22 D13 C19 I2 P13 W14 Ch3, L10, Mv 30 ft inc when burrowing. Detects movement tremors within 120 ft, *Causes Injuries* on critical hits.

Area 7 – Sleeping Quarters

The majority of the urgot tribe use this series of 3 chambers as their sleeping quarters. There are 3d6 urgot in each chamber, including 50% children. The urgot are always hungry, and will likely view any humans as a welcome meal.

PCs concealing themselves in urgot clothing (ragged cloaks, furs, etc) and rubbing themselves with the mutants' foul smelling secretion might pass themselves off as kin if they keep to half lit corners (Cha (Deception) check vs Perc (Detection) check). Each chamber conceals 1 x Carry Loot and 1 x Potion (LFG p.136, 150) hidden amongst sleeping furs, piles of old clothes, small sacks, etc.

Area 8 – Living Chamber

This 100 ft by 60 ft chamber is the biggest in the complex, with a number of large rock pillars towards the centre. The mutants use the area of their main living chamber, and 4d6 urgot are here at any one time; eating, fighting, etc. Looting this chamber reveals 1 x Carry Loot (LFG p.136).



Area 9 – Wolf Den

This 20 ft by 40 ft cave houses 2d4 *Wolves* that have been semi domesticated by the urgot. The pack is still relatively wild however, and could easily be turned against their "masters" by a PC competent in Animal Lore.

Wolf, AC 12, HD 1+2, Bite 1d4+1, 19: target is knocked prone, S13 D14 C15 I2 P12 W10 Ch6, L4, 60 ft. Advantage when tracking and on attack rolls when flanking.

Area 10 – Treasure Room

This 30 ft cavern is used to store goods stolen from barbarians, skorn and other travellers, as well as items discovered in ruins across the elder forest. One small box is trapped with an obvious arcane rune (triggers a *Feeblemind* spell if opened, inside is a Scroll LFG p.152). Searching the room gains 1 x 5 HD Lair Treasure (LFG p.140).

Area 11 – Medusa's Lair

Agueda's lair is approx 60 ft in diameter, the floor covered in scattered salt. There is a 50% chance of a recent barbarian victim; a life like salt sculpture (the salt is well set but will break if pressed forcefully).

Agueda Zargor, Medusa Boss Monster, AC 13, HD 8 (99 hp), *Xaolung* 1d8+2 and Snake Hair Attack 1d3 + poison, 19: the target's weapon or armour (even chance) turns to salt, S10 D15 C12 I15 P13 W15 Ch8 L9, Mv 30 ft. Agueda may activate her gaze at any time, causing onlookers to make a *Luck* (Con) save each round or be transmuted into salt. On their turn, PCs may choose to fight blind and avoid making a save. Snake hair poison causes 2d6 damage and 1d4 Dex loss (*Luck* (Con) save for half). If reduced to zero Dex, the target turns to salt.

Agueda casts spells like a 5th level Magic User, and may choose from the following spells four times per combat: *Charm Person*, *Disguise Self*, *Unseen Hand*, *Speak with Animals*, *Cure Minor Injury*, *Phantasmal Force*, *Heat Metal*, *Levitate*, *Ritual Magic*.

Xaolung

Agueda wields *Xaolung*, a 3,000 year old scimitar of the *Wing Mai* dynasty, infused with the spirit of its Sun Dragon namesake. The blade causes 1d8+2 damage. The first attunement grants the ability to cast *Firebreath* once per week (as *Lightning Bolt* but fire). The second attunement grants *Scaled Wings* (as *Fly*) once every 1d4 days. The third attunement grants *Polymorph* once per month. Any further attunements are at the GM's discretion. Agueda has access to the first two attunements.

Aftermath

If the mine is secured, the Mordukes pay the agreed fee and spread word of the party's talents, earning them some fame amongst the merchant class and highborn.

If Agueda is not defeated, she gathers increasingly discontent where she is. Eventually she takes control of a ship, intending to sail to Dol-Karok, and learn the fate of her House. Whether she makes it that far, and/or whether such a monster can survive in such a place, is left for the GM to determine.

CREDITS

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