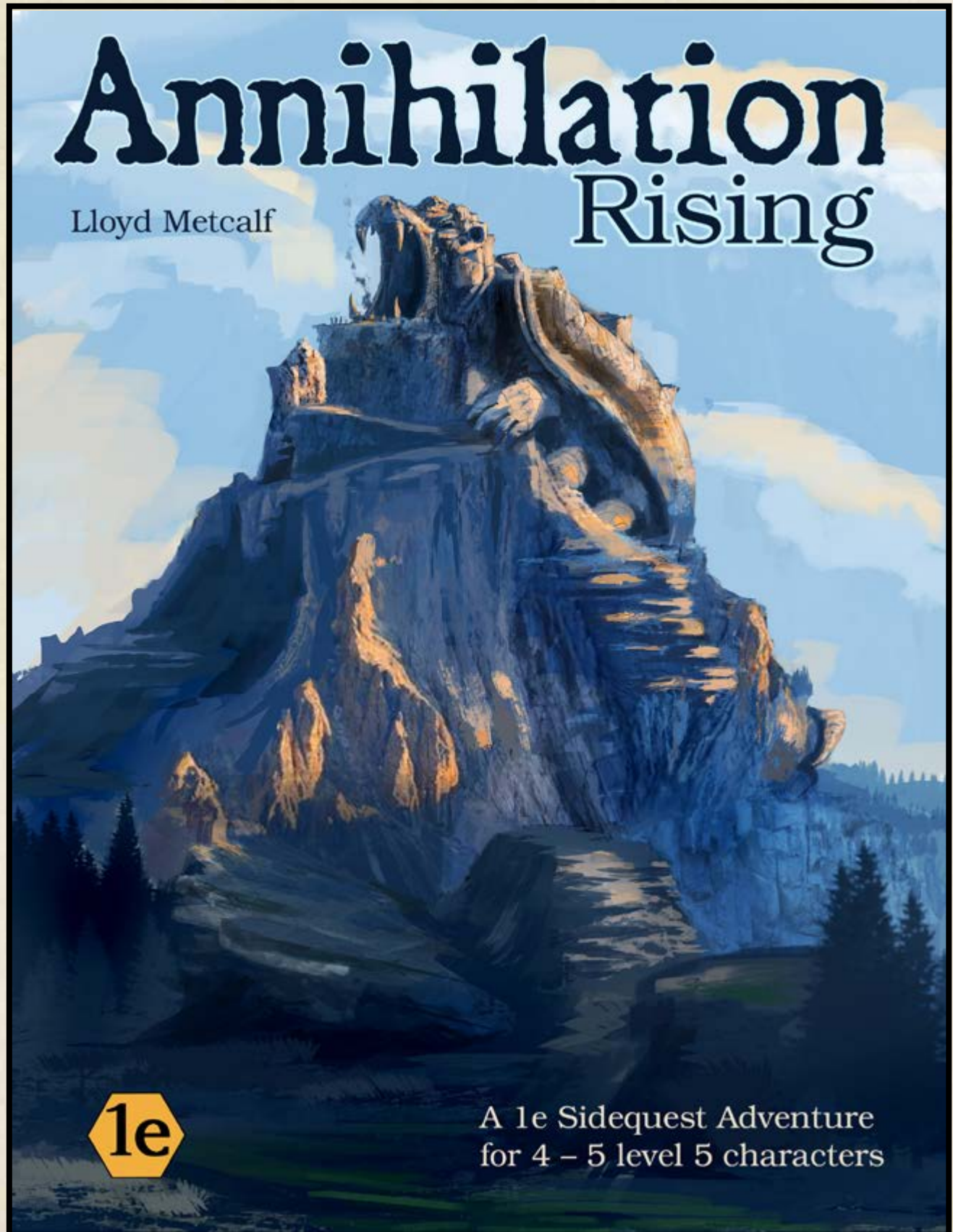


**A 1E adventure
for 4–5 level 5 characters**

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Annihilation Rising

Lloyd Metcalf



**A 1e Sidequest Adventure
for 4 – 5 level 5 characters**

Using This Adventure

This adventure is intended to be a standalone side quest or short adventure for Game Masters to have in their arsenal when larger campaigns need a respite. Some players may decide to go one way when all your plans lie in the opposite direction. This is such a time to have FSG Side Quests handy.

Boxed text is intended to be read aloud to players and aid you, the GM, in setting the scene and descriptions. Feel free to alter or ignore these descriptions to suit your personal gaming style.

Whenever possible and practical, standard monsters are referenced by the page number where they are found in your favorite Manual of Monsters, i.e., Worg MM pg. 101.

Magical Ley Lines. In the Fail Squad Games' world of Artera, linear sources of energy called ley lines crisscross the globe and affect magic, creatures, and even terrain. When nearby, a ley line emboldens both wizardly and godly magic. When afar, the weakened influence of the ley line results in a low-mana environment. Ley line intersections are especially powerful and are often sought out and coveted by those practicing the magical or holy crafts.

Synopsis

In Artera, tarasques are more aligned with the French mythological creatures rather than traditional titanic beasts of popular tabletop RPG products. More than one may exist in a world, but more horrifying, they have a lord and master—Monsieur Nerluc.

Monsieur Nerluc clings to the local mountainside. Villagers tell frightened children that the monstrous form of earthen stone is just a natural rock formation. It's a lie they'd like to believe themselves. Monsieur Nerluc is, in fact, the lord of all tarasques, and strange cultists seek to waken him. If they do, his age-old toothache will begin to throb, and he's going to be horrendously angry.

The lord of Tarasques is a gigantic creature of ancient legend. He is similar to a great dragon with a lionlike head, stout bear legs, an oxlike body covered with a turtle shell, and a terrible scorpion tail. The last time it woke hundreds of years ago, the land in all directions was devastated and rendered utterly useless. He was lulled into a slumber and sent back to his plane of

chaos by a pious bard named Zhou Yinyue. His great form then turned to stone atop the mountain, and the days of chaos were slowly forgotten.

Chaotic cultists who worship the lord of world-eaters, Ordre de Nerluc, discovered that they may be able to rouse their god where he rests atop a mountain by chipping away at an exposed tooth in his maw. They even hope to enrage their lord so he might swallow them first before he “cleanses” the world with his chaos.

Can the heroes stop the cult, lull the creature back into a stupor, pull the tooth and save the world? Or will they be devoured along with everything around them?

This adventure takes place in the shadow of high jagged mountains that lie at the intersection of magical ley lines and is best resolved with a bard or religious character in the party. It is suggested that GMs find a suitable location in their world to place the adventure (refer to maps) and be prepared to potentially let loose a tarasque into the world should the party fail. Alternately, GMs may try the Fail Squad Games' **Lands of Lunacy** setting for the adventure and place the following events in a “safe” dimensional pocket away from your campaign world.

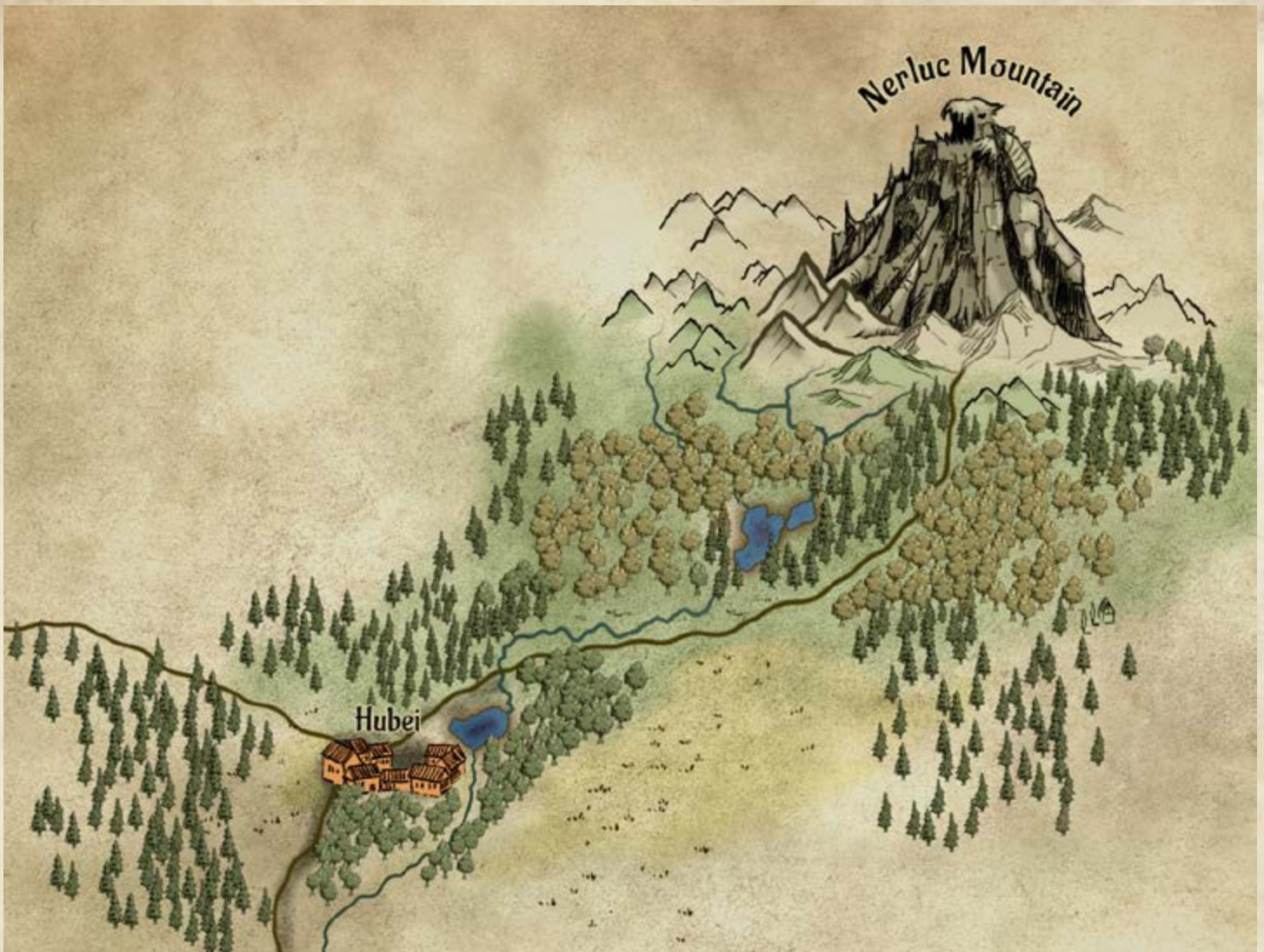
Introduction

Over the past couple of months, small earthquakes are shaking the area around Hubei and the mountain ranges. They vary from soft rumblings to the earth shuddering, enough to disrupt basic activities but not causing major damage. The quakes are at the forefront of almost all local conversations and rumors.

Hubei is a humble town thirty miles southwest of a harsh mountain range. It offers most amenities any small town could afford. The town relies heavily on Lake Hubei for its fish and its water to run mills and irrigate the crops. What Hubei is truly known for, though, is its beautiful gardens maintained by the Temple of Eternal Contemplation.

A Tale of Wisdom from Hubei

Among the stories listed on the table below, one halfling elder, Jisha (Eternal Contemplation attendant), tells an old tale of her temple whenever talk of Monsieur Nerluc comes up. The PCs may encounter this elder halfling woman at a roadside meditation shrine or simply in the village. She only identifies herself as



Jisha Li. Jisha Li is the fourth generation of attendants known as Jisha Li. Her only concern is tending to the upkeep of the gardens and tidiness of the temple and sharing the tranquility of its gardens with visitors.

“Many years ago, my ancestors told a tale of the Rinpoche, Zhou Yinyue. The Tarasque Lord was destroying all the living trees, razed entire villages, and caused great chaos across the land. The Rinpoche was a pious Master of Music and Song. Faced with such terrible chaos and no warriors to battle the beast, he traveled to the highest peak and began to play his pipa. He sang a song of peace, meditation, and harmony with the world around him. This song lulled Monsieur Nerluc into such a deep slumber that the beast came to listen, then turned to stone atop the mountain as it fell asleep to rest forever.

Perhaps ‘forever’ was a poor way to describe his rest.”



Other tales of Monsieur Nerluc include:

Tales of Monsieur Nerluc	
1	“Every time the ground shakes, it’s Monsieur Nerluc’s belly rumbling. But really, we don’t pay it no mind. Quakes aren’t too uncommon here in the mountains, but we have had a lot of them lately. Maybe it means a good harvest this fall!”
2	“Monsieur Nerluc? Bah, it’s an odd rock formation, no living creature could be so big as the top of a mountain. What we really need to worry about are the cultists running around up there. End-of-the-world types, I double my prices when they come in, I just don’t trust ‘em.”
3	“The Ordre de Nerluc cultists were in town loading up with mountain climbing gear, traveling food, and strange supplies. They had strange looking gold, not from around here. They were talking like they didn’t need it much longer. I was glad to see them go.”
4	“Old Monsieur Nerluc watches over the village at night to protect us while we sleep. Hrm... that’s what mother always told me, but I hear the alpaca farmers tell it differently. It’s Zhou Yinyue that watches over them when they sleep. I suppose stories get funny after a hundred years or more.”
5	“It really is hard to account for the shape of Nerluc Mountain. I mean, it certainly isn’t natural, but we are near some magical ley lines, or so the wizards say. I don’t know much about history or legend really, but them Ordre de Nerluc folks seemed to think a lot of strange stories were true.”
6	“Monsieur Nerluc crawled up there and got a good look at my ex-husband is what happened!! Turned him to stone. Homeliest S.O.B. ever created under the sun! I’m glad whatever it is or was is up there on that mountain, though. I carve likenesses of it and sell them to tourists and travelers. Keeps us well fed in the winter. My horses and livestock have had enough of the quakes, though. My hens stop laying and the horses are impossible after every one.”

The Ordre de Nerluc

This initial interaction may happen on the road or near Hubei. The characters may receive word about the traveling religious order from locals or simply come across the cultist camp in their travels. No matter the circumstance, this first encounter has the PCs approaching a camp of the unusual religious zealots.

On the Road

While traveling the road, you see the smoke of a campsite ahead. No sooner do you note the campfire than the earth beneath your feet trembles and shifts. A deep, low growl shudders through the ground; trees shift and shake from side to side. The shaking is such that a bit of concentration is required to stay on your feet. Birds erupt from the trees in a panic. The quake lasts for a little more than a minute, and the smoke from the campfire has changed to a large plume.

Once the quake hits, the cultists douse their fire with water and quickly begin packing up their cart to get back on the road.

The Campsite

Initiate (8) see Appendix

AC 6, Mv 12, HD 2, #Att 1, Dmg 1d6+1, SA Spell, SD Nil, MR std, Int Average-very, Align CE, Sz M

Five men and three women in dark blue and black clothes scramble around the campsite to pack up a wagon pulled by a team of horses. The horses are half-panicked, and two group members are attempting to control them. Four more are hurriedly throwing crates and supplies in the cart while the remaining two chant in a strange language. The chanting pair streak their faces with blue paint and stop the activity of their cohorts to mark their faces while they work.

These are the Ordre de Nerluc. They are not immediately hostile to travelers but are in a hurry to pack their cart and get on the road to Nerluc Mountain. They talk about their cause and intentions openly with any that seem interested but become hostile if there is any intent to delay, harm, or obstruct their mission.

“We hope we are not too late to greet the great lord’s coming and be devoured by him when he arrives.”

“The quakes are our great lord awakening. He will come and cleanse the world of all its troubles and woes by giving us a clean start.”

“We MUST reach the mountain before the lord awakens so he may swallow us first. Then, we can bask in the great cleansing as he devours the troubles of this world!”

“How can anyone NOT believe that Monsieur Nerluc is real? I mean... he’s right there on top of the mountain. You can literally see our god from all around! We are so blessed and honored with his gifts.”

“I am sorry, not much time to talk, we must be on our way”

Trailing the cultists results in one of the following possibilities.

- 1) The initiates are far enough ahead of the PCs to survive the avalanche (see Mountain Approach below) and continue on the road beyond the avalanche.
- 2) Closely following or joining the cultists means the cultists and their cart are killed and lost in the chaos of the avalanche (see Mountain Approach below).

If the cultists are forced to do battle, they begin by casting *command* and *darkness* to disable attackers. If possible, they prefer to strip the PCs of their supplies and leave them tied up on the roadside alive. They only want to reach the mountain to awaken their god, they do not want the trouble caused by killing local heroes.



Holy symbol of The Ordre de Nerluc

Mountain Approach

Wise players approaching Nerluc Mountain have come prepared with mountain gear, pickaxes, hammers, and ropes. Those following or traveling with the cultist from previous encounters are in or near a wagon full of supplies. Those who approach the mountain unprepared may pay the ultimate price.

Travel up the mountain is difficult: physical activity becomes extremely taxing as the air gets thinner. For purposes of climbing, running, extended lifting, etc. beyond the first hour up the mountain road, all Constitution-based checks are at a -2 penalty.

There is only one road up to the top of Nerluc Mountain. The mountain juts sharply from the ground and towers above all others in the chain. It is formed of sheer cliffs, jagged edges, and precarious boulders. The road is clearly a traveling hazard with unsettling overhangs, narrow passages carved out of rock, and long terrible drops to jagged cliffs. High above, silhouetted behind the clouds, you can just make out the great form of Monsieur Nerluc’s stone form resting atop the great peak. If the answer to the earthquakes isn’t there, it’s certainly the answer for the cultists.

An hour into the journey up the steep winding path and after a terrifying switchback that might topple a regular wagon, the entire mountain is struck with a serious quake.

The ground growls, heaves beneath your feet, and shakes from side to side. Your only hope to avoid being thrown over the edge is to drop to your knees. The trembling is the worst you have yet experienced. Boulders and earth tumble wildly down the cliffs; the shaking feels like the end of the world, but eventually, it slows. The smashing and thunderous roar in your ears is actually a huge section of the mountain that has dislodged and is cascading down the steep mountain directly toward you. Tons and tons of earth, great boulders, entire trees, all smash into one another in a horrendous roar.

The PCs have 3 rounds to take an action to avoid dying in the avalanche. Some of the most common scenarios are listed below.

- 1) Run back along the road. This is a longshot but possible. PCs attempting this must have at least a 12-movement rate to hope for success of such a feat. They must run at full speed back down

the road. (Running forward past the avalanche is not possible as there is a switchback above that is in the fall zone.) This requires at least 3 Dexterity checks to avoid falling boulders and debris. Failing a check results in 6d6 damage for each failure and requires a SECOND Dexterity check to not be thrown off the side of the mountain from the hit.

- 2) Run for cover under overhanging rock. Fair chance of survival, however, the character is buried alive under falling rock and earth. This requires a pickaxe, shovels, hammers, or some way to dig out from the debris.
- 3) Flying or levitating. Magical or gifted players may levitate or fly above the avalanche to avoid most or all of the damage. Doing so requires the character to rise at least 60' straight up to avoid all the flying debris. Those who can fly only need to rise 30' up but 20' out away from the face of the mountain as a minimum to avoid damage.

*Note: Attempting to fly all the way to the top of the mountain guarantees being seen and considered hostile by all the cultists and possibly the griffins (see below).

Horses, wagons, carts, or other large creatures and objects on the road are likely to be lost over the edge or separated from the party during the avalanche. Equipment may be snatched from wagons and carts in the 3 rounds provided.

Once the PCs dig their way out or gather themselves after the avalanche, it becomes clear that the road up Nerluc Mountain is lost. A long, dangerous climb lies ahead or a treacherous retreat to the lower mountains.

The climb up the mountain requires some knowledge of rope use, climbing, pitons, hammers, and other equipment to travel safely. Attempting to climb without this equipment, training, or some alternative requires checks to be made with a -2 penalty. Failure results in more avalanches, tumbling boulders, battling high wind gusts, and falls. Even climbing with the proper gear requires a handful of ability checks, at least one of each Dexterity and Constitution.

Meet the Griffins

Griffins (6) MM pg. 60

AC 3, Mv 12 /30, HD 7, #Att 3, Dmg 1d4 1d4 2d8, SA Nil, SD Nil, MR std, Int Average, Align N, Sz L

The griffons of Nerluc Mountain live near the crossroads of ley lines and are more intelligent than most. Treat them as INT 10 and able to speak Common and Auran.

Not long after the earthquake and avalanche, six winged creatures can be seen circling high above. They continue to observe the PCs for up to an hour before approaching. Tentatively, they land nearby and seek to speak with the PCs. If attacked, they will retaliate or withdraw (50% chance of either). The griffins are as follows:

Iapetus – Leader of Highwing Eyrie. Bold, confident, indifferent to the plight, struggle, or even feelings of humans and their ilk. Little patience for flattery, holds a respect for dwarven women.

Penfei – Reeve and mate to Iapetus. Inquisitive, enjoys things that sparkle. She respects Iapetus' position in the eyrie and is reserved around him. They share a great love, and he will bend to her will and curiosity if pressed.

Kwatoko – First Guard of Highwing Eyrie. Steadfast and loyal.

Antheia – Currently nesting. Hopes to lay soon. Shy and reserved.

Attus – Dislikes humans, demi-humans, and “civilization” of all sorts and those who create it.

Chiron – Injured wing, missing a few primary feathers. Elderly, former leader.

Iapetus introduces the representatives of the Highwing Eyrie and feigns an interest in the PCs' condition as best he can. In the interaction, he makes it clear that Highwing Eyrie will not meddle in the affairs of men but confirms that some strange people are atop Nerluc Mountain. He agrees to bring the PCs to the human encampment on the mountain if they aid the griffins.

The Highwing Eyrie raises some of the hardiest and most delicious wild horses in the high valleys. A troll has moved into some caves, eaten many horses, and released the rest. The griffins cannot pursue the creature into its caves. When they did capture the wretched



beast out at night, they raked it to pieces only to watch it reform and return to the cave the following day.

Refusal to aid the griffins means the PCs must climb the dangerous mountain on their own. Accepting the mission from the griffons results in the creatures returning the PCs to their roost and being healed by their eldest reeve. There are 15 griffons in the eyrie that work and live together. All take great pride in their horses and leaving the “poisonous” livestock of men alone.

Under no circumstances can the griffons be forced or coerced into dealing with the cultist problem. They are resolved to not interfere.

PCs are allowed to rest and prepare in the roost. The griffins fly the party to the high valley, a lush magnificent valley among the mountains, one, they say, is green for all but the very coldest month of winter. They are directed toward a hole in one of the nearby cliff faces. Griffon claw marks are evident all around the hole. The entrance is dark, moist, and smells of death and putrescence. The griffons look on hopefully, and all but Iapetus cringe back at being near the place.

The Troll Cave

Entrance

The entrance to the troll cave is just four feet wide and seven feet high. Togotor, the troll, has to duck his head and slide through the first 25 feet of the passage almost sideways. After the first 25 feet, the ceiling of the natural caverns rises 12–20' high and is peppered with stalactites and rough rock.

Any excessive noise near the entrance alerts the residents of the caves that intruders are approaching. The trolls and enfants will not come out of the cave to confront intruders. The griffins frequently attempt to lure the trolls out of hiding to shred them to pieces. It is very difficult to start or maintain a nonmagical fire in the caverns because of the high altitude and wet walls, ceilings, and air.

A clear trail of blood, horse hair, and entrails covers the floor from the entrance, through area 4 to area 2.

Starting an open battle anywhere in the caverns attracts the attention of the remaining residents (1 adult troll, 3 troll enfants).



The narrow, dark entrance to the caves has deep claw marks in the earth and stone. The cave walls are wet, and the air is moist and laden with the putrescence of troll, filth, and death. The ground leading into the entrance is greasy and thick with old black blood.

1 – Unsettling Secrets

Troll Infant (1) see Appendix

AC 6, Mv 9, HD 3, #Att 2, Dmg 1d6 1d6, SA Nil, SD Regen, MR std, Int Low, Align CE, Sz M

This 25' long and wide cavern has a ceiling covered in heavy stalactites, and many stalagmites litter the floor. Four columns connect the ceiling and floor. The sounds of water dripping and trickling echoes off the walls. The floor and all the walls are covered in slick brown algae, making it difficult to maintain footing.

A troll enfant rests in a hidden nook amongst three centrally located columns. If there has been significant noise outside or anywhere in the caverns, or if any light sources enter the cavern, the enfant is aware of the PCs and preparing to surprise them. It crawls up the columns near the ceiling and lies in wait above (adding advantage to surprise rolls, passive Perception DC18 to notice).

The slimy and spike-ridden cavern is considered difficult terrain when modifying for movement though



the trolls with their rubbery feet and sharp claws have no problem navigating the area. A Dexterity check for non-trolls to keep footing is required when moving rapidly, running, or fighting.

2 – The Feeding Pit

Many horses have been dragged into the caves and devoured here after being slain or rent to pieces near the entrance. Freshly chewed bones and horse parts are scattered throughout the cavern. The floor is greasy, and the air is heavy with the scent of decaying internal organs and bile.

3 – The Sleeping Chamber

Troll Enfant (1) see Appendix

AC 6, Mv 9, HD 3, #Att 2, Dmg 1d6 1d6, SA Nil, SD Regen, MR std, Int Low, Align CE, Sz M

Bundles of twigs and mounds of wet mud make up 2 bowl shapes that can only be described as troll nests against the southern wall of this chilled damp chamber. Bits of horse bones and other remnants jut out of the mud throughout the nests.

If no noise or battle has taken place in or near the caves, a troll enfant is sleeping in the smaller of the nests.

6,456 cp, 1,400 sp, 250 ep, 345 gp, 33 pp, 3 gems (10 gp, 50 gp, 120 gp) are packed in the mud and twigs of the nests. Two full hours are required picking through the mud and troll filth to retrieve the treasure.

4 – The Bloody Trail

Troll Enfant (1) see Appendix

AC 6, Mv 9, HD 3, #Att 2, Dmg 1d6 1d6, SA Nil, SD Regen, MR std, Int Low, Align CE, Sz M

The bloody trail of horse hair and entrails from the entrance leads through this room. A horribly deformed troll creature crawls on all fours here. The thing has an unsettlingly large head, and it is licking the maggots and blood off the slimy cavern floor. When it lifts its bulk from the floor, you can see it has no legs, only four arms that end in black-taloned claws.

If there has been fighting or noise in the caverns, this enfant is likely charging toward the commotion.

5 – The Troll Bath

Troll (1) MM pg. 291

AC 4, Mv 12, HD 6+6, #Att 3, Dmg 1d4+4 1d4+4 2d6, SA Nil, SD Regen, MR std, Int Low, Align CE, Sz L

A large grey troll rolls about in a roughly 15' x 15' pool of water toward the middle of this cavern. It blows snotty phlegm bubbles into the water and cackles with delight whenever it dips its nose below the water.

If a battle or loud noises have erupted, the troll arrives soaking wet and very difficult to set aflame. All

attempts to do so are at disadvantage unless the flames are magical.

Troll Victory

Once the trolls are destroyed, the griffons of Highwing Eyrie are extremely grateful and relieved. Iapetus even softens his view of humans and the like a bit. They agree to fly the PCs to what they call the “High Shelf” near where the cultists have been living.

Iapetus remains concerned about returning the remnants of the herd that were driven from the valley. An inspiration point should be the reward for PCs who assist in the retrieval and containing of the herd in the valley either before or after dealing with the cultists.

Another quake strikes the mountain. Use these small quakes as a reminder of the bigger task at hand whenever needed. There need not be avalanches or challenges associated with a quake for it to be an effective piece of the story.



The High Shelf (if approached with griffons)

The griffons allow the PCs to ride as they fly ever higher up Nerluc Mountain to deliver them to the “High Shelf”. The air becomes very thin, and all CON-based rolls are with a -2 penalty for those not acclimated to living at high altitudes. All Nerluc cultists and the shamanka are acclimated to high altitudes and suffer no such penalties.

As you approach the High Shelf, you can clearly see the tremendous scale of Monsieur Nerluc and the mountain upon which he rests. The peak with the stone form of the creature towers above all others and is well above the clouds. The creature’s head drifts almost as if it were in a sea of white.

A makeshift commune of tents and supplies with a couple of carts occupies a flat shelf below the mountain peak. As you approach and land in a nearby clearing, Iapetus can barely contain his disgust for the blight the humans have brought to the mountain. The pair of remaining horses at the shelf tramp and rear nervously at the sight of the griffons.

Iapetus wishes you luck and takes flight, plunging below the clouds. The ground softly trembles beneath your feet.

The High Shelf (if approached by ropes)

At long last, you reach a respite, and the upper road reveals itself. You are well above the avalanche site and the cloud level! You are looking down on a milky sea that obscures the land below. The air is remarkably thin and every breath is a labor, but your feet are on walkable ground again.

Ahead, a makeshift commune of tents and supplies with a couple of carts occupies a flat shelf below the mountain peak. The tremendous head of Monsieur Nerluc blocks out the sun from above. The scale of the creature that must have been is staggering. The ground softly trembles beneath your feet.

The Defector

Initiate (1) see Appendix, Defenders (2) see Appendix
Initiate - AC 6, Mv 12, HD 2, #Att 1, Dmg 1d6+1, SA Spell, SD Nil, MR std, Int Average-very, Align CE, Sz M
Defender - AC 4, Mv 12, HD 3, #Att 2, Dmg 2d4+1 (broadsword) or 1d6 (bow), SA Nil, SD Defend, MR std, Int Average, Align CE, Sz M

The High shelf camp is a mostly abandoned, cluttered jumble of haphazardly placed tents, gear, and supplies.

Above you, up a steep path toward Monsieur Nerluc’s head, you hear chanting and yelling. The ground softly trembles beneath your feet, and the voices above rise in excitement.

The true horror of the cult is discovered near the cooking pit where human remains are intermixed with one of the horses. They have clearly eaten some of their own.

Someone is trying to hide behind one of the carts.

The initiate Grayson Basten is hiding behind a cart. He joined the cultists in Hubei, and after coming to the mountain and witnessing the awakening of the world eater, he had regrets about the decision. He attempted to slip down the road unnoticed just before the quake and narrowly avoided being swept along with it.

Once he is sure the PCs are not part of the Ordre de Nerluc, he attempts to convince them he wants to aid them if they can help him escape. Grayson is completely sincere in his pleas and will aid the party any way he can.

He has the following information and will share what he can when asked.

- Monsieur Nerluc is indeed some sort of real thing. His true name is unknown, but he IS a tarasque.
- The cultists intend on not only waking up their master but antagonizing him into a fury so he will devour them.
- They believe they will have an honored seat in the monster’s belly when he destroys the world.
- They are trying to accomplish their goal by chipping away at a “tooth” of the stone remnants above. It appears to be causing the creature great pain.
- If we can heal the tooth or remove it, perhaps it would ease the creature’s suffering. No matter what, we need to stop the cultists from antagonizing the creature.
- The cult is led by a shamanka named Helena Ayleth. The secret of the world eater, what I suspect is its weakness, is in a locked box in her tent.

The shamanka's tent is guarded by two defenders who are quite casual about their duties. They are passing a long stem pipe between them and smoking an acrid herb (-2 on all Perception rolls).

Under the shamanka's cot, amid many disturbing spell components, charms, and adornments, is a small, carefully crafted gnomish box: 13" long by 3" wide and 3" high. It is locked and trapped with a potentially deadly poison needle. Save vs. poison to avoid Constitution being drained to 3. Failing the save requires another save vs. poison 3 turns later to avoid death. The condition lasts until the next eight-hour rest.

The legendary sheet music of the song sung by Zhou Yinyue is in the box. The scroll is written by the hero himself and is a holy artifact of great value to bardic colleges or the Temple of Eternal Contemplation. The music is written for the pipa (similar to a lute), but a bard or priest with musical knowledge should be able to translate it to another instrument perhaps with an Intelligence check.

Performing the song within 30' of Monsieur Nerluc puts the great beast into a slumber while the music is being played. Once he is fully awake, the song can only return him to slumber by a true master, or an exceptional performance.

The Maw

Shamanka Helena Ayleth (see Appendix), Defender (2), Fanatic (2), Initiate (4) (see Appendix)

Initiate - AC 6, Mv 12, HD 2, #Att 1, Dmg 1d6+1, SA Spell, SD Nil, MR std, Int Average-very, Align CE, Sz M

Defender - AC 4, Mv 12, HD 3, #Att 2, Dmg 2d4+1 (broadsword) or 1d6 (bow), SA Nil, SD Defend, MR std, Int Average, Align CE, Sz M

Fanatic - AC 5, Mv 12, HD 3, #Att 1, Dmg 1d6+2 (falchion), SA Spell, SD Nil, MR std, Int Average - very, Align CE, Sz M

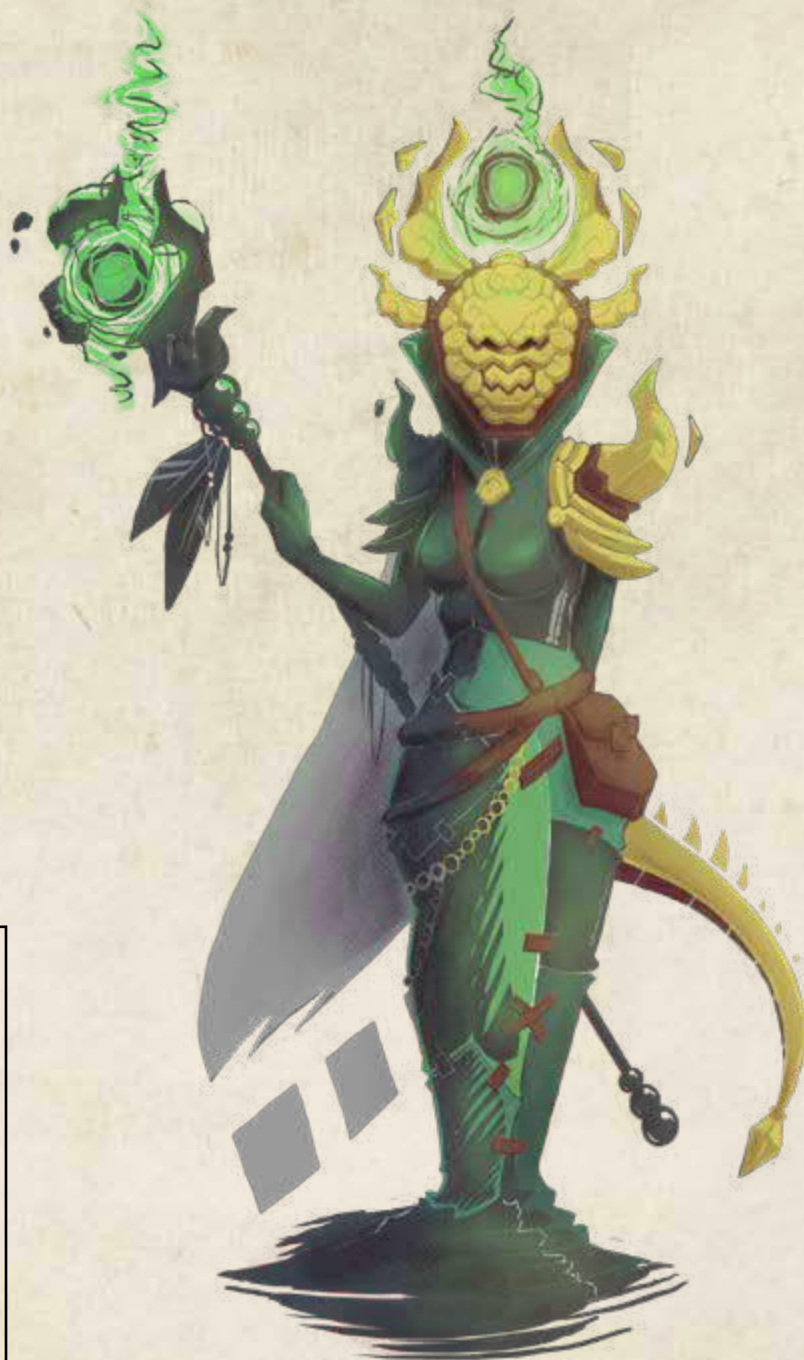
Shamanka - AC 4, Mv 12, HD 6 (shaman), #Att 1, Dmg 1d6+4 (falchion +2), SA Spell, SD Nil, MR std, Int Very, Align CE, Sz M

Climbing the steep path, you see the great maw of Monsieur Nerluc at the mountain peak. In his mouth near a great stone pillar that is a tooth, cultists dance and chant in a dark language to their lord. Some are clearly speaking in tongues and taken into a trancelike frenzy as they do so.

A three-foot-wide brass bowl is burning brightly with oil-soaked wood and canvas. Three steel rods are being heated in the bowl. A large defender, or warrior of the cult, pulls a red-hot pickaxe from the flame and swings a mighty blow at the root of the large tooth. A

piece of stone spins off of the already chipped root, and the entire mountain trembles wildly! Others grab at the steel rods to poke at the root in their gibbering chants.

Clearly, the top of the great maw is now lifting a bit while the entire mountain shakes and groans. A long, hot gust of wind expels from the maw... it certainly appears to be waking up. A striking shamanka wearing a mask that resembles Monsieur Nerluc directs the cultists. She is nearing a religious frenzy when the mountain shifts and moves.



The world eater is awakening, shifting, and moving as the ritual slowly brings him into this world from his plane of existence. The cultists' morale is fanatical, and they will defend their god to their deaths if the PCs attempt to stop them. They may use the red-hot steel rods to aid in their battle. If things become desperate, they spill the oil to burn intruders and themselves if required. There are 2 gallons of refined oil remaining in the bowl. Throughout the battle, the creature releases deep earth-shaking roars that cause the quakes to become more intense, requiring an Dexterity check to remain standing and avoid the raining rocks and debris.

If the song is not sung or the cultists stopped within 5 rounds, Monsieur Nerluc should be considered awake... and everyone atop the mountain peak has a tarasque on their hands. The cultists will defend their god before throwing themselves to the back of its throat when it is fully flesh.

The creature is only lulled into a slumber while the song is being performed in some way. If it ends or is interrupted, the cultists return to chipping away at the tooth and Monsieur Nerluc again begins to awaken.

GM note: The above confrontation is purposefully quite difficult. To ease the encounter, you may allow the PCs a short rest at the High Shelf encounter or allow them the element of surprise the first round when they approach the maw.

Nerluc Mountain is Taken

Once the cultists are defeated, Nerluc mountain is taken. Failure to win this battle means that the world eater has been released and likely none survive.

If the song is sung to lull Monsieur Nerluc into submission and the great boulder that is his tooth removed, it is safe to assume the beast has returned to his home plane of chaos indefinitely. With the song, the entire stone structure can be dismantled, or at least the head removed, with 3 months of constant labor by 20 or more masons/stone workers.

Two days after the great battle, the griffons arrive and realize their error in underestimating people and the beast that was resting atop their mountain. They fly the PCs back to Hubei, which allows them to arrive in a grand, heroic fashion.

Appendix

Name Helena Ayleth Race Human Class Shamanka Level 6 Align CE

General character appearance & notes

Helena is the leader of the Ordre de Nerluc. She is in peak physical condition and has lived in the high altitudes of Nerluc Mountain for many years worshipping and studying the world eater.

STR	13	Hit		DD		OD	1-2	Rate	4%	Para/Poison	Petri/Poly	R,S,W	Breath	Spell	XP
DEX	9	Reac		Mis		Def				9	12	13	15	14	
CON	17	HP	+2	Sys	97	Res	98			AC	HP				
INT	15	Lang		Know		Min		Max		4	45		Move	12	
WIS	18	Save	+4	Bon		Fail									
CHR	15	Inch	7	Loyal	+15	React	+15								

Weapon

Adj

Spd

Range

Damage

10

9

8

7

6

5

4

3

2

1

0

Falchion +2				1d6+3 / 2d4+2											
Staff				1d6											

Equipment / treasure / notes

Elven Chainmail +2, Falchion +2, potion polymorph self, scroll hold person
Spells - 1st: bless, command, cure light wounds x2
2nd: chant, hold person, resist fire, spiritual hammer, silence 15'
3rd: animate dead, continual light, dispel magic

and are recruited from the strongest followers.

Initiate

These cultists are the devout followers who have risen to the Ordre de Nerluc. They are initiates in the upper order of priesthood and represent the elite of the general followers. Initiates may later become fanatics, defenders, priests, or even shaman/shamanka level followers depending on their abilities and interests. The Ordre is generally chaotic and loosely organized; however, the members of the Ordre take weapon and spell training very seriously.

Initiate	
Frequency	Uncommon
#Encountered	2d4
Size	Medium
Move	12"
Armor Class	6 (Leather, shield, dex)
Hit Dice	2
Attacks	1 (Weapon or spell)
Damage	1d6 +1 (Short sword)
Special Att	Spells (See below) (1 level 1 spell / day)
Special Def	None
Magic Res	Standard (Save as F2)
% In Lair	15%
Intelligence	Average – very
Alignment	Chaotic Evil
Level / XP	2, 60 + 2/hp

Spells: Initiates only have 2 clerical spells to choose from, gifted initiates may have 3. Initiates cannot turn or control undead. Typical spells are *command* and *darkness (light)*. Occasionally initiates will have access to cure (cause) light wounds at GM discretion. If a group of initiates are traveling together, they will compare daily spell choices and diversify as much as possible.

Defender

The defender may forgo one of their sword attacks each round to go on the defensive. Doing so grants them a +1 AC bonus. Foregoing both attacks to completely defend grants an additional +2 for a total +3 bonus to AC.

These cultists are Ordre de Nerluc's devout warriors. They are members of the upper order of priesthood

Defender	
Frequency	Uncommon
#Encountered	1d4
Size	Medium
Move	12"
Armor Class	4 (Chainmail + shield)
Hit Dice	3
Attacks	2 (Weapon)
Damage	2d4+1 (Broadsword) or 1d6 (Longbow)
Special Att	None
Special Def	Defend (see below)
Magic Res	Standard (Save as F3)
% In Lair	15%
Intelligence	Average
Alignment	Chaotic Evil
Level / XP	2, 60 + 2/hp

Fanatic

These cultists are Ordre de Nerluc second tier of worshippers. They are members of the upper order of priesthood and are recruited from the elite of initiates. The Ordre is generally chaotic and loosely organized; however, the members of the Ordre take weapon and spell training very seriously.

Fanatic	
Frequency	Uncommon
#Encountered	1d6
Size	Medium
Move	12"
Armor Class	5 (Studded leather, shield, dex)
Hit Dice	3
Attacks	1 (Weapon or spell)
Damage	1d6 +2 (Falchion)
Special Att	Spells (See below) (2 level 1 spells / day)
Special Def	None
Magic Res	Standard (Save as F3)
% In Lair	15%
Intelligence	Average – very
Alignment	Chaotic Evil
Level / XP	2, 75 + 3/hp

Spells: Fanatics choose spells as regular clerics and can

control undead using their holy symbol. If a group of fanatics, or fanatics and initiates are traveling together, they will compare daily spell choices and diversify as much as possible.

Troll Infant

The troll infants are malformed troll offspring that form when propagated pieces from a troll are not allowed to reform with the original body. On some occasions, a removed arm, for instance, may regrow an entirely new troll if the arm is not allowed to reattach to the body of origin. Troll infants result before the creatures are fully formed into functioning trolls.

Infants are often horribly misshapen creatures with extra limbs, misplaced heads, eyes, or simply horribly disfigured features. While the troll body recovers and grows, they are often covered in festering pustules that ooze blood and filth as the body attempts to regrow various parts and realign flesh and organs.

Troll infants regenerate slower than their full-size creators (1 HP/round). Just as their larger relatives, they are affected permanently by fire and acid.

Troll infant	
Frequency	Uncommon
#Encountered	1d4
Size	Medium
Move	9"
Armor Class	6
Hit Dice	3
Attacks	2 (Depending on limbs Claws or bites)
Damage	1d6
Special Att	None
Special Def	Regeneration
Magic Res	Standard
% In Lair	50%
Intelligence	Low
Alignment	Chaotic Evil
Level / XP	2, 75 + 3/hp

Tarasque Lord (*Monsieur Nerluc*)

The Tarasque Lord lives on a plane of darkness and chaos where it wages eternal battle against light and order.

In battle the Tarrasque lord radiates unnatural fear. This

is a residual effect that is dragged into the prime material plane from its realm of darkness. All creatures of 1 or fewer hd are stricken with utter horror and cannot move or speak. All creatures of more than 1 but less than 3 hd have no save and flee immediately. Creatures of 3 or more hd are allowed a save vs. death to avoid the effect.

The Tarasque Lord can release a thunderous roar twice per day. All creatures with functional hearing within 300 yards must save vs. breath or be stricken deaf permanently. The roar also inflicts 3d4 points of damage as the thunderous sound bursts eardrums and disrupts internal organs.

The creature radiates decay in all directions. Plant life withers and decays as the Tarasque Lord draws the life from everything around it for up to a half mile. Once per day it can focus this decay into a single attack against a single creature anywhere within 50 yards. Those struck are drained of all health down to their last hit point. The Tarasque Lord absorbs the drained health as if healed. A save vs. spell negates the effect.

The Tarasque Lord scorpion tail carries a lethal sting of negative matter that is deadly to living creatures. Those who survive the sting of the monstrous tail must save vs. poison or die.

Tarasque Lord	
Frequency	Unique
#Encountered	1
Size	Gargantuan
Move	12"
Armor Class	-3
Hit Dice	400 hp
Attacks	3 Bite, Trample, Sting
Damage	6d6+10, 6d100, 5d8 + poison
Special Attack	Fear 100' radius, Thunderous roar, Decay (see below)
Special Def	+2 or better to hit
Magic Res	15%
% In Lair	Nil
Intelligence	Low
Alignment	Chaotic Evil
Level / XP	11, 45,000

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