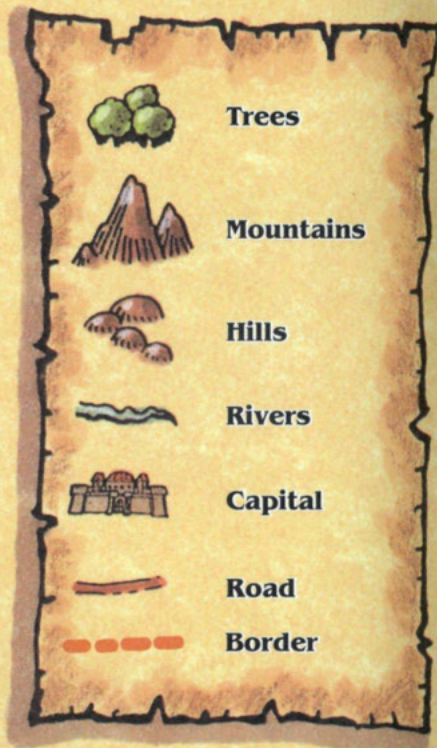


# The Stonecrown Mountains





# warlock of the stonecrowns

A BIRTHRIGHT™ adventure  
for characters levels 4—10

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120 Church End  
Cherry Hinton  
Cambridge CB1 3LB  
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3110XXX1501  
ISBN 0-7869-0185-3

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Sample file

## introduction

**W**arlock of the Stonecrowns is a BIRTHRIGHT™ adventure designed for 3–6 player characters (PCs) of levels 4–10 (about 32 total levels). At least one of the PCs should be a regent in the north of Anuire, and one wizard-regent is also required. The action takes place in the Stonecrown Mountains near Mhoried, the Five Peaks, and Cariele.

Notes are provided for using this adventure successfully with both lower-level (4–6) and higher-level (7–10) parties. Lower-level parties may approach the adventure more than once, and may gain levels between attempts. The adventure's open framework allows for more than one successful conclusion.

This adventure also includes trigger events to keep the plotline moving if the PCs reach a stall. They are included in each section.

## note from the designer

**W**orking on this BIRTHRIGHT adventure restored my love of high fantasy, a style I'd gotten away from while designing for the estimable AL-QADIM® and PLANESCAPE™ settings. Of course, just because Warlock is high fantasy doesn't mean that it's a typical adventure by any means. It rearranges some of the basic elements of fantasy role-playing adventures. Why is Warlock of the Stonecrowns different? Three reasons dominate.

First, Warlock can unfold over years of game time. The long time span means that a party may begin the adventure at mid-level, but finish it at high levels.

Second, the Trigger events allow the DM to change the pace as necessary. They also allow the PCs to pursue the widest possible range of approaches to completing the adventure.

First, unlike more traditional, linear adventures, the plot is open-ended and the story's direction is determined by the players. Forcing a party through Warlock won't work. Don't try to lead your group around by the nose. Warlock can tell more than one story; let the players solve its challenges their own way.

Most of all, this is your adventure to do with as you will. Modify it as necessary, ignore the text if it doesn't seem right, and always, always make sure your players have fun.

Wolfgang Baur  
April, 1995

## background

**S**ince the death of the gods at Mount Deismaar and the furious bloodtheft that created the abominable awnsheghlien, the Gorgon has plotted to found a dynasty to rule his kingdom. Soon after forging his mountainous domain, he selected a number of concubines to bear the progeny that would rule after him. His children were horrible creations, being neither entirely human nor entirely awnshegh. But soon the Gorgon began to suspect that age alone would not kill him.

In fact, like many awnsheghlien of powerful bloodlines, the Gorgon is immortal—and immortal kings need no successors. In fact, his heirs who would never succeed to the throne were greater threats than lieutenants. Something had to be done, and quickly, before his children drew the same conclusions.

As evil turns against itself, so the Gorgon sent his assassins to seek out his various legitimate and illegitimate offspring and slay all that could be found. Most of the Gorgon's children were murdered that year, but a few—the cautious few—survived.

The Gorgon eventually ended his hunt; his remaining bastard children may yet be useful as distractions: Long years ago, the Gorgon's armies swarmed into the lands of Kiergard, Mur-Khad and Markazor. Since that time, the Gorgon's every move has been closely watched by the rest of Anuire, and the awnshegh's chances of a second surprise invasion are slim indeed.

Of course, the Gorgon has no intention of giving up his schemes to conquer all of Cerilia, but he is much too clever to make the next move when everyone is watching. Warfare, after all, is the game of kings, and he doesn't intend to lose. What is called for, then, is a distraction. The Warlock unwittingly seems willing to be that distraction.

But if the Gorgon isn't careful, his distractions may become a much bigger problem than he ever intended.

## the son of the awnshegh

**D**uring the early days of his rule, the Gorgon spent a good deal of time hand-picking his successor. He fed some of the young awnsheghlien from birth with his own hands, strengthening them

with human flesh torn from prisoners, making them utterly dependent and utterly loyal to him alone. When they came of age, he made the creatures his vassals, bound with magical chains of ice, shadow, and blood. Among these offspring, the creature he called the Drake served him best. But after the cleansing war, and when it had slain many of its siblings, the Drake grew rebellious, snapped its chains, and stole away to the deepest caverns of the Stonecrowns to escape the Gorgon's wrath. The Drake's days as a vassal were over, but it was not yet free of the bonds of fear, and so it lived in darkness.

For long ages the son of the awnshegh hid, calling himself Saeryk the Warlock and mastering the arts of invocation, realm magic, and manipulation of ley lines that channel *mebhaighl* from the wellsprings of magical power into the mage's hands. He learned to assume his namesake's half-draconic form and went out seeking brides and concubines. In the fullness of time the Warlock fathered children of his own, infusing his blood into the fhoimoriens, creating fhoimorien warlocks (all of them his sons) and giving them a taste of magical power. The orogs grew to worship the Warlock as a god, sacrificing their plunder to him and turning to him for protection in the dark times, when human and dwarf armies forced them to hide deep under the earth.

The Warlock was not like his followers, for more than he feared the armies of men, the Warlock feared that the Gorgon might discover his hiding place and seek his destruction. The orogs dug deep into the mountain, driven by the Warlock's fears. With the stone they quarry from the depths they built the Wyrmstone Citadel, a spiralling, twisting keep high in the mountains called the Stonecrowns.

## the gorgon's bastard

Saeryk is a powerful warlock, a master thief, and a regent with a bloodline strong enough to rival the raw power of the true dragons. No living creature but he and the Gorgon knows his true parentage, though the goblins of the Five Peaks know a part of the truth; they say Saeryk was the Gorgon's pet dragon, but he escaped (not so far from the truth, though goblin literal-mindedness makes the Drake a true dragon). Others claim that he is a bastard the Gorgon's dragon sired on some succubus, or that

he is neither dragon nor human, but simply the result of a foul magical experiment—a sort of horribly enhanced homonculus.

As far as the PC regents are concerned, it should matter little who sired Saeryk. What should matter is that he is cruel, ruthless and strong enough to storm out of the Stonecrowns when his plans are ripe. And the time is drawing nigh.

## the midnight cauldron

To help achieve his dreams of conquest, rapine, and slaughter, the Gorgon commanded his twisted smiths, the dwarves of Mur-Kilad, to create a source of power for him, a vessel to steal and hold the very power of the land itself. After long years and the sacrifice of many virgin souls, the master smith of the dwarves of Mur-Kilad presented the Midnight Cauldron, and the Gorgon was well pleased. The Gorgon gave the Cauldron to his son, who risked his life to take it with him when he fled his father's home. None know the extent of its powers, but after years of study has the Warlock learned to use it. He keeps it hidden in his mountain domain, fearful that the Gorgon will track it down and demand its return.

The Midnight Cauldron is an enormous vat, 10 feet in diameter and fully 5 feet high, and carved from top to bottom with tarnished magical signs and disturbing figures of the Gorgon and his armies with rusted highlights that seem hideously deliberate. The interior is lined with a silvery mithral alloy.

The Midnight Cauldron siphons raw power from the aqueducts of ley lines to itself, creating a reservoir of *mebhaighl*. Source levels of all neighboring provinces and the value of all ley lines which cross through those domains are drained by one level each, and the energy creates a source value equal to the number of domains and ley lines the cauldron taps (in the Warlock's case, begin with a source value of 7 for realm magic). This reservoir of *mebhaighl* can either be used to cast realm spells, or it can be distilled into a powerful magical elixir that strengthens troops brought to it for a form of dark baptism. The orogs call the Cauldron's draught the "Dark Gift," though the Warlock simply calls it the *elixir of undeath*. The Cauldron can create enough of the elixir to baptize a number of units equal to half its source value per year, which is also how long those effects will last.

Using the Cauldron requires a domain action roughly equivalent to casting a Realm spell. It costs 4 RP and 1 GB per company affected. It is an evil artifact, forged by the same magical processes that animate the undead and, like them, is tied to the Shadow World.

Anyone entering the cauldron when there is no elixir brewing suffers effects described in area 74, below. Destroying the Midnight Cauldron requires powerful magic such as a *crystalbrittle*, *disintegrate*, or *limited wish* spell.

