

Servants of the Cinder Queen

A Dungeon World Adventure



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Introduction

This adventure is intended for use with the *Dungeon World* rules, and as such is structured differently than a traditional RPG adventure. *Servants of the Cinder Queen* is a self-contained, but includes an Adventure Front and Grim Portents (page 2) which you may see fit to use as a component in any campaign that extends beyond the adventure.

While the adventure is divided into multiple “Areas” as might be expected of a traditional RPG module, for the most part these areas are not fully fleshed out with detailed maps and descriptions. Instead, the contents of each Area are suggested by the following elements:

- * **Connections** note what other Areas may be reached from the Area in question. It’s up to the GM and players to fill in the details of how they get from place to place, and what they discover along the way.
- * **Impressions** are environmental aspects which the GM can introduce as needed. Impressions can be used to describe the general surroundings, and/or any specific locations within the Area which the GM wishes to flesh out.
- * **Details** are specific aspects of the Area described more thoroughly, in order to explain complex things like traps, puzzles, unique environmental factors, etc. Sometimes Details will include entries keyed to a floorplan of the Area.

- * **Area Moves** are moves that are triggered by actions of the PCs within the Area. When a PC does the thing described, the move triggers.
- * **Discoveries** are potentially useful or interesting things within the Area which may not be readily apparent, but may be found by the PCs at the GM’s discretion.
- * **GM Moves** are suggestions for moves that the GM might make in the Area. GM Moves are listed in order from softest to hardest.

Each Area may also have one or more additional unique elements, such as a table, list, and/or map. The purpose of such elements, if not readily apparent, is open to GM interpretation.

Likewise, it’s up to the GM to decide which information in this book is “player-facing” and which is “GM-facing.” For instance, the GM may choose to be forthright with the players about what triggers a particular Area Move, or she may keep that information hidden until the actions of the PCs trigger that move. Some GMs like to let their players know how a magic item works as soon as it is acquired, while others like to let the players figure it out by experimentation.

In these cases and any others where the question seems open, the GM should make the call according to her own judgment and her group’s style of play.



Background

300 years ago, there was a monastery and attendant village, called Kaldhammar (“Cold Cliff”), on the slope of the volcanic mountain called Hvitr’s Horn. The *kaldbrud*, warrior monks dedicated to Hvitr, were entrusted with the stewardship of a number of important artifacts and texts, but above all else they were gatekeepers; for Hvitr’s Horn is an active volcano, and thus (like all active volcanoes) a gateway to Ellorash, one of the elemental planes of fire.

The end of Kaldhammar came with an eruption of the Horn that spewed forth the Flaming Host of Ellorash. Hvitr himself descended from the heavens to beat them back, sealing the planar gateway with his mighty two-handed hammer, but not before the Ellorashites were able to drown the monastery, the village, and all who lived there in a flood of lava.

Despite this unholy disaster, the Catacombs beneath the monastery—a network of passages connecting tombs, libraries, and vaults—remain almost completely intact.

Adventure Front: Breaking the Planar Seal

Cast of characters

- * **Gildarthe**, the Cinder Queen
- * **Thorde Skul**, High Priest of Gildarthe
- * **Asassha**, vampire bat servant of Thorde Skul
- * **Disciples of Gildarthe**

Description

An obsessed, chaotic priest by the name of Thorde Skul seeks to reopen the passage to Ellorash, in order to bring his patron (and true love), the demi-goddess Gildarthe, into the Mundane World. To this end, he has created a seal-breaking “key” he calls the *Aksr-geist*, or Staff of Cinders. When the Staff is held against the Seal created by Hvitr’s Hammer, the Seal will crack, and the gateway to Ellorash will open once more. Skul only lacks the proper incantation, a specific Hvitric blessing from the *Book of Rains* which must be spoken in reverse.

Gildarthe, The demi-goddess of flame, came to Skul in a dream and told him that the *Book of Rains* could be found in the Catacombs, bidding him to seek entrance via a lava vent that exits the mountain some miles from the actual site. Skul, along with Asassha, his vampiric familiar, and a dozen Disciples of Gildarthe, ascended the vent, and thence into the lower reaches of the Catacombs. However, Skul was frustrated to discover that the Library, where the *Book of Rains* was said to reside, had been rendered inaccessible by a collapse.

Having no immediate means of moving large quantities of rock, Skul set about creating a workforce that could do so. Using the power of the Staff of Cinders, he began raising the entombed monks to become “Servants of the Cinder Queen:” cadavers animated with a magical fire that causes their bones to burn wildly for the duration of their short unlife. This fire gives them great strength, but burns quickly, so Skul makes the most of them before they collapse into useless, blackened heaps.

After some experimentation, Thorde observed that freshly slain corpses last longer, so he sent the Disciples forth to prey upon the unfortunate residents of Meervold. Villagers are abducted, held captive, sacrificed to Gildarthe, and put to work moving rock until flaming flesh gives way to bone, and bone gives out. By this means, Skul is on the verge of gaining access to the Library.

Notes

Grim Portents in *Servants of the Cinder Queen* are intended to work slightly differently than as described in the *Dungeon World* rules.

Normally, a Grim Portent is something directly witnessed by the PCs, indicating that the a Danger has moved one step closer to its Impending Doom.

Here, the PCs may or may not be in a position to witness evidence that a given Portent has transpired.

If they are in such a position, relevant evidence of the Portent is described as usual (a distant scream is heard, Thorde Skul’s commands echo through the Catacombs, etc.); if they are not, the Portent occurs “offscreen.” In this case, the GM checks off the appropriate box on the Portent list and indicates to the players that something has happened, but they don’t know what. An evil laugh or cryptic comment can be employed to reinforce this idea.

Danger

* **Thorde Skul**, High Priest of Gildarthe
Impulse: To please Gildarthe

Grim Portents:

- Skul sacrifices captive villagers and uses the Staff of Cinders to reanimate them as Servants of the Cinder Queen (ongoing).
- ☐ Skul gains access to the **Catacomb Library** (page 11).
- ☐ Skul locates the *Book of Rains*.
- ☐ Skul reaches the **Sealed Caldera** (page 13).
- ☐ Skul reverses the Ritual of Stone-sealing, breaking the planar seal.
- ☐ Gildarthe and her Flaming Host are unleashed.

Impending Doom: Destruction

Stakes

- * Who among the PCs will win Hvitir’s favor?
- * What will happen to Thorde Skul when he is reunited with Gildarthe?
- * How many villagers will be rescued?
- * What will happen to the world if the planar seal is broken?

Player Introduction

Before play begins, you may want to allow or assign hirelings to the PCs. Any Hireling recruited in the village of **Meervold** (page 6) will have at most 1 skill point.

Begin the adventure by reading the **General Intro** (page 5) aloud, then asking some or all of the Adventure Questions on this page, to build context for the characters' interest in the Catacombs. Take note of their answers, and look for opportunities to integrate those answers into play.

If you want to start the characters in the local settlement, **begin in Area 1: the village of Meervold** (page 6).

If you want to start the characters off in *Dungeon World* style, read the *In Media Res* Intro to them aloud, and begin in **Area 3: The Catacombs** (page 8).

If you want a more traditional adventure start, read the **Traditional Intro** to them aloud, and begin in **Area 2: The Forsaken Fell** (page 7).



Adventure Questions

For Bards and Thieves:

- * *Do you believe the rumors of supernatural forces at work in the Catacombs to be true? How much did you wager on this belief, and with whom?*
- * *What treasure is said to await the clever and perceptive soul who dares the dangers of the Catacombs?*

For Clerics and Paladins:

- * *What is your deity's relationship with Hvitir, the Lawful god of Storms and Justice?*
- * *Why has your faith compelled you to enter the Catacombs?*

For Barbarians and Fighters:

- * *Someone you know personally from the village of Meervold has gone missing. Who is it, and what is your relationship to them?*
- * *What doom is said to await those who enter the Catacombs, and why are you heedless of that doom?*

For Druids and Rangers:

- * *Someone you know personally from the village of Meervold has gone missing. Who is it, and what is your relationship to them?*
- * *Why do you consider the Catacombs an abomination against nature?*

For Wizards:

- * *A gateway to Ellorash, an elemental plane of fire, is said to lie within the mountain. Why does this interest you?*
- * *What arcane text is said to reside in the Library of the Catacombs, and why to you seek it?*

General Intro

Many a fireside tale has been spun from the Forsaken Fell, that stony ledge halfway up Hvitr's Horn where lies a maze of broken walls clotted by black lava. Before your grandmother's grandmother walked the world, they say the mountain vomited forth molten rock that destroyed a monastery, its attendant village, and all who dwelt within. Since then, few have dared set foot upon the Fell, fearing the attention of the charred spirits said to stalk the ruins.

One by one, residents of the village at the foot of the mountain have been disappearing. Rumors of distant screams carried on the cold wind and flaming skulls flying through the night have driven those that have not fled to cower fearfully in their huts.

The time has come to get to the bottom of whatever lies beneath the Forsaken Fell.

In Media Res Intro

The ceiling has collapsed, filling the air with choking dust and putting several tons of stone between you and the exit. Who among you has been partially trapped by this rockfall, and how?

You stand at a three-way intersection. You hear the clatter-shuffle of something approaching down one of the narrow, twisting passages. Something heralded by a flickering orange light that grows brighter with each passing moment. Who among you stands to the fore?

Your torch gutters in the darkness.

What do you do?

Traditional Intro

A murder of crows circles above the the Forsaken Fell. A dusting of snow swirls down from the shoulders of Hvitr's Horn, and the birds scatter like chaff, wheeling off into the pines that reach down the mountainside toward Meervold, below.

The ruins lie spread out before you, flooded by the ancient lava flow. Black and dead beneath a leaden sky.

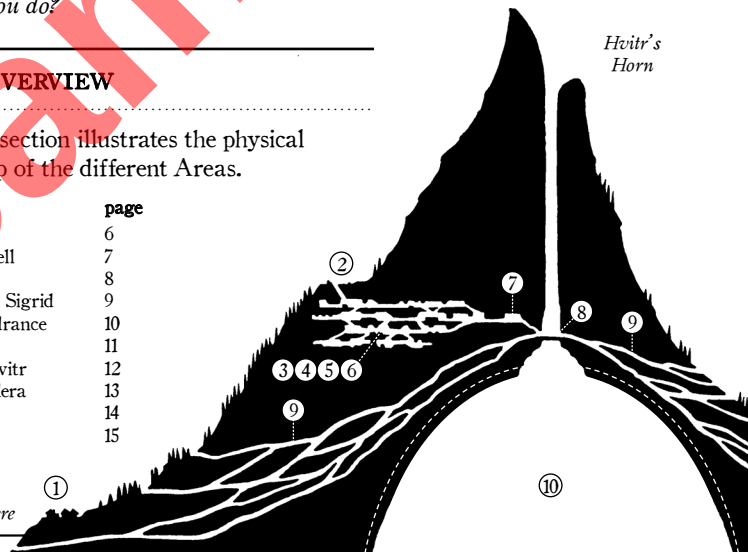
What do you do?

AREA OVERVIEW

This cross-section illustrates the physical relationship of the different Areas.

Area	page
1: Meervold	6
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The Baldesmere



Area 1: Meervold

Village on the shore of the Baldesmere, at the foot of Hvittr's Horn.

Steading Tags

Prosperity: *poor*
Population: *shrinking*
Defenses: *none*
Resource: *fish*
Other: *religious* (Hvittr), *blight* (unknown forces), *need* (adventurers)

Connections

- * At the end of the Cold Road
- * On the shores of the Baldesmere
- * In the shadow of Hvittr's Horn
- * Half a day's hike to Area 2: **The Forsaken Fell** (page 7)

Impressions

- * The dark mirror of the Baldesmere
- * Smell of fish and woodsmoke
- * Empty footpaths, shuttered hovels
- * Shrine to Hvittr, laden with offerings
- * Muffled sobbing
- * Gray skies, likely rain
- * Rain

Villager Names

1d12 **Male name** **Female name**

1	Armar	Aghnildg
2	Barde	Dana
3	Byre	Diga
4	Egir	Gerthe
5	Finni	Gunnva
6	Gari	Hura
7	Horne	Hvenda
8	Horo	Ingel
9	Ordmalfr	Laga
10	Ororn	Raga
11	Teine	Rida
12	Thorfe	Thallber

Rumors

1d6 Rumor

- 1 *Hvittr has forsaken us.*
- 2 *The Baldesmere will one day boil.*
- 3 *The dead will claim the living.*
- 4 *The monks who lived in the monastery at Kaldhammar were punished for their lack of faith.*
- 5 *Many of those taken yet live.*
- 6 *Holy weapons lie buried within the mountain, awaiting righteous hands.*

Area Moves

When you **put out the call for volunteers**, roll +CHA:

- 10+** 1d4 villagers show up.
- 7-9** 1 villager shows up.
- 6-** Mark XP, and no one shows.

Discoveries

- * **Berta Solsisdottir**, a widowed fisherwoman who lives in a humble shack on the shore of the lake, will offer hot tea, a warm fire, and sage advice (see **Rumors**, this page).

GM Moves

- * They learn that Meervold lies lawless and ungoverned, its Council of Elders broken.
- * They learn that those villagers remaining are paralyzed by terror.
- * A chill fog rolls in
- * **1d4 Disciples of Gildarthe** (page 17) descend under cover of darkness to abduct the unwary.
- * One of them goes missing