



Sample file

The Gauntlgrym Gambit

A D&D® adventure for characters of levels 3-5

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INTRODUCTION

“The Gauntlgrym Gambit” begins in the coastal city of Neverwinter. Whispered rumors and fenced artifacts lead the heroes through the trackless wilderness in search of the legendary lost dwarven realm of Gauntlgrym, where they face not only the Ashmadai cultists who uncovered a portion of the city but also the monstrous denizens of its lightless expanse and the strange oozes that threaten to subsume it entirely.

This DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® adventure is designed for characters of levels 3-5. For more information on Gauntlgrym, the Ashmadai, and the Abolethic Sovereignty, see the *Neverwinter™ Campaign Setting*.

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ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

In ages past, the subterranean city of Gauntlgrym was the capital and crown jewel of the ancient Delzoun empire. Its cavernous halls, some large enough to contain entire surface villages, were carved with unerring precision, their ceilings soaring scores of feet overhead. Towering statues of dwarven gods and heroes stood vigil over chambers and lined thoroughfares, the least of which was wide enough to sail a ship along.

The mines produced endless tides of iron, silver, gold, and mithral, and booming trade brought goods and wealth from across Faerûn, but it was the Great Forge that was the burning heart and true treasure of the city. Deep beneath the settled layers, dwarven craftsmanship and elven magic bound the slumbering primordial Maegera, a godlike being of raging fire and unfettered destruction, and harnessed its unthinkable heat to power the Forge. There, on anvils of adamantine blessed by dwarf priests, items of power could be forged without the need for enchantments, their base material infused with a splinter of the primordial's essence. The unceasing wonders that flowed from these forges helped the dwarves to turn barren mines and caverns into one of the most magnificent cities Faerûn has ever known.

As glorious as Gauntlgrym was, nothing lasts forever. Relations between the great empires of the elves, dwarves, and humans grew sour as the centuries passed. So it was that when the numberless hordes of what became known as the Orc Marches smashed into the north, each empire stood alone. The war was devastating. Gauntlgrym was lost to the rampaging armies of the orcs, and the empire of Delzoun was shattered in the brutal fighting. Ultimately, the orcs were driven back, but at great cost. The once-mighty dwarven empire was left crippled, never to recover. It was humans, from nearby Illusk, who finally drove

the remaining orcs from Gauntlgrym, but their hold on the city proved just as short-lived, for foul creatures from the Underdark soon swarmed from the depths to claim the city as their own.

Over the next thousand years, history turned to legend and mighty Gauntlgrym was all but forgotten by humans and elves and dwarves of the surface world. Illithids, duergar, drow, and aboleths now vie for control of the fallen city, its treasures, and the entombed primordial at its core.

Recently, in what amounts to little more than a faint in the larger struggle, a plague of creeping mold and toxic slime was released by the Abolethic Sovereignty upon a far-flung outpost of the city held by the duergar. Rather than expend valuable resources combating the infection directly from this strategically unimportant location, the duergar resolved to quarantine the affected area by hastily shutting the passages leading back to the rest of Gauntlgrym.

Unknown to the duergar, the tremors caused by their ongoing demolitions opened the uppermost section of the city to a natural sinkhole that leads to the surface. Tales of the sudden appearance on the surface of native Underdark creatures, which were fleeing the encroaching oozes, filtered back to Neverwinter and caught the attention of the Ashmadai spy network. When the scouts that were dispatched returned with confirmation that not only were the stories true, but that an entrance to fabled Gauntlgrym had been uncovered, the Ashmadai assembled an expedition to claim the city for the glory of their infernal master.

ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

As the adventure opens, the characters must sort through the rumors circulating on the streets to discover clues to the location of the Ashmadai expedition and, more important, the possible way into Gauntlgrym. Even with these clues, however, the path is far from clear. Finding the opening with

only snippets of secondhand rumors to guide one through the monster-infested wilderness is a monumental effort. Many have searched for an entrance to the legendary city; none have succeeded, and few return at all.

Once the heroes reach the sinkhole, they must fight their way through the Ashmadai camp before descending into the depths on a swaying, multiple-platform lift. Midway through their descent, the characters are set upon by a swarm of stirges escaping the oozes below and a band of cultists willing to risk life and limb by leaping from platform to rickety platform to bring death to the enemies of Asmodeus a hundred feet above the floor.

A group of more erudite cultists and their bodyguards await characters who make it to the ground in one piece at their forward exploration site and defensive perimeter. Progress deeper into the city reveals what the Ashmadai were guarding against—a nest of monstrous spiders happy to supplement their diet with fresh meat. Beyond the web-choked passageways, and down yet another cliff, the adventurers stumble upon the remains of an ill-fortuned, and rather singed, duergar demolition team and the aggressive oozes they were attempting to contain.

The tunnels ahead are host to more oozes that slither their way through an inverted forest of grasping, hanging stands of mold. The heroes must cross a veritable sea of garishly colored, acidic ooze welling up from the depths, battling a massive black pudding across a bridge formed from a fallen dwarf statue of titanic proportions. As if footing made even more treacherous by slippery cave slime was not enough, a massive explosion set off by the duergar rocks the battlefield, dislodging great chunks of the chamber's ceiling.

The adventurers confront the duergar demolitionists at the newly collapsed end of the last passage leading into Gauntlgrym proper. After successfully

sealing off the rest of the city, the duergar have nothing more to do except dispense with the heroes and leave. The duergar's defeat does not reopen the tunnel, but earns the heroes a coded map that appears to lead to the city and further adventure.

GETTING THE HEROES INVOLVED

Here are three ways the adventurers might become involved in the story.

A drunken trapper, in over his head and out of coin in a game of cards at a table near the characters, tosses a battered dwarf figurine the size of his meaty fist into the meager pot, proclaiming with great volume, if not clarity, that the statue is a "genuine Gauntlgrym artifact" and that it should more than cover his bet. The piece is obviously dwarven in manufacture, though determining whether the damage is from the slow march of ages or a week in the drunkard's sack will require closer inspection.

Tales of fearsome monsters attacking people are all too common in Neverwinter, but the story being told in the next group over from the characters features the wrong monster. The young woman relating her tale of woe seems sincere enough at first glance, but the coal-black, flightless bird-creature she is describing sounds suspiciously like a dire corby, a beast said to be native to lost Gauntlgrym. What would one of those be doing wandering the forest?

Expeditions of dwarves searching the wilderness near Mount Hotenow for their lost city are not unusual, but a band of humans, some of whom are whispered to be devil worshipers, gearing up just like the dwarves do and heading toward the mountain, is. Though the humans have tried to keep their activities a secret, the rumor mill still turns, and news of the devil cultists reaches the characters' ears. It's up to the heroes to figure out what the Ashmadai are up to now.

THEME TIE-IN

One of the new character themes presented in the *Neverwinter Campaign Setting* is the heir of Delzoun. An heir of Delzoun character who handles one of the authentic Gauntlgrym artifacts introduced in this adventure (either the one from the drunken trapper in the adventure hook or the one uncovered during the first skill challenge) can sense that he or she is holding a piece of the dwarves' ancestral home. This sensation does not provide any mechanical benefit, but rather an opportunity for that character to become personally invested in the adventure.

If there are no heirs of Delzoun among the heroes, another dwarf character might experience this feeling instead. This alternative would be most appropriate for a shield dwarf, but the heir of Delzoun was scattered far and wide after the collapse of the dwarven empire, and any dwarf could carry enough Delzoun blood to feel the call.

INTO THE LOST CITY

Gauntlgrym has remained undiscovered for centuries. Its location is a secret that has claimed the lives of many who sought to uncover it. Even though the Ashmadai think they've found a way into the city's once-sacred halls, the path remains as treacherous as ever.

Event 1. Finding the Sinkhole

Skill Challenge Level 4 (875 XP)

Finding the sinkhole entrance to Gauntlgrym is no easy task.

There are no roads that lead to Gauntlgrym; only tales of terrible monsters and rumors of devil worshipers serve to guide you through the trackless, hostile wilderness in search of a destination that has remained lost for a thousand years.

Monsters prowl the darkened Neverwinter Wood, the slopes of Mount Hotenow, and the stony ridges of the Crag, more than ready to prey upon any creatures foolish enough to stumble into their domain. The trek itself might prove to be equally deadly, as the adventurers push themselves over dangerous terrain, testing their mental and physical limits.

Level: 4.

Complexity: 5 (requires 12 successes before 3 failures).

Time Frame: Each character can make a check in this challenge once per hour. If the party attempts to rest, denizens in the vicinity disturb their sojourn and prevent them from gaining any benefit.

Primary Skills: Athletics, Endurance, History, Nature, Perception, Stealth.

Athletics (DC 14): Rugged trails and sheer cliffs are as nothing to the character, and the clear paths and climbing lines she leaves behind ease the way for those who follow.

Endurance (DC 10; group check): The adventurers push through rough terrain without rest, risking exhaustion and injury in order to make good speed. Each character makes an Endurance check. The party gains one success if at least half the checks are successful.

History (DC 14): The character uses her familiarity with Gauntlgrym's history and legend to tease out possible landmarks mentioned in the ancient tales. A DC 21 check removes one failure from the party's total instead of awarding a success.

Nature (DC 14): The character navigates the wilderness, avoiding pitfalls others might have fallen into while homing in on likely locations for the sinkhole. A DC 21 check awards an additional success.

Perception (DC 14): The character spots trouble before it happens and detects the subtle outlines of

ancient landmarks beaten low by the march of centuries or covered with teeming vegetation. A DC 21 check awards an additional success.

Stealth (DC 10, group check): Avoiding unnecessary and fruitless encounters with the region's belligerent or hungrier inhabitants requires a light step and careful planning. Each character makes a Stealth check. The party gains one success if at least half the checks are successful.

Secondary Skills: Diplomacy, Heal, Insight, Intimidate.

Diplomacy (DC 14): Words of encouragement and support keep allies motivated over the grueling march and endless searching. Successes and failures do not count toward the skill challenge. Instead, a success grants one character a +2 bonus on her next skill check, while a failure imposes a -2 penalty on the next skill check made in the challenge.

Heal (DC 14): The character dispenses both preventative and curative treatments for the most common injuries sustained during extended marching, enabling their allies to keep up the pace without lasting harm. Successes and failures do not count toward the skill challenge. Instead, a success grants one character a +2 bonus on her next skill check, while a failure imposes a -2 penalty on the next skill check made in the challenge. A DC 21 check removes one failure from the party's total instead of granting a bonus, though this benefit can happen only once during the challenge.

Insight (DC 14): The strain of a prolonged trek wears on the nerves as well as the body, a fact the character is well equipped to notice and counter before it impacts the group as a whole. Successes and failures do not count toward the skill challenge. Instead, a success grants one character a +2 bonus on her next skill check, while a failure imposes a -2 penalty on the next skill check made in the challenge.

Intimidate (DC 14): Whether with shouted threats or pointed ribbing, the character pushes her allies to greater efforts. Successes and failures do not count toward the skill challenge. Instead, a success grants

one character a +2 bonus on her next skill check, while a failure imposes a -2 penalty on the next skill check made in the challenge.

The Price of Failed Checks: Each time a character fails a skill check with a primary skill that does not involve a group check, each character in the party loses a healing surge as the heroes run afoul of hostile natives or become lost and must struggle over even rougher terrain to regain their bearings. Each character can lose up to three healing surges in this manner.

Success: The party manages to locate the Ashmadai camp. Proceed to Event 2.

Failure: The characters stumble upon the Ashmadai camp eventually, but their delay in discovering the site means that the camp is more heavily populated. Continue with Event 2, adding another three human goons to the encounter.

Treasure: None.

Event 2. Ashmadai Encampment

Combat Encounter Level 4 (960 XP)

The surface camp of the Ashmadai expedition blocks the only access to the city below.

Perception DC 14: The character notices that the tents are made from oilcloth, a waterproof but very flammable material.

Light: Bright light (daylight, or bonfire and lanterns).

Monsters: 2 branded zealots (Z), 10 human goons (G), 2 seared devils (D).

Start Area: The characters enter the encounter area along the western edge of the map directly opposite the sinkhole.

When everyone is ready to begin, read:

Canvas tents, interspersed with piles of supplies, form a makeshift camp ahead. A number of humans drift about

the encampment, performing mundane tasks. Two robed figures appear to direct the workers' efforts, while a pair of what appear to be horribly burned humanoids stare sullenly into the fire, occasionally poking at an errant twig.

A yawning hole opens beyond the camp, its mouth straddled by geared mechanisms of some kind. Heavy chains dangle down into the opening, slowly clanking their way over the gears.

The Ashmadai are still setting up and organizing the site, and they drop what they are doing to attack anyone who approaches.

Oilcloth Tents: The tents are flimsy enough to push through while moving but substantial enough to count as difficult terrain both before and after they are collapsed. A creature taking refuge behind an erect tent has partial concealment from creatures on the other side. The oiled canvas the tents are made from is quite flammable, and a tent that takes fire damage or is in the area of a burst or blast that deals fire damage catches fire. A tent on fire burns until the end of the encounter. A creature that enters its square or starts its turn there takes 5 fire damage.

Bonfire: The fire is kept burning at all times to entertain the searing devils and keep them from setting any more workers on fire. The square is difficult terrain that deals 5 fire damage to a creature that enters it or starts its turn there.

Supply Crates: The heavy crates are difficult terrain and provide partial cover.

Lanterns: Crude oil lanterns, etched with the sign of Asmodeus, are kept lit around the camp at all hours. (The map depicts four lanterns, spaced roughly around the bonfire; you can create others if desired.) A creature can hurl a lantern as a standard action to make the following attack.

Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); +7 vs. Reflex

Hit: Ongoing 5 fire damage (save ends).

Effect: Tents in a close burst 1 centered on the target's square catch fire.

Salvaged Lift: Closer inspection of the geared mechanisms reveals them to be a series of ore lifts that were scavenged from the city below. Several rickety platforms, a recent addition by the cultists, have been lashed to chains and are raised and lowered through the 200-foot-deep sinkhole by means of the enchanted gearing. Crude wooden scaffolds jut out to meet the platforms where they reach the surface. These platforms appear to be the only method of descending into the lost city. (This makeshift elevator takes the characters to Event 3 and, eventually, to the site of encounter G1.)

Sinkhole: A creature forced over the edge of the hole must succeed on a saving throw to fall prone in the nearest unoccupied square along the edge and end the forced movement. If the saving throw fails, the creature falls 30 feet to the nearest platform, taking damage as normal. A creature can climb the heavy chain with a DC 10 Athletics check.

Treasure: 50 gp, 2 *potions of healing*, and a cracked stone mug bearing the seal of Gauntlgrym (worth 250 gp).

Tactics: When combat is joined, the goons mob characters while staying close enough to their fellows to benefit from their *mob rule* ability. They toss conveniently located lanterns at the adventurers, but focus on clubbing the intruders down.

The branded zealots don't shy away from melee, as long as it's on their terms. They use *bow to your master* as soon as an enemy is in range and repeat that attack as often as possible.

The devils rush into combat with the nearest characters, then attempt to intercept characters that target or move directly against the zealots.

All the enemies fight to the death, expiring with Asmodeus's name on their lips.

Extra Goons: If the characters failed the skill challenge in Event 1, three more human goons are waiting for them at the campsite. You can represent these three with separate tokens, locating them where you

see fit, or you can use them as reinforcements to take the place of the first three goons that go down.

2 Branded Zealots (Z)		Level 4 Brute
Medium natural humanoid, human		XP 175
HP 66; Bloodied 33		Initiative +4
AC 16, Fortitude 17, Reflex 16, Will 15		Perception +4
Speed 6		
STANDARD ACTIONS		
⚔ Branding Iron (fire, weapon) ♦ At-Will		
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC		
Hit: 2d6 + 8 fire damage.		
🏹 Hellfire Chain (fire) ♦ At-Will		
Attack: Ranged 3 (one creature); +7 vs. Fortitude		
Hit: 2d6 + 5 fire damage. The zealot pulls the target up to 2 squares, and the target is slowed until the end of its next turn.		
🏹 Bow to Your Master ♦ Recharge if both attack hits		
Effect: The zealot uses <i>hellfire chain</i> . If the target is then adjacent to the zealot, the zealot uses <i>branding iron</i> against it. If both attacks hit, the target falls prone.		
Skills Intimidate +8, Stealth +9		
Str 17 (+5)	Dex 11 (+4)	Wis 14 (+4)
Con 16 (+5)	Int 11 (+2)	Cha 12 (+3)
Alignment neutral		Languages Common
Equipment robes, mace		

10 Human Goons (G)		Level 2 Minion Soldier
Medium natural humanoid, human		XP 31 each
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion. Initiative +3		
AC 15, Fortitude 13, Reflex 11, Will 11 Perception +2		
Speed 6		
TRAITS		
Mob Rule		
While at least two other human goons are within 5 squares of the goon, it gains a +2 power bonus to all defenses.		
STANDARD ACTIONS		
⚔ Club (weapon) ♦ At-Will		
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +7 vs. AC		
Hit: 5 damage.		
Str 14 (+3)	Dex 11 (+1)	Wis 12 (+2)
Con 12 (+2)	Int 9 (+0)	Cha 13 (+2)
Alignment unaligned		Languages Common
Equipment club		



2 Seared Devils (D)		Level 3 Soldier
Medium immortal humanoid (devil)		XP 150 each
HP 50; Bloodied 25		Initiative +5
AC 19, Fortitude 16, Reflex 14, Will 14		Perception +3
Speed 5		
Resist 10 fire		
STANDARD ACTIONS		
⚔ Ashen Slam ♦ At-Will		
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +8 vs. AC		
Hit: 2d6 + 4 damage, and the target is marked until the end of the devil's next turn.		
TRIGGERED ACTIONS		
Choking Ashes (fire) ♦ At-Will		
Trigger: A creature marked by the devil uses an attack power that does not include the devil as a target.		
Effect (Immediate Reaction): The triggering creature takes 5 fire damage and is slowed until the end of its next turn.		
Skills Stealth +8		
Str 13 (+2)	Dex 14 (+3)	Wis 14 (+3)
Con 18 (+5)	Int 11 (+1)	Cha 9 (+0)
Alignment evil		Languages Supernal

Event 3. The Clanking Lift

Combat Encounter Level 5 (1,075 XP)

The elevator system installed by the Ashmadai is the fastest and safest way into the city below. At the start of this part of the adventure, only the two platforms on the north side of the map are visible and accessible to the characters.

When everyone is ready to continue, read:

Just as you start to examine the platforms and the chains they travel on, the mechanism creaks and begins to move. The platforms in front of you begin to descend slowly.

The characters can board the platforms with no risk of falling. (If the group has more than four members, they'll need to split up.) The ride down is uneventful until, about halfway through the 200-foot descent, the adventurers encounter a band of Ashmadai riding to the surface, and the noise of the resulting combat disturbs a small flock of stirges nesting in the shaft.

Perception DC 20: The character spots the nested stirges.

Light: Dim (running lights attached to the platforms).

Monsters: 3 hellfire warlocks (W), 1 human transmuter (T), 5 stirge suckerlings (S).

Start Area: Each character begins the encounter on one of the two platforms along the north side of the shaft.

The monotony of the slow ride down is shattered by a shout from below as a platform filled with cultists rises into view, and another one appears nearby. With a screech of chains against gears, all four platforms stop moving.

The human transmuter, riding up with three cronies, brought the elevator to a halt by pulling on a brake lever attached to their platform. The crazed devil

worshippers are willing to fight to the death in this precarious arena; they will do anything to prevent the characters from reaching the bottom of the shaft in one piece.

The numbers on three of the platforms represent their elevation in feet relative to the unlabeled platform (so that the northeast platform is 10 feet higher than the northwest one, 15 feet higher than the one holding the cultists, and 20 feet higher than the unoccupied platform to the southwest). The platforms remain in these positions until the end of the encounter.

The stirges are hiding when the encounter begins. Place them only when they move to attack or are spotted by a character.

Platforms: The rickety platforms are stable enough to be used to move cargo but were never intended as a combat arena. Climbing from or onto a platform follows the normal rules for jumping. A creature on a platform can sever the iron chains and rope lashings that keep a platform attached to the large central chain as a standard action by making a DC 22 Thievery check or a DC 15 Strength check. Creatures on a platform that is disconnected in this way fall unless they succeed on a saving throw to grab hold of an adjacent chain, platform, or handy piece of wall.

The platforms (or chains, if the platforms were disabled) eventually deposit their riders at the bottom of the shaft, where encounter G1 occurs.

Chains: The chains that support the platforms can be climbed easily, requiring only a DC 10 Athletics check. Jumping from a chain poses no problem, but catching hold of one at the end of a jump requires a DC 15 Acrobatics check or Athletics check. On a failed check, the jumper falls.

Sinkhole Walls: The rough stone walls of the sinkhole are uneven and prone to crumbling, but can be climbed with a DC 15 Athletics check.

Purposefully leaping onto the wall requires a DC 15 Athletics check to avoid falling, but springing from the wall to another object is simple enough.

Falling: A creature that falls can make a saving throw to catch hold of the sinkhole wall or a length of chain after falling 20 feet. If that saving throw fails, the character gets another one at 50 feet. A creature that catches itself in this manner takes 1d10 or 2d10 damage.

A creature that fails these saving throws plunges 100 feet to the floor. Because the impact is somewhat cushioned by piled bags of flour and other soft goods, the creature takes only 5d10 damage.

Treasure: A common level 7 item (carried by the human transmuter).

Tactics: The warlocks open with *hellfire*, hoping to set someone aflame so that they can take the fight to the enemy by using *ride the fire*.

The transmuter blasts clumps of characters into the void, cursing and hexing whichever adventurer poses the greatest danger.

The stirges have tangled with the Ashmadai before and have little desire to repeat the experience. They avoid the cultists and any PC who uses fire powers.

Development

The characters can get the platforms moving again if one of them makes a DC 14 Perception check to identify the brake lever that controls the elevator. (Each platform has its own lever, which operates the entire mechanism.) Manipulating the brake causes the two northern platforms to continue descending while the two southern platforms head in the other direction.

In the time it takes to finish their descent, the characters receive the benefit of a short rest.