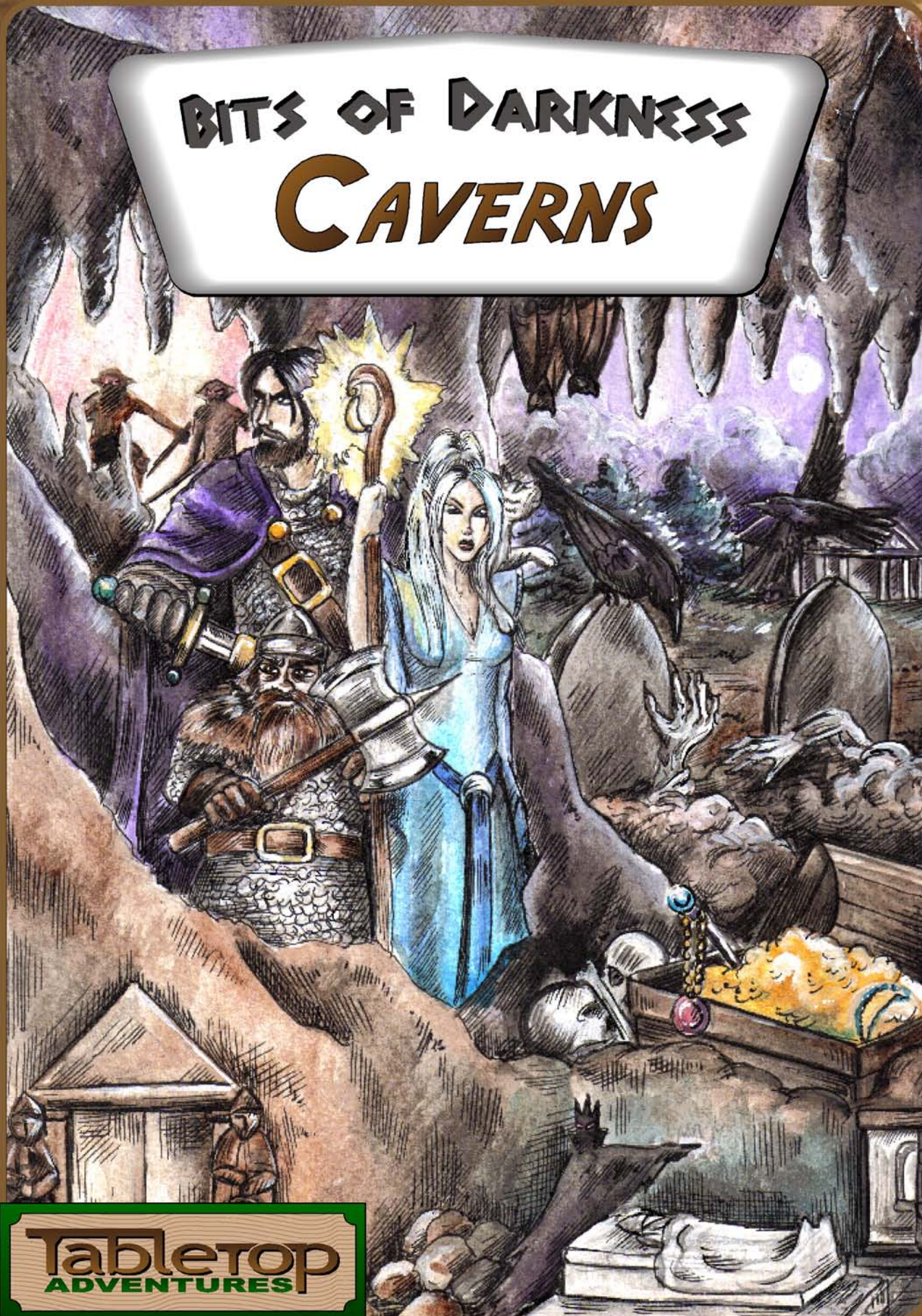


Tabletop Adventures presents

BITS OF DARKNESS *CAVERNS*



Tabletop
ADVENTURES



BITS OF DARKNESS: CAVERNS

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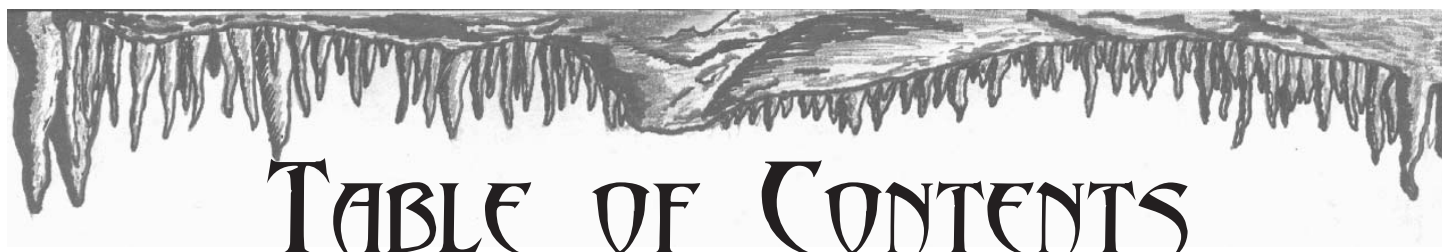


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WELCOME TO BITS OF DARKNESS: CAVERNS

A Word About Caverns

If you are like me you have never given caverns their due in your game. To help you make caverns unique and exciting (and different from your dungeons), we have included two articles that can assist in familiarizing you with caverns and how to explore them. It also might be worth your while to read about climbing and falling in the rules of the gaming system you are using because they will show up a lot here. Falling is the number one accident caverns have and the Bits reflect some of this danger. However, we have designed Bits of Darkness: Caverns to be a "Buy it Today, Play it Tonight" product and you don't have to spend a lot of time reading the articles before you play. They are there in case you want them, as a resource for you!

If you expect to have a lot of caverns, it might be fun to plan a trip to a nearby cavern as a group. We had fun with that prior to doing this project. However, even today caves can be places of great danger and you should only enter into their mysteries in the company of an experienced caver. Therefore, keep your players and yourself safe by limiting your expeditions to caves that have already been explored and offer tours for you to enjoy in safety. If you don't have time for "field trips," you could also have your players gather around a computer and oooh and aaah over the spectacular images at the highly-inspirational Virtual Cave (www.goodearthgraphics.com/virtcave.html). It would be a good visual prelude for what their characters might see.

If you are familiar with Bits of Darkness: Dungeons, you will find the introduction to this product substantially similar. A couple of observations have been made since we introduced our first product, however, and you may find those of interest. If you are new to the Bits of Darkness series then we hope this introduction is useful to you.

– The Overlord

The Harried Game Master

Have you ever lamented not having the time you want to spend on your game? Have you had friends call up when you didn't have anything ready and say, "Hey, let's play tonight. I had a rough day and I want to kill something"? Welcome to Tabletop Adventures' line of products for the Harried Game Master. These Shards and Bits are created for your convenience, as a time-saving but game-enhancing device. It seems that the more rushed

or frazzled the GM becomes, the more mechanical the game tends to be. With these Shards and Bits, you can focus on the crunch. We provide the fluff and atmosphere, giving you the best of both worlds even in a pinch.

One thing we had noted in some games and modules was that if a room in a dungeon or a chamber in a cavern was merely empty, it often had very little description. If the GM or module actually described something, it was usually significant to the story. This occasionally produces interchanges like: "You see a broken arrow lying on the floor." "We draw our swords and fan out!" "Why?" asks the GM. "Uh, we have a psychic premonition that something important is happening?"

While experienced gamers may not be so obvious about their reactions, they still tend to have a general knowledge that something important is about to happen and their demeanor changes accordingly. Now, instead of saying "There's nothing here," a GM can whip out one of our descriptions and say, "Lying near the side wall is a backpack that has been slashed to ribbons by a set of sharp objects set parallel to each other [claws]. There are stains on the pack, and if you look closely you can see an old, faded smear leading from that spot to the opposite entry [blood]." There is still effectively nothing there, but it's a little more exciting for the players and keeps up their level of interest. It is no longer just "another empty room."

Description is also a very important part of adventuring in caverns. In a cave, nothing is ever "just an empty room." Every location has some natural feature that makes it unique. It's difficult to give the feel of a cavern without some kind of description for each place, and that's where our product comes in.

What Are Shards and Bits?

Shards and Bits should be viewed as small pieces of an adventure. Bits are tiny pieces of description that can be thrown in anywhere to provide "color" or add a little excitement to what might otherwise be a dull spot. Shards are longer and more elaborate, meant to be selected rather than added randomly. They can describe a specific place or set a feel for an area.

This tool provides the GM with a way to stimulate





the characters' senses and the players' imaginations without having to use game-changing information. The descriptions can give players a "feel" for a situation, a better image of what is happening or what their characters are experiencing without all of those experiences leading directly to combat or treasure. While these bits are not intended as occasions for combat, they can enhance role-playing by encouraging character building, reaction, and interaction.

How to Use this Resource

Bold print is to be read to the players; light print is for the GM. One thing to remember in the use of this product is that the Bits are here to add drama. Therefore, delivery is important. When you are reading the Bits they will be much more effective if read as a storyteller might tell them. The way you choose to deliver the Bits of Darkness can make all the difference in the world.

In addition, most of these Bits assume that someone in your party has normal or low-light vision and requires the use of lighting. The Cavern Bits are written as if the adventurers have a light source with them. If your entire party has darkvision and no one is using a light, you should be aware that some of the Bits may need adjustments.

As with our previous product, these Bits of Darkness have been numbered so that a GM can roll percentile dice and randomly generate a dash of description to put into an adventure. Indexes are provided in case a Bit is needed to fit a particular situation.

These descriptions need not be followed verbatim. The GM should feel free to adapt them however he or she needs in order to use them to greatest effect. For instance, if a body of a fallen adventurer is described, the GM could add to the description of the body so that it fit into the story that was being played out. Similarly, there may be "whisperings" that are heard by adventurers. (Or are their ears just playing tricks on them?) In this case the whisperer could be the spirit of someone who has fallen to a monster ahead. The spirit could even re-appear with a personality if the GM wanted to add it to the story. If the GM has set an orcs' lair in a cavern and drums are heard in the deep, when the orcs are finally discovered perhaps there are drums in their lair. Even that is not necessary. These Bits are for whatever you

want! If a piece sparks your imagination (or that of your players) and you want to build on it, then go for it.

Another consideration is that, while most Bits do not add encounters, in some situations a minor encounter is possible if the GM allows it. In these cases you will find the information you need for an encounter in the printed text of the work or in the Appendix. This is for your convenience so you do not have to be suddenly scrambling for a book. These statistics are written using material from the System Reference Document but they can be modified relatively easily to other systems and their use is totally optional.

These pages can be printed out on regular paper. However, the final pages are formatted to be printed on card stock. As cards they can be shuffled and drawn randomly during play or sorted ahead of time, with the GM selecting certain Bits for use and placing them with the appropriate map or other materials. If you don't want to work with cards, you can roll randomly and read the description to the players, or write the appropriate number in the room or hallway of the GM's map and refer to it when the party arrives there.

We have taken care so that the descriptions can be used to enhance most settings without "clashing" with your existing campaign or information. Some mechanics are offered for your convenience in places, but you should feel free to adapt them to either the circumstances or game system as needed. Similarly, if you should roll or draw a "bit" that doesn't seem to fit your game or the situation, simply roll or draw again and use another. These are made for you, to ease the lives of Harried Game Masters everywhere.

I would be happy to hear any comments or suggestions you may have. Please send them to me at overlord@tabletopadventures.com. If you have problems or complaints, on the other hand, please contact our Complaint Department at executioner@tabletopadventures.com. Thank you.

Enjoy, have fun, and create fun for others!

The Evil Overlord and his minions
...er...I mean,
the good people at Tabletop Adventures
www.tabletopadventures.com





Entrances

1. CLIMBING BY A WATERFALL – As you walk along through the trees, you begin to hear the murmur of flowing water and you spy a small stream meandering along nearby, flowing from the direction you are heading. Further down the path, the splashing sound of falling water comes to your ears. You can see the stream coming from what seems to be the base of a cliff ahead of you. As you come into a clearing, you notice that the water that feeds the little stream is falling from an opening in the rock face about 20 feet above the valley floor, less than halfway up its height. The opening through which the rivulet falls is a circular hole about 8 feet in diameter. Though the rock face is vertical, there are plenty of handholds between the ground and the cave opening. There also seems to be a shallow stone shelf next to the opening itself. *[A Climb check at DC15 is required to reach the cave, DC20 if the GM wishes to consider the entire surface to be wet and slippery.]*

2. THROUGH THE LAIR – After defeating the monsters and looking around amongst the trash, bones, offal and mud that make up their lair, you notice a severely-dented old shield leaning against the wall at the back of the cave. While the shield is rusted and useless, it is of interest because you realize that it seems to be covering a hole in the wall. After moving the shield, an opening roughly three feet square is revealed. The air that flows from the opening is cool and fresh compared to the foul stench present in the lair. Looking into the hole with a light source, you can see that the narrow crawlway seems to go about ten feet and then opens up into a larger chamber. *[This could be the lair of almost any medium-size or larger creature. The larger size means that the entrance to the rest of the cavern would not be used on a regular basis.]*

3. CAVE IN A CLEARING – There seems to be a small clearing in the woods at the foot of the hills that are directly to the north. As you enter the clearing you notice that much of the space seems to be taken up by a deep hole in the ground. This hole is at least twenty feet across and drops to a floor about twenty feet below the ground's surface.

The pit seems to be natural and is lined with rock. As you look down into it you can tell that the shadow in the northwest corner of the cavity is an opening deeper into the earth. The first and best clue for this is the amount of cool moist air that is rising out of the gap; it smells damp and inviting. The inner opening is roughly 8 feet in diameter.

4. ENTERING A CAVE –

[This is a continuation of the previous setting and can be used in conjunction with it.]

Peering into this opening, it is difficult to see anything at first. As your eyes adjust to the darkness you see that the natural passageway before you leads down at a 30- to 45-degree angle.



"Trail to Adventure"

created by Jesus and Javier Carmona-Esteban
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The floor of the passageway is of damp earth and is strewn with half-buried rocks. The center of the ceiling flattens and lowers to a mere four to five feet in places as the passage spreads out to over fifteen feet wide. Where you stand and also just inside the opening you can see signs of animal passage. The air cools and becomes more damp as you descend into the bowels of the earth.

Ascents and Decents

5. CLIMBING UP LOOSE ROCKS – In this area there is a steep rise covered with rock and shale. At the top of the rise several boulders are wrapped in shadow. It would be a very defensible position, if anyone is already up there, against the direction from which you are approaching. The loose rock will pose a hazard for anyone climbing and the slope is steep enough that it would be beneficial to use at least one hand when climbing.

Type of Check		Half Speed	Full Speed
Two hands free	Climb check	DC0	DC5
One hands free	Reflex save	DC10	DC15
Both hands full	Reflex save	DC15	DC20

[Falling does 1d6 damage in the lower half of the rise, and 2d6 in the upper half. All Spot checks are at -10 when a character is moving. Nothing can be heard except the sound of sliding rocks unless everyone in the party remains still.]

6. A CLIMB IN A CAVERN – You enter a huge vaulted cavern. As you examine the area you take a deep breath of fresh clean air and feel invigorated by the sense of openness. A faint breeze filters down from above. On the far side of this space is a wall that rises to a ledge fifteen feet from the chamber floor. The shadows from the light create areas of deep darkness but also give rise to a sense of wonder as you view the myriad shapes that make up a rise to the left. Along that wall is a craggy, uneven collection of crevices, hand holds, and ledges that rise irregularly to the level of the shelf. The climb should not be too difficult for anyone who has both hands free, and is unencumbered.

[Adventurers should make a Climb check at DC10. Be sure to use the Armor Check Penalty and any modifiers for encumbrance.]

7. DESCENDING A DANGEROUS SLOPE – Here is an extremely steep slope of shale and rock. It

descends down into the blackness below and just standing on the edge has started a cascade of pebbles down the slope. The descent will be dangerous and would be even worse without rope. There is a large boulder to the left at the top that could be used to secure a rope – if you have one.

[A successful Climb check is necessary to descend without incident. With a rope the descent is DC 5; without one it is DC15. The drop here is 40 feet down (or GM's discretion). Falling does 1d6 points of damage per ten feet fallen. While this is not a straight drop the damage is the same because of the other rocks that will cascade down upon the clumsy.]

8. A CRAWL DOWN – At this point the passageway begins to decline sharply at an angle between 45 and 60 degrees. The floor has become slicker because of the water dripping off the ceiling. The passage has widened but become shorter, so that normal-sized men have to crawl on hands and knees or slide under the low ceiling. Here and there short stalagmites and stalactites make the obstacle course even more difficult. [This is an area where the adventurers should slow and begin thinking about the use of rope and safety. The explorers will need to make a Climb check at DC5 to descend at ¼ speed; DC10 for ½ speed. If the characters use safety ropes and climbing equipment, DC will be 0 or 5. Falling will result in 1d4 points of damage per 10 feet. The length of the slope is up to the GM. A Reflex save at DC18 could allow a fall to be stopped by grabbing onto a rock formation.]

9. A CRAWL UP – At this point the passageway begins to rise rapidly, ending in an ascent slope of nearly 60 degrees. Handholds and footholds abound because of the rock formations and small stalagmites on the floor of the passage. There are spots where the ceiling of the passage lowers to less than 3 feet on the climb. The footing is treacherous in places because of the water seeping and dripping from the roof in spots. [During the climb characters should make a Climb check at DC5 to ascend at ¼ speed; DC10 for ½ speed. If the characters use safety ropes and climbing equipment, DC will be 0 or 5. Falling will result in 1d4 points of damage per 10 feet. The length of the slope is up to the GM. A Reflex save at DC18 could allow a fall to be stopped by grabbing onto a rock formation.]

10. FORTY-FOOT DROP – The passageway narrows down to about 4 feet here. Directly in front of you, you see a drop-off and the passage seems to end.





As you look over the lip of the drop you can see the bottom about 40 feet below, and from there it seems that a passageway continues in the direction you have been going. There are plenty of small stalagmites and a column at the top of the drop to which you could anchor a rope. The sides of the drop vary from four to five feet apart, and they are both wet with water seeping from the walls.

[The characters need to have rope to get down this drop safely (Climb check DC5). If they try without rope they will need to make a Climb check at DC25 to descend successfully. Falling will cause 1D6 points of damage per 10 feet fallen.]

Other Settings

11. POTENTIAL CAVE-IN – As you enter this area you see that part of the wall on the right has collapsed. Rocks and rubble are piled here and vary in size from particles like sand to boulders as big as your chest. The smell of dust is heavy in the air; it seems to be a bit hazy in your light.

[Note: If any character speaks normally, drops anything loudly, or makes a similar amount of noise, there will be a slight trickle of sand and dust from the ceiling. If a shout is raised or battle is joined here, there will be a cave-in in 1-3 rounds. If this occurs, read the following:] **The noise has caused a steady stream of detritus and pebbles to fall from the ceiling. This stream increases to a torrent and with a steady rumble the roof of the cavern begins collapsing upon you. It is very difficult to avoid the cave-in because rock is falling everywhere. Only the very lucky and the very quick have a chance at all.** [The heroes and monsters must each make a Reflex save at DC20 to avoid injury. Anyone failing the roll takes 2d8 points of damage plus 1d4 additional points for every 5 full points by which they miss their save. The GM must decide if this area has completely collapsed or if it is still navigable.]

12. THE UNDERGROUND RIVER – You hear the sound of rushing water up ahead. As you approach the noise rises in a crescendo that is almost deafening and requires members of your party to shout in order to be heard. The air is filled with a cool and refreshing mist, and smells clear and clean. When you get to the source of the noise you discover an underground river that bursts from the wall five feet to your left and disappears down a tunnel to your right about 10 feet past the path that you have been following. The river is about fifteen feet across. Spanning this underground

river is a bridge of stone that appears to have been worn from the rock rather than built by hands. It is about a foot thick at the center, approximately two and a half feet wide and lies only an arms length over the rushing water. The bridge is wet with moisture, making the rock slippery, and the air is thick with the spray of the waters. [Crossing this bridge is somewhat treacherous because of the slick surface but anyone who Takes 20 can cross it without incident. If the adventurers are in a hurry they can cross successfully with a Reflex save at DC 10 for one-quarter movement, DC 15 at half movement or DC 20 at full movement.

If the Reflex save is missed by:	The result will be:
1-2	fall on the bridge
3-5	hanging from the bridge
more than 5	fall in the water (no damage)

Any character hanging from the bridge must make a Climb check at DC15 to pull back up onto the bridge. (A result of no progress means the hero is still hanging; a failure means a fall into the river.) Others could move to help but must make a Reflex save if they hurry (see above). If an adventurer falls into the water, he or she must make a Reflex save at DC15 to avoid being carried into the tunnel. The GM may require a Swim check for a person in the river to do anything other than just be carried along. The river's captive may be deposited later on some dark underground beach, carried to the lower depths of the cavern, or even carried back to the surface. Searching for a missing party member could become an adventure in itself.]

13. A DANGEROUS CROSSING – There is so much shale and fallen rock here that you cannot even see the actual floor of the cavern. Although the ceiling looks steady now, there was obviously a substantial cave-in here at one time. This is not a place where you would want to make a great deal of noise! The shadows of the piles of rock are long and deep and they seem to move in the flickering of the lights you bring. Recesses in the walls could hide anything up to the size of a man, or slightly larger. There is an eerie silence over the whole scene as your party surveys the area. The still air carries in it a faint smell of dust and dryness. Crossing this area will be extremely hazardous and will require a good deal of mutual assistance to navigate it safely. The rocks vary in size from as large as your head to as small as acorns and it is impossible to take a step without everything shifting. As you are looking at the rubble you hear the sharp "clack-clack" of a rock that has apparently





fallen. Whether it fell from the ceiling or just shifted off a pile you do not know. [Speed here is reduced to one-quarter and even with that a Reflex save at DC 10 is required to avoid injury. Additional modifications: Moving one-half speed, DC+5; Combat, DC+5. Injury is 1d3 points of damage for every 5 points by which the Reflex save is missed. Yes, this is potentially a skull-fracturing, arm-breaking area. All Spot checks are at -10 when a character is moving because of the amount of attention it takes to navigate safely. One must stop in place to make checks normally. Moving makes so much noise that all Listen checks are at -10 unless everyone in the party remains still.]

14. A SHOWER OF WATER – As you enter a huge chamber you can hear a steady sound of rain hitting water. The heavy moisture of the room is so noticeable it feels almost like a physical blow when you enter. As you get more light into the room you notice that the roof of the chamber towers over 200 feet high. In the middle of the roof of the chamber hangs a cone-shaped rock formation. It is narrow where it nestles into the roof of the chamber, and widens to about six feet at the lower end. The center of the cone is open and from the middle of it a steady rain falls straight to the cavern floor. There the water has collected into a clear pool that does not look deep, but is a good 20 feet across. From there the water runs in a stream toward the opposite end of the chamber. Twenty-foot-tall stalagmites are crowded around the pool. The water showers down only in the area that is directly below the formation on the cavern's ceiling. [The water is clear but heavy with minerals. It will wash off dirt and grime and refresh, but it is cold, and has tiny particles of minerals in it.]

15. STEPPED SHELVES – From the side of this chamber, about 30 feet above the cavern floor, a steady stream of water flows. It pours down over a series of stepped rock shelves that are irregularly spaced but relatively close together, with only a foot to a foot and a half difference in height from one to the next. The cascade empties into a pool at the side of the cavern which is 3 feet deep and 15 feet across. The water must flow out through the wall of the cavern lower down because the pool does not seem to be getting bigger or deeper. The rock shelves look a lot like a circular stairway leading up to the opening where the water enters the room. [These formations are known as trays. They look

substantial but are really quite fragile. If an adventurer tries to climb the trays, he or she must make a Reflex save at DC20 to ascend without breaking any of the trays. (Armor Check Penalty applies.) The second climber will face DC22; the third DC24, and so on. If a tray (or trays) breaks, the unlucky climber falls into the lake, which is not deep enough to break the fall. Standard damage is 1D6 per 10 feet fallen.] (This was not included with the ascents because it would be so difficult for a party to make its way up this formation.)

16. UNDERGROUND GEYSER – Here the passageway opens up to twice its normal width and in the middle of the passageway sits a massive, stunted stalagmite. It is only about five feet high but has a diameter of nearly ten feet, and is five feet wide across the top. As you approach the stalagmite you hear a gurgling sound, then a loud hiss, and a stream of water shoots from the top of the stalagmite. The geyser hits the ceiling 25 feet above with enough force that the water is atomized into a fine mist which settles down onto the whole area. The stream itself lasts for only two seconds, drops back to a low bubbling and then subsides. Any stalactites have been blasted away from the center of the ceiling here but around the edges of the open area they have grown long, several joining with stalagmites to form columns. [This type of geoform is called a bathtub. The massive stalagmite has a 5-foot pool in its top that is fed through a pressure tube from deep in the earth. This one is very active; the eruption repeats every 3 or 4 minutes.]

17. CAVE LIZARD – There is a hint of a fishy smell in the air reminding you of the waterfront. As you walk on you think you hear something very faint in the area ahead. [If the heroes pause to listen:] You hear a light scratching, and a crunching noise. [When the party enters the next area, this is what they see:] Your light reflects off milky stone and shimmers in reflections on water as a pebble clatters across the stone. Something white and slick slides rapidly across the floor. A pale lizard-like creature nearly as long as a man clambers up the rim of a large crater filled with water. It pauses at the brink with its head turned as if looking at you, but its eyes are white and empty. What seems like an eternity to you is actually only a fraction of a second and in a flash, the lizard disappears into the pool and is gone. [If the party investigates, they will see no trace of the creature in the water but





will find claw scratches on the rim and a half-eaten dead fish.]

18. BAT SWARM – The foul smell of manure assails your nostrils as you advance and you see the black smudges of rodent droppings on the floor. [As the party proceeds:] The smell grows stronger and the droppings more numerous as you approach the next area. The ceiling of this cavern is high and vaulted. Suddenly, there is a rushing of wings and a squealing noise as a cloud of blackness rushes toward you. [Pause for the party's response. With a Reflex save of DC15, they can throw themselves on the manure-strewn ground in time to avoid the swarm.] Almost faster than you can react you are surrounded and buffeted by a cloud of wings and teeth. [Anyone holding a light source must make a Will save at DC10 or drop it. If all lights go out, relighting them in the dark would be very difficult.] In an instant the cloud of bats is past you and disappearing down the passage, leaving you unharmed with rapidly beating hearts and a room of bat guano. [To use this as an encounter, see statistics on a Bat Swarm in Appendix 2: Swarms.]

19. A LONG WAY TO FALL – Upon entering this room you smell rotting flesh and hear the scurrying of tiny claws upon stone. As you take in the view before you, you see a bloody mass lying in the center of the chamber. A closer look shows it to be the remains of a [wart hog/large pig/wild boar – choose whichever is most appropriate]. Off to the side you hear the scolding squeak of rats trying to warn you away from their dinner. This turns your attention to them and you see that one in the front has a bloody piece of ripped flesh at its feet. Trails of blood crossed with red paw prints mark the stones around you. The rats do not flee but flit from shadow to shadow. Turning your attention back to the hog, it is clear that it is dead. Immediately above it is an opening a great deal like an inverted well that stretches off above you into the blackness. The creature must have fallen in here all the way from the surface. Looking about, you realize there are other bones present, including some that are obviously human. [To use this as an encounter, see statistics on a Rat Swarm in Appendix 2: Swarms.]

20. STALAGMITE WIZARD – As you walk along you notice a shape ahead in the flickering shadows. It

looks very much like a human-sized creature wearing a long robe. His hands seem to be raised above his head, and moving. [Pause for the party's reaction.] As you get closer and the light gets better, you can see that the figure you are watching no longer seems to be moving; it must have been the uncertain light that gave that impression. In fact, the figure is actually an irregular stalagmite with three tips: a rounder one in the center that looks roughly like a head and higher ones to either side that look like raised arms.

[Two scenarios (old and recent) are given here; use the one that fits your game.]

(1) As you near the formation you notice an arrow imbedded deeply in what would seem to be the figure's chest. Upon close examination you can see the arrow is of Elven make and is stuck into the stalagmite a good four inches. The first inch may have been from the initial force of the impact, but the last few inches are due to the expansion of the stalagmite.

(2) As you near the formation you notice an arrow imbedded in what would seem to be the figure's chest. Upon close examination you can see the arrow is of Elven make and is stuck into the stalagmite about an inch. The examination also readily reveals that the arrow is a very recent addition to the geological formation.





Formations

01. A damp coolness permeates everything. When you listen, a steady drip, drip, drip can be heard from almost every direction. The walls of this corridor are uneven, rounded as if worn away by water thousands of years ago; there are no tool marks on the walls or floor. In front of you out of the darkness rises a stalagmite, its base about five feet in diameter, tapering to a point eight feet from the floor. The minerals that make it up seem to appear in bands of color—reddish brown, dark grey, milky white, dirty yellow, and others, sometimes repeating colors as the rings approach the apex. You can see that this is one of the sources of the dripping sound as there are droplets steadily hitting the tip of the formation. [The moisture dripping down the stalagmite runs away from it in rivulets, wearing shallow ravines in the floor before disappearing into several small cracks in the stone.]



02. As you enter the next chamber, your light glimmers all across the walls. Some sort of tiny crystals are catching the light and reflecting it back. When you take a closer look, you see the sides of the chamber are covered with little groups of crystalline spikes. They look almost like brittle flowers, or frosty clusters of icy thorns. [They are extremely fragile; even brushing against them will crumble the more slender stems. It is easy to break off groups, but very difficult indeed to keep them whole. *If that is desired, success would require a Dexterity roll at DC 20.*]

03. The passage here is tall enough for you to stand, about 7' high in the center. The pale gray walls are smooth, slightly rounded, and appear bowed out. The floor of the passage is also slightly rounded, with the low spot running down the center and the rest of the floor slanting toward it. The ceiling is not as smooth as the walls; it has occasional cracks and broken places. The floor is not smooth either, being littered in places with debris fallen from the ceiling. The rocks on the floor vary in size from small pebbles to stones the size of a fist to rough rocks larger than a man's head. It will be necessary to make your way with care to avoid an injury. [-3 to Spot checks, Reflex save at DC 10 to avoid injury; failure indicates a fall doing 1d3 points of damage.]

04. The ceiling here is low. Creatures over 5 ½ feet tall have to stoop and move carefully to avoid hitting their heads. [-2 to Spot checks, Reflex save at DC 8 for each person to avoid hitting his or her head. Damage 1d2; a helmet can reduce the damage by one point.]

05. To your left lies an outcropping of rock and upon it is growing what appears to be a crystalline tree. The structure looks amazingly like a small tree or bush that has been caught in a sleet storm. It shimmers and glistens in the light like fine crystal and needle-like projections extend from its 'branches' like icicles on a frozen tree. It looks amazingly delicate and sharp. [This structure is actually a mixture of calcium and aragonite that forms naturally. Despite its appearance like crystal or quartz it is of no value. Anyone who touches it with a bare hand will have a one-in-three chance of pricking a





finger enough to draw blood. This causes no damage but will hurt. If the formation is touched with a mailed hand, it has a one-in-six chance of being broken.]

06. In the area you are entering there is a large pinkish domed pillar that is about five feet in diameter and eight to ten feet tall. To the right of it lies a shallow pool of water. Moisture dripping from the roof onto the dome trickles down into the pool. The surface of the pillar is slick but not smooth; it is veined and bumpy from hundreds of tiny stalagmites that have formed and are forming the pillar and its rounded dome. There is another similar formation on the other side of the pool that is about six feet tall but only one foot across. The pool itself has additional mineral deposits that make the edge and subsurface slick and treacherous.

07. From the cavern roof a rock projects that looks like a funnel inverted and stuck into the ceiling. From this funnel droplets of water fall like a steady shower of rain. When the water reaches the floor of the cavern, it falls into a pool that apparently has no outlet but neither does it overflow.

08. In this area there is a mound that looks like it was created from corded-ware pottery built up to about knee level. At the top of the mound there is a basin of water approximately an arm's length across that is fed by a steady drip from the ceiling. Drip, [pause], drip, [pause], and so on. It has to have been dripping for many lifetimes. The mound looks like dirty brownish quartz. The basin is dark, and it is impossible to tell if anything lives in it or not. [This could be a nice home for a fantasy water creature.]

09. This area has unusual oval-shaped stones that look just like eggs. There are single eggs all around the room and groups gathered in four stone "nests" on the floor. Each "nest" is like a flat bowl made of stone, about two feet across. The eggs are about the size of swans' eggs. Amazingly, there are three more "nests" of similar size on the walls. The "eggs" seem to be attached to the walls and floor and are whitish in color. [These eggs are natural outcroppings that are formed by solutions forced out of cracks in the walls and floor. However, if the GM prefers they could be eggs of an earth or crystalline

creature. If they are smashed they have a milky, whitish liquid inside.]

10. Here, glistening blades of reddish brown stone protrude from the walls, ceiling, and floor. They are shaped variously as disks and like short broad-bladed weapons. They are irregular in size and shape and appear to have grown naturally rather than being carved. The stones are sharp and very strong and must be moved around rather than through. The patches of these "blade-stones" vary from a couple feet across to the size of a small flower garden. [There are 2-12 patches that the GM should place randomly. If someone falls or is pushed onto a patch they will encounter 1-4 blades that each do 1-6 points of damage. Similarly an explosion or someone with giant strength hitting the sides could cause the roof blades to fall.]

11. In the center of this area a massive column two feet in diameter stretches from floor to ceiling. This column is not carved but appears to be formed by the meeting of a stalactite that has grown down from the ceiling and a stalagmite that has formed from the cavern floor. Throughout this area stalagmites grow with their fingers reaching up toward the ceiling and sharp stalactites menace from above. As you look, the shadows cast by the light and the formations are stark, menacing, and confusing. There are many places where menace could be hidden and there is no way to navigate the area without weaving in and around the formations of rock.

12. This area is filled with "death coral." It is a sharp, treacherous formation of rock that covers the floor, growing up like menacing bushes of stone spines. It looks much like colonies of sea coral, with growth built upon other growth to produce large masses of dangerous lance-like points. Navigating through here will be hazardous and a misstep could mean a fall onto the sharp rocks. [Traversing the room requires a Reflex check at DC 10 for one-quarter movement, DC 15 for half movement and DC 25 for full movement. All Spot checks are at -10 when a character is moving because of the amount of attention it takes to navigate safely. If a character falls, he or she will take 2d4 points of damage from the death coral.]





13. Along the wall a white fibrous substance glistens. It looks like a large scalp lying on the ground with strands of white hair stuck to the wall above it. [Upon closer inspection:] This is not actually hair at all, but it looks like hair that has grown out of a hole in the wall and pooled together in a pile. The substance glistens slightly and is actually mineral in nature. [If it is broken it will crumble into minute flakes resembling snow and will have tiny shards that prick the skin much like touching a small fuzzy cactus.]

14. Cascading down along the left wall is a rock that looks like it was turned to liquid and began to spill down in rivulets billowing over each other like water in a stream. The wall is quite solid now and you have no idea what could have caused it to flow down like this. The entire surface glistens and shines and looks almost like salt that has been poured from the ceiling and piled along the wall. [It is neither granules nor liquid, however; it is quite solid. This of course limits the actual maneuver area here because the formation has "grown" out onto the floor.]

15. The ceiling in this part of the cavern gradually drops until it is only four feet from the floor. It appears to continue for some distance before opening up again. Both the floor and the ceiling here are weathered stone. You aren't sure what has weathered it, but it has made for a smooth surface both above and below. [Because of the limited space, if man-sized characters are attacked here they will take -4 to attack and -2 to defense. If they choose to remain stationary and on their knees without taking the free five-foot step they can improve their defense to -1.]

16. A stagnant black pool has gathered in a low place on the floor here; you are not sure how deep it is. You notice a dark patch of wetness on the ceiling above the pool. It appears that it may be dripping because there is a bead forming in its center, but if so it is dripping extremely slowly. The air here is damp and cool and a musty smell fills your nostrils. [If the adventurers move closer to the pool:] As you approach you see that a film covers the surface of the water and nothing appears to have moved in or around it for some time.

17. As you are walking along, the irregular floor begins to rise toward the passage roof. The opening that is left is less than two and a half feet high. The passage appears to continue like this for about twenty feet, then it opens back out to its previous dimensions. [Adventurers will have to crawl if they want to continue. Large or armored characters may have to remove some of their equipment to fit through the crawlway.]

18. The right wall of the cavern you are in is partially hidden from view by a milky white curtain wall that seems to flow from the ceiling of the cavern. The wall is quite opaque, but is extremely thin and brittle. [If examined closely the characters can see that the wall does not reach the cavern floor in some areas. There is enough space behind the curtain wall for five to eight people to hide and take refuge. If you wish, there can be passages behind the wall that lead away from this room.]

19. As you are walking along the passageway, you notice that the way ahead seems to be impeded by a milky white stone that looks as though it flowed out of a spot high up on the right-hand side of the passageway. The creamy stone has filled up the tunnel except for a two-foot by three-foot opening in the upper left corner of the passageway. The white billowed stone is quite hard, but in many areas it is still wet as the liquid that has been forming the stone over the last many years continues to seep from the corner above. The incline of the stone is about thirty degrees.

[Characters can climb to the opening and then clamber down the other side of the flowstone and continue on their way but can pass the opening only one at a time and may have to take off accoutrements before crawling through. This is an excellent place for an ambush or encounter while the group is split up.]

20. To the side of the room you are traversing you can see what seem to be stone reeds growing from the ceiling. They grow in clumps of three and four and are each hollow. They range from a foot to three feet long and some continue to drip very slowly. [The formations are very brittle and will shatter if pried from place. In modern parlance these formations are known as soda straws.]





21. A fissure has opened here and deep cracks run up the walls on either side. The air is hot and foul as a reddish smoke rises from the crevice. [If the characters enter the room and approach the fissure:] **The heat rises dramatically as you approach the fissure. While it doesn't burn, it is uncomfortable and causes you to sweat. The smell is even worse here; you feel the smoke claw at your lungs as a cough builds deep in your chests.** [Any one who enters must make a Fortitude save at DC10 or begin coughing uncontrollably, giving a -4 to all rolls. If the save is missed by five or more, the victim loses consciousness and begins to lose 1 point of Constitution every minute he or she remains in the room. If Constitution reaches zero, the unlucky person dies. Otherwise the loss of points is not permanent and will be recovered at 1 point per 3 hours, 48 hours maximum.]

22. In this chamber, as your light touches the walls and the stalagmites, you notice that there is a demarcation line about seven feet above the cavern floor. Everything below that line seems to be a reddish brown in color, while colors above it are generally lighter hues with more variation. All the geological formations below the line are covered with puffed out, bulbous cloud-shaped forms, whereas above the line the cavern and stalagmite walls are straight. [This room used to be under water to the demarcation line. The reddish hue is due to the iron content of the water. The puffy, cloud-like formations are characteristic of underwater geofom development, as the minerals seep out of the water and collect around magnetic centers on the rock surface.]

23. As you walk along the passageway, you begin to hear the sound of rushing water. The sound becomes quite loud before you find its source, a five-foot-wide crack in the floor running from one side of the passageway to the other. You can tell quite plainly that the noise is coming from down inside the crevice. When you lower a light all you can see is the sheer drop down the sides of the crack. The moisture of the torrent is billowing up out of the crack. The water could be just out of range of your light, or a hundred feet down.

24. As you walk down the passageway you notice a small rivulet of water running down the right side of the passageway. Every now and then the rivulet widens into a bowl-shaped pool six to eight

inches in diameter. In these depressions you can see white pearls, some times 15 or 20 in a bowl. They vary in size from 1/8 to 1/2 inch in diameter. [These are known as cave pearls and are formed by calcite in the water. They can be crushed into powder by a hammer or the pommel of a sword. Most are not cemented into the bowls and can become a slipping hazard if knocked out of the bowl and onto the floor of the passageway, making footing treacherous and falls common. They have very little value, and are generally not perfectly round.]

25. In this room the floor has numerous clumps of short, sharp, leaf-like reddish-brown stalagmites. There are 20 to 30 flat spines in every group. [This is called death coral and it can be dangerous, as the name implies. If a character or monster falls on them, they are sharp enough and stiff enough to cause 1-3 points of damage each even through most armor. Falling into the midst of them, a normal-sized person could slice himself on 5 to 14 of them (1d10 +4). They are brittle, and if kicked from the flat side they will become detached from the cave floor and fall flat. It is possible to move through the room at a normal speed if it is done with care. In combat, however, anyone who falls will need to make a Reflex save at DC15 to avoid falling on one of the spiny clumps.]

26. As you enter this chamber the smell of rotten eggs assails your nostrils. Against the right hand wall of the chamber you can see, when illuminated, a pool of yellowish, very liquid mud. The pool of mud is boiling and large bubbles are breaking the surface constantly. This seems to be where the smell is coming from. As you approach the pool the fumes get more intense. [This is a sulfur pool and the fumes can be very dangerous in an enclosed environment such as this! If the characters linger in this room or approach the pool too closely they will need to make a Fortitude save at DC13; any who fail fall unconscious. If an unconscious character is not removed from the chamber quickly, they will suffocate and die in a number of rounds equal to the victim's Constitution.]

27. As you enter this new room you cannot help but be amazed at its sheer size. Towering stalagmites shoot out of the ground, searching for the ceiling lost in the shadows above. Your path here will necessarily be convoluted, and the formations make it difficult to keep your comrades in sight much less spot any possible enemies. [With a Listen check of DC 15 read the following:] **As you weave**





your way through the labyrinthine room you hear something fleeing, always ahead of you.

28. The passageway here is rounded and relatively smooth. As you walk along it is becoming taller, but narrower near the bottom. The center begins to slope downward in a four foot wide area. Your party is forced to go single file as this trench deepens to about six feet. Suddenly the center of the passage takes another drop, and the middle two feet become four feet lower yet. [Everyone is now walking in a narrow trough in the bottom of the four-foot-wide trench, where there remains a space of about one foot on either side of the center trough.] The passage meanders one way then another as it flows forward. The lowest trough suddenly ends in a short, broad crack straight ahead. Above that you can see the former smooth tunnel resume. [Adventurers will need to climb a total of ten feet to get back up to the former tunnel and continue on.]

29. The passageway here opens into a large grotto. To the right of where the passage enters the chamber, a stream of water wells up from under the wall and flows into a large pond that fills half of the chamber. The water is quite clear and you can see huge white eyeless fish meandering around in the pool. The water seems to be quite deep as well, between ten and twenty feet in areas. Below the surface of the water, all the walls of the basin are covered with puffy cloud-like deposits of white minerals. The waterway continues on, flowing out under the far wall of the chamber.

30. You come upon what looks like a natural well in the floor of the chamber. It is very deep and you cannot see the bottom. [If someone drops in a stone or similar item:] It falls for four seconds, hits something and begins to ricochet, clattering to a stop three seconds later. [If someone drops in something with a magical light to it:] It drops about four seconds and then the light is cut off. You hear some thumping and see the light moving far below before it disappears. It appears that the well is not straight and you cannot see where it goes.

31. The smell of damp earth fills your nostrils as you stride along. The chamber here is very damp and droplets of water on the walls glisten in your light. The sandy ground here is wet and clings to

your boots. The sound of dripping water echoes loudly as water drops from several places in the ceiling into stagnant pools below. The pools have no real depth but everything is moist and clammy.

32. The blue-gray walls of this room stretch before you, inviting you to enter. Peering through the dimness you can make out your own haggard reflection in the still waters of a subterranean lake. There is a small path along the left side of the water, dry but narrow. You will only be able to walk in single file, but that's not a problem because nothing could be living in the water this far underground, could it?

33. This chamber is marked by the reaching fingers of stalagmites and stalactites. The shadows cast by your light make ghastly flickering images upon the wall and as you watch them dance a low moan fills the cavern like the deep cry of a ghost or a condemned soul. [Feel free to make a moaning sound. Pause, and repeat a couple of times. Continue while the players stay in this area. The sound comes from air moving through a vent in the ceiling but that is not readily visible from the chamber floor.]

34. In this room there is a great pool of water. The crystal-clear liquid swirls from a hidden current deep below the surface and you can see small white fish flitting about in your light. The water appears to be fresh and deep; the ground is sandy and contains only a few large smooth rocks. It looks like an excellent place to rest. [The water is indeed clean, fresh, and potable. If anyone touches the water read:] The water is cold and clear. It feels fresh and clean to your touch and the smell is like the freshness after the rain.

35. This chamber has great columns that rise from the floor to the ceiling. The columns vary from 3-8 feet in diameter and are arranged irregularly. The multicolored pillars seem to have formed as stalactites from the ceiling met stalagmites from the floor and joined. Several of the veined columns are slick with wetness as they continue to grow slowly and increase in thickness over the years.

36. In this area there is a fetid pool more than eight feet wide. From a hole high above it, a rancid greenish stream trickles down a wall that is covered





with slime and stench. Even the spark of light coming through the distant opening seems sickly. There are masses of algae upon the water, some still green and some black and dead looking. A layer of some oily substance covers the pond's surface between the clumps. The whole room reeks of foul smells and decay.

37. Your footsteps echo ahead of you as you make your way into this cavern. The light seems subdued, illuminating only a short distance and leaving everything beyond cloaked in shadow. Overhead the stalactites covering the ceiling gaze down malevolently upon you. The cold stone is not a welcoming sight but it appears this room is empty. Of course, looks aren't everything.

38. In the vaulted chamber ahead of you, you see what looks almost like a stack of mushrooms. As you enter, you see many such stacks stretched high above you. The nearest stands three times the height of a man, and it looks like the caps of a dozen or more gigantic mushrooms were piled on top of each other and turned to stone. Across the room is a formation that has a broad, layered base nine feet high and six feet wide. On top of it are piled more of the narrow stacks, giving it the look of a keep with ornate spires gone wild. [This type of stalagmite commonly forms in an area with high ceiling, where drops of water splash widely when they fall rather than dripping slowly onto a narrow tip.]

39. Ahead of you the tunnel takes a sudden dip into a welling stream. The walls, which had been rounded and wide-set, draw close together, making a chasm through which the water runs. You could possibly wade through the current but it is icy and its depth is unknown. You do see one alternative; a narrow ledge runs from where you stand along the side of the chasm, less than ten feet above the water. It would be a tricky climb, but possible if you are unencumbered. Which route will you choose? [Progress requires a successful Climb check at DC10; Armor Check Penalty and encumbrance apply. Anyone who falls will probably hit rocks rather than water, as the stream is very narrow. The stream runs 40 feet (or at the GM's discretion) and then disappears further underground. The party is then able to leave the ledge and return to the passage in which they were traveling.]

40. The walls and floor of this chamber are covered with tiny curling formations. They are mostly white, ranging in size from less than the length of a lady's finger to nearly a foot long. There are many growing in clumps, giving the look of some loose-petaled flower. Others stand alone, reaching out from the walls or up from the floor. None are straight; all are bent, curved or swirled. In the corners of the floor along the walls are broken and shattered pieces of these curled stones. Either some creature comes and periodically sweeps them off the walls or they eventually grow long enough that their own weight causes them to fall. [These are called gypsum flowers and are found in relatively dry parts of caves.]

Other Features



41. As you are walking through this area you notice a bundle of material lying near a stalagmite with an oddly-shaped top. As you approach the bundle you realize that it is the headless body of an armored orc. The flesh is totally gone from the corpse's bones and the armor is rusted beyond any





kind of usefulness. There are no other items around. When you take a close look at the stalagmite beside the body, you see that the orc's head has been placed on the tip of the stalagmite. Mineral-laden water still drips steadily onto the orc's helmetless head. The minerals have seeped into the flesh and petrified it, and so it remains, its features contorted into an angry scream. The stalagmite has continued forming around and on top of the head. It must have been placed here in some bygone day, a trophy from a long-forgotten battle.

42. As you enter this chamber you realize that something has been digging here. There is a cavity carved into one wall that is about five feet high, four feet wide, and six feet deep. A crudely-made pick-ax with a cracked handle lies nearby. Additionally, there are two irregular holes dug into the cavern floor, each about six feet by eight feet at the top and five feet deep. You see no one in the area and you didn't hear any digging as you approached this area. [Upon closer examination:] You see nothing of interest in the excavations. It all appears to be rock and dirt. There are some tracks in the bottoms of the two holes. [A Knowledge (nature or dungeoneering) check at DC 10 will reveal that they have been there undisturbed for some time; DC 15 will show them to be made by an underground dweller appropriate for the area – goblins or orcs, perhaps.]

43. Ahead of you lies a cliff, and the path you are following skirts around the drop. As you approach the edge, you notice a rope tied around an outcropping of stone nearby. It is dirty, and badly frayed where it passes over the lip. [If it is pulled up:] The rope is about 40' long past the frayed spot. The end that was hanging loose is unraveling.

44. At the bottom of a long drop lies a pile of bones. It is a single body, which must have been here for many years because nothing is left but the skeleton. Close examination shows the skull is broken, though it probably didn't happen when it hit the sand where it is now lying. Looking up, you can see a knobby rock that is a more likely culprit. Looking at the skeleton again, you notice that one of the legs is lying under the body at an unusual angle. The thigh bone has been broken in half and twisted around. It would have been very painful – if the poor wretch had been alive to feel

it. [At the GM's option, some items could be found in the bones, particularly things of ceramic, stone or metal.]

45. Along the wall, roughly 6 ½ feet high, are some blackish marks about 18 inches long. Close examination shows them to be soot.

46. A slick band as wide as the length of your forearm runs the entire length of this area, in a low spot along the center of the floor. If you look at the ceiling you see moisture beading and dripping from there to the slick area. This area is easily avoided; however, if the party were to face combat here it could be a hazard. [If in combat: Reflex save each round at DC 10 to avoid slipping, which results in the victim being prone and suffering 1d2 points of damage OR the character can choose to take a -1 to all to hit and defense rolls to avoid making the check, representing using extra caution during the battle.]

47. The air here is unusually chilled and the silence is oppressive. You realize that the entire party has come to a halt and you are not entirely sure why. The only sound is the creak of leather and clink of armor as your companions shift warily in their stances. The shadows that dance upon the walls at the fringes of the light are deep and foreboding but you see and hear nothing unusual.

48. A misty haze gathers in corded wisps along the low spots on the floor. In places it is so thick that you cannot see the floor beneath it. The air here is cold and a chill fingers its way up your spine causing you to involuntarily hunch your shoulders. You can see your breath slightly here as well but you can see no immediate cause for the change in temperature. The air smells of mold and decay and beads of moisture gather upon the walls and ceiling.

49. A single broken arrow lies before you. It is definitely not an orc arrow; it is better made than that. It would require closer examination, though, to determine its source. [If the adventurers examine the arrow closely the GM should have it come either from a party that the adventurers know preceded them into the caverns or from a nearby settlement. If the adventurers do examine it closely the GM should tell its origin and read on:] **The tip has a dark stain on it; it seems to have been bloodied. Looking**





around, at the edge of the light you see another arrow of similar design. There are no other signs of the archer or the targets.

50. As you survey this area a glint of metal catches your eye as it reflects back your light. It appears to be a long sword of competent construction, its blade nicked and stained brown. Additionally, you find a broken bow nearby and the dust and dirt are very disturbed as if a battle may have taken place. There is a partial imprint of a large clawed foot, but the prints are obscured by the drag marks of two man-sized objects that were drawn after it. A little way farther on there are 7 arrows scattered in the dust of cavern floor that may have fallen from a quiver. The dust gives way to rock then and no more marks can be seen.

51. Here there are meticulously-detailed statues of two fighters whose swords are in their scabbards, but their hands are raised before their eyes as if to ward off an attack. There is also a wizard with a raised staff in one hand and the other up before his face with the palm out. A statue of a female in armor shows her with her sword half-drawn from her scabbard and looking to her left. Behind a rock crouches a stone halfling with a short sword in his hand. The faces all show surprise and they look like they were carved to show a state of shock and fear. Oddly, they show no tool marks at all. It is almost as if they were just created from stone all at once. The shadows cast here are long and irregular. Somewhere a pebble clatters softly across the stone floor.

52. This area has a very dusty floor scattered with pieces of stone. There are some confused tracks in the dusty regions. *[Someone with appropriate Knowledge or Survival skills might be able to identify them and the GM can make up whatever monster seems to best fit the area. How recent they are can depend on whether or not the GM has populated these caverns.]* Scattered about this area are stones that vary in size from the size of your fist to large enough for someone to hide behind. The shadows and the placement of the stones make it impossible to see if anything is behind them. *[Note: There is nothing behind these stones. However, if the party is cocky or used to finding nothing when these Bits are used, you could keep them on their toes by adding a wandering monster here.]*

53. As you enter the next chamber you begin to hear a squeaking and chittering noise from high above your head. The floor that you are walking on has become a slimy mess, and a rising smell of ammonia drifts up from beneath your feet. *[If the adventurers can illuminate the cavern ceiling:]* You notice some movement up on the ceiling of the cavern. You can see many small furry bodies, hanging from the cavern ceiling, wrapped in what seem to be rubber wings. Bats! What looks like hundreds of bats are clinging to the ceiling. The ammonia smell from the bat guano is not overpowering but it is not a pleasant smell and is pungent enough to cover any other smells that may be in the area. The floor has become quite slick with the smelly bat urine and guano mix.

54. As you walk along you hear a whoosh as a small furry object flies by your party. It was coming from in front of you and passing to your rear. Intermittently there are similar sounds as bats attracted by your light sources speed by your group.

55. Ahead you see three piles of stones. Each is about 7-8 feet long and 4 feet wide, tapering to about 2 feet in height. They look like cairns that have been erected to cover the dead. At one end of two of these stand pitted and rusting swords which have been embedded into the ground blade first. The third bears no such marking. *[If the adventurers pause to examine the swords, they seem to be of human make. A character with weaponsmithing (Craft) can check for detailed information and the GM can tie the swords to a nearby culture. The swords are unremarkable and the damp has corroded them to the point of uselessness. If the characters try to rob the graves they will find skeletons in rotted scraps of leather and clothing but not enough remains to even identify colors anymore. Each corpse has a copper coin on each of the eye sockets but nothing else of value.]*

56. This area is open and empty except for an unusually-shaped rock in the shadows to your left. It is about the size of a human's head. *[When the characters enter or if they increase the lighting they will notice the rock glints of metal and appears to be a helmet. If they examine the helmet more closely they will see:]* This is a crested helm that used to





bear a fine plume of feathers but now has been ravaged by some cavern-dwellers, possibly insects. The helm has a major dent in its side so deep that it would be impossible to use without repair. The metal is otherwise in good condition. *[If anyone has armorsmithing (Craft) and a hammer it would be a relatively easy repair (DC10).]*

57. *[Choose a character and say:]* As you approach this area you hear something very faint up ahead but it is impossible to tell what it is because of the noise of the accoutrements and boots of the party. *[If the party stops to listen they hear:]* The sound is like the faint crackling of dead leaves rustling distantly in a cold fall breeze. It goes on and on. *[If the party continues, they walk into a swarm of beetles. When they get closer they see:]* In your light you see that the floor ahead is black, shifting chaotically in a thousand directions simultaneously. Looking at it too long or too closely is dizzying but it is clear that the floor is covered with a huge swarm of beetles. Whatever attracted them or what they may be feeding upon is unclear to you. *[The GM can determine whether the beetles move out of the way, attack, or just ignore the party and get stepped on. For statistics on a Cave Beetle Swarm, see Appendix 2: Swarms.]*

58. The acrid stench of serpents assails your nostrils and you have the urge to cover your nose. The floor ahead of you drops suddenly and forms a ledge that is down about two feet. There are no steps, just a ledge and then another 4 foot drop. As you look into the room you see a twisting, intertwining, slithering mass of snakes. There appear to be hundreds upon hundreds of them in various shapes, colors and sizes. The movement is eerily silent until one serpent raises its head, spreads its hood and hisses at you very loudly. *[For statistics on a Serpent Swarm, see Appendix 2: Swarms.]*

59. The sickly-sweet smell of rotting meat fills your nostrils as you approach this area. Here to your left you see most of a humanoid rib cage on the floor. Several of the bones have been broken off and they are tossed aside like finished chicken bones at a feast. Some meat still clings to the ribs as beetles and maggots compete for the remains. A dark stain has spread out from the rib cage on the sand but the blood of the stain has long since dried. There is no sign of the rest of the body or

what has had the feast, but breaking off a rib is not something done by the weak.

60. The stone throughout this area is blackened and sooty and the whole area smells like charcoal from a spent fire. Throughout the area are scattered bones, shields, armor and swords. Nothing seems to be alive in here and it is difficult to tell how long ago this may have happened. There is no heat and no smell of burnt flesh so it must have been some time ago. *[If anyone enters the room read:]* The soot clings to your boots and anything else that touches the walls, floor, or artifacts in this room. It is impossible to brush off. *[Closer examination reveals the bones to be humanoid, smaller than man-sized; specifically goblin bones. Investigation shows that the weapons and armor have their hilts and leather pieces burnt off. Further, if anyone tests the metal they will find that heat has robbed the metal of its temper; the shields bend and swords break if hit with any force.]*

61. In this area, immediately in front of you, there is a collection of bones that look like they belong to a human arm. Another similar group is to your left. Farther on there is a helmet that has been bent almost in half and a large chest-sized boulder with a stain upon it like dried blood lies nearby. A crushed breastplate that still contains the ribs and spine of a human is about four feet past that. As you look around you see the bones of a leg over here, and another set over there. A broken sword glints in the dirt of the floor as well. It looks like something violently crushed whoever this was with repeated blows from the rock and then ripped them to pieces. Closer examination of the helm reveals that only the left side of the skull is intact; the rest of the skull, the teeth and jaw are broken to tiny bits.

62. This area looks like the scene of a cave in. Shale and rocks cover the floor and make an uneven surface for you to navigate. *[Moving at one-quarter speed requires a Reflex save at DC 10 to avoid injury. Modifications: Moving one-half speed, DC+5; Combat, DC+5. Damage is 1d3 for every 5 points by which the Reflex save is missed. Spot checks are at -10 when moving. Listen checks are at -10 unless everyone in the party remains still.]* The walls and roof appear solid now, however. As the characters come to the middle of the room they see a single gauntleted





hand reaching up out of the rock. [If the adventurers dig out the skeleton they find its armor, which is crushed and twisted, a sword that did not survive the force of the blows from the rock and is bent, a dagger of average quality that was under the corpse, and a purse which contains two pieces of gold and three silver.]

63. Striding through the entryway of the next chamber, the first thing you notice is the startling cold. It seems to pierce through your armor and into your heart. In the frigid silence you hear the distant dripping of water into an unseen pool. The stone here is a dull gray, except for the sparse patches of moss defying the cold in an attempt to cling to life. Somewhere a hidden shaft lets in air from the surface. The surface! A place of warmth and light, it is suddenly just a fond memory.

64. As you enter this chamber you see several imposing stalagmites. In the center of the room sits the largest of the stalagmites, its base over 15 feet in diameter and towering more than 60 feet in height. As you get closer to this particular stalagmite you can see that a two-foot-wide stairway has been chipped out of the sides of the formation. The stairway coils its way around the stalagmite as it ascends to a height of twenty feet, and ends in a small platform in front of an ornate, five-foot-high door. [The stair and door are of dwarven make, and an example of excellent craftsmanship. However, the door is only carved on the side of the stalagmite; there is no opening, only what looks like a door lintel and ornate stone door.]

65. You notice that a stalagmite you are passing has a picture incised on it. It looks like the picture was carved by a knife point. The crude drawing shows a three-legged, barrel-chested monster with a huge mouth in the top of its body. Two of the arms that are held above its head have stick figures of men in their big hands. There is an arrow pointing to the right toward a dark opening. The picture must have been done sometime ago because, while the chisel marks from the knife point seem to be pretty deep, they are smoothed over by a mostly transparent layer of mineral deposits.

66. Up ahead you hear what sounds like an owl's call. This seems slightly suspicious, as you are in

a cavern and not outside. [As the party moves forward:] **As you continue on there is a second call, similar to the first.** [When they enter the next chamber:] **The area you are entering is a jumble of stalagmites and rocks strewn chaotically about. The formations prevent the light from revealing the cavern's secrets, and cast deep shadows through the chamber. You breathe the cool moist air as you survey the strange scene before you. Suddenly, a great white shape rises up out of the rocks and spreads wings as wide as your outstretched arms.** [Pause for the party's reaction.] **The huge white owl flies to a ledge at your upper left and sits up there in the shadows watching you. Somehow, it looked bigger when you were startled.**

67. Up ahead you see the beginnings of a faint green glow. The air here has the tang of mold and smells more like a mossy forest than a cavern. [Pause for the party to move along.] **As you enter the chamber you see innumerable patches of a glowing green moss. It gives out practically no light but anyone with low light vision can see well here. The fuzzy green moss glows a gentle green that fades out as your light brightens the room. Without the unnatural glow it looks like normal green moss that you would find in a forest.** [The last person in the party sees:] **When you look back to where you have passed, you see the glow return to the moss as your light fades.**

68. The walls here are irregular and craggy. From the shadows you see two piercing red eyes peering at you from the shadows of a rough niche a little ahead of you and to your right. [When the heroes approach:] **The red eyes disappear with a squeal and a scurrying sound.** [When the party reaches the crevice they see:] **There is a fissure here that disappears deep into the cave wall. It is too narrow for a man to enter but a slender elf or halfling might be able to follow it after removing all armor and accoutrements. In the dirt at the base of the crack there are footprints that look like those of a dire rat. Still, they have a similarity to human feet that is discomfiting and suggests that this may not have been a normal rat.**

69. Suddenly there is a strong gust of cool damp air and the torches sputter and go out. [If there was no magical light:] **You are left in a darkness**





that is all-embracing and almost palpable. You feel the weight of the tons of stone above you pressing in upon you. *[Will save at DC 5 to avoid panic. If anyone panics, roll d6: 1-2: attempt to run off in the darkness; 3-6: just scream for 1d4 rounds or until someone helps to calm them.]*

70. In this area you find a string of headless rats fastened together and lying on the floor. They are tied together by their hind feet like a string of fish. The rats are fairly fresh but the smell of many unwashed bodies pervades the air around you. The dust has been disturbed by many feet that appear smaller than man-sized but the confused tracks make it impossible to tell what made them. You heard nothing as you approached, but something left here fast enough that it didn't stop to pick up its lunch.

71. As you enter this room you see crude cave paintings on the walls. The drawings seem to depict torture, mayhem, and the destruction of small villages. From the quality of the art you would guess that they were made by insane children – or orcs. This is the art of evil and despite the lack of skill you can make out gruesome images of beheading, dismemberment, and the slaughter of innocents. The pictures seem to take a fiendish delight in depicting all manners of cruelty in excruciating, though primitive, detail. One picture clearer than the rest will stick in your mind for a long time, of a child's head severed from its body.

72. A perfect dome rises above you. It is apparently supported by four pillars carved into the walls in four corners. The dome itself is painted a dark blue; there is a silvery crescent moon upon it and shimmering flashes of light like stars. You recognize several constellations; there is the hunter and over there the bull. The pillars that support the "sky" are each carved differently, with one of them carved like rising flames that have been turned to stone and another like a beautiful waterfall frozen in rock. Another hardly looks carved at all; it seems to be a column of stone grown from the joining of a stalagmite and stalactite. The last pillar is narrower at the base than at the top and looks like a whirling funnel of air. This hall matches no style any of you have ever seen and despite the vibrant color you have an overwhelming impression that this is very ancient.

73. You hear a squeaking and scurrying ahead of you as hundreds of rodents race away from you and your light. The hopping, running grey mass bounces and rolls like waves over the rocks before you. It appears to be parting from the center and moving toward the walls. Only when you realize that the rats are not piling up on each other do you notice that they are disappearing down dozens of rat holes in both side walls of the room. This area has the foul stench that you would expect from a rat den, and you see insect vermin flitting among the feces. *[To use this as an encounter, see statistics on a Rat Swarm in Appendix 2.]*

74. There is a moment when the party pauses. No one is moving and you are able to clearly hear the sound of dripping. It is very faint at first but as your ears focus on the sound it becomes quite clear. Somewhere there is a steady drip, drip, drip of water into a pool. Because of the way sound reverberates in the caverns it is impossible to tell which direction it is coming from but the dripping continues.

75. You begin to feel a vibration through the stone. There seems to be a throbbing bass drumming that you feel before you hear. *[Pause for the party to move along.]* All at once the drumming sound is clear. From somewhere in the depths of the earth comes the thunder of many drums in a brutal staccato rhythm. It rises and falls in a swirling, dizzying beat that makes your heart pound faster and your brow sweat. Then, as suddenly as it started, the drumming stops.

76. This chamber is deathly still. Along the wall to the left sits a skeleton with a few rags of clothing. It is very old and you know in your heart that nothing has walked this way for a very, very long time. There is no sign of violence on the skeleton except some marks of tiny teeth on the bones. It looks like some poor soul got lost and finally just sat down and died. As you gaze at it, you begin to feel the mounting weight of tons of rock pressing in upon your spirit from every side. The oppression grows until it is difficult for you to master and a sense of panic builds within as you become certain that none of you will ever find your way out of here again. *[Any who fail a Will save at DC10 will panic and flee in terror toward what they perceive as the way out. They will*





move at full speed for 1d6 rounds before stopping.]

77. As you enter this area you hear the chirping of a cave cricket – tuweep, tuweep, tuweep. Sometimes when you move it stops, only to start up again in what sounds like another place. It is very annoying and you almost get the feeling that it is taunting you.

78. You think you hear something but it is faint. [If the party stops to listen:] You hear the click, click, click of a small rock upon a larger one. It is like someone is tapping out a message. Click, click [pause] click, click. It is impossible to determine if it is coming from in front of you or from behind you – it's like the sound is everywhere. It continues for several repetitions. Click, click [pause] click, click [pause] click, click. Finally, it stops and you hear nothing more.

79. The low sound of a mournful wind is in your ears as a dank wisp of cold air sends a shiver down your spine. You look around; everyone seems to have felt it and stopped in their tracks. You pause for a moment but the air current is gone. In its wake it has left a mouldering smell of death and decay that reminds you of a tomb. Though you continue to try to sense it, there is no longer a draft nor is there any trace of where the breeze came from or where it went.

80. You come upon a sudden drop of about two feet as you enter the next room. Once you drop down onto the floor, you see a figure lying by a rock on the right side of the chamber. It is unmoving and appears to have been dead for quite some time. An old lamp sits next to the body, with both oil and wick long burned away. Not far away is a pack that has been tossed aside along with an empty wineskin. A bag of the type some travelers use to carry rations lies near the corpse as well. The body is of that of a man in a rotting shirt of leather armor and a leather helm. Across his knees is a rusty short sword. The man seems to have cut away one of his boots and the foot that is free is clearly broken. He apparently was unable to leave and died in this place alone and in the dark.

81. In the sand at your feet part of a human skull protrudes from the earth. Other bones are visible

as well. [If anyone digs in the sand it is apparent that an entire skeleton is here.] **The earth has gathered around to reclaim the bones but it is clear they had not been buried.** [Pick a player and tell him or her the following:] **Your ears catch the whisper of a voice. At first it is too faint to hear but then you seem to make out the words. “Why did you not come sooner? Why leave me here to die alone in the dark earth? I thought you were my friend, but you are like all the others.”** [At the GM's discretion the words can plague the player until the bones are buried in hallowed ground.]

82. You hear the faint clatter of falling rocks somewhere in this area followed by the soft sound of a stream of sand running to lower ground. The air here is dry and dusty, like a desert wind. Periodically other sand and small rocks fall in various places, and the floor is littered with rocks and gravel. [There is a 10% chance per character that a cave-in will occur large enough that the party is required to dodge. They can evade damage by a Reflex save at DC 15. Damage is 1d6 for every 5 points or fraction thereof by which the save is missed.]





83. The ceiling of the next chamber rises high above you. The near side is lit by your torch [lantern], if only faintly. Across the room the ceiling slopes steeply upward and is lost in the darkness. [If the adventurers cross the room:] On the opposite side of the room, a small bundle of bones lies at the base of the wall. The skeleton belonged to some four-footed creature. [The skeleton is that of a calf, young deer or other young animal. Many of the bones are broken. The animal fell into a hole at the top of a deep shaft which opens high above this chamber.]

84. [As the adventurers enter the next area, a Spot check at DC 15 will show they have noticed the following. If the area is dark, Spot check is at DC 7.] You see a light coming from a low tunnel along the side wall. [If the adventurers investigate more closely:] There is an opening in the wall about eighteen inches high and two and a half feet wide. It is a rough tunnel that burrows into the rock about 30 feet, where it ends in a rock fall. This is easy to see, because in front of the pile of rocks lies a small stone, alight with flame. [This is a pebble with a Continual Flame spell cast on it.]

85. As you enter the next area, you are startled to discover a flame burning brightly on the floor. It is coming from a stone about the size of a fist. [If the adventurers look at it closely:] Close investigation shows it to be a simple grey rock, completely common except that it seems to be burning and is as bright as a torch. [This is a rock with a Continual Flame spell cast on it. On a Spot check at DC 12 the adventurers will also notice:] You see another light, coming from the ceiling. This one is very dim. You realize it is light from outside shining through a hole at the top of a long shaft. As dim as the light is, the opening must either be very small or very high above you.

86. On the wall to your left there is a large chalk arrow that points the way that you are already going. There is no annotation or indication as to who could have made the mark. You see nothing else in this area that indicates that anyone has passed this way before you.

87. Scrawled on the wall in what looks like blood are the words, "Go Back". There are also trails of dried blood on the stone floor. [A Knowledge (nature)

check at DC10 will tell that these trails are relatively fresh – they have been here long enough to dry but not much longer.] Two footprints crossing the bloody tracks are larger than a man's and deeper. Possibly they were made by some sort of ogre or cave giant but it is hard to tell.

88. You proceed carefully through the darkness. The stillness is unearthly, and you don't understand what dwarves like about the underground. Suddenly, an ear-piercing scream shatters the silence and fades away. Its echoes die slowly and leave the silence that follows feeling even more unnatural.

89. A great roar rises from the depths. It is the loudest and most massive sound you have ever heard and the very earth around you trembles at its power. The sound seems to come from all around you as if the walls themselves were reverberating. As the echoes fade away your ears begin to ring. Sounds are tricky in caverns and you are not sure from which direction that one came, other than down.

90. In the dirt of this cavern there is a mound that looks suspiciously like a fresh grave. As you approach it you see that the earth has been turned and something indeed has been buried here. [This is the grave of an adventurer and is only a couple days old. If the party digs up the body, it is fresh and smelly and everything of value has been taken off the corpse.]

91. Here there are paintings around the walls that show stick figures battling great shaggy, horned beasts and huge bears. In other pictures the figures are chasing deer or just living day to day. They do not seem to live in cities and there is little to indicate who they are. Along one wall are six areas where stones are placed carefully in half circles. [Beneath each half circle lie buried the remains of a family. These are prehistoric remains so all that will be left will be stone spear points and broken fragments of bone. There is nothing of value here.]

92. Painted on the wall is an eight-pointed gold star surrounded by strange symbols. [A Knowledge (arcane) check at DC10 reveals that these mystical symbols represent the elements.] A group of stones, large enough to be used for seats, are arranged in a semi-circle





looking in toward the paintings on the wall. A thick flat stone longer and broader than a tall man lies beneath the symbol. At four corners of the flat stone, narrow upright stones are embedded into the earth. Each standing stone has a worn groove just above the level of the slab about which, perhaps, ropes could be tied. The flat stone is stained dark with what looks to you like ancient blood.

93. As you enter this area you find a large wooden shield cracked down the center. It is crudely made and obviously did not hold up to the use to which it was put. The shield is dusty and has been here for some time. Looking around the room you see several other broken shields and a broken spear. There also are many decaying skeletons of small humanoids in leather armor. [A Knowledge (nature or local) check at DC 12 will identify these as goblin skeletons.] It appears that they had battled for some reason and then left their dead to rot upon the floor of the cavern. Anything of use has long since been stolen from the bodies.

94. This room is full of the foul smell of serpents but you see none here. There are many rough rocks in this room and an apparent drop on the far side prevents you from seeing that far. [When the players advance to the ledge:] You look down onto the rocks below and see the crackly thin skin of a vast serpent. The cast-off skin is several feet in diameter and dozens of yards long. The stone gives no indications of where the serpent may have gone.

95. [This could be used in conjunction with Bit #94.] A piercing hiss slices the air in warning; it sounds aa if the earth itself has opened and is expelling its heat. As the warning dies away you hear the slithering of giant scales sliding across stone. Nothing small could have made that sound; some great serpent lives nearby. [If the characters search, they will find a hole three feet in diameter with the stench of serpents coming from the far side. If the characters really want to crawl through to kill a giant serpent with no treasure, here is a summary of its statistics.]

Constrictor Snake, Giant

Size/Type: Huge Animal

CR 5; Hit Dice: 11d8+14 (63hp); Initiative +3

Speed: 20 ft., climb 20ft., swim 20 ft. Armor Class: 15

Base Attack/Grapple: +8/+23;

Attack: Bite +13 melee (1d8+10)

Special Attacks: Construct 1d8+10, improved grab

Special Qualities: Scent; Saves: Fort +8, Ref +10, Will +4

Abilities: Str 25, Dex 17, Con 13, Int 1, Wis 12, Cha 2

Skills: Balance +11, Climb +17, Hide +10, Listen +9,

Spot +9, Swim +16

Feats: Alertness, Endurance, Skill Focus (Hide), Toughness

96. Here are broken weapons and skeletons of both humans and some small humanoids. [A Knowledge (nature or dungeoneering) check at DC12 will identify these as goblin skeletons.] Clearly, they fell in battle. At one point you see a human skull with an axe buried in it, the haft of which is shattered and useless. Similar scenes are abundant throughout the room. Anything that remains is broken and worthless; the winners took everything of value and left the dead. The battle has been over for some time and only skeletons, ruined shafts, and scraps of leather remain.

97. Ahead of you, you see something most unusual. Passage into the next area is blocked by a set of stone doors. This large double door completely fills the entry, which has been squared off so the doors fit tightly. As you get closer you can see that the surface of the doors is completely smooth, but the edges are worn, as if from much use. [The doors are heavy but well-balanced and could be opened easily from the inside by any person with Strength>9. However, the adventuring party is on the outside of the doors and will have to find a way to pull the doors open. The bottom center of the doors is worn enough that a hand or some other type of tool could be inserted and used to pull. To pull the door open (instead of pushing it) requires a Strength of 16 and a way to pull it.]

98. At the entrance of this chamber you feel the hairs on the back of your neck stand up. Wondering what horrors this new room holds, you boldly step forward. Underfoot something snaps. Upon closer inspection it turns out to be an arrow, well made but apparently very old. On the left side there is an ancient door, barred shut, and now partially blocked by a rock fall. A fallen warrior lies in the corner, his sword broken and his bow snapped. It looks as though he shut the door only to find his enemies at his back. Could the same thing happen to you? [The GM may incorporate this ancient door into the game if desired. Otherwise, adventurers who





manage to clear the way and open it will find the other side to be totally choked with rubble to a distance of many feet.]

99. Across the room, an amazing feature catches your light. It looks like a curtain or drapery billowing down from a broad overhanging rock. Its colors range from pale ivory on the upper portion through variations of gold and orange to a deep rust color at the bottom. [Upon closer examination:] **It is almost unbelievable that this can be rock, but the smooth cold surface under your hands says that is indeed what it is. It looks thin enough to be translucent, if there was a light on the other side.** [If the party looks behind the drapery:] **Stepping around the beautiful wall you are startled to discover the body of a man. His skin looks leathery and dry; his body has effectively mummified here in the dry air of this chamber.** [The man may have been an escaped prisoner or a fleeing bandit, seeking a secure hiding place. He died there and no one has known for years. He has no valuables on him.]

100. [On a Spot check at DC 12, one of the adventurers notices:] **Tucked behind a low rock to the side you see a bag-like object with a dangling strap.** [Upon closer examination:] **This is a crudely-fashioned bag, made from badly-tanned leather. The strap has been attached with rough stitches made with some wide thread or other material.** [The bag is dry and brittle; handling it will make it crack and break. In it is a pile of pale, dry powder; its contents crumbled to dust long ago. The powder is not hazardous in any way but that is not immediately obvious.]



Upcoming Products from TTA

Be watching for the next product from Tabletop Adventures! Shards of the City, which answers the question, “So what do we see as we walk down the street?” will be available in early 2005. Just in time for Valentine's Day will come Shards of the Heart which answers the burning question: “So is the barmaid/bartender cute?”





INTO THE COLD EARTH

by Daniel M. Brakhage

Solution caverns are the most common cavern in the world and they can also be the largest. They can be found in literally any terrain or environment from oceans to mountains to jungle. If you have a terrain type in your world, there are probably caves in it. They have been known throughout history but we are constantly discovering more that were previously unknown. Caverns are uncharted, mysterious, beautiful, and ancient.

Caves tend to be hidden and secret and nearly all caves have been discovered by accident. In our world, caves have been found by people chasing their prey, looking for lost animals, or even searching for unicorns. Their entrances vary from large openings that you can walk through to unassuming holes in the ground; holes that can sometimes lead to vast complexes beneath the earth. One modern author described them as being so prevalent and so numerous that it was like having a layer of secret continents underneath us. In earlier times caves were thought to be entrances to the underworld or to even other places entirely. They were believed to be homes to monsters, magical races, or gods and goddesses. An Irish tale about caves says that on Halloween (or Samhain) the secret caves of the earth open up and monsters and demons are let loose upon the earth.

Solution caves, as noted above, are very common and are often called limestone caves because limestone is the type of stone in which they are most frequently formed. However, solution caves could be found in any carbonate rocks or gypsum, or even in marble. Most of these caves are actually formed below the water table and only after the water recedes do the secondary formations (such as seen in our Cavern Shards and Bits) begin to appear. Solution caves form over very long periods of time and can be very, very deep. Most limestone caves can be found in mountains and there they can be very deep indeed. (Reading about those caves reminded me often of the Mines of Moria in J. R. R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings.)

Caves can begin as cracks into which water flows. Rain water sinks into the soil of the earth, absorbing carbon dioxide from plant residue as it goes, and becomes carbonic acid. The acidic mixture then dissolves the calcite in the limestone and as it does so the cracks get bigger until eventually caves form. In some cases underground rivers carve out passages for themselves in a more dramatic fashion. Some caves are completely filled with water; some may have become dry over the centuries but if you go deep enough you will find the water that formed and is continuing to form the caverns. This makes most caves damp and cold. The average temperature of a cave 55 degrees Fahrenheit and so they are quite cool. When someone refers to the cold, dark earth it is both literal and figurative. Even the dryer areas will tend to be cold.

Just because an area of a cave is dry doesn't mean it has stopped changing. As the earth shifts and chunks of rock resettle, huge caverns can be formed even as others cave in and become blocked. Under the earth you can find great caverns that have narrow, twisting passages leading to them and caverns can easily get lost in their depths. Even today cave exploration is perilous. However, there are many places where caves have already been explored (in full or in part) and you can tour them in relative safety. If you have a chance I would highly recommend journeying to a cavern to see firsthand the wonders that it holds. However, if you are not an experienced caver you need to beware, for caving is dangerous even for the experienced. Caves should not be entered without appropriate safety precautions. If caves continue to hold mystery and danger in our world today, how much more might they hold in your game world?

Whether they are in our world or in yours, caverns are everywhere. They are places of mystery, secrets, peril, and perhaps even treasure, waiting for your players to discover. You can be their guide as they journey into the cold, dark earth!



FANTASY CAVE EXPLORATION

by Mark Potter

I enjoy spelunking. It is fun to climb down into a cave where not many people have been and experience the wonders that are below the surface of our world. I do it for the experience, to satisfy my curiosity, and for the intangible things I derive from what I experience – beauty, wonder and so on. However, when playing a character in a role-playing game (RPG) I have found that my experiences and motivations in exploring caves and caverns are quite different. RPG characters tend not to do things for intangible reasons, mainly because we as players are unable to experience these motivators in an RPG setting. Adventurers need a pecuniary or mission-oriented reason to head into a cave, such as to chase down a monster and take its loot, or to rescue a friend. Motivation is something a good Game Master provides. So what are some good reasons adventurers in a fantasy world might be going into caves?

Most people throughout history thought of caves as dangerous, unknown and something to be avoided in order to live a successful life. In ancient and medieval times caves were thought to be places where different worlds met. Caves were entrances to the underworld or Hades where the gods ruled. There were other mythological creatures that inhabited the deep caves as well: dwarves, gnomes, goblins and the possible civilizations in which they lived. If they were disturbed, they might march forth from the earth to ravage the surface and enslave the people scratching out a living there. In the fantasy worlds we create, there may be legendary treasures, lost civilizations or dragons to be found deep in the caverns. While this possibly might be a hindrance to the average surface-dweller, it becomes a magnet to the daring adventurer. Rumors, tales around the campfire, dusty tomes and brittle scrolls could all reveal things that would motivate adventurers to explore underground.

In our fantasy game settings there are also “needs” that could be filled from items found in caves. Magic users might need spell components

that can be found below. Cave pearls, generally useless to the jewelers, could be a powerful component of earth magic, as could pieces of flowstone or stalactites. Earth deities might demand some rare item as a sacrifice or penance. Perhaps the evil lord’s pet basilisk is in need of a special type of stone for a bed, or to bolster its health! The realm of fantasy opens up many possibilities.

Many animals make their lairs in caves, but those caves are generally erosion caves carved out by wind, or surface water, and are not extensive, unlike limestone caverns which can stretch for miles underground. These shallower caves can provide temporary shelter for adventurers, especially in harsh weather. Of course, a simple cave could be connected to a deeper cavern....

Caves are distinct from mines, another subterranean venue. Mines are generally dug or blasted into the rock in order to get to minerals that are commercially viable. Caves on the other hand are usually formed in the limestone strata under the surface of the earth where there are very few commercially-viable minerals to plunder.

REAL-WORLD CAVING – SKILLS AND EQUIPMENT

The reality is that caving (or spelunking) is a dangerous process. Just the climbing skills needed to explore caves are daunting to most people. That is why most of the caves in our own world have only been seriously explored in the last 100-150 years. Technology today has provided the climbing aids needed and people’s leisure time has expanded to the point where the intangible rewards of caving have surpassed its very real costs and the threats of danger.

Certain skills are very important for delving into caves; climbing is one of those skills. Subterranean rock faces and slopes are every bit as steep as the ones on the surface, except without as much head room. Ropes are put to the same uses in caving as in mountaineering, so skill with



them is important as well. Many survival skills could be equally useful underground – fire building, swimming, and fighting blind to name a few.

As some mountaineering skills are useful underground, so much of the equipment needed is the same: ropes, crampons, grappling hooks. These all were known in the medieval world, and so may be available in a fantasy setting. Of course rope is important. The ideal rope would be light, and not just normal rope but one that is knotted. The knots help in ascending or descending the rope, especially in free climbs where no wall or other structure is close enough to brace against. Though a knotted rope is an improvement over a straight rope, tying up safety lines is important as well.

Some other very important equipment is lighting, preferably a light source that doesn't need to be carried by hand, since both hands may be needed to climb. In medieval times the choices were probably limited to a candle or torch carried in the teeth! Proper clothing is also important. Caves are cool, and an explorer in very light-weight clothing will become chilled unless he or she keeps moving. Knee pads are a must. Spaces are often cramped in cave systems and much of the travel is done on hands and knees. Bare rock can be very traumatic to unprotected knees. The knee pieces of armor would offer protection here as long as the armor is padded on the inside, which it generally is. Even wrapping any kind of extra clothing material around unprotected knees would help.

FANTASY CAVING – SKILLS AND EQUIPMENT

One of the nice things about fantasy spelunking is that it gives a few more tools to use when faced with potentially dangerous situations. First off it's always good to have a magic user around for a light. Spells producing continual or permanent light are worth putting up with the personality quirks of most magic users. A permanent light spell cast on a head band or belt buckle can give a light source that won't go out and isn't dangerous when dropped or bumped. A rock with a similar

spell is handy to throw into places you want to examine but don't want to venture into prematurely.

Another use for magic in spelunking is spells to ease movement when the going gets rough. A lead climber who can stick like a spider could climb an ascent without ropes and then tie up some safety lines. Falling like a feather could be helpful in case of a misstep into a dark hole with no perceived bottom; falls (or rather the nasty, sudden stops at the end of them) are the number one killer of mountaineers and spelunkers alike. A flying spell would be very useful in many reconnaissance situations, or for just getting from point A to point B quickly, with the least amount of interaction with dangerous surfaces.





Clerics would also be valuable to have along. There are air-quality issues in some portions of caves, and not everybody wants to carry a canary. When the sulfur or carbon dioxide content in the air gets a bit too high in a fantasy world, somebody can use a spell to purify the air. Food and water can be provided in an emergency. Of course, healing is appreciated when needed no matter what the circumstances!

REAL-WORLD CAVING – REAL DANGERS

There are very real dangers associated with caving. Any kind of climbing is physically demanding, but the added dimension of crawling can make spelunking even more exhausting than mountain climbing. Before the modern-day, high tech safety gear came to spelunking, falls from ropes were the highest cause of fatalities for cavers; muscles get fatigued and climbers just lose their grip.

There are other dangers as well, such as the danger of falling rock or a collapsing ceiling. The falling of rock material that is no longer supported by the structure of the cave is a part of the development and aging of cave systems. Generally, solution (limestone) caves are created by water flow through the rock strata in the past. It is the continued presence of water, its capillary action, and its other properties that cause many of the geological formations found in caves. Water also causes many of the dangers of cave exploration. Deep, viscous mud can be more dangerous than any quicksand on the surface; it immobilizes and suffocates. Flash floods are also common in many caves when rain or tides cause of a rush of water from the surface.

The temperature in caves generally stays the same throughout the year, about 55 degrees F. It is cool but not too cold, a good temperature for physical exertion. However, it can be a bit cool for immersion. It can take a much longer time to warm up after being in water. Hypothermia is a real danger for injured, weak or sick individuals who get wet in a cave; the dark, windless environment is not conducive to drying off quickly.

FANTASY CAVING – STILL MORE DANGERS

Beyond the troubles of caving in the real world are the wonderful dangers that fantasy can add. There are all kinds of incredible monsters that can be placed in caverns to keep your players on their toes and humble. Cave trolls, cave bears, giants, goblins, lizards, hydras, dragons and a host of other creatures can make your cavern adventures more memorable than most walks in the park. Think of the excitement of climbing quickly with something below trying to eat the last person on the rope, or making your way along a high, narrow ledge while small humanoids fire arrows from the shadows at your well-lit party. The danger of swimming in an icy underground river may seem a reasonable alternative to facing off against an enraged dragon.

When it comes down to it, I think the thing that can make adventuring in caverns so much fun is the same thing that makes spelunking fun here in the real world. It is a complex environment, totally different from that above ground, and its richness lies in its beauty and strangeness to our senses – things never before seen, heard, smelled or felt. The appeal for the gamer is in the description. In order for the players to envision just a little of that environment, a Game Master has to give a good description of the things the characters are experiencing. Powerful descriptions can pull the players into a whole new world of wonder and fun, giving them a gaming experience they will never forget.





APPENDIX 1 - Climb Skill

Climb (Str; Armor Check Penalty)

Check: With a successful Climb check, you can advance up, down, or across a slope, a wall, or some other steep incline (or even a ceiling with handholds) at one-quarter your normal speed. A slope is considered to be any incline at an angle measuring less than 60 degrees; a wall is any incline at an angle measuring 60 degrees or more.

A Climb check that fails by 4 or less means that you make no progress, and one that fails by 5 or more means that you fall from whatever height you have already attained.

A climber's kit gives you a +2 circumstance bonus on Climb checks.

The DC of the check depends on the conditions of the climb. Compare the task with those on the following table to determine an appropriate DC.

Climb DC	Example Surface or Activity
0	A slope too steep to walk up, or a knotted rope with a wall to brace against.
5	A rope with a wall to brace against, or a knotted rope, or a rope affected by the rope trick spell.
10	A surface with ledges to hold on to and stand on, such as a very rough wall or a ship's rigging.
15	Any surface with adequate handholds and footholds (natural or artificial), such as a very rough natural rock surface or a tree, or an unknotted rope, or pulling yourself up when dangling by your hands.
20	An uneven surface with some narrow handholds and footholds, such as a typical wall in a dungeon or ruins.
25	A rough surface, such as a natural rock wall or a brick wall.
25	An overhang or ceiling with handholds but no footholds.
—	A perfectly smooth, flat, vertical surface cannot be climbed.

Climb DC Modifier ¹	Example Surface or Activity
10	Climbing a chimney (artificial or natural) or other location where you can brace against two opposite walls (reduces DC by 10).
-5	Climbing a corner where you can brace against perpendicular walls (reduces DC by 5).
+5	Surface is slippery (increases DC by 5).

¹ These modifiers are cumulative; use any that apply.

You need both hands free to climb, but you may cling to a wall with one hand while you cast a spell or take some other action that requires only one hand. While climbing, you can't move to avoid a blow, so you lose your Dexterity bonus to AC (if any). You also can't use a shield while climbing.

Any time you take damage while climbing, make a Climb check against the DC of the slope or wall. Failure means you fall from your current height and sustain the appropriate falling damage.

Accelerated Climbing

You try to climb more quickly than normal. By accepting a -5 penalty, you can move half your speed (instead of one-quarter your speed).

Making Your Own Handholds and Footholds

You can make your own handholds and footholds by pounding pitons into a wall. Doing so takes 1 minute per piton, and one piton is needed per 3 feet of distance. As with any surface that offers handholds and footholds, a wall with pitons in it has a DC of 15. In the same way, a climber with a handaxe or similar implement can cut handholds in an ice wall.

Catching Yourself When Falling

It's practically impossible to catch yourself on a wall while falling. Make a Climb check (DC = wall's DC + 20) to do so. It's much easier to catch yourself on a slope (DC = slope's DC + 10).

Catching a Falling Character While Climbing

If someone climbing above you or adjacent to you falls, you can attempt to catch the falling character if he or she is within your reach. Doing so requires a successful melee touch attack against the falling character (though he or she can voluntarily forego any Dexterity bonus to AC if desired). If you hit, you must immediately attempt a Climb check (DC = wall's DC + 10). Success indicates that you catch the falling character, but his or her total weight, including equipment, cannot exceed your heavy load limit or you automatically fall. If you fail your Climb check by 4 or less, you fail to stop the character's fall but don't lose your grip on the wall. If you fail by 5 or more, you fail to stop the character's fall and begin falling as well.

Action

Climbing is part of movement, so it's generally part of a move action (and may be combined with other types of movement in

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a move action). Each move action that includes any climbing requires a separate Climb check. Catching yourself or another falling character doesn't take an action.

Special

You can use a rope to haul a character upward (or lower a character) through sheer strength. You can lift double your maximum load in this manner.

A halfling has a +2 racial bonus on Climb checks because halflings are agile and surefooted.

The master of a lizard familiar gains a +3 bonus on Climb checks. If you have the Athletic feat, you get a +2 bonus on Climb checks.

A creature with a climb speed has a +8 racial bonus on all Climb checks. The creature must make a Climb check to climb any wall

or slope with a DC higher than 0, but it always can choose to take 10, even if rushed or threatened while climbing. If a creature with a climb speed chooses an accelerated climb (see above), it moves at double its climb speed (or at its land speed, whichever is slower) and makes a single Climb check at a –5 penalty. Such a creature retains its Dexterity bonus to Armor Class (if any) while climbing, and opponents get no special bonus to their attacks against it. It cannot, however, use the run action while climbing.

Synergy

If you have 5 or more ranks in Use Rope, you get a +2 bonus on Climb checks made to climb a rope, a knotted rope, or a rope-and-wall combination.

APPENDIX 2 - Swarms

Swarms

Swarms are dense masses of Fine, Diminutive, or Tiny creatures that would not be particularly dangerous in small groups, but can be terrible foes when gathered in sufficient numbers. For game purposes a swarm is defined as a single creature with a space of 10 feet—gigantic hordes are actually composed of dozens of swarms in close proximity. A swarm has a single pool of Hit Dice and hit points, a single initiative modifier, a single speed, and a single Armor Class. It makes saving throws as a single creature.

Many different creatures can mass as swarms. The swarm's type varies with the nature of the component creature (most are animals or vermin), but all swarms have the swarm subtype.

A swarm of Tiny creatures consists of 300 nonflying creatures or 1,000 flying creatures. A swarm of Diminutive creatures consists of 1,500 nonflying creatures or 5,000 flying creatures. A swarm of Fine creatures consists of 10,000 creatures, whether they are flying or not. Swarms of nonflying creatures include many more creatures than could normally fit in a 10-foot square based on their normal space, because creatures in a swarm are packed tightly together and generally crawl over each other and their prey when moving or attacking. Larger swarms are represented by multiples of single swarms. A large swarm is completely shapeable, though it usually remains contiguous.

Combat

In order to attack, a single swarm moves into opponents' spaces, which provokes an attack of opportunity. It can occupy the same space as a creature of any size, since it crawls all over its prey, but remains a creature with a 10-foot space. Swarms never make attacks of opportunity, but they can provoke attacks of opportunity. Unlike other creatures with a 10-foot space, a swarm is shapeable. It can occupy any four contiguous squares, and it can squeeze through any space large enough to contain one of its component creatures.

Vulnerabilities Of Swarms

Swarms are extremely difficult to fight with physical attacks. However, they have a few special vulnerabilities, as follows:

A lit torch swung as an improvised weapon deals 1d3 points of fire damage per hit.

A weapon with a special ability such as flaming or frost deals its full energy damage with each hit, even if the weapon's normal damage can't affect the swarm.

A lit lantern can be used as a thrown weapon, dealing 1d4 points of fire damage to all creatures in squares adjacent to where it breaks.

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Bat Swarm

Size/Type: Diminutive Animal (Swarm)
Hit Dice: 3d8 (13 hp), Initiative: +2
Speed: 5 ft. (1 square), fly 40 ft. (good)
Armor Class: 16 (+4 size, +2 Dex), touch 14, flat-footed 12
Base Attack/Grapple: +2/—
Attack: Swarm (1d6), Full Attack: Swarm (1d6)
Space/Reach: 10 ft./0 ft.
Special Attacks: Distraction, wounding
Special Qualities: Blindsight 20 ft., immune to weapon damage, low-light vision, swarm traits
Saves: Fort +3, Ref +7, Will +3
Abilities: Str 3, Dex 15, Con 10, Int 2, Wis 14, Cha 4
Skills: Listen +11, Spot +11
Feats: Alertness, Lightning Reflexes
Environment: Temperate deserts
Organization: Solitary, flight (2-4 swarms), or colony (11-20 swarms)
Challenge Rating: 2
Treasure: None, **Alignment:** Always neutral
Advancement: None, **Level Adjustment:** —

A bat swarm is nocturnal, and is never found aboveground in daylight.

Combat

A bat swarm seeks to surround and attack any warm-blooded prey it encounters. The swarm deals 1d6 points of damage to any creature whose space it occupies at the end of its move.

Distraction (Ex)

Any living creature that begins its turn with a swarm in its space must succeed on a DC 11 Fortitude save or be nauseated for 1 round. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Wounding (Ex)

Any living creature damaged by a bat swarm continues to bleed, losing 1 hit point per round thereafter. Multiple wounds do not result in cumulative bleeding loss. The bleeding can be stopped by a DC 10 Heal check or the application of a cure spell or some other healing magic.

Blindsight (Ex)

A bat swarm notices and locates creatures within 20 feet. Opponents still have total concealment against the bat swarm (but swarm attacks ignore concealment).

Skills

A bat swarm has a +4 racial bonus on Listen and Spot checks. These bonuses are lost if its blindsense is negated.

Cave Beetle Swarm

Size/Type: Diminutive Vermin (Swarm)
Hit Dice: 6d8-6 (21 hp), Initiative: +3
Speed: 10 ft. (2 squares), fly 20 ft. (poor)
Armor Class: 18 (+4 size, +4 Dex), touch 18, flat-footed 14
Base Attack/Grapple: +4/—
Attack: Swarm (1d3), Full Attack: Swarm (2d6)
Space/Reach: 10 ft./0 ft.
Special Attacks: Distraction
Special Qualities: Darkvision 60 ft., immune to weapon damage, swarm traits, vermin traits
Saves: Fort +6, Ref +6, Will +2
Abilities: Str 1, Dex 16, Con 8, Int 0, Wis 10, Cha 2
Skills: Listen +4, Spot +4
Feats: —
Environment: Any Underground
Organization: Solitary, cloud (2-7 swarms), or plague (11-20 swarms)
Challenge Rating: 3
Treasure: None, **Alignment:** Always neutral
Advancement: None, **Level Adjustment:** —

A swarm of cave beetles moves on the ground until it is stirred up to attack. Then the swarm becomes a cloud of thousands of winged vermin that bites and attempts to devour any organic material in its path.

Combat

A swarm of cave beetles surrounds and attacks any living prey it encounters. A swarm deals 1d3 points of damage to any creature whose space it occupies at the end of its move. If a party actively attempts to attack the beetles (note they don't have to do damage, just attempt to attack), then the beetles become aroused and swarm the party with the damage becoming equivalent of a full attack.

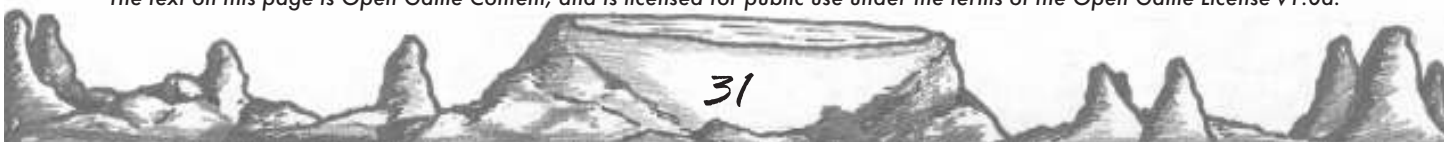
Distraction (Ex)

Any living creature that begins its turn with a cave beetle swarm in its space must succeed on a DC 10 Fortitude save or be nauseated for 1 round. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Skills

A cave beetle swarm has a +4 racial bonus on Listen and Spot checks.

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Rat Swarm

Size/Type: Tiny Animal (Swarm)
Hit Dice: 4d8 (13 hp), Initiative: +2
Speed: 15 ft. (3 squares), climb 15 ft.
Armor Class: 14 (+2 size, +2 Dex), touch 14, flat-footed 12
Base Attack/Grapple: +3/—
Attack: Swarm (1d6 plus disease), Full Attack: Swarm (1d6 plus disease)
Space/Reach: 10 ft./0 ft.
Special Attacks: Disease, distraction
Special Qualities: Half damage from slashing and piercing, low-light vision, scent, swarm traits
Saves: Fort +4, Ref +6, Will +2
Abilities: Str 2, Dex 15, Con 10, Int 2, Wis 12, Cha 2
Skills: Balance +10, Climb +10, Hide +16, Listen +6, Move Silently +4, Spot +7, Swim +10
Feats: Alertness, Stealthy, Weapon Finesse
Environment: Any
Organization: Solitary, pack (2-4 swarms), or infestation (7-12 swarms)
Challenge Rating: 2
Treasure: None, Alignment: Always neutral
Advancement: None, Level Adjustment: —

Combat

A rat swarm seeks to surround and attack any warm-blooded prey it encounters. A swarm deals 1d6 points of damage to any creature whose space it occupies at the end of its move.

Disease (Ex)

Filth fever—swarm attack, Fortitude DC 12, incubation period 1d3 days, damage 1d3 Dex and 1d3 Con. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Distraction (Ex)

Any living creature that begins its turn with a swarm in its square must succeed on a DC 12 Fortitude save or be nauseated for 1 round. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Skills

A rat swarm has a +4 racial bonus on Hide and Move Silently checks, and a +8 racial bonus on Balance, Climb, and Swim checks. A rat swarm can always choose to take 10 on all Climb checks, even if rushed or threatened. A rat swarm uses its Dexterity modifier instead of its Strength modifier for Climb and Swim checks. A rat swarm has a +8 racial bonus on any Swim check to perform some special action or avoid a hazard. It can always choose to take 10 on a Swim check, even if distracted or endangered. It can use the run action while swimming, provided it swims in a straight line.

Serpent Swarm

Size/Type: Tiny Animal (Swarm)
Hit Dice: 9d8 (37 hp), Initiative: +7
Speed: 15 ft. (3 squares), Climb 15 ft, Swim 15 ft.
Armor Class: 17 (+2 size, +3 Dex, +2 natural), touch 15, flat-footed 14
Base Attack/Grapple: +0/—6
Attack: Swarm (1d8 plus poison), Full Attack: Swarm (1d8 plus poison)
Space/Reach: 10 ft./0 ft.
Special Attacks: Poison, distraction
Special Qualities: Half damage from blunt weapons, darkvision, scent, swarm traits
Saves: Fort +2, Ref +5, Will +2
Abilities: Str 6, Dex 17, Con 11, Int 2, Wis 12, Cha 2
Skills: Balance +11, Climb +11, Hide +15, Listen +7, Move Silently +2, Spot +7, Swim +6
Feats: Alertness, Stealthy, Weapon Finesse, Improved Initiative
Environment: Any
Organization: Solitary, pack (1-3 swarms), or infestation (4-9 swarms)
Challenge Rating: 6
Treasure: None, Alignment: Always neutral
Advancement: None, Level Adjustment: —

Combat

A snake swarm seeks to surround and attack any prey it encounters. A swarm deals 1d8 points of damage + Poison to any creature whose space it occupies at the end of its move.

Poison (Ex)

While not every snake in a snake swarm is poisonous there are enough to make these attacks very hazardous. Besides the damage listed in the swarm attack, the poisonous damage here is listed as for a viper. Fortitude DC 10, initial damage 1d6 Con, secondary damage 1d6 Con. Save is required with any injury. The save DC is Constitution-based.

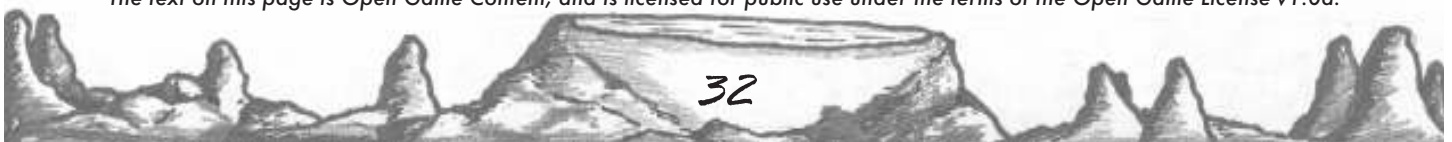
Distraction (Ex)

Any living creature that begins its turn with a swarm in its square must succeed on a DC 12 Fortitude save or be nauseated for 1 round. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Skills

A serpent swarm has a +4 racial bonus on Hide and Move Silently checks, and a +8 racial bonus on Balance, Climb, and a +6 racial bonus on Swim checks. A serpent swarm uses its Dexterity modifier instead of its Strength modifier for Climb and Swim checks. A serpent swarm has a +6 racial bonus on any Swim check to perform some special action or avoid a hazard. It can always choose to take 10 on a Swim check, even if distracted or endangered.

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RESOURCES

Web Resources –

<http://www.goodearthgraphics.com/virtcave.html>
The Virtual Cave is the best source of visual inspirational material for Game Masters and gamers alike.

<http://www.showcaves.com/> - This site has information on caves around the world.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cave> - Encyclopediatype information, photos and links on a variety of topics related to caves.

<http://www.caves.org/> - The web site of the (US) National Speleological Society. Sections of particular interest to gamers are “Learn About Caves” and “Cave Art and Music,” which includes links to cave photography sites.

<http://www.cavernstours.com/default.htm> - This site has information on guided tours of several caverns in California. Photo galleries of each cavern are included.

<http://www.psc-cavers.org/gangsta-mappers/>
This site represents a group of people who map caves on an on-going basis. It includes lots of interesting accounts of caving experiences, as well as numerous photographs. Especially valuable to Game Masters could be the photos of several different cave entrances.

<http://wrgis.wr.usgs.gov/docs/parks/project/index.html>
Virtual tours of US national parks, including a tour of Mammoth Cave in Kentucky.

<http://www2.nature.nps.gov/geology/tour/caves.htm>
The (US) National Park Service has links to cave information including geological and historical facts, and photos of a number of caves.

<http://www.pipeline.com/~caverbob/> - Although definitely an amateur site, this offers links to various interesting statistics on caves (longest, deepest), as well as to other caving sites.

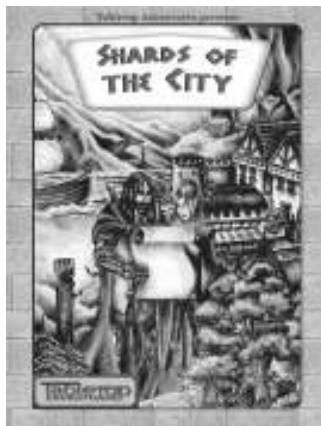
<http://www.indiana.edu/~iusc/> - The home page of the Indiana University Caving Club is not exciting, but the photographs in its “Photo Album” are!

<http://www.design42.com/caving/index.htm> - The Underground World of Caves has information on cave formations and hints on how to find caves as well as excellent pages of resources and links.

http://www.weatherfriend.com/travel/txcave/cave_photography.htm - This page is mostly about how to take photographs in caves, but the examples used to demonstrate are wonderful on their own.

Other Resources –

Books on caves can usually be found in libraries under Dewey decimal number 551.44, while caving is at 796.525. Also check for videos, possibly in the travel section. For books with a larger ratio of pictures to text, try the juvenile section!



Upcoming Products from TTA

Be watching for the next product from Tabletop Adventures! “*Shards of the City*,” which answers the question, “So what do we see as we walk down the street?” will be available in early 2005. Just in time for Valentine’s Day will come “*Shards of the Heart*,” which answers the burning question: “So is the barmaid/bartender cute?”



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CAVERNS

01

A damp coolness permeates everything. When you listen, a steady drip, drip, drip can be heard from almost every direction. The walls of this corridor are uneven, rounded as if worn away by water thousands of years ago; there are no tool marks on the walls or floor. In front of you out of the darkness rises a stalagmite, its base about five feet in diameter, tapering to a point eight feet from the floor. The minerals that make it up seem to appear in bands of color—reddish brown, dark grey, milky white, dirty yellow, and others, sometimes repeating colors as the rings approach the apex. You can see that this is one of the sources of the dripping sound as there are droplets steadily hitting the tip of the formation. [The moisture dripping down the stalagmite runs away from it in rivulets, wearing shallow ravines in the floor before disappearing into several small cracks in the stone.]

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CAVERNS

02

As you enter the next chamber, your light glimmers all across the walls. Some sort of tiny crystals are catching the light and reflecting it back. When you take a closer look, you see the sides of the chamber are covered with little groups of crystalline spikes. They look almost like brittle flowers, or frosty clusters of icy thorns. [They are extremely fragile; even brushing against them will crumble the more slender stems. It is easy to break off groups, but very difficult indeed to keep them whole. *If that is desired, success would require a Dexterity roll at DC 20.*]

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CAVERNS

03

The passage here is tall enough for you to stand, about 7' high in the center. The pale gray walls are smooth, slightly rounded, and appear bowed out. The floor of the passage is also slightly rounded, with the low spot running down the center and the rest of the floor slanting toward it. The ceiling is not as smooth as the walls; it has occasional cracks and broken places. The floor is not smooth either, being littered in places with debris fallen from the ceiling. The rocks on the floor vary in size from small pebbles to stones the size of a fist to rough rocks larger than a man's head. It will be necessary to make your way with care to avoid an injury. [-3 to Spot checks, Reflex save at DC 10 to avoid injury; failure indicates a fall doing 1d3 points of damage.]

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CAVERNS

04

The ceiling here is low. Creatures over 5 ½ feet tall have to stoop and move carefully to avoid hitting their heads. [-2 to Spot checks, Reflex save at DC 8 for each person to avoid hitting his or her head. Damage 1d2; a helmet can reduce the damage by one point.]

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CAVERNS

05

To your left lies an outcropping of rock and upon it is growing what appears to be a crystalline tree. The structure looks amazingly like a small tree or bush that has been caught in a sleet storm. It shimmers and glistens in the light like fine crystal and needle-like projections extend from its 'branches' like icicles on a frozen tree. It looks amazingly delicate and sharp. [This structure is actually a mixture of calcium and aragonite that forms naturally. Despite its appearance like crystal or quartz it is of no value. Anyone who touches it with a bare hand will have a one-in-three chance of pricking a finger enough to draw blood. This causes no damage but will hurt. If the formation is touched with a mailed hand, it has a one-in-six chance of breaking.]

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CAVERNS

06

In the area you are entering there is a large pinkish domed pillar that is about five feet in diameter and eight to ten feet tall. To the right of it lies a shallow pool of water. Moisture dripping from the roof onto the dome trickles down into the pool. The surface of the pillar is slick but not smooth; it is veined and bumpy from hundreds of tiny stalagmites that have formed and are forming the pillar and its rounded dome. There is another similar formation on the other side of the pool that is about six feet tall but only one foot across. The pool itself has additional mineral deposits that make the edge and subsurface slick and treacherous.

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CAVERNS

07

From the cavern roof a rock projects that looks like a funnel inverted and stuck into the ceiling. From this funnel droplets of water fall like a steady shower of rain. When the water reaches the floor of the cavern, it falls into a pool that apparently has no outlet but neither does it overflow.

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CAVERNS

08

In this area there is a mound that looks like it was created from corded-ware pottery built up to about knee level. At the top of the mound there is a basin of water approximately an arm's length across that is fed by a steady drip from the ceiling. Drip, [pause], drip, [pause], and so on. It has to have been dripping for many lifetimes. The mound looks like dirty brownish quartz. The basin is dark, and it is impossible to tell if anything lives in it or not. [This could be a nice home for a fantasy water creature.]

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09

This area has unusual oval-shaped stones that look just like eggs. There are single eggs all around the room and groups gathered in four stone "nests" on the floor. Each "nest" is like a flat bowl made of stone, about two feet across. The eggs are about the size of swans' eggs. Amazingly, there are three more "nests" of similar size on the walls. The "eggs" seem to be attached to the walls and floor and are whitish in color. [These eggs are natural outcroppings that are formed by solutions forced out of cracks in the walls and floor. However, if the GM prefers they could be eggs of an earth or crystalline creature. If they are smashed they have a milky, whitish liquid inside.]

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10

Here, glistening blades of reddish brown stone protrude from the walls, ceiling, and floor. They are shaped variously as disks and like short broad-bladed weapons. They are irregular in size and shape and appear to have grown naturally rather than being carved. The stones are sharp and very strong and must be moved around rather than through. The patches of these "blade-stones" vary from a couple feet across to the size of a small flower garden. [There are 2-12 patches that the GM should place randomly. If someone falls or is pushed onto a patch they will encounter 1-4 blades that each do 1-6 points of damage. Similarly an explosion or someone with giant strength hitting the sides could cause the roof blades to fall.]

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11

In the center of this area a massive column two feet in diameter stretches from floor to ceiling. This column is not carved but appears to be formed by the meeting of a stalactite that has grown down from the ceiling and a stalagmite that has formed from the cavern floor. Throughout this area stalagmites grow with their fingers reaching up toward the ceiling and sharp stalactites menace from above. As you look, the shadows cast by the light and the formations are stark, menacing, and confusing. There are many places where menace could be hidden and there is no way to navigate the area without weaving in and around the formations of rock.

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12

This area is filled with "death coral." It is a sharp, treacherous formation of rock that covers the floor, growing up like menacing bushes of stone spines. It looks much like colonies of sea coral, with growth built upon other growth to produce large masses of dangerous lance-like points. Navigating through here will be hazardous and a misstep could mean a fall onto the sharp rocks. [Traversing the room requires a Reflex check at DC 10 for one-quarter movement, DC 15 for half movement and DC 25 for full movement. All Spot checks are at -10 when a character is moving because of the amount of attention it takes to navigate safely. If a character falls, he or she will take 2d4 points of damage from the death coral.]

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13

Along the wall a white fibrous substance glistens. It looks like a large scalp lying on the ground with strands of white hair stuck to the wall above it. [Upon closer inspection:] This is not actually hair at all, but it looks like hair that has grown out of a hole in the wall and pooled together in a pile. The substance glistens slightly and is actually mineral in nature. [If it is broken it will crumble into minute flakes resembling snow and will have tiny shards that prick the skin much like touching a small fuzzy cactus.]

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14

Cascading down along the left wall is a rock that looks like it was turned to liquid and began to spill down in rivulets billowing over each other like water in a stream. The wall is quite solid now and you have no idea what could have caused it to flow down like this. The entire surface glistens and shines and looks almost like salt that has been poured from the ceiling and piled along the wall. [It is neither granules nor liquid, however; it is quite solid. This of course limits the actual maneuver area here because the formation has "grown" out onto the floor.]

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15

The ceiling in this part of the cavern gradually drops until it is only four feet from the floor. It appears to continue for some distance before opening up again. Both the floor and the ceiling here are weathered stone. You aren't sure what has weathered it, but it has made for a smooth surface both above and below. [Because of the limited space, if man-sized characters are attacked here they will take -4 to attack and -2 to defense. If they choose to remain stationary and on their knees without taking the free five-foot step they can improve their defense to -1.]

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16

A stagnant black pool has gathered in a low place on the floor here; you are not sure how deep it is. You notice a dark patch of wetness on the ceiling above the pool. It appears that it may be dripping because there is a bead forming in its center, but if so it is dripping extremely slowly. The air here is damp and cool and a musty smell fills your nostrils. [If the adventurers move closer to the pool:] As you approach you see that a film covers the surface of the water and nothing appears to have moved in or around it for some time.

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17

As you are walking along, the irregular floor begins to rise toward the passage roof. The opening that is left is less than two and a half feet high. The passage appears to continue like this for about twenty feet, then it opens back out to its previous dimensions. [Adventurers will have to crawl if they want to continue. Large or armored characters may have to remove some of their equipment to fit through the crawlway.]

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18

The right wall of the cavern you are in is partially hidden from view by a milky white curtain wall that seems to flow from the ceiling of the cavern. The wall is quite opaque, but is extremely thin and brittle. [If examined closely the characters can see that the wall does not reach the cavern floor in some areas. There is enough space behind the curtain wall for five to eight people to hide and take refuge. If you wish, there can be passages behind the wall that lead away from this room.]

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19

As you are walking along the passageway, you notice that the way ahead seems to be impeded by a milky white stone that looks as though it flowed out of a spot high up on the right-hand side of the passageway. The creamy stone has filled up the tunnel except for a two-foot by three-foot opening in the upper left corner of the passageway. The white billowed stone is quite hard, but in many areas it is still wet as the liquid that has been forming the stone over the last many years continues to seep from the corner above. The incline of the stone is about thirty degrees. [Characters can climb to the opening and then clamber down the other side of the flowstone and continue on their way but can pass the opening only one at a time and may have to take off accoutrements before crawling through. This is an excellent place for an ambush or encounter while the group is split up.]

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20

To the side of the room you are traversing you can see what seem to be stone reeds growing from the ceiling. They grow in clumps of three and four and are each hollow. They range from a foot to three feet long and some continue to drip very slowly. [The formations are very brittle and will shatter if pried from place. In modern parlance these formations are known as soda straws.]

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21

A fissure has opened here and deep cracks run up the walls on either side. The air is hot and foul as a reddish smoke rises from the crevice. [If the characters enter the room and approach the fissure:] The heat rises dramatically as you approach the fissure. While it doesn't burn, it is uncomfortable and causes you to sweat. The smell is even worse here; you feel the smoke claw at your lungs as a cough builds deep in your chests. [Any one who enters must make a Fortitude save at DC10 or begin coughing uncontrollably, giving a -4 to all rolls. If the save is missed by five or more, the victim loses consciousness and begins to lose 1 point of Constitution every minute he or she remains in the room. If Constitution reaches zero, the unlucky person dies. Otherwise the loss of points is not permanent and will be recovered at 1 point per 3 hours, 48 hours maximum.]

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22

In this chamber, as your light touches the walls and the stalagmites, you notice that there is a demarcation line about seven feet above the cavern floor. Everything below that line seems to be a reddish brown in color, while colors above it are generally lighter hues with more variation. All the geological formations below the line are covered with puffed out, bulbous cloud-shaped forms, whereas above the line the cavern and stalagmite walls are straight. [This room used to be under water to the demarcation line. The reddish hue is due to the iron content of the water. The puffy, cloud-like formations are characteristic of underwater geofom development, as the minerals seep out of the water and collect around magnetic centers on the rock surface.]

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23

As you walk along the passageway, you begin to hear the sound of rushing water. The sound becomes quite loud before you find its source, a five-foot-wide crack in the floor running from one side of the passageway to the other. You can tell quite plainly that the noise is coming from down inside the crevice. When you lower a light all you can see is the sheer drop down the sides of the crack. The moisture of the torrent is billowing up out of the crack. The water could be just out of range of your light, or a hundred feet down.

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24

As you walk down the passageway you notice a small rivulet of water running down the right side of the passageway. Every now and then the rivulet widens into a bowl-shaped pool six to eight inches in diameter. In these depressions you can see white pearls, some times 15 or 20 in a bowl. They vary in size from 1/8 to 1/2 inch in diameter. [These are known as cave pearls and are formed by calcite in the water. They can be crushed into powder by a hammer or the pommel of a sword. Most are not cemented into the bowls and can become a slipping hazard if knocked out of the bowl and onto the floor of the passageway, making footing treacherous and falls common. They have very little value, and are generally not perfectly round.]

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25

In this room the floor has numerous clumps of short, sharp, leaf-like reddish-brown stalagmites. There are 20 to 30 flat spines in every group. [This is called death coral and it can be dangerous, as the name implies. If a character or monster falls on them, they are sharp enough and stiff enough to cause 1-3 point of damage each even through most armor. Falling into the midst of them, a normal-sized person could slice himself on 5 to 14 of them (1d10 +4). They are brittle, and if kicked from the flat side they will become detached from the cave floor and fall flat. It is possible to move through the room at a normal speed if it is done with care. In combat, however, anyone who falls will need to make a Reflex save at DC15 to avoid falling on one of the spiny clumps.]

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26

As you enter this chamber the smell of rotten eggs assails your nostrils. Against the right hand wall of the chamber you can see, when illuminated, a pool of yellowish, very liquid mud. The pool of mud is boiling and large bubbles are breaking the surface constantly. This seems to be where the smell is coming from. As you approach the pool the fumes get more intense. [This is a sulfur pool and the fumes can be very dangerous in an enclosed environment such as this! If the characters linger in this room or approach the pool too closely they will need to make a Fortitude save at DC13; any who fail fall unconscious. If an unconscious character is not removed from the chamber quickly, they will suffocate and die in a number of rounds equal to the victim's Constitution.]

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27

As you enter this new room you cannot help but be amazed at its sheer size. Towering stalagmites shoot out of the ground, searching for the ceiling lost in the shadows above. Your path here will necessarily be convoluted, and the formations make it difficult to keep your comrades in sight much less spot any possible enemies. [With a listen check of DC 15 read the following:] As you weave your way through the labyrinthine room you hear something fleeing, always ahead of you.

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28

The passageway here is rounded and relatively smooth. As you walk along it is becoming taller, but narrower near the bottom. The center begins to slope downward in a four foot wide area. Your party is forced to go single file as this trench deepens to about six feet. Suddenly the center of the passage takes another drop, and the middle two feet become four feet lower yet. [Everyone is now walking in a narrow trough in the bottom of the four-foot-wide trench, where there remains a space of about one foot on either side of the center trough.] The passage meanders one way then another as it flows forward. The lowest trough suddenly ends in a short, broad crack straight ahead. Above that you can see the former smooth tunnel resume. [Adventurers will need to climb a total of ten feet to get back up to the former tunnel and continue on.]

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29

The passageway here opens into a large grotto. To the right of where the passage enters the chamber, a stream of water wells up from under the wall and flows into a large pond that fills half of the chamber. The water is quite clear and you can see huge white eyeless fish meandering around in the pool. The water seems to be quite deep as well, between ten and twenty feet in areas. Below the surface of the water, all the walls of the basin are covered with puffy cloud-like deposits of white minerals. The waterway continues on, flowing out under the far wall of the chamber.

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30

You come upon what looks like a natural well in the floor of the chamber. It is very deep and you cannot see the bottom. [If someone drops in a stone or similar item:] It falls for four seconds, hits something and begins to ricochet, clattering to a stop three seconds later. [If someone drops in something with a magical light to it:] It drops about four seconds and then the light is cut off. You hear some thumping and see the light moving far below before it disappears. It appears that the well is not straight and you cannot see where it goes.

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CAVERNS

31

The smell of damp earth fills your nostrils as you stride along. The chamber here is very damp and droplets of water on the walls glisten in your light. The sandy ground here is wet and clings to your boots. The sound of dripping water echoes loudly as water drops from several places in the ceiling into stagnant pools below. The pools have no real depth but everything is moist and clammy.

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CAVERNS

33

This chamber is marked by the reaching fingers of stalagmites and stalactites. The shadows cast by your light make ghastly flickering images upon the wall and as you watch them dance a low moan fills the cavern like the deep cry of a ghost or a condemned soul. [Feel free to make a moaning sound. Pause, and repeat a couple of times. Continue while the players stay in this area. The sound comes from air moving through a vent in the ceiling but that is not readily visible from the chamber floor.]

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CAVERNS

35

This chamber has great columns that rise from the floor to the ceiling. The columns vary from 3-8 feet in diameter and are arranged irregularly. The multicolored pillars seem to have formed as stalactites from the ceiling met stalagmites from the floor and joined. Several of the veined columns are slick with wetness as they continue to grow slowly and increase in thickness over the years.

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CAVERNS

32

The blue-gray walls of this room stretch before you, inviting you to enter. Peering through the dimness you can make out your own haggard reflection in the still waters of a subterranean lake. There is a small path along the left side of the water, dry but narrow. You will only be able to walk in single file, but that's not a problem because nothing could be living in the water this far underground, could it?

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CAVERNS

34

In this room there is a great pool of water. The crystal-clear liquid swirls from a hidden current deep below the surface and you can see small white fish flitting about in your light. The water appears to be fresh and deep; the ground is sandy and contains only a few large smooth rocks. It looks like an excellent place to rest. [The water is indeed clean, fresh, and potable. If anyone touches the water read:] **The water is cold and clear. It feels fresh and clean to your touch and the smell is like the freshness after the rain.**

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CAVERNS

36

In this area there is a fetid pool more than eight feet wide. From a hole high above it, a rancid greenish stream trickles down a wall that is covered with slime and stench. Even the spark of light coming through the distant opening seems sickly. There are masses of algae upon the water, some still green and some black and dead looking. A layer of some oily substance covers the pond's surface between the clumps. The whole room reeks of foul smells and decay.

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CAVERNS

37

Your footsteps echo ahead of you as you make your way into this cavern. The light seems subdued, illuminating only a short distance and leaving everything beyond cloaked in shadow. Overhead the stalactites covering the ceiling gaze down malevolently upon you. The cold stone is not a welcoming sight but it appears this room is empty. Of course, looks aren't everything.

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CAVERNS

39

Ahead of you the tunnel takes a sudden dip into a welling stream. The walls, which had been rounded and wide-set, draw close together, making a chasm through which the water runs. You could possibly wade through the current but it is icy and its depth is unknown. You do see one alternative; a narrow ledge runs from where you stand along the side of the chasm, less than ten feet above the water. It would be a tricky climb, but possible if you are unencumbered. Which route will you choose?

[Progress requires a successful Climb check at DC10; Armor Check Penalty and encumbrance apply. Anyone who falls will probably hit rocks rather than water, as the stream is very narrow. The stream runs 40 feet (or at the GM's discretion) and then disappears further underground. The party is then able to leave the ledge and return to the passage in which they were traveling.]

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CAVERNS

41

As you are walking through this area you notice a bundle of material lying near a stalagmite with an oddly-shaped top. As you approach the bundle you realize that it is the headless body of an armored orc. The flesh is totally gone from the corpse's bones and the armor is rusted beyond any kind of usefulness. There are no other items around. When you take a close look at the stalagmite beside the body, you see that the orc's head has been placed on the tip of the stalagmite. Mineral-laden water still drips steadily onto the orc's helmetless head. The minerals have seeped into the flesh and petrified it, and so it remains, its features contorted into an angry scream. The stalagmite has continued forming around and on top of the head. It must have been placed here in some bygone day, a trophy from a long-forgotten battle.

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38

In the vaulted chamber ahead of you, you see what looks almost like a stack of mushrooms. As you enter, you see many such stacks stretched high above you. The nearest stands three times the height of a man, and it looks like the caps of a dozen or more gigantic mushrooms were piled on top of each other and turned to stone. Across the room is a formation that has a broad, layered base nine feet high and six feet wide. On top of it are piled more of the narrow stacks, giving it the look of a keep with ornate spires gone wild. [This type of stalagmite commonly forms in an area with high ceiling, where drops of water splash widely when they fall rather than dripping slowly onto a narrow tip.]

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40

The walls and floor of this chamber are covered with tiny curling formations. They are mostly white, ranging in size from less than the length of a lady's finger to nearly a foot long. There are many growing in clumps, giving the look of some loose-petaled flower. Others stand alone, reaching out from the walls or up from the floor. None are straight; all are bent, curved or swirled. In the corners of the floor along the walls are broken and shattered pieces of these curled stones. Either some creature comes and periodically sweeps them off the walls or they eventually grow long enough that their own weight causes them to fall. [These are called gypsum flowers and are found in relatively dry parts of caves.]

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42

As you enter this chamber you realize that something has been digging here. There is a cavity carved into one wall that is about five feet high, four feet wide, and six feet deep. A crudely-made pick-ax with a cracked handle lies nearby. Additionally, there are two irregular holes dug into the cavern floor, each about six feet by eight feet at the top and five feet deep. You see no one in the area and you didn't hear any digging as you approached this area. [Upon closer examination:] You see nothing of interest in the excavations. It all appears to be rock and dirt. There are some tracks in the bottoms of the two holes. [A Knowledge (nature or dungeoneering) check at DC 10 will reveal that they have been there undisturbed for some time; DC 15 will show them to be made by an underground dweller appropriate for the area – goblins or orcs, perhaps.]

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43

Ahead of you lies a cliff, and the path you are following skirts around the drop. As you approach the edge, you notice a rope tied around an outcropping of stone nearby. It is dirty, and badly frayed where it passes over the lip. [If it is pulled up:] The rope is about 40' long past the frayed spot. The end that was hanging loose is unraveling.

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45

Along the wall, roughly 6 ½ feet high, are some blackish marks about 18 inches long. Close examination shows them to be soot.

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47

The air here is unusually chilled and the silence is oppressive. You realize that the entire party has come to a halt and you are not entirely sure why. The only sound is the creak of leather and clink of armor as your companions shift warily in their stances. The shadows that dance upon the walls at the fringes of the light are deep and foreboding but you see and hear nothing unusual.

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CAVERNS

44

At the bottom of a long drop lies a pile of bones. It is a single body, which must have been here for many years because nothing is left but the skeleton. Close examination shows the skull is broken, though it probably didn't happen when it hit the sand where it is now lying. Looking up, you can see a knobby rock that is a more likely culprit. Looking at the skeleton again, you notice that one of the legs is lying under the body at an unusual angle. The thigh bone has been broken in half and twisted around. It would have been very painful – if the poor wretch had been alive to feel it. [At the GM's option, some items could be found in the bones, particularly things of ceramic, stone or metal.]

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46

A slick band as wide as the length of your forearm runs the entire length of this area, in a low spot along the center of the floor. If you look at the ceiling you see moisture beading and dripping from there to the slick area. This area is easily avoided; however, if the party were to face combat here it could be a hazard. [If in combat: Reflex save each round at DC 10 to avoid slipping, which results in the victim being prone and suffering 1d2 points of damage OR the character can choose to take a -1 to all to hit and defense rolls to avoid making the check, representing using extra caution during the battle.]

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48

A misty haze gathers in corded wisps along the low spots on the floor. In places it is so thick that you cannot see the floor beneath it. The air here is cold and a chill fingers its way up your spine causing you to involuntarily hunch your shoulders. You can see your breath slightly here as well but you can see no immediate cause for the change in temperature. The air smells of mold and decay and beads of moisture gather upon the walls and ceiling.

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CAVERNS

49

A single broken arrow lies before you. It is definitely not an orc arrow; it is better made than that. It would require closer examination, though, to determine its source. [If the adventurers examine the arrow closely the GM should have it come either from a party that the adventurers know preceded them into the caverns or from a nearby settlement. If the adventurers do examine it closely the GM should tell its origin and read on:] **The tip has a dark stain on it; it seems to have been bloodied. Looking around, at the edge of the light you see another arrow of similar design. There are no other signs of the archer or the targets.**

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CAVERNS

50

As you survey this area a glint of metal catches your eye as it reflects back your light. It appears to be a long sword of competent construction, its blade nicked and stained brown. Additionally, you find a broken bow nearby and the dust and dirt are very disturbed as if a battle may have taken place. There is a partial imprint of a large clawed foot, but the prints are obscured by the drag marks of two man-sized objects that were drawn after it. A little way farther on there are 7 arrows scattered in the dust of cavern floor that may have fallen from a quiver. The dust gives way to rock then and no more marks can be seen.

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51

Here there are meticulously-detailed statues of two fighters whose swords are in their scabbards, but their hands are raised before their eyes as if to ward off an attack. There is also a wizard with a raised staff in one hand and the other up before his face with the palm out. A statue of a female in armor shows her with her sword half-drawn from her scabbard and looking to her left. Behind a rock crouches a stone halfling with a short sword in his hand. The faces all show surprise and they look like they were carved to show a state of shock and fear. Oddly, they show no tool marks at all. It is almost as if they were just created from stone all at once. The shadows cast here are long and irregular. Somewhere a pebble clatters softly across the stone floor.

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52

This area has a very dusty floor scattered with pieces of stone. There are some confused tracks in the dusty regions. [Someone with appropriate Knowledge or Survival skills might be able to identify them and the GM can make up whatever monster seems to best fit the area. How recent they are can depend on whether or not the GM has populated these caverns.] **Scattered about this area are stones that vary in size from the size of your fist to large enough for someone to hide behind. The shadows and the placement of the stones make it impossible to see if anything is behind them.** [Note: There is nothing behind these stones. However, if the party is cocky or used to finding nothing when these Bits are used, you could keep them on their toes by adding a wandering monster here.]

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53

As you enter the next chamber you begin to hear a squeaking and chittering noise from high above your head. The floor that you are walking on has become a slimy mess, and a rising smell of ammonia drifts up from beneath your feet. [If the adventurers can illuminate the cavern ceiling:] **You notice some movement up on the ceiling of the cavern. You can see many small furry bodies, hanging from the cavern ceiling, wrapped in what seem to be rubber wings. Bats! What looks like hundreds of bats are clinging to the ceiling. The ammonia smell from the bat guano is not overpowering but it is not a pleasant smell and is pungent enough to cover any other smells that may be in the area. The floor has become quite slick with the smelly bat urine and guano mix.**

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54

As you walk along you hear a whoosh as a small furry object flies by your party. It was coming from in front of you and passing to your rear. Intermittently there are similar sounds as bats attracted by your light sources speed by your group.

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55

Ahead you see three piles of stones. Each is about 7-8 feet long and 4 feet wide, tapering to about 2 feet in height. They look like cairns that have been erected to cover the dead. At one end of two of these stand pitted and rusting swords which have been embedded into the ground blade first. The third bears no such marking. [If the adventurers pause to examine the swords, they seem to be of human make. A character with weaponsmithing (Craft) can check for detailed information and the GM can tie the swords to a nearby culture. The swords are unremarkable and the damp has corroded them to the point of uselessness. If the characters try to rob the graves they will find skeletons in rotted scraps of leather and clothing but not enough remains to even identify colors anymore. Each corpse has a copper coin on each of the eye sockets but nothing else of value.]

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57

[Choose a character and say:] **As you approach this area you hear something very faint up ahead but it is impossible to tell what it is because of the noise of the accoutrements and boots of the party.** [If the party stops to listen they hear:] **The sound is like the faint crackling of dead leaves rustling distantly in a cold fall breeze. It goes on and on.** [If the party continues, they walk into a swarm of beetles. When they get closer they see:] **In your light you see that the floor ahead is black, shifting chaotically in a thousand directions simultaneously. Looking at it too long or too closely is dizzying but it is clear that the floor is covered with a huge swarm of beetles. Whatever attracted them or what they may be feeding upon is unclear to you.** [The GM can determine whether the beetles move out of the way, attack, or just ignore the party and get stepped on. For statistics on a Cave Beetle Swarm, see Appendix 2: Swarms.]

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59

The sickly-sweet smell of rotting meat fills your nostrils as you approach this area. Here to your left you see most of a humanoid rib cage on the floor. Several of the bones have been broken off and they are tossed aside like finished chicken bones at a feast. Some meat still clings to the ribs as beetles and maggots compete for the remains. A dark stain has spread out from the rib cage on the sand but the blood of the stain has long since dried. There is no sign of the rest of the body or what has had the feast, but breaking off a rib is not something done by the weak.

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56

This area is open and empty except for an unusually-shaped rock in the shadows to your left. It is about the size of a human's head. [When the characters enter or if they increase the lighting they will notice the rock glints of metal and appears to be a helmet. If they examine the helmet more closely they will see:] **This is a crested helm that used to bear a fine plume of feathers but now has been ravaged by some cavern-dwellers, possibly insects. The helm has a major dent in its side so deep that it would be impossible to use without repair. The metal is otherwise in good condition.** [If anyone has armorsmithing (Craft) and a hammer it would be a relatively easy repair (DC10).]

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58

The acrid stench of serpents assails your nostrils and you have the urge to cover your nose. The floor ahead of you drops suddenly and forms a ledge that is down about two feet. There are no steps, just a ledge and then another 4 foot drop. As you look into the room you see a twisting, intertwining, slithering mass of snakes. There appear to be hundreds upon hundreds of them in various shapes, colors and sizes. The movement is eerily silent until one serpent raises its head, spreads its hood and hisses at you very loudly. [For statistics on a Serpent Swarm, see Appendix 2: Swarms.]

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60

The stone throughout this area is blackened and sooty and the whole area smells like charcoal from a spent fire. Throughout the area are scattered bones, shields, armor and swords. Nothing seems to be alive in here and it is difficult to tell how long ago this may have happened. There is no heat and no smell of burnt flesh so it must have been some time ago. [If anyone enters the room read:] **The soot clings to your boots and anything else that touches the walls, floor, or artifacts in this room. It is impossible to brush off.** [Closer examination reveals the bones to be humanoid, smaller than man-sized; specifically goblin bones. Investigation shows that the weapons and armor have their hilts and leather pieces burnt off. Further, if anyone tests the metal they will find that heat has robbed the metal of its temper; the shields bend and swords break if hit with any force.]

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61

In this area, immediately in front of you, there is a collection of bones that look like they belong to a human arm. Another similar group is to your left. Farther on there is a helmet that has been bent almost in half and a large chest-sized boulder with a stain upon it like dried blood lies nearby. A crushed breastplate that still contains the ribs and spine of a human is about four feet past that. As you look around you see the bones of a leg over here, and another set over there. A broken sword glints in the dirt of the floor as well. It looks like something violently crushed whoever this was with repeated blows from the rock and then ripped them to pieces. Closer examination of the helm reveals that only the left side of the skull is intact; the rest of the skull, the teeth and jaw are broken to tiny bits.

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This area looks like the scene of a cave in. Shale and rocks cover the floor and make an uneven surface for you to navigate. [Moving at one-quarter speed requires a Reflex save at DC 10 to avoid injury. Modifications: Moving one-half speed, DC+5; Combat, DC+5. Damage is 1d3 for every 5 points by which the Reflex save is missed. Spot checks are at -10 when moving. Listen checks are at -10 unless everyone in the party remains still.] The walls and roof appear solid now, however. As the characters come to the middle of the room they see a single gauntleted hand reaching up out of the rock. [If the adventurers dig out the skeleton they find its armor, which is crushed and twisted, a sword that did not survive the force of the blows from the rock and is bent, a dagger of average quality that was under the corpse, and a purse which contains two pieces of gold and three silver.]

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63

Striding through the entryway of the next chamber, the first thing you notice is the startling cold. It seems to pierce through your armor and into your heart. In the frigid silence you hear the distant dripping of water into an unseen pool. The stone here is a dull gray, except for the sparse patches of moss defying the cold in an attempt to cling to life. Somewhere a hidden shaft lets in air from the surface. The surface! A place of warmth and light, it is suddenly just a fond memory.

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CAVERNS

64

As you enter this chamber you see several imposing stalagmites. In the center of the room sits the largest of the stalagmites, its base over 15 feet in diameter and towering more than 60 feet in height. As you get closer to this particular stalagmite you can see that a two-foot-wide stairway has been chipped out of the sides of the formation. The stairway coils its way around the stalagmite as it ascends to a height of twenty feet, and ends in a small platform in front of an ornate, five-foot-high door. [The stair and door are of dwarven make, and an example of excellent craftsmanship. However, the door is only carved on the side of the stalagmite; there is no opening, only what looks like a door lintel and ornate stone door.]

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65

You notice that a stalagmite you are passing has a picture incised on it. It looks like the picture was carved by a knife point. The crude drawing shows a three-legged, barrel-chested monster with a huge mouth in the top of its body. Two of the arms that are held above its head have stick figures of men in their big hands. There is an arrow pointing to the right toward a dark opening. The picture must have been done sometime ago because, while the chisel marks from the knife point seem to be pretty deep, they are smoothed over by a mostly transparent layer of mineral deposits.

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66

Up ahead you hear what sounds like an owl's call. This seems slightly suspicious, as you are in a cavern and not outside. [As the party moves forward:] As you continue on there is a second call, similar to the first. [When they enter the next chamber:] The area you are entering is a jumble of stalagmites and rocks strewn chaotically about. The formations prevent the light from revealing the cavern's secrets, and cast deep shadows through the chamber. You breathe the cool moist air as you survey the strange scene before you. Suddenly, a great white shape rises up out of the rocks and spreads wings as wide as your outstretched arms. [Pause for the party's reaction.] The huge white owl flies to a ledge at your upper left and sits up there in the shadows watching you. Somehow, it looked bigger when you were startled.

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67

Up ahead you see the beginnings of a faint green glow. The air here has the tang of mold and smells more like a mossy forest than a cavern. [Pause for the party to move along.] As you enter the chamber you see innumerable patches of a glowing green moss. It gives out practically no light but anyone with low light vision can see well here. The fuzzy green moss glows a gentle green that fades out as your light brightens the room. Without the unnatural glow it looks like normal green moss that you would find in a forest. [The last person in the party sees:] When you look back to where you have passed, you see the glow return to the moss as your light fades.

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68

The walls here are irregular and craggy. From the shadows you see two piercing red eyes peering at you from the shadows of a rough niche a little ahead of you and to your right. [When the heroes approach:] The red eyes disappear with a squeal and a scurrying sound. [When the party reaches the crevice they see:] There is a fissure here that disappears deep into the cave wall. It is too narrow for a man to enter but a slender elf or halfling might be able to follow it after removing all armor and accoutrements. In the dirt at the base of the crack there are footprints that look like those of a dire rat. Still, they have a similarity to human feet that is disconcerting and suggests that this may not have been a normal rat.

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69

Suddenly there is a strong gust of cool damp air and the torches sputter and go out. [If there was no magical light:] You are left in a darkness that is all-embracing and almost palpable. You feel the weight of the tons of stone above you pressing in upon you. [Will save at DC 5 to avoid panic. If anyone panics, roll d6: 1-2: attempt to run off in the darkness; 3-6: just scream for 1d4 rounds or until someone helps to calm them.]

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70

In this area you find a string of headless rats fastened together and lying on the floor. They are tied together by their hind feet like a string of fish. The rats are fairly fresh but the smell of many unwashed bodies pervades the air around you. The dust has been disturbed by many feet that appear smaller than man-sized but the confused tracks make it impossible to tell what made them. You heard nothing as you approached, but something left here fast enough that it didn't stop to pick up its lunch.

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71

As you enter this room you see crude cave paintings on the walls. The drawings seem to depict torture, mayhem, and the destruction of small villages. From the quality of the art you would guess that they were made by insane children – or orcs. This is the art of evil and despite the lack of skill you can make out gruesome images of beheading, dismemberment, and the slaughter of innocents. The pictures seem to take a fiendish delight in depicting all manners of cruelty in excruciating, though primitive, detail. One picture clearer than the rest will stick in your mind for a long time, of a child's head severed from its body.

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72

A perfect dome rises above you. It is apparently supported by four pillars carved into the walls in four corners. The dome itself is painted a dark blue; there is a silvery crescent moon upon it and shimmering flashes of light like stars. You recognize several constellations; there is the hunter and over there the bull. The pillars that support the "sky" are each carved differently, with one of them carved like rising flames that have been turned to stone and another like a beautiful waterfall frozen in rock. Another hardly looks carved at all; it seems to be a column of stone grown from the joining of a stalagmite and stalactite. The last pillar is narrower at the base than at the top and looks like a whirling funnel of air. This hall matches no style any of you have ever seen and despite the vibrant color you have an overwhelming impression that this is very ancient.

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73

You hear a squeaking and scurrying ahead of you as hundreds of rodents race away from you and your light. The hopping, running grey mass bounces and rolls like waves over the rocks before you. It appears to be parting from the center and moving toward the walls. Only when you realize that the rats are not piling up on each other do you notice that they are disappearing down dozens of rat holes in both side walls of the room. This area has the foul stench that you would expect from a rat den, and you see insect vermin flitting among the feces.

[To use this encounter, see statistics on a Rat Swarm in Appendix 2.]

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75

You begin to feel a vibration through the stone. There seems to be a throbbing bass drumming that you feel before you hear. [Pause for the party to move along.] All at once the drumming sound is clear. From somewhere in the depths of the earth comes the thunder of many drums in a brutal staccato rhythm. It rises and falls in a swirling, dizzying beat that makes your heart pound faster and your brow sweat. Then, as suddenly as it started, the drumming stops.

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CAVERNS

77

As you enter this area you hear the chirping of a cave cricket – tuweep, tuweep, tuweep. Sometimes when you move it stops, only to start up again in what sounds like another place. It is very annoying and you almost get the feeling that it is taunting you.

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74

There is a moment when the party pauses. No one is moving and you are able to clearly hear the sound of dripping. It is very faint at first but as your ears focus on the sound it becomes quite clear. Somewhere there is a steady drip, drip, drip of water into a pool. Because of the way sound reverberates in the caverns it is impossible to tell which direction it is coming from but the dripping continues.

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76

This chamber is deathly still. Along the wall to the left sits a skeleton with a few rags of clothing. It is very old and you know in your heart that nothing has walked this way for a very, very long time. There is no sign of violence on the skeleton except some marks of tiny teeth on the bones. It looks like some poor soul got lost and finally just sat down and died. As you gaze at it, you begin to feel the mounting weight of tons of rock pressing in upon your spirit from every side. The oppression grows until it is difficult for you to master and a sense of panic builds within as you become certain that none of you will ever find your way out of here again. [Any who fail a Will save at DC10 will panic and flee in terror toward what they perceive as the way out. They will move at full speed for 1d6 rounds before stopping.]

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78

You think you hear something but it is faint. [If the party stops to listen:] You hear the click, click, click of a small rock upon a larger one. It is like someone is tapping out a message. Click, click [pause] click, click. It is impossible to determine if it is coming from in front of you or from behind you – it's like the sound is everywhere. It continues for several repetitions. Click, click [pause] click, click [pause] click, click. Finally, it stops and you hear nothing more.

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79

The low sound of a mournful wind is in your ears as a dank wisp of cold air sends a shiver down your spine. You look around; everyone seems to have felt it and stopped in their tracks. You pause for a moment but the air current is gone. In its wake it has left a mouldering smell of death and decay that reminds you of a tomb. Though you continue to try to sense it, there is no longer a draft nor is there any trace of where the breeze came from or where it went.

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81

In the sand at your feet part of a human skull protrudes from the earth. Other bones are visible as well. [If anyone digs in the sand it is apparent that an entire skeleton is here.] The earth has gathered around to reclaim the bones but it is clear they had not been buried. [Pick a player and tell him or her the following:] Your ears catch the whisper of a voice. At first it is too faint to hear but then you seem to make out the words. "Why did you not come sooner? Why leave me here to die alone in the dark earth? I thought you were my friend, but you are like all the others." [At the GM's discretion the words can plague the player until the bones are buried in hallowed ground.]

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83

The ceiling of the next chamber rises high above you. The near side is lit by your torch [lantern], if only faintly. Across the room the ceiling slopes steeply upward and is lost in the darkness. [If the adventurers cross the room:] On the opposite side of the room, a small bundle of bones lies at the base of the wall. The skeleton belonged to some four-footed creature. [The skeleton is that of a calf, young deer or other young animal. Many of the bones are broken. The animal fell into a hole at the top of a deep shaft which opens high above this chamber.]

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80

You come upon a sudden drop of about two feet as you enter the next room. Once you drop down onto the floor, you see a figure lying by a rock on the right side of the chamber. It is unmoving and appears to have been dead for quite some time. An old lamp sits next to the body, with both oil and wick long burned away. Not far away is a pack that has been tossed aside along with an empty wineskin. A bag of the type some travelers use to carry rations lies near the corpse as well. The body is of that of a man in a rotting shirt of leather armor and a leather helm. Across his knees is a rusty short sword. The man seems to have cut away one of his boots and the foot that is free is clearly broken. He apparently was unable to leave and died in this place alone and in the dark.

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82

You hear the faint clatter of falling rocks somewhere in this area followed by the soft sound of a stream of sand running to lower ground. The air here is dry and dusty, like a desert wind. Periodically other sand and small rocks fall in various places, and the floor is littered with rocks and gravel. [There is a 10% chance per character that a cave-in will occur large enough that the party is required to dodge. They can evade damage by a Reflex save at DC 15. Damage is 1d6 for every 5 points or fraction thereof by which the save is missed.]

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84

[As the adventurers enter the next area, a Spot check at DC 15 will show they have noticed the following. If the area is dark, Spot check is at DC 7.] You see a light coming from a low tunnel along the side wall. [If the adventurers investigate more closely:] There is an opening in the wall about eighteen inches high and two and a half feet wide. It is a rough tunnel that burrows into the rock about 30 feet, where it ends in a rock fall. This is easy to see, because in front of the pile of rocks lies a small stone, alight with flame. [This is a pebble with a Continual Flame spell cast on it.]

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85

As you enter the next area, you are startled to discover a flame burning brightly on the floor. It is coming from a stone about the size of a fist. [If the adventurers look at it closely:] Close investigation shows it to be a simple grey rock, completely common except that it seems to be burning and is as bright as a torch. [This is a rock with a Continual Flame spell cast on it. On a Spot check at DC 12 the adventurers will also notice:] You see another light, coming from the ceiling. This one is very dim. You realize it is light from outside shining through a hole at the top of a long shaft. As dim as the light is, the opening must either be very small or very high above you.

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87

Scrawled on the wall in what looks like blood are the words, "Go Back". There are also trails of dried blood on the stone floor. [A Knowledge (nature) check at DC10 will tell that these trails are relatively fresh – they have been here long enough to dry but not much longer.] Two footprints crossing the bloody tracks are larger than a man's and deeper. Possibly they were made by some sort of ogre or cave giant but it is hard to tell.

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CAVERNS

89

A great roar rises from the depths. It is the loudest and most massive sound you have ever heard and the very earth around you trembles at its power. The sound seems to come from all around you as if the walls themselves were reverberating. As the echoes fade away your ears begin to ring. Sounds are tricky in caverns and you are not sure from which direction that one came, other than down.

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CAVERNS

86

On the wall to your left there is a large chalk arrow that points the way that you are already going. There is no annotation or indication as to who could have made the mark. You see nothing else in this area that indicates that anyone has passed this way before you.

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88

You proceed carefully through the darkness. The stillness is unearthly, and you don't understand what dwarves like about the underground. Suddenly, an ear-piercing scream shatters the silence and fades away. Its echoes die slowly and leave the silence that follows feeling even more unnatural.

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90

In the dirt of this cavern there is a mound that looks suspiciously like a fresh grave. As you approach it you see that the earth has been turned and something indeed has been buried here. [This is the grave of an adventurer and is only a couple days old. If the party digs up the body, it is fresh and smelly and everything of value has been taken off the corpse.]

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91

Here there are paintings around the walls that show stick figures battling great shaggy, horned beasts and huge bears. In other pictures the figures are chasing deer or just living day to day. They do not seem to live in cities and there is little to indicate who they are. Along one wall are six areas where stones are placed carefully in half circles. [Beneath each half circle lie buried the remains of a family. These are prehistoric remains so all that will be left will be stone spear points and broken fragments of bone. There is nothing of value here.]

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92

Painted on the wall is an eight-pointed gold star surrounded by strange symbols. [A Knowledge (arcane) check at DC10 reveals that these mystical symbols represent the elements.] A group of stones, large enough to be used for seats, are arranged in a semi-circle looking in toward the paintings on the wall. A thick flat stone longer and broader than a tall man lies beneath the symbol. At four corners of the flat stone, narrow upright stones are embedded into the earth. Each standing stone has a worn groove just above the level of the slab about which, perhaps, ropes could be tied. The flat stone is stained dark with what looks to you like ancient blood.

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93

As you enter this area you find a large wooden shield cracked down the center. It is crudely made and obviously did not hold up to the use to which it was put. The shield is dusty and has been here for some time. Looking around the room you see several other broken shields and a broken spear. There also are many decaying skeletons of small humanoids in leather armor. [A Knowledge (nature or local) check at DC 12 will identify these as goblin skeletons.] It appears that they had battled for some reason and then left their dead to rot upon the floor of the cavern. Anything of use has long since been stolen from the bodies.

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94

This room is full of the foul smell of serpents but you see none here. There are many rough rocks in this room and an apparent drop on the far side prevents you from seeing that far. [When the players advance to the ledge:] You look down onto the rocks below and see the crackly thin skin of a vast serpent. The cast-off skin is several feet in diameter and dozens of yards long. The stone gives no indications of where the serpent may have gone.

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95

[This could be used in conjunction with Bit #94.] A piercing hiss slices the air in warning; it sounds as if the earth itself has opened and is expelling its heat. As the warning dies away you hear the slithering of giant scales sliding across stone. Nothing small could have made that sound; some great serpent lives nearby. [If the characters search, they will find a hole three feet in diameter with the stench of serpents coming from the far side. If the characters really want to crawl through to kill a giant serpent with no treasure, see the text for a summary of its statistics.]

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96

Here are broken weapons and skeletons of both humans and some small humanoids. [A Knowledge (nature or dungeoneering) check at DC12 will identify these as goblin skeletons.] Clearly, they fell in battle. At one point you see a human skull with an axe buried in it, the haft of which is shattered and useless. Similar scenes are abundant throughout the room. Anything that remains is broken and worthless; the winners took everything of value and left the dead. The battle has been over for some time and only skeletons, ruined shafts, and scraps of leather remain.

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Ahead of you, you see something most unusual. Passage into the next area is blocked by a set of stone doors. This large double door completely fills the entry, which has been squared off so the doors fit tightly. As you get closer you can see that the surface of the doors is completely smooth, but the edges are worn, as if from much use. [The doors are heavy but well-balanced and could be opened easily from the inside by any person with Strength>9. However, the adventuring party is on the outside of the doors and will have to find a way to pull the doors open. The bottom center of the doors is worn enough that a hand or some other type of tool could be inserted and used to pull. To pull the door open (instead of pushing it) requires a Strength of 16 and a way to pull it.]

At the entrance of this chamber you feel the hairs on the back of your neck stand up. Wondering what horrors this new room holds, you boldly step forward. Underfoot something snaps. Upon closer inspection it turns out to be an arrow, well made but apparently very old. On the left side there is an ancient door, barred shut, and now partially blocked by a rock fall. A fallen warrior lies in the corner, his sword broken and his bow snapped. It looks as though he shut the door only to find his enemies at his back. Could the same thing happen to you? [The GM may incorporate this ancient door into the game if desired. Otherwise, adventurers who manage to clear the way and open it will find the other side to be totally choked with rubble to a distance of many feet.]

Across the room, an amazing feature catches your light. It looks like a curtain or drapery billowing down from a broad overhanging rock. Its colors range from pale ivory on the upper portion through variations of gold and orange to a deep rust color at the bottom. [Upon closer examination:] It is almost unbelievable that this can be rock, but the smooth cold surface under your hands says that is indeed what it is. It looks thin enough to be translucent, if there was a light on the other side. [If the party looks behind the drapery:] Stepping around the beautiful wall you are startled to discover the body of a man. His skin looks leathery and dry; his body has effectively mummified here in the dry air of this chamber. [The man may have been an escaped prisoner or a fleeing bandit, seeking a secure hiding place. He died there and no one has known for years. He has no valuables on him.]

[On a Spot check at DC 12, one of the adventurers notices:] Tucked behind a low rock to the side you see a bag-like object with a dangling strap. [Upon closer examination:] This is a crudely-fashioned bag, made from badly-tanned leather. The strap has been attached with rough stitches made with some wide thread or other material. [The bag is dry and brittle; handling it will make it crack and break. In it is a pile of pale, dry powder; its contents crumbled to dust long ago. The powder is not hazardous in any way but that is not immediately obvious.]