

# Advanced Dungeons & Dragons®

Adventure

## The Apocalypse Stone

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## Introduction

Every civilization has its own myth about the end of the world. The phrase itself conjures images of earthquakes, rains of fire, floods, plagues, crumbling civilizations, and a host of other terrifying catastrophes. These are powerful, evocative images of finality and are not to be introduced lightly into an AD&D® campaign. But if you intend to bring your campaign to a memorable close, you can't beat the impact of the world's destruction.

Many reasons might motivate a Dungeon Master (DM) to bring about the end of a game world, and with it his or her campaign. This book helps you do just that! The story of your campaign's final days can be one of the most difficult and challenging tasks you ever undertake as DM—but it can be among the most rewarding as well.

## How to Use This Product

**Warning:** This adventure will end your campaign and destroy your world!

The *Apocalypse Stone* is an adventure for four to six characters of level 15 and above, for a total of 60 to 90 experience levels. The player characters (PCs) undertake what they initially believe to be a divine quest, which they later discover is a terrible lie. Worse, their unwitting participation leads to a dire sequence of events that culminate in the destruction of their world. The PCs eventually learn that they had a hand in setting these events in motion and are partially (albeit unintentionally) responsible. They also realize that they can do little, if anything, to prevent the coming apocalypse.

Read this adventure carefully before running it: The plot is complex, and requires you to pull the wool over the eyes of both the player characters and the players themselves. Yes, that's right: The *players* must believe this is just a typical adventure for Garloth's setup to work. A reclusive wizard wants a group of adventurers to get back a family heirloom, and he's willing to pay handsomely for services

rendered. This is a classic opening that shouldn't arouse undue suspicion.

The most important piece of advice is: Lie to your players. Really! Hide it inside another module, pull out the pages and put them in a binder, whatever it takes to keep your group from suspecting this adventure is different from the rest. Without the shock value, its impact is considerably less.

Second, make recovering the *Stone of Corbinet* seem like the end of the adventure. Try to ensure that the game session ends after the PCs give Garloth the *Stone* and collect their payment. This will make it seem like they have once again emerged triumphant from a deadly situation. They should have no idea that their actions may spell the end of the world.

Though intended as an adventure to end your current campaign with the proverbial bang, this product is also a guide to running a compelling story with an apocalyptic theme and contains general information on adapting these concepts effectively to your own campaign style. It can also establish a dramatic transition from your current campaign setting to an entirely new one, if you so choose. Chapter 6: *Apocalyptic Advice* offers some suggestions to the DM looking for a challenge.

## Why Blow Up the World?

By this point you might be thinking, "Hey! Wait just a minute! I've put a lot of time, effort, and energy into creating and developing and running my campaign—*why* on earth would I want to bring it to a screeching, smoking halt?" That's an excellent question with several equally excellent answers, each of which leads to a possible conclusion (see Chapter 5: *The Keep at the End of the World*). If you're uncertain about the wisdom of destroying your campaign world, read on.

## The End Times

It happens: You've been running the same campaign for years, and your DM intuition tells you that the time is right to bring closure to all the stories you have told. It's time to retire the current campaign and possibly prepare the stage for a new one. This is especially true if events in your campaign have altered the course of its world's history or destiny; cataclysmic natural disasters, divine intervention,



and the ultimate battle between good and evil can all herald the end times.

Every story has a natural endpoint, and long-term campaigns are no exception. But when you have poured heart and soul into yours, it's unsatisfying to simply tell your players, "Sorry, that's it." Both they and you deserve a conclusion that has meaning, involves the player characters, ties up all those loose ends, and creates great, lasting memories of equally great roleplaying. Concluding your campaign with a shattering apocalypse achieves all these goals, and lets you have a lot of fun in the bargain.

### Out with the Old, In with the New

Perhaps your campaign has reached the point where it no longer has the same excitement and challenge as when it was new, and you're looking for something different. Nonetheless, you may be reluctant to destroy all that you have labored long to create—quite understandable.

An apocalyptic adventure doesn't necessarily mean the literal end of your campaign.

Instead, the campaign world, or just a portion of it, undergoes dramatic changes that effectively create a new campaign setting. The conclusion of *The Apocalypse*

*Stone* changes your campaign world significantly and permanently, but also leaves it relatively intact as the setting for a whole new range of possibilities.

New stories can be set on the same world as the old campaign, but the changes wrought by these apocalyptic events give the new campaign an entirely different atmosphere, tone, and style.

### Correcting Mistakes

Sometimes what begins with the best of intentions doesn't quite turn out right in the end. Campaigns

that endure for years, unless managed very carefully, often see the player characters ascending to tremendous heights of power. When this happens, there's not much you can throw at the PCs to seriously challenge them any longer, and both the players and their characters become jaded with even cosmic-level threats. It's a struggle to come up with bigger and more dangerous story elements for every game session, and once the characters have truly climbed the highest mountains, what else can they look forward to? Ending the world "cleans house" on a campaign that's gone over the top.

### Taking a Break

Sometimes even a well-loved campaign, one that has provided many hours of fun and excitement, reaches a point where you just want to take a break from it. Maybe you need time to think up new stories, or perhaps your regular game group is in transition and you don't want to continue the campaign until it stabilizes. Or maybe you just don't like the direction it's taking and want to figure out how to put it back on track.

*The Apocalypse Stone* offers a solution: Destroy the campaign world with a dramatic flourish, but allow the

player characters to survive. This puts your campaign on hold until you're prepared to continue it and at the same time offers an array of entirely different story possibilities. Once you've decided where you want to go with the campaign, you can take it out of "retirement" and carry on.

### What If You Don't Want to End the World?

Perhaps, on reflection, you have decided that you don't want to end things once and for all. Maybe





you're happy with your campaign just the way it is, and you would prefer to continue telling its stories for a while longer. Or perhaps you find the idea of lying to your players unfair and would prefer to give the PCs an even chance to rescue themselves and their home. You can opt to run *The Apocalypse Stone* as an open-ended adventure that gives the heroes the opportunity to come out on top, averting disaster at the last moment should they think of a reasonable means of doing so. You can even eliminate any possibility of the PCs stumbling by introducing a fail-safe element, such as a fatal flaw in the villain's scheme or the ultimate monkey-wrench—divine intervention.

**Preparing for the End**

This adventure is designed for use with any campaign, which means that you must adapt some portions of it to suit your own game's milieu, history, and style.

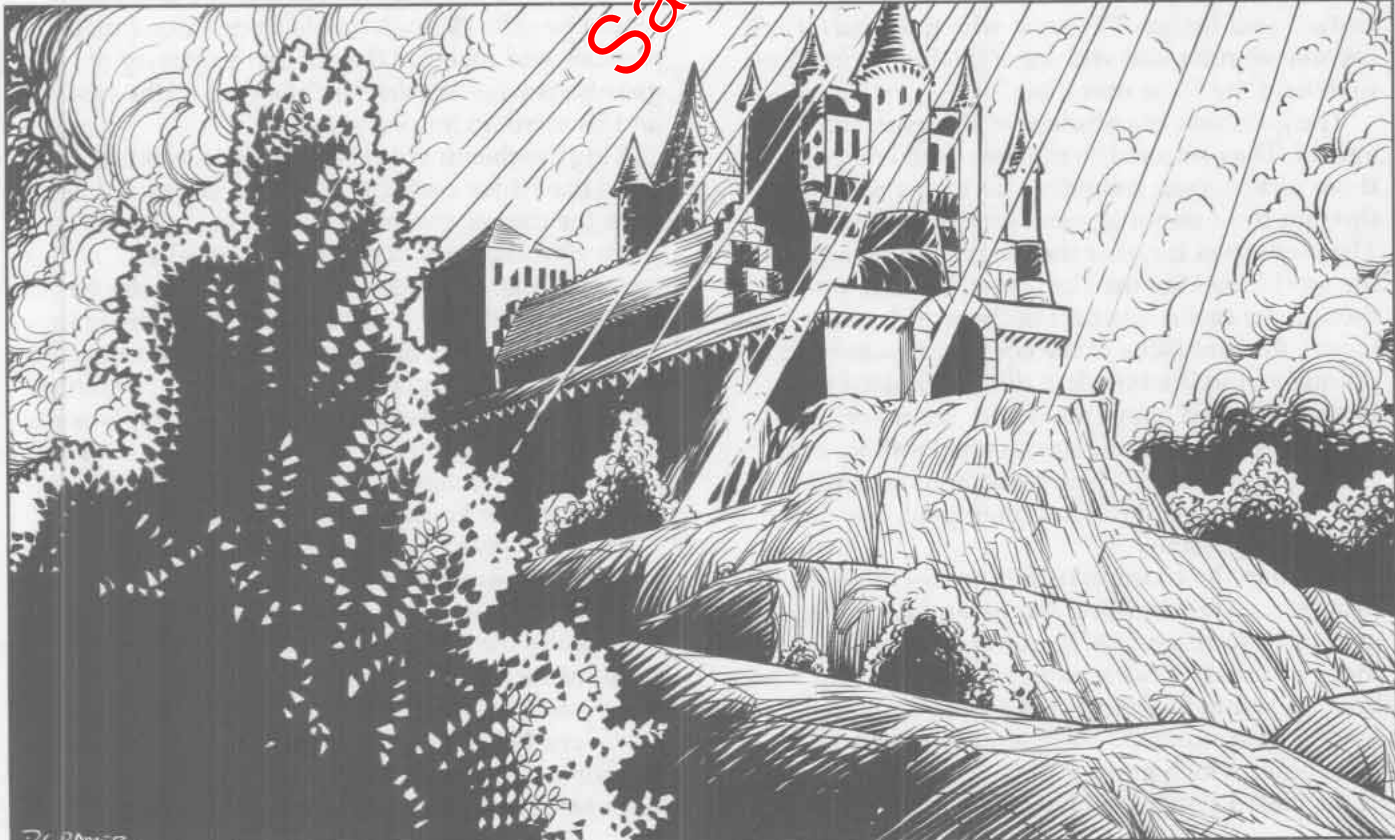
**Who's in Charge?**

What deities are responsible for creating the *Stone of Corbinet* and *Castle Pescheour*? (See Chapter 1: The Beginning of the End.) Most published AD&D campaign settings have a pantheon of gods who are more or less involved in the affairs of mortals; whether you are using one of these or running a homegrown campaign, you'll need to decide which ones participated in the compact that both created the *Stone* and agreed on its guardians.

You'll also have to establish the identity of the god whom the Pescheour family worships and who set up the heroic tests the PCs will encounter. This adventure is written on the assumption that this is the God of Justice, but pantheons and campaigns vary. If no deity in your pantheon corresponds to this role, choose another that works equally well and adjust the information presented in the text as necessary.

**Where's the Castle?**

The adventure leads the party to a remote island on which is located *Castle Pescheour*. The information





presented in Chapter 2: The False Test places the island in the tropics and suggests appropriate locations in various published AD&D campaign settings. But if you're running this adventure in a world of

your own creation, you'll have to set up this locale. See Chapter 2 for some more suggestions about customizing this island to your campaign.

### *The Castle and the Stone*

Long ago, before the very beginning of things, the gods assembled in their place of meeting. They agreed to build a world and set in its navel the *Stone of Corbinet* [kor-bee-NET], the center of its existence and the source of its life. To protect this precious seed, they raised around and above it a fabulous castle, built of gleaming marble and darkest obsidian. But the gods could not agree on who should guard the castle—each desired his or her own champion to have the honor, and none would permit the chosen agent of another to take up the task. Finally the God of Justice addressed the assembled deities and proposed a test to determine the best guardian for the castle and the *Stone*.

"Let each of us choose a champion to seek the castle," said Justice. "The one who first finds it will become its ruler and will sire a family of guardians to defend the *Stone* ever after."

The gods saw the wisdom of this plan and agreed. They selected champions who embodied those virtues their respective divine patrons thought most important and sent them forth. These questers traveled the length and breadth of the world, seeking the elusive stronghold. But though the castle was part of the world, as the *axis mundi*, the umbilicus of the cosmos, it possessed a unique feature that made it difficult indeed to locate: It moved about the world, seemingly at random, appearing one day in one location, only to disappear the next. The champions searched far and wide but could not find their goal. The quest seemed impossible.

One day the champions met to discuss their progress, each admitting failure and declaring the goal to be unreachable. It was at this time that a man, who rode a horse without a saddle and who bore no symbol, device, or weapon, appeared among their number. The champions asked the newcomer which god he served, and he replied: "I am called Pescheour. Each of you embodies

those qualities your gods deem best. I am what is best in mortals."

So saying, Pescheour [pesh-UR] turned his horse away without another word and rode straight to the castle. Its gate opened before him, and he passed inside without difficulty and beheld its secret, the *Stone of Corbinet*. The God of Justice crowned him ruler of the castle that very day, and King Pescheour made a pact with the gods: Neither he nor his descendants would ever remove the *Stone* from the castle or reveal the secret of its power to any other living creature or being, lest a terrible curse befall their line forever.

The newly crowned King Pescheour gathered to his seat others of purity and honor, and after swearing them to the same pact with the gods, made them his household. With such folk at his command, he was well satisfied that the *Stone* would be safe. He took a wife from among their number, and together they began a dynasty of guardians who remain the defenders of the castle and its secret to this very day.

King Pescheour ruled in peace and wisdom for more than three centuries and then stepped down from the throne, crowning his eldest son in his place. Still vigorous despite his unusually advanced age, Pescheour departed the castle on horseback and rode away from its gates, never to return. Some of his line speculate that he ascended to the realm of the gods, to sit among their number and serve them; others believe that he simply wandered the world and died in some foreign land. His true fate remains unknown, even to his family, and if the gods know they have not said.

Since that time, King Pescheour's descendants have ruled the castle and honored their pact with the gods. Once or twice in each generation, a lone hero locates the castle and its mysteries; any such worthies are admitted into the household and sworn to the pact, swelling the number of the *Stone's* defenders. None who gained the castle are permitted ever to set down their burden, and thus its existence remains the most closely guarded secret.