



THE CROOKED KING'S CHALICE

Compatible with the Swords & Wizardry rules

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome, brave adventurers! You are no doubt walking your way across the land in search of fame, fortune and more than a little glory, so lend me your ears and I will tell you of a place so foul with the corruption of evil and chaos, and yet so full of the gold and renown you seek, you'll wonder if the risk is worth the rewards.

Do you dare seek out the Chalice of the Crooked King, and risk eternal damnation for the chance of more riches than even Kings have ever seen?

Of course, I know what your answer will be.

This is The Crooked King's Chalice, a White Box adventure for an experienced adventuring party, although it will be easy enough to adjust the statistics of the foes and dangers to suit any level of skill.

This adventure is also an introduction to the town of Mallard, a settlement built from the ruins of a peculiar forgotten temple that covered a whirlpool fed by the Backwash River, a whirlpool that seems to go nowhere... The town is built around the pool and, apart from the long years of bad luck the town seems to have endured, it is a peaceful, quiet place. The Referee should feel free to use Mallard as a 'base of operations' of sorts, where PCs can rest and recuperate, buy supplies and otherwise relax between adventures. They may even want to buy a house here! The town and the primary persons of interest will be detailed at the end of the adventure, once the PCs have had a chance to gather their wits once the danger is over.

It goes without saying that if you're a player in this adventure, then STOP READING NOW! Only the Referee should be allowed to read this adventure through and any prior knowledge of things to come will not only ruin it for the rest of the group but for you, also.

If you're the Director then press on; make sure that you've read the adventure thoroughly before starting the game so that you're familiar with the story and the dangers the players are to face. If necessary, adjust the ability scores or the numbers of foes to suit your group as the last thing you want is the entire party crippled or killed due to the dangers being far too much for them! Remember to keep it challenging.

BACKGROUND

There are dozens of local tales about the Crooked King, and none of them are even remotely attractive or inspiring. The tales centre on a small settlement, about half a day's ride to the west following the Backwash River, called Mallard. This small hamlet has a population of one hundred and twelve, mainly farmers and workers at the local copper mine, and is quite bright and welcoming. However, the tales they tell of long-dead Kings and magic foul and dark, and of a legacy that will destroy their homes and bloodlines are many and create an atmosphere of doom that you can almost taste.

The players will learn of the Crooked King, investigate mysterious goings-on in the copper mine and discover an underground tomb, maybe of the King himself, leading to untold riches and fame... or the grave.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF MALLARD

Many years ago, a corrupt and long forgotten King used a magical Chalice to gain power, but his courtiers conspired against him to take the Chalice away, killing him. The King cursed the courtiers and their families that they might never prosper. More details can be found in the 'Aftermath' section of the first part of the adventure.

The bloodlines of the courtiers lived for many generations and the last descendant of the betrayers - the family of Porinnus - are all that remain. The Mayor of Mallard, Virian Porinnus, is trying her best to break the curse that the Crooked King set upon her family, but to no avail. In the last week, the hamlet has gone from bad to worse; after a collapse at the copper mine, the town has now been attacked by a band of mercenaries of orcs, men and goblins, led by the notorious leader Grinbar Zull, a half-orc warrior of ill reputation.

Grinbar is looking for something... and the Mayor thinks she knows what it is he seeks.

THE PCs

There are no capability requirements of any of the players, although some magical knowledge wouldn't go amiss. Players are free to use any kind of character they wish, so this adventure is perfect for an already established band of adventurers.

THE ADVENTURE

The adventure itself is in three parts:

Missions in Mallard
Exploring the copper mines
The finale in the tomb

Although there are missions available in Mallard, the players are not required to participate or complete any of them and, once they have wind of possible riches in the copper mine, are welcome to travel there and begin their search immediately.

However, the more they help the denizens of Mallard the more help they'll receive in their quest to the copper mine and the tomb. For every bit of help they give the people of Mallard, the more items they'll receive to help them complete their quest.





PART 1

~ MALLARD ~

Read this aloud to the players:

'Ah, spring. On a day like this, with the mild air in your lungs and the gentle breeze on your face, the dusty track underfoot and the sound of the Backwash River mumbling softly into your ears, what more could an adventurer ask for? An open road, a warm sun and nothing and no-one to ruin it.

Singing birds, rustling trees, gurgling water, and the sound of swords clashing and people shouting...

Wait... what was that?

As you turn the corner you see the walled settlement of Mallard in front of you and something is very, very wrong. There are people running in all directions and there are shouts of alarm and screams of terror. The road leading up to the gates is littered with smashed crates and overturned wagons and at least one body lies in the road, dressed in useless leather armour, a rusting sword just out of reach. Inside the hamlet there are several trails of smoke rising and you see, just inside the gates, uniformed thugs with swords chasing the denizens around.

Mallard is under attack!"

There are several things the players can do, but in general they can rush straight in, hide and watch what happens, or question one of the townsfolk fleeing the hamlet.

HIDING

Hiding isn't a great option; if the players do decide to hide and watch to see what happens then they can, but in doing so they will seal the fate of the town and many people will die, including all of the individuals who would have given them missions that would have aided them in their quest. If this happens then they can get the information about the copper mines and the tomb from a local, who will impart the location and the reason why they are under attack (see the next section 'Questioning A Townsperson') with his dying breath, and then gasp *'why did you not help us?'* before expiring. It's up to the players if they want to hide, but these are the consequences!

QUESTIONING A TOWNSPERSON

Questioning one of the fleeing townspeople may seem to be the best idea at this point. Grabbing or flagging down a random fleeing denizen will be difficult as they are too filled with terror to stop, or will fight off any attempts to hold them. A successful CHA roll is required here, to calm them down and get some kind of sense from them.

'It's horrible! The Bloodfall Company marched into the town an hour ago, and Grinbar Zull himself demanded that the Mayor tell him where the Tomb of the Crooked King was! The Mayor didn't know and Zull went mad, and told his men to tear Mallard apart! The poor Mayor! Beaten half to a pulp and left for dead, but she must have told Zull something that he wanted to hear because the vile half-orc laughed and then left the town with his best

men, sent most of his soldiers on westwards and left this rabble to do what they pleased! Zull was headed in the direction of the copper mine to the east, laughing all the way, and now his men are intent on razing Mallard to the ground! Oh, can't you help? Please?'

If the players hesitate, or ask the age-old question 'what has it got to do with us?', then the townspeople will also add:

'The Mayor will pay very well.'

RUSHING INTO THE TOWN

Once they get what they need from a townspeople then they can try their luck - of course, if they rush straight in then carry on with the below, as the more heroic of the players might want to get stuck in and aid the town straight away. This is fine, and they can learn more about the attack and why the town was stormed afterwards.

The attackers are members of Grinbar Zull's mercenary band, known as the Bloodfall Company. While not hiring themselves out to the corrupt and the vile, this warband likes to spend their spare time raiding and pillaging defenceless places such as this one. They wear dark green leather armour - there's splash of red dye on the chest, representing the company's name of 'Bloodfall' - and they carry shortswords. They are all bedraggled-looking humans, orcs and goblins of varying ages, do not appear to be very fearsome and lack discipline and training. They also seem to be intent on simply wandering around and kicking in random doors, dragging the screaming orcs out and taking whatever is in there. They do

not travel in groups larger than the number of PCs present.

MERCENARY THUGS

Armour Class: 7[12]

Hit Dice: 1+2

Attacks: Weapon

Move: 12

HDE/XP: 2/30

Each mercenary has 1 gold piece each, with Grinbar Zull's initials scratched on it.

Let the players fight as many as you see fit - considering that their ability scores are quite low, if you have around three encounters, and have each encounter have the mercenaries equal the same number of players, it should be a simple but rewarding defence of the town. Once the final mercenary falls to the dirt, the townspeople will slowly emerge and hail the players as PCs.

QUESTIONING A BLOODFALL COMPANY MERCENARY

If the players decide to take a mercenary prisoner to question them they will be met with snide resistance, but that will rapidly evaporate if there is even the slightest threat made to the mercenary's well-being. Not so brave after all, these Bloodfall members.

Failing that, during the fight one of the final mercenaries will surrender.

If asked why the town was attacked:

'Zull's orders, innit? He says go here, fight there, we do what we're told, what we're paid for. He had us march to this place all the way from the mountains, hardly stopped all the way here.'

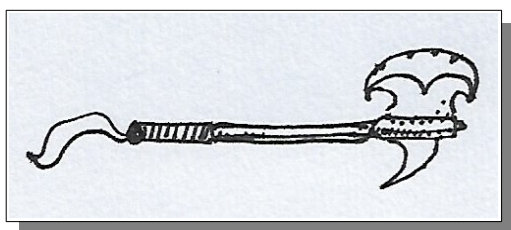
If asked about what Grinbar Zull was looking for:

'Dunno, he doesn't tell us anything. I do know he had dealings with some necromancer back at the pass, spent a day or two with him; there was some dark magic going on, but then he has us pack up and march here. Kept babbling on about some Chalice, I have no idea what he's talking about.'

If asked about Grinbar Zull's other men:

'He's taken his best men with him, and the rest he sent further down the river to an old camp of ours, to wait for him. I heard him say 'I will join you when I have the power', but I don't know what he meant by that.'

That's it; other than the promise of loot and violence, which is why this mercenary joined up, he doesn't know anything else. What the players do with him is up to them or the local justice system. If they let him go, for whatever reason, he will immediately head after Grinbar Zull to warn him of the PCs and their interference.



THE MAYOR OF MALLARD

Mayor Virian Porinnus is on the steps of the town hall, covered in bruises and cuts, and nursing a bloodied mouth that's missing more than a few teeth. She's around five and a half feet tall and slightly overweight, but her

burning eyes and thick jaw tell the players that she's a woman of action and determination. Even as the PCs approach she will try to stand to thank them for their help, her chain of office clattering to the floor which she ignores. At the insistence of her aide, and perhaps even the PCs, she slumps back down onto the steps.

No doubt the PCs have some questions about what has happened and what they have learned.

If asked about the raid:

'That mercenary filth came marching in and demanded answers, and before we even had a chance to negotiate he set his dogs loose. Look at our town! The scum-sucking villains!'

If asked about Grinbar Zull:

'He's a well-known mercenary warleader, recruits all kinds of low-life to join his ranks with the promise of gold and beer. Hires himself out to whoever can pay, and takes what he wants anyway. He's no soldier, he's a thug and his men are thugs. He came out of the mountains years ago with a few men, started bullying the locals and took protection money. He ended up being hired by local barons and lords, evil men of questionable parentage, and called himself a mercenary. He deserves a headman, or a noose, but that would be too good for him.'

If asked about the Chalice:

'He kept asking about the Crooked King's Chalice. It's just a fairytale, an old legend to scare children. There was always a story about a lost tomb where the Chalice was hidden, because it

couldn't be destroyed, but no-one really believed it. In the copper mines, about half an hour's walk away to the east, or so the story goes.

Look, I have the tale in one of my books. I'll get it for you, but can you help around here? The town guards are all dead, and I'm sure the people here could do with the help. They'll pay what they can, I'm sure... I know you're no mercenaries, not like them, but even so...'

It's at this point the PCs notice that a crowd is gathering and the aftermath of the attack is beginning to become apparent. With fires, some resistance from mercenaries hiding in the houses and back alleys, and other disasters, the town will need some help.

MISSION 1 - 'FIRE! FIRE! POUR ON WATER!'

This mission is from the town butcher Gladys Mensun. Gladys is a rough, no-nonsense woman and she's running past the PCs with empty buckets, shouting and beckoning for them to follow.

'My shop's all goin' up in flames, and my little Chika is up in the bedroom! Please help, and save my little one!'

Gladys runs as fast as she can to a burning building just off the town square, marked as 'B' on the map.; the lower floor already has flames licking out of the broken windows. Gladys quickly passes the buckets out and starts scooping water from a fountain very close.

If the PCs help, they must make as a successful DEX check each (roll their DEX score or less on a D20), with each

player rolling one after the other in order of their DEX score, highest to lowest, If any DEX scores are the same, just decide who goes first.

If any one of the DEX rolls fail, then the fire has took hold again and they must start from the beginning with the highest player rolling their DEX score again, running backwards and forwards from the fountain to the fire. They can only fail three times - if that happens, then the butchers burns down to the ground, although the PCs will be thanked for making sure the fire didn't spread.

If the building is saved then Chika - a small white mewling kitten with a red ribbon tied around her neck - is also saved.

If the players think they won't make it, or if they fail their rolls, then remind them that if they don't act fast then little Chika is done for. If any of the PCs decide to try and shoulder their way in, brave the fire and get to the second floor to save Chika, then they can do so. Any spellcaster with a Levitate spell would come in handy about now!

Any PC bursting in must test their CON. If they cover themselves with a cloak or blanket, they get a +1 to their CON score for this roll, and if the cloak or blanket is dampened they get a +2.

Successful tests get them to the top floor where they find Chika, a small white mewling kitten with a ribbon tied around her neck, cowering in a corner.

A failed test results in 1D6-2 (min 1) damage roll due to burning.

If the PCs save the building and Chika, Gladys is ecstatic - she gifts them three days worth of rations each, 10 gold pieces each and a single Potion of Health (+1d6).

If the PCs save Chika or the building, but not both, they receive 5 gold pieces each for their help.

If the PCs save neither the building or Chika, Gladys collapses in tears and cannot be consoled. The PCs receive nothing.

MISSION 2 - 'THERE'S A RAT IN MY KITCHEN!'

One of the PCs has their sleeve tugged, and a young boy asks *'Can you help my da? Those bad men smashed the door to his cellar, and the rats have got out!'*

The mercenaries have raided the trading house of local merchant Beevel Ondrus, marked as '3' on the map. He has a large warehouse where he keeps his goods - which are a little thin on the ground at the moment, as the thugs have smashed much of what he had; pottery, some bolts of cloth and bottles of wine - and then they tried to get into the locked cellar.

Beevel kept the cellar locked for a good reason; there's a large family of giant rats that live down there, and instead of using an old bolt tunnel to emerge far outside the town to find their food, they're now threatening to do some serious damage.

Beevel himself has hidden in one of his crates in the warehouse. The PCs will have to fight the rats to save him. There are two rats per PC, minimum four.

GIANT RAT

Armour Class: 7 [12]

Hit Dice: 1-1

Attacks: 5% are diseased

Move: 12

HDE/XP: <1/10



If they save Beevel, he will reward them 3 gold pieces each and single Potion of Health (+1d6).

MISSION 3 – 'HIDE AND SEEK'

As the PCs catch their breath, a dwarf with a singed beard and wild, curly hair comes running over.

'I'm Gruffthul, owner of the High Dragon Inn, and I need help! Some of those Bloodfall thugs were hiding in my inn but now they've escaped, and they're skulking in the alleys and back lanes somewhere! They've got flint, tinder and oil and seem intent on doing more damage! Can you help?'

The trouble is over behind the High Dragon Inn (marked as 2 on the map) where there are a series of small houses. The Bloodfall mercenaries have run into the maze of buildings and are hiding, leaping on anyone unfortunate enough to wander past them to rob them, and every time they get the chance they try to start a fire to cover their escape.

After a while it becomes obvious to the PCs that these Bloodfall thugs are hopelessly lost in the alleys, and after a few rounds will start to call for help and that they're more than happy to surrender.

When the players enter the maze of buildings behind the High Dragon Inn just ask them where they are going. Every time they come across a junction this is a possible encounter with the mercenaries, and you can resolve it by rolling on the following table:

- 1 - 3 – The mercenaries surrender
- 4 - They attack, one per PC
- 5 – 6 They attack, two per PC!

MERCENARY THUGS

Armour Class: 7[12]

Hit Dice: 1+2

Attacks: Weapon

Move: 12

HDE/XP: 2/30

Keep rolling on the table until you roll twice on the surrender result. This means that the Bloodfall mercenaries have gotten tired of being lost and have given up trying to escape.

What the PCs do with them is up to the players or the local justice system. If they let them go, for whatever reason, he will immediately head after Grinbar Zull to warn him of the PCs and their

interference. If the PCs manage to get through this, Gruffthul will reward them 10 gold pieces each and a single Potion of Health (+1d6).

AFTERMATH

Once the players have done all, or some, of the missions then a relative calm will fall upon the town. Mallard is in something of a state but the majority of the buildings are still standing. The cruel and bitter job of gathering the fallen and helping the injured begins, but the people of this small town are resilient and begin to work quickly.

As the situation calms the PCs have time to catch their breath and perhaps see to their own injured. If they feel like replacing supplies or shopping for anything then they're out of luck; the stores are either shut or damaged, and the traders really don't feel like pushing their wares today. Give the PCs time to do what they need to do, but once they're happy and ready to proceed the mayor sends for the PCs. She is in the town hall and the building is pretty much one large room.

The mayor is ashen-faced and filthy, with blood on her clothes and a fussy attendant trying to get her to sit down so that her wounds can be seen to. The mayor brushes him off with an angry growl.

'Here', she says, 'I have the page that describes what has happened here, and why I think Grinbar Zull has come. He is looking for the Crooked King's Chalice!'

She hands the page over and this contains the following passage, which you can read aloud to the players:

"From the book 'Backwash River's Local Legends and Myths', by Markas Taskmaster (3rd Edition)'.

'The town of Mallard, a strange place built around a whirlpool that even the greatest scholars know nothing about, was founded many decades ago as a centre of a group of farms originally created to serve the town of Chalisian, but in recent years the discovery of local caves in the low hills, and the copper they contain, has led to an increase of wealth and prosperity that means that, very soon, the town will be able to expand and may be able to afford to call itself a city. Miners and traders are becoming regular and the population is increasing. The Mayor, Virian Porinnus, is a wealthy woman and her family line stretches back generations; and herein lies the problem.

Local legend has it that an ancient King once ruled these lands; at least, King is what he is called in the stories; if he ever was a King he has been long forgotten. Perhaps he was just a powerful landowner and as the story grew in size and importance, so did his stature. Regardless, he is now known as King and that is what gives the story its power.

This King ruled using fear, threats and dark magic. It is said he had a Chalice gifted to him by a foul demon from the Abyss who told the King that every time he filled the Chalice with his own blood, riches and wishes would be granted to him. The King, greedy for gold and power, filled the Chalice regularly and power and fortune was his. However, as time passed the magic drained him until he was nothing more than a brittle, hunched, decaying thing that sat on a throne of bones and ruled his failing land with increasing madness. He became known as the Crooked King - his real name is lost in time - and he cruelly tormented his people as he fell further and further into corruption.

Secretly, the people of the land conspired against him and a select few courtiers plotted to steal away the Chalice, and therefore the King's source of power. Late one night, after drugging the King's loyal guards, they took the Chalice away and hid it at a secret location. When the King realised what they had done he flew into a rage, but the power of the Chalice had diminished him so much that his body withered away immediately. His last breath was to curse the courtiers who had betrayed him, that their bloodlines would forever be consumed by misfortune and tragedy. When he finally died, his body was quickly cremated and the ashes scattered to the winds, although rumours still abound that this didn't happen and that his mummified corpse is buried somewhere in the hills around Mallard. One tale describes the tomb as surrounded by a cave of 'orange and green stone'. Could this be the copper mine local to the town?

The land never truly recovered, and even though the courtiers tried their hardest to make the kingdom prosperous they could not. Eventually the lands were absorbed by other territories, and the kingdom was forgotten.'

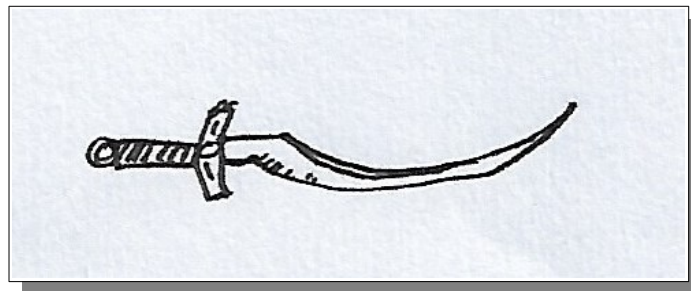
The mayor is distraught.

‘My family bloodline is one of those courtiers who betrayed the King, and we’ve had nothing but bad luck for generations. Famine, floods, and now we had to close the copper mine years ago because of monsters and Drow slavers! If that Chalice is found, who knows what evils it’ll do in the hands of a foul heart like Grinbar Zull!’

‘I know you’ve done a lot for this town, but with our guard depleted and our best injured I can only ask for more help from you all. Please, for the love of all that is good, get to the copper mine and stop Grinbar Zull before he uses the Chalice to increase his power!’

If the PCs hesitate, she adds:

‘Would 50 gold each help?’



PART 2

~ THE COPPER MINE ~

Just half an hour's walk from Mallard is the abandoned copper mine. After heading east along the tree line a short path heads south towards the mine, which is set into a seemingly natural cliff face that juts from the ground and heads off in both directions, like the edge of a small plateau.

The mine has been abandoned for a while and debris consisting of smashed wood, damaged crates and rusted buckets litter the ground. There are two intact but overgrown buildings, the larger one has huge chimneys jutting into the sky, and they are slightly dilapidated and overgrown.

The displaced earth has been piled up against the cliff face and appears somewhat unstable, and a mine cart track leads into the natural cave that leads off into darkness.

The whole place feels cold, miserable and there's a hint of sadness in the air. This once prosperous mine is now a pale shadow of its former glory.

1 – THE MAIN BUILDINGS

Read this aloud to the players:

'These two buildings were once the main storeroom and the smelter for the copper mine, where the copper would be melted down and formed into ingots. The large buckets and the fires are cold, now, and the smaller storeroom is empty and looks as though it has been ransacked a few times. The holes in the ceilings have allowed rainwater in, and it seems with just a few days work and

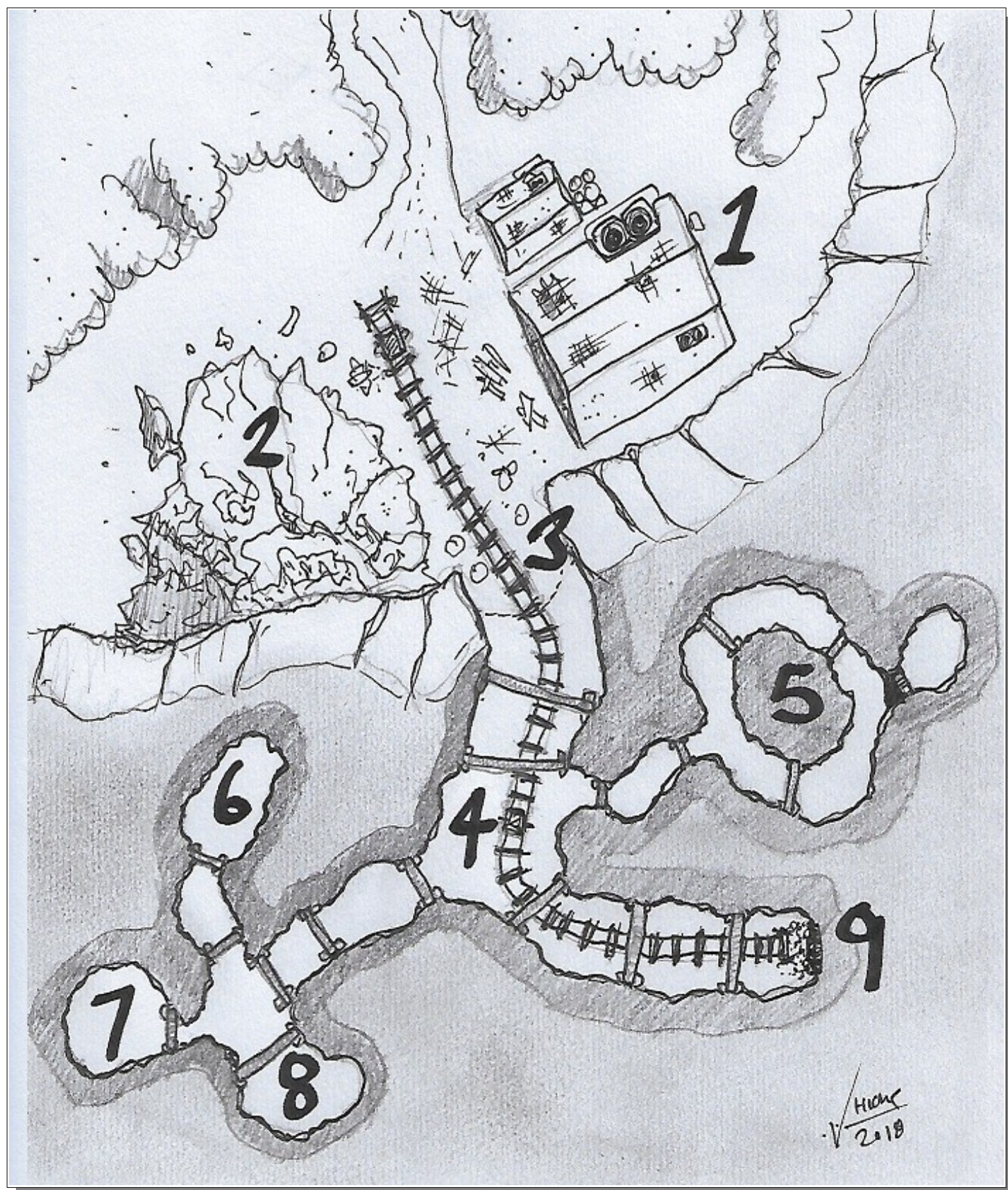
some attention this place could get back up and running again in no time.'

There is very little of use in either of these buildings, but in the storeroom there is a sturdy pickaxe that has been left lying on the floor in the middle of the room. It is made of good dwarven steel and has obviously been ignored by mistake; anyone wanting to take it can do so as it would be worth something.

However, picking up the pickaxe triggers an alarm trap. Give the PCs a chance to notice the trap – an almost invisible cord is tied around the handle – but if they still miss it then the cord yanks on a stick that pulls out a stopper that allows a rope loose that allows a weight to drop that allows a large bell hidden in the darkness of the ceiling to start ringing. Great, mournful tones echo loudly through the air.

There is no immediate danger, but the alarm will do two things; it will alert a group of Drow in the area that there are people here and that they have a chance to capture fresh slaves, and it will alert the mercenaries in the mine that there are people outside, and they will be wary.

If the PCs do trigger the trap, the Drow will arrive by the time they reach number 4, the junction. They will stealthily enter the mine and do their best to take as many people alive as possible. Not only this, the Bloodfall Mercenaries in the mine will be alerted, and they will lie in wait for trouble, possibly ambushing the PCs on their approach. PCs can try to sneak into the mine, but it will be made very difficult due to the mercenaries being on alert.



Regardless, if the PCs do take the pickaxe it is worth 10 gold pieces, and in one hand it does equal damage to a battleaxe.

2 – THE DIRT HEAP

Read this aloud to the players:

‘This huge mound of dirt is the detritus left over from digging out the mine, and it has been piled up haphazardly against the cliff face. Shattered wheelbarrows lie at its base along with piles of stone that appear to have been cut to shape but then abandoned, and even touching it allows small cascades of rubble to slide down. If this was hit hard enough it would undoubtedly collapse.’

There is nothing more of interest here, but it may come in handy as a trap or a way of slowing down pursuing enemies. However, climbing to the top is impossible and anyone who tries risks having the whole thing collapse on them; they will have to succeed a Save test to avoid being buried alive.

If anyone teleports or flies to the top they will suffer the same result, except the whole thing will come crashing down and spread out across the ground, forcing everyone to make a Save roll to avoid being buried, partially blocking the cave entrance and bringing a number of Bloodfall Mercenaries equalling the number of PCs running out to confront them.

Anyone who is buried takes 1 Hit Point of damage per round and must make two successful CON rolls to dig themselves out, or one CON roll if they have someone helping them. They can make a CON roll every round, and

once they succeed on their one or two rolls they are freed.

3 – THE ENTRANCE

Read this aloud to the players:

‘The entrance to the mine is wide, a natural cave that disappears into darkness. Some support beams have been put up to make sure that the mining does not bring the roof down and the mine cart track is damaged, bent and useless.’

If the Bloodfall Mercenaries are NOT alerted to the PCs, continue with the following:

‘There are guards just in the inside of the entrance and you see lamps flickering in the dark, illuminating the mine. They seem relaxed and casual, talking amiably between themselves about their poor pay, the terrible working conditions and what they intend to do once they get some time off’.

It’s possible that the PCs could distract the mercenaries to sneak into the mine, or they could ambush them, or use magic to get by them. Or, they could simply charge in, swords swinging. Whatever they decide to do, the mercenaries are taken completely by surprise.

However, if the Bloodfall Mercenaries ARE alerted to the PCs, read the following:

‘There don’t appear to be any guards, but light flickers further in the mine from lanterns attached to the walls.’

If the PCs set off the alarm in the storeroom, the guards are wary of intruders. They are hiding in the shadows and they will ambush any PC who enters the cave. There will be one mercenary per PC, plus one who will come running on the second round of combat out to help if his comrades are attacked.

MERCENARY THUGS

Armour Class: 7[12]

Hit Dice: 1+2

Attacks: Weapon

Move: 12

HDE/XP: 2/30

4 – THE JUNCTION

Read this aloud to the players:

‘As you approach a junction ahead you hear the sounds of crashing rock and stone, and then a cry goes up - ‘Kill the damnable thing!’ - accompanied by the strange sound of skittering, like hundreds of claws are scraping against rock. There are cries and shouts, and the sound of swords swinging and striking stone can be heard, followed by the scream of a man and guttural groaning, like mucus being gargled in a pipe’.

If the PCs move forward they will see a group of Bloodfall Mercenaries fighting two GIANT CENTIPEDES, and they have already badly wounded one but lost one of their own to the other. The creatures appear to have burst from a hole in the wall where a support beam has come loose, and they’re looping themselves around whatever they can get hold of and biting hard.

GIANT CENTIPEDE (MEDIUM)

Armour Class: 5[14]

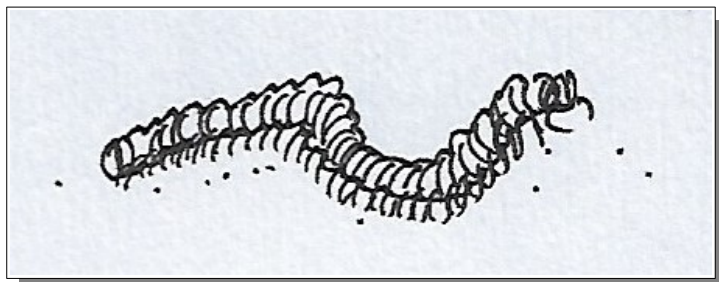
Hit Dice: 2

Attacks: Bite

Special: Poison - +6 mod to opponent’s Saving Throw

Move: 15

HDE/XP: 4/120



If the PCs leave them to fight the GIANT CENTIPEDES will eventually win but one of them will be killed and the second will be reduced to 1 HD, making their job easier if they have to face them. It will not move after the fight so they will have to engage it to get past.

If they join the fight and help the Bloodfall Mercenaries they will defeat the creatures together. After the fight, unless the PCs attack the mercenaries first, they will appear confused but they will be grateful.

‘You know what?’ says one of them, a huge female Ogre, ‘I never signed up for this madness. Zull’s down there,’ she motions to the locations where 5, 6 and 7 are, ‘and he’s gone mad with this stupid quest, whatever it is. He’s got us hitting the walls looking for some secret entrance, which bought these beasts on us. You’re welcome to him. Come on, boys.’

They know nothing else, and they will all thank the PCs and leave.

If the PCs set off the alarm trap in the storeroom outside, the Drow will now have entered the mine, looking for fresh slaves to drag back to their underground lairs. If the Bloodfall Mercenaries have been allowed to leave they will encounter them and shout a warning back to the PCs, and they will deal with the Drow swiftly as they already have their blood up. Such are the benefits of making new friends.

If the Drow have no obstruction, they will sneak into the mine. Every time the PCs enter a new location, roll a single d6 – if a 1 is rolled, the Dark Elves will attack and there will be a single Drow for every single person in the room, PC and enemy alike. The Drow will try to take them alive and if any of them are reduced to 2 HP or less they will flee.

DROW

Armour Class: 4[15]

Hit Dice: 1+1

Attacks: Weapon

Move: 12

HDE/XP: 2/30

Armed with Spears and Nets

If you do not roll a 1 at any of the locations, the Dark Elves will cut their losses and leave with no further trouble.

5 – THE HOOP

Read this aloud to the players:

‘The tunnel, obviously not natural and carved from the rock, comes to a T-junction and heads left and right. There are sounds of men working, rock being struck, and then a cry of ‘What is dis rubbish? Why has da boss got us looking for secret doors? Is he mad?’

‘Silence!’ cries another voice. ‘Another outburst like that and I’ll use your thick head to break the rock!’

‘Sorry,’ is the pitiful reply and the sounds of work resume.’

The tunnel goes around in a loop so no matter which way the PCs go they will encounter the Bloodfall Mercenaries working the rock with old pickaxes and hammers. As they see them one of them cries out, *‘I’ve found an opening!’* and the sound of falling rubble and dust fills the air.

How the players proceed is completely up to them. They can attack if they wish, there are four mercenaries working here, or they can observe them working.

A part of the wall has collapsed and revealed a secret chamber beyond (see the room on the map attached to the hoop). If the PCs have not attacked then all they here is one of the mercenaries whisper, *‘Treasure!’* and then with a whoop of triumph the group bundles into the room.

If the PCs attacked and defeated the group the first chance they got before they found the secret room then the room will stay hidden unless the PCs pound the walls themselves. If they attack after they have found the room or after they have entered then they have the advantage of surprise. If they try to reason with the Bloodfall Mercenaries at any time they will be ignored, and flat out attacked if the room has been opened.

The secret room is a treasure cache and there are chests of gold and jewels in there worth 250 gold pieces. It’s quite the haul! It’s unguarded and untrapped,

but don't let the PCs know that; it could be quite the spectacle watching them thinking that this treasure find is 'too easy', but that's the truth of it. If they hang back and watch the Bloodfall Mercenaries loot the room, they'll also watch them make off with it!

MERCENARY THUGS

Armour Class: 7[12]

Hit Dice: 1+2

Attacks: Weapon

Move: 12

HDE/XP: 2/30

6 – THE RICH VEIN

If the PCs head down this way, read the following aloud:

'This appears to be cut from the rock, not natural at all, and the copper vein here is strong. If anyone could get this mine working again they stand to make quite a profit!'

There are several Bloodfall Mercenaries working down here, hitting the walls with hammers, and they are all grumbling about what a waste of time this all is. If the PCs decide to attack or leave them is completely up to them.

7 – THE POOL

Read this aloud to the players:

'The short narrow tunnel ends in a round room where the sound of splashing can be heard. A single lantern barely illuminates a space filled with a wall to wall pool, with water cascading from a hole in the far wall and filling the pool. Where the water runs off to is anyone's guess as the darkness makes the water appear

as an abyss of inky blackness. There is nothing else of interest in the room.'

This pool feeds into an underground stream that leads to the pool in the centre of the town of Mallard. It's a powerful pull, and anyone putting their hand into the water is in danger of being immediately sucked in.

A magical pull drags anything down, sweeps it underground to the whirlpool in the town and, if the individual can't get out of the water, sucks them down into the vortex. If this happens, then you'll need to refer to the 'Secrets of the Whirlpool' section in the 'Town of Mallard' chapter at the end of this book.

To get themselves out of the water the PC must make a successful DEX roll. If anyone else wishes to help them, they also must make a successful DEX roll; however, due to the cramped space only one other person may help PC in trouble. If either DEX roll succeeds then the PC is successfully pulled away from the water.

8 – THE STOREROOM

Read this aloud to the players:

'This room has been trashed, but not in an attempt to search for treasure but to clear a path to the wall. The stone has been chipped and cracked, obviously from attempts to break through, and split, shaky-looking supports groan under the weight of the rock. There are six small, unopened chests in here, but it looks like the roof will come down at any moment.'

The storeroom can be investigated and even looted, but at a great risk. For every one of the six chests the PCs

search they will find 1d10x10 gold pieces but they will have to be quiet as every time they search a container they will run the risk of bringing the roof down!

Any container searched or any loud noise the PCs – and only one PC at a time can roll for a single chest - make must be followed by a Save roll. If they succeed, then the ceiling rumbles ominously but stays intact. If they fail, the ceiling cracks, the walls split and the room caves in.

Any PCs in the room must make a Save test to avoid the debris or take a single d6 of damage, and they must also lose a single item (of their choosing) that cannot be retrieved. This does not mean losing a single coin or a single glove – one item of their inventory that is not clothes or coin must be removed.

9 – THE END OF THE NATURAL CAVE

Read the following aloud to the players:

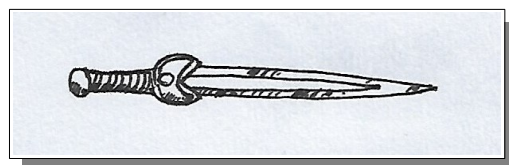
'At the end of the main natural tunnel, where the mine cart track finishes, is a large wall that has been beaten down, and rubble lies everywhere. The ceiling appears to have partially collapsed and the body of an unfortunate Bloodfall Mercenary lies under the rocks. Beyond the collapsed wall is a tunnel, obviously not natural as the walls have been shored up by huge blocks of stone, and the stench of stale air makes you gag.

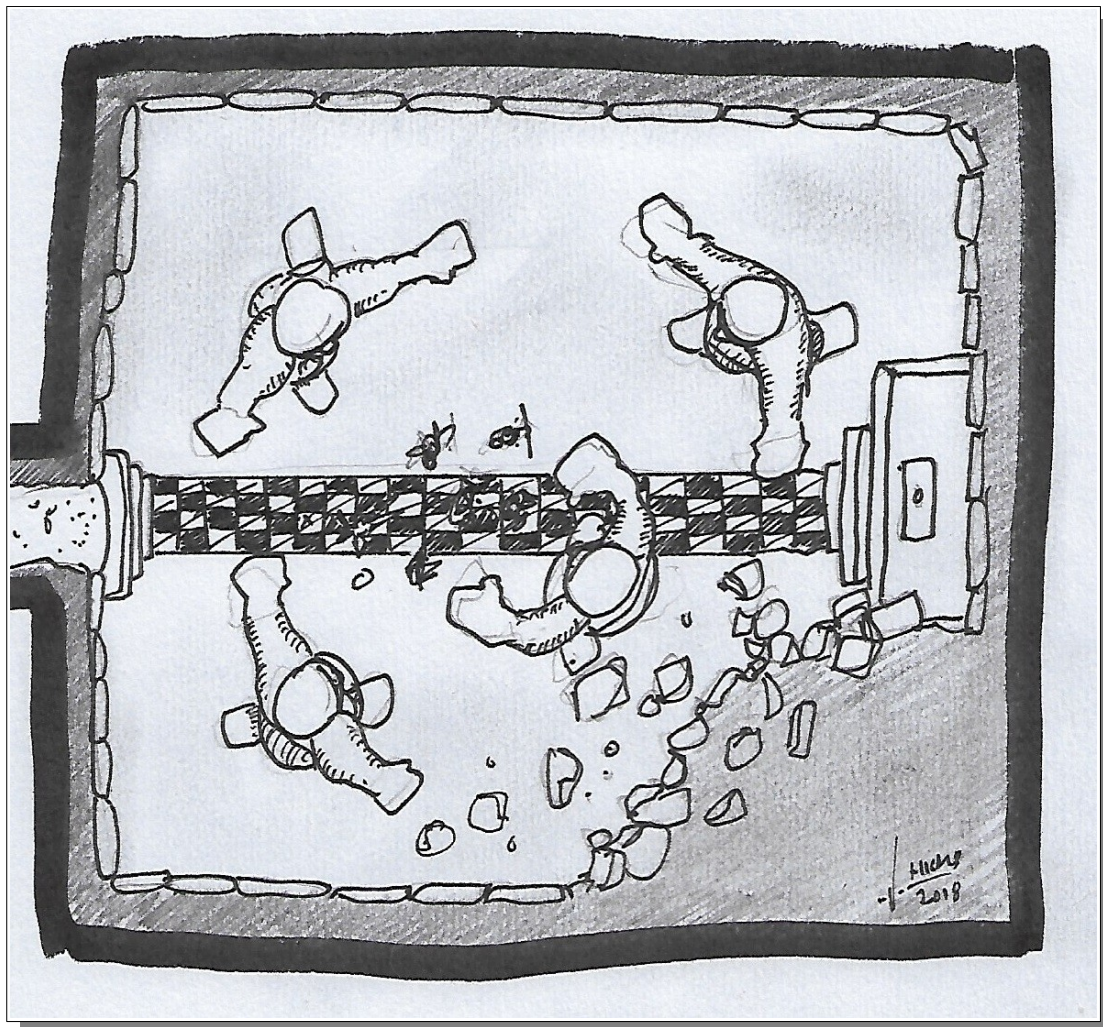
There is light flickering at the end of the tunnel but the rock dust hangs heavy in the air and it's hard to make out any details. However, the sounds of

shouting and swords clashing can be heard; whatever the mercenaries have found down there, it doesn't sound friendly.'

The PCs can continue on; go to 'Part 3 – The Crooked King's Chalice' to continue the adventure.

If the PCs decide not to venture forth right now and have not yet explored the rest of the mine, they may do so. Once they do return, simply begin the Part 3 at the 'Battle's Aftermath' section once you've read out the description of the tomb.





PART 3

~ THE CROOKED KING'S CHALICE ~

This is the final part of the adventure, the tomb of the Crooked King. It is a large location and for good reason; the King has been interred with protectors; four huge oversized GOLEMS.

This is the finale of the adventure. As the fight rages on, the PCs will need to move fast to secure treasure, safety and their ultimate goal!

Read this aloud to the players:

'The tunnel opens out into a huge tomb with a high vaulted roof. The walls are shored up with huge blocks of stone,

each one the size of a horse, so the time it must have taken to construct this tomb – not to mention the cost - must have been immense.

The roof and walls were once decorated in frescos of lords, ladies and battles but these are now faded, and the images that are left dance eerily in the flickering light from the torches lying on the floor where they were dropped by dead or fighting Bloodfall Mercenaries.

The tomb is easily fifty paces long by fifty paces wide, with the ceiling about ten paces high, disappearing into the gloom. At the far end is a raised dais with nothing but a small stone table on it, about waist height, and on this table is a single unadorned chest.

However, the tomb is dominated by four huge stone GOLEMS; at each corner, their arms stretched upwards to hold the ceiling in place, these massive hulking protectors glare down upon the intruders. One of them has left their position at the far right of the tomb and is even now fighting the Bloodfall Mercenaries. Where the GOLEM was standing and supporting the ceiling, the entire area has collapsed and, as you watch the fight, rocks continue to tumble down to fill the tomb.

With a victorious cry from the mercenaries the GOLEM comes crashing down, but as it's body strikes the flagstoned floor another comes alive and attacks; as soon as it moves the part of the ceiling it was holding up collapses and more of the tomb begins to crumble.

The GOLEMS can be defeated, but the tomb will obviously collapse as a result.'

Four GOLEMS. As each one is defeated another comes alive (in a clockwise order) and the part of the roof they were supporting starts collapsing. This doesn't bode well.

The fallen GOLEM is surrounded by Bloodfall Mercenaries, the number of which are double the number of PCs plus the half-orc himself; Grinbar Zull. He is huge, at least seven feet tall, and his muscular frame threatens to split open the chain armour he wears, and the cruel serrated battle axe he holds in one hand is cracked and chipped. As the PCs watch, he rallies his men to face the next GOLEM.

'Hey, lads! Let's get on with it! For the Bloodfall!'

This cry seems to energise the already tired soldiers and, with a forced cheer, they attack the GOLEM.

GOLEM

Armour Class: 5[14]

Hit Dice: 16

Attacks: Fist (2d6)

Move: 6

HDE/XP: 16/3,200

GRINBAR ZULL

Armour Class: 5[14]

Hit Dice: 4

Attacks: Sword (1d6)

Move: 12

HDE/XP: 3/60

The PCs have some options as to how they handle the situation.

Sneaking past the fight: If the PCs opt to leave the Bloodfall Mercenaries to it and sneak past them to get to the dais to seize the chest, then they can do so. There is plenty of rubble and rocks for them to move amongst as the mercenaries battle the creature.

Each PC that makes the attempt will have to make a successful roll to get to and from the dais. They will also have to make a single DEX roll to avoid falling debris; if they fail the roll then they will have to make a successful DEX roll to avoid the falling rock, but failure will result in a loss of 1 HP in damage.

If they're successful, the PCs can then get away with the chest without having to get involved with the fight, leaving Grinbar Zull and his Bloodfall Mercenaries to their fate.



Getting involved in the fight against the GOLEM: The PCs can help if they wish, but as soon as the GOLEM is defeated the ceiling will collapse some more, and if all the GOLEMS are defeated the tomb will collapse completely.

For every GOLEM that falls, the Bloodfall Mercenaries will lose a single man. So, as there are twice as many mercenaries as there are PCs, the numbers may start to favour the PCs. Let's say that three PCs enter the tomb; this means there are six mercenaries plus Grinbar Zull, and their number falls by one for every GOLEM killed. If the players have to face off with the mercenaries at any point then you'll know what they're up against!

Even if the PCs help, Grinbar will still fight them off. He will send half his remaining troops to fight the PCs and engage them himself. He is more than happy to sacrifice his men fighting the GOLEM to fight off interlopers and grab the chest for himself.

Attacking the Bloodfall Mercenaries: If the PCs attack the mercenaries, Grinbar Zull will send half his troops to fight the PCs and also engage them himself.

Attacking another GOLEM: If another GOLEM that has not yet begun to fight is attacked it will immediately come to life and attack. The section of ceiling it was supporting will also collapse, adding to the collapsing tomb. Even if an arrow is fired at the GOLEM it will retaliate.

If the PCs have not yet recovered the chest then this will seal the tomb forever, or perhaps they have decided not to take the risk and leave the chest where it is and allow it to be buried forever.

If all the GOLEMS are defeated, the tomb will collapse and unless there are PCs close to the chest they will have no chance to grab it. Anyone who makes for the chest must make a successful Save roll to escape the collapsing tomb or be buried alive; **make sure this is clear to any PC who tries for the chest.** Grinbar Zull will also make for the chest, so if he and a PC try then make a standard initiative opposing roll between him and whoever goes for it. Whoever wins gets the chest.

Any mercenaries that make it out will turn on the PCs, especially Grinbar Zull who will rage at being interrupted. As this section of the mine is collapsing the fight will have to be a running battle to location 4, the Junction. If the fight is conducted in this area, each round everyone has to make a successful Save roll or get hit by falling rocks for 1 point of damage.

Make sure that the PCs understand the danger and confusion of the conflict; the ceiling is collapsing, rock dust fills the air, and with every falling wall another lantern goes out and the darkness encroaches. Even the rats are making a run for it.

THE CHEST

Of course, the treasure that Grinbar appears to have been after is the chest on the stone table.

If the chest has been abandoned or lost then the adventure ends here; there is no way that the PCs will be able to retrieve the chest from under the hundreds of tons of rock that now fill the tomb. They may return to Mallard with heavy hearts that they did not retrieve the goal, but at least it is not in the hands of evil.

If Grinbar got the chest and somehow managed to escape then he will run as fast and as hard as he can, abandoning any men that are left and, indeed, even sending them against the PCs to slow them down as he makes his escape. What happens then? Well, they will never hear from Grinbar again; see the next result for the reason why.

If the PCs managed to secure the chest and escape the danger then they now have the chance to open it. It's not trapped (but don't let the PCs know that!) and unlocked.

Once opened... it is filled with ashes

In these ashes is a thin crown, studded with jewels. This alone is worth 200 gold pieces. There is also a rolled up piece of parchment bound in a gold ring (worth 10 gold pieces)...



Read the following aloud to the players:

'The King is dead.

*His ashes will be forever held here,
until the end of days.*

*The Chalice, the vessel of the King's
power, is destroyed. His benevolent
grace has been torn from the kingdom
and those who took this from him will
suffer, they and their families, until
their bloodlines diminish and fade.
While the King's ashes lie here
undisturbed, the curse will poison their
descendants as they poisoned their
King.*

*Know, then, that the true followers of
the King lay his head to rest in this
blessed place, and the Four Guardians
will protect him and the curse while he
sleeps.*

*Long live the King. Long suffer the
King's betrayers.'*

Of course, if the chest was not recovered then the PCs will not discover any of this. However, the destruction of the tomb will also destroy the chest and the curse will be lifted regardless.

RETURNING TO MALLARD

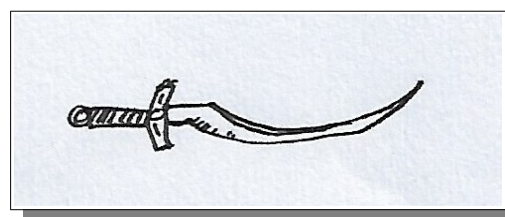
Upon returning to the town of Mallard the PCs will see a marked difference already; it's as if a gloom has been lifted from the town, and even though they have suffered at the hands of the Bloodfall Company the feeling is one of hope, as if they have survived this disaster and, therefore, they can survive anything.

The mayor is incredibly pleased to see the PCs and comes out with her entourage.

Whether the PCs were involved or not, the chest containing the ashes of the King has been taken and/or destroyed and the curse lifted. How the PCs want to take credit for that is up to them; did they get the chest or were they responsible for the collapse of the tomb? Or did Grinbar Zull get the chest and escape with it? If Grinbar did escape with the chest - or was responsible for the destruction of it - and the PCs take the credit then make a note. What if, somewhere in following days or weeks, someone makes the claim that the PCs did no such thing? Such an accusation could damage their reputation!

Either way, the Mayor is incredibly pleased that the PCs have returned and will make a fuss of them no matter what. She will honour her gold payment, and any damages will be repaired for free by the Ogre blacksmith Grulm. Not only that, but free food and board at the High Dragon Inn and their wounds healed at no cost.

The PCs will be heralded as the saviours of Mallard – depending on how honest they are, of course – and they will be welcome here for the rest of their lives.



THE TOWN OF MALLARD

Mallard is a small walled town along the Backwash River. It was a farming community and then they struck copper in the hills, improving the town's wealth, but a lingering curse always held them back and the crops would fail, the copper mine would suffer collapses and accidents and disease and sickness would frequently visit the denizens of the small settlement.

Now that the adventure is over, the players should feel free to use Mallard as a 'base of operations', a location where they can rest and recuperate between adventures and heal, repair their belongings and trade. They can even buy a house here, if they wish!

HISTORY

Mallard was founded by the family of Porinnus not long after the Crooked King was cast down, and over the generations it has grown quite steadily. However, it's beginnings are somewhat peculiar.

Before the town was founded, a huge temple stood over a whirlpool that was fed by a stream from the Backwash River. The temple - a strangely carved ziggurat - and it's surrounding low buildings had been abandoned for centuries and nobody knew anything about where it came from or why it existed. The design of the temple had been likened to the temples found in the deserts, but why anyone would wish to emulate the constructions of the snake people or why any of that vile race would come this far north is anyone's guess.

The temple covered the whirlpool – which is now the centre of the town –

and people knew not to enter it as anyone sucked down into it's depths were never seen again!

The temple was also partially collapsed, so when the land was being cleared for farming it made for excellent building materials. The blocks of the ziggurat and the buildings were used to construct the walls of the town and laid the foundations of the town hall.

Over time it was realised that even though the water was vanishing down the whirlpool it was still fresh water and very drinkable as it was being constantly refreshed. This flow of fresh water made for healthy townsfolk, but sadly the curse of the Crooked King on the families kept them from finding true greatness. Now that the curse has been lifted, perhaps Mallard can once again flourish!

The town is built around the whirlpool and even though people can drink and draw water from it nobody is allowed to enter it. A high fence sits around the pool to stop any accidents, and people are made wary of the pool when they first enter the town with notices, warnings from the townsfolk and stern words from the town guard.

PLACES AND PEOPLE OF INTEREST

The Town Hall (1)

The town hall has the lower stones of the original temple but the rest of it is of a traditional design. It is the largest building in the town and is used by everyone; the Mayor lives in a wing but the hall, the large library and the kitchens are available for anyone to use to their heart's content. The Mayor, in

an attempt to offset the curse, treats her people incredibly fairly to help relieve the effects of her bad luck, and the townsfolk appreciate her for it.

The Mallard Library isn't huge but it has plenty of books about all kinds of subjects. If the PCs ever need to do any research into anything then they should feel free to use the library here, there's even magical tomes looked after by the town wizard Harminul, who pretty much lives in here.

The High Dragon Inn (2)

This large inn is owned by the dwarf Gruffthul, and he runs it with bravado and passion. With a huge selection of local ales and imported spirits it is a popular place and there are those who travel for miles from neighbouring villages to sample his beers and meads. He makes his own honey mead which is very popular amongst the higher social classes, and his skills as a brewer are always in demand. He's also famous for being able to secure barrels of strong mead from relatives in the north.

The High Dragon Inn is an excellent place, large rooms with a cosy common room that contains a huge fire that people warm their feet by, and food to die for.

As the PCs have aided Mallard, Gruffthul is happy to charge them only half the going rates for food and board from now on. He welcomes everyone, of every race and every species, as he has renounced his violent past...

He has a rough voice and a stern face, but innkeeper Gruffthul is one of the most amiable and friendly dwarfs you'll ever meet. Gruffthul is also the

adopted father of Grulm the Ogre, the town blacksmith next door to the inn. Gruffthul took Grulm in after he found him as a baby – what Grulm doesn't know is that years ago Gruffthul and his group of fellow adventurers raided an Ogre bandit camp, and after they had finished their grisly work they found the Ogre baby mewling in a corner, hidden under blankets. Gruffthul took pity on the child and took him in, but never told him that he was most likely responsible for the death of his parents.

Grulm is huge and muscular – he's an Ogre, after all – incredibly friendly but heavy handed, and there seems to be a simmering, boiling aura of tension about him, as if he's about to explode in rage any second.

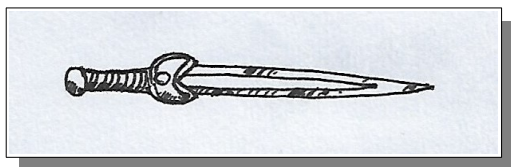
Beevel's Bazaar (3)

Whatever you need, whatever you want to sell, Beevel can help you with that.

The bazaar is visited daily by trading caravans travelling the Backwash River so if you want something he either has it in stock or he can order it for you from one of the local traders.

From cutlery to weapons and from clothes to armour, Beevel can get it for you. PCs are welcome to ask him for anything on the standard equipment lists and he will have it, but for more exotic items he will have to make a special order. They can wait for 7-12 days for a standard order (roll one d6 and add six to determine how long it will take) or he can send a special order using one of his pigeons to get the item rushed to him in 1-6 days (roll a single d6 to determine how long). This special service costs 2 gold pieces.

Beevel himself is a tall, thin man with a long thin moustache and a floppy hat with a feather stuck into it. He has a 'finger in every pie', and knows where he can get you the best stuff *nod-nod-wink-wink*.



The Copper Mine

Now that the tomb has been destroyed and the mine freed from the curse, the town will begin to start mining there again. They will still have trouble with the Drow looking for slaves, so perhaps the PCs could help clear the area of evil, monsters and threats so that the miners can work in peace.

They may even want to invest in the mine as the hills here are rich with ore. They can invest monthly, and for every gold coin they invest they receive back the same plus 25 percent. So, if the PC invested 100 gold pieces a month to keep the mine running, they would receive 125 gold pieces back at the end of the month. PCs can invest as much as they please and they can make an excellent living from the mine. For a payment of 10 percent of their return, a clerk in the town hall will take care of their investment and re-invest their gold every month so that the PCs can go on their travels and know that their wealth is steadily growing. However, at the end of every month roll a D20 – if a 1 is rolled, the clerk steals all of their gold and runs away with it! Getting it back would be an adventure in itself!

The copper mine will be reopened by the butcher, Gladys Mensun. Her

butcher's shop is heavily damaged and while that is being rebuilt she will invest heavily in the mine. She is from a mining family and only became a butcher when the mine closed, so she is more than happy to reopen it.

Gladys is very focused and hard to deal with, but when it comes to her family or her cat she is incredibly soft and warm.

THE WHIRLPOOL (4)

The whirlpool is a swirling vortex that is constantly fed by the Backwash River and disappears into nothing.

In fact, and this is something that has never been discovered by any scholar, the temple contained a corrupt teleport spell that had been covered by the temple, either to protect it or worship it. However, the temple flooded and the teleport spell sank into the ground – still activated.

Now the water churns into the portal and vanishes, but any living thing that enters it will be immediately transported to a random location anywhere across the land.

If a person enters alone they vanish and have to roll on the table below, but if a group enters linked - by holding hands or tied together by rope or however – they all end up in the same place.

To determine where the person(s) ends up, choose six locations in your campaign world and roll a d6. The result is where they end up.

How they deal with suddenly appearing in a strange place and how they get back home, well... there's a whole adventure in there.

If you want to add to this list, or if there's a particular place you want to automatically send them to, then feel free to do so. However, before they make any kind of choice to enter the whirlpool, make sure you lean forward across the table and say with a smile, 'Are you *SURE* you want to do that?'

**THE
CROOKED KING'S
CHALICE**

-oOo-

Written and Illustrated by
Jonathan Hicks

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NOTES

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