

# Advanced Dungeons & Dragons<sup>®</sup> Adventure

## Monstrous Arcana<sup>™</sup>

# Eye of Doom

by Thomas M. Reid

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# Introduction

Welcome to *Eye of Doom*, an adventure designed for characters of levels 6 to 10 (at least 40 total levels) that can be played separately or as the second of a trilogy. The other two adventures in the series are *Eye of Pain* and *Eye to Eye*. As always, before you attempt to run this adventure, you should familiarize yourself with the plot and individual encounters. If you are pressed for time, at the very least skim through the text, noting the main sections, and only read the first two sections (Background and Beginning the Adventure) in any detail.

*Eye of Doom* is set up so that you can utilize it almost anywhere in your campaign world. The locations are generic enough that they can easily be renamed, if needed, to match a particular region that is already detailed in your setting.

Be aware that although this adventure is designed for mid-level characters, it should not be taken lightly by the players. *Eye of Doom* revolves around some of the more well-known but potentially underrated creatures in the AD&D® game system—the cunning beholder and its kin. This is not just a hack-and-slash

affair; characters who venture forth, intent on stomping into the beasts' lair and slaying them without any forethought and preparation, are in for a nasty surprise. In fact, the PCs will be hard pressed to survive against the guileful machinations of the creatures, much less actually succeed.

Although the DM does not need anything other than the *DUNGEON MASTER*® *Guide*, the *Player's Handbook*, and the *MONSTROUS MANUAL*™ accessory in order to get full use out of this adventure, it is part of the *MONSTROUS ARCANA*™ series of products that includes *I, Tyrant*, a sourcebook on beholders. *I, Tyrant* is a perfect complement to the entire beholder trilogy of adventures, providing the DM with all sorts of additional information on beholders and beholder kin. It can serve as an invaluable way to spice up the characters' encounters with the nastiest creatures in this and the other two adventures. In fact, *I, Tyrant* provides some of the material in these adventures.



# Background

Far removed from the sight of man, a hive of beholders has taken root, biding its time until the glorious day when it can rise up and reclaim ancient sacred beholder lands from its hated enemies, the humans. The hive mother, a great, lumbering behemoth known as Ixathinon, rules the hive with an iron grip, demanding the strictest obedience from her minions.

One such subordinate, however, has other ideas and has been carefully implementing its own insidious plans, unbeknownst to the hive mother. Qeqtoxii, an elder orb, has kept its true identity a secret from the hive mother by posing as a mere true beholder. It hopes someday to claim leadership of the hive for its own. In order to do this, however, Qeqtoxii must defeat and destroy the hive mother—a formidable task, indeed.

Thus, Qeqtoxii has decided to utilize outside forces in its quest for supremacy—namely, unwitting adventurers. The first part of the elder orb's plans (which took place in *Eye of Pain*, the adventure that precedes this one) included finding a group of adventurers hearty and clever enough to survive exploration of a devious underground lair created by Qeqtoxii himself. Laden with cruel minions, insidious traps, and a bit of treasure—just enough to tantalize the heroes—the lair served as a testing ground to prove the heroes' mettle. Once they had survived that, Qeqtoxii knew they were capable of even greater—and more deadly—challenges.

Qeqtoxii left a trail for the characters to follow as it departed from the secret lair, hoping the subtle clues it planted would be enough to lead the heroes deeper into the complex web of its plans and eventually back to the hive. In order to appear free of involvement to Ixathinon the hive mother, and also to keep from overwhelming the characters with more than they can handle, Qeqtoxii has broken its plan into multiple phases, with the initial phase designed to pit the characters against the elder orb's own forces.

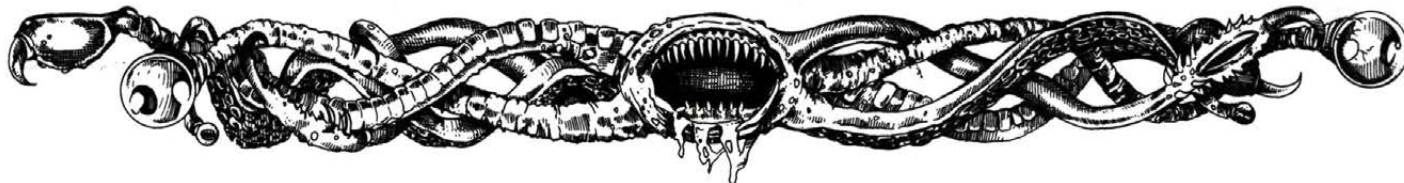
The hive mother's ultimate goal has been to reclaim for the hive a region of land occupied by

humans. The beholders consider the terrain sacred, as it is the site of an ancient beholder city. Unfortunately, the town of Cumbert lies directly over the remains of this site, and in her fervor, Ixathinon has become insistent upon eradicating the town and all who live within its walls. The problem, of course, is that the hive is not strong enough to achieve this through open warfare. Instead, Ixathinon intends to subtly take control of the city through a program of organized criminal activity.

The hive mother chose Qeqtoxii to head up this operation, an assignment the elder orb has carried out effectively and with great relish. The elder orb's criminal organization, known to the outside world as the Unblinking Eye (an attempt at ironic humor by Qeqtoxii, who feels a constant need to identify with humans in order to better manipulate them), is a smoothly running machine with involvement in various forms of organized crime. These activities include such things as corrupting governments, smuggling, creating a protection racket against the merchants, forging documents, and so forth.

Of course, the higher chains of command within the Unblinking Eye are secretive, with orders being issued and reports being made through special methods to keep identities of superiors a secret. Nobody within the organization knows Qeqtoxii's true identity, and in fact it has taken steps to ensure that it has no recognizable visage within the Unblinking Eye, either. The minions in the organization know Qeqtoxii simply as the Faceless Man, and they all believe it to be a human of some sort but have never been allowed to get a good glimpse of its face—a translucent screen hides it.

Because of the great success of the Unblinking Eye, Qeqtoxii has come to enjoy the level of power it commands among the surface dwellers and is not so willing to surrender it to Ixathinon. It sees her plan to destroy Cumbert as foolish and a waste of potential resources and has decided to usurp her and take over the hive. If it is successful, Qeqtoxii will continue to build its power base



## Background

within Cumbert and eventually spread its organization's influence farther afield.

In order to allay suspicion, Qeqtoxii intends to lead the characters right into the midst of the Unblinking Eye, and thus let them "discover" that there are beholders behind the activity. If the heroes act according to the elder orb's plans, they will follow the trail Qeqtoxii has planted for them right to the hive (with a minimum of disruption to its own well-oiled criminal machine). Of course, in order to get the characters to infiltrate the Unblinking Eye, it needs to get their attention. The elder orb intends to do that through judicious use of its alias, Velinax the Vermilion.

By spreading rumors that Velinax is out to bring down the criminal organization, the elder orb has goaded its members into taking action against the wizard and all of his associates. Of course, the heroes believe that Velinax is interested in finding beholders, but trying to convince a criminal organization of this may be difficult, at best. Eventually, Qeqtoxii hopes, the characters will put two and two together and realize that the disappearance of Velinax and their harassment by the Unblinking Eye are connected, and they will go after the culprits.

Once the characters start following the trail of the Unblinking Eye, it becomes only a matter of time before they manage to infiltrate the criminal operation and begin interfering with things. Qeqtoxii realizes that a certain level of disruption to its business is inevitable if the plan is to work, but it hopes to minimize the damage by making it easy for the characters to go right to the heart of the matter. The clues it plants will allow the heroes to quickly follow the chain of command and confront the highest levels of leadership in their secret headquarters.

At this stage of the game, however, it is a very real possibility that the characters could be captured; after all, the elder orb's highest officers are powerful individuals in their own right. To avoid the risk of premature destruction of its "pets," Qeqtoxii will arrange for many of its closest subordinates to be away from the headquarters when the PCs invade.

One way or another, the heroes will come

before the Faceless Man, the mastermind of the Unblinking Eye. Since the Faceless Man *is* the elder orb, it will be within its power to direct the PCs right where it wants them—down below the town of Cumbert, deep into its own Inner Sanctum and one step away from the hive itself. From there it will manipulate them by posing once again as Velinax the Vermilion, this time making it appear that he has been a prisoner of the beholder.

The final bits of evidence will be carefully worded lies from "Velinax" to the heroes. They have rescued the wizard, and he has quite a bit of useful information to reveal. There is more to this beholder situation than he ever dreamed, he will tell them, and the source of the danger lies ever deeper beneath the surface of the earth. They must rest up and prepare to enter the darkest recesses of an ancient beholder city and confront the dark denizens hiding there. Then the true danger is only beginning.

## Beginning the Adventure

The majority of the adventure takes place in and beneath Cumbert, a rather nondescript small town. There are two ways to start; the first choice is for those DMs who wish to begin the story with this adventure, skipping *Eye of Pain* entirely. In this case, begin with the event entitled *A Strange Wizard*, immediately below. The second choice assumes that you ran the previous adventure, *Eye of Pain*, for the players and their characters. If this is the case, then the adventure picks up about a week after the last adventure left off, beginning with the event entitled *An Old Mystery*, further below.

# A Strange Wizard

This event is designed as a lead-in to the main part of this adventure for those DMs who did not choose to run *Eye of Pain* previously. It begins with the characters relaxing in a tavern known as the Grumbling Goblin in the town of Cumbert one evening. The details of Cumbert do not matter much; feel free to flesh it out further however you wish.

A wizard who wishes to hire the characters to aid him in ferreting out a nest of beholders beneath the city approaches the group. Read the following aloud to the players:

The Grumbling Goblin is an unremarkable place, a typical tavern with a smokey interior. A few folk sit in small groups here and there, but the place is hardly full. Off to one side and a ways toward the back, a gentleman sits at a round table. This fellow stands out from the crowd, as he is dressed rather garishly, decked out from head to toe in bright red robes. It is a pretty sure bet that he is a wizard.

He catches your eye, smiles graciously, and moves to where you are sitting. He nods his head slightly as he introduces himself. "Greetings and good evening to you. I am Velinax the Vermilion, and I have a business proposal for you. May I buy you a round while we discuss it?"

Allow the players to decide whether their characters are interested in hearing Velinax's story. If they are not, then go immediately to Ambush, below. Otherwise, continue by reading the following aloud to the players:

"Very good, then," says the aging gentleman as he signals for a bar wench and seats himself at your table in one motion. He orders a round of drinks and then proceeds.

"I am looking for a group such as yours to aid me in a rather dangerous expedition. For a number of years, I have been gathering infor-

mation on beholder lore. It is a wondrous subject. Of course, all of my studies have been abstract in nature—very few people have encountered one of the eye tyrants and come back to tell the tale, much less come back with any useful details.

"I have reached a point where I feel that my studies have gone as far as they can in the laboratory, and I wish to do some firsthand field research. As preposterous as it sounds, I strongly believe that a nest of beholders is living somewhere beneath this town.

"I've been gathering evidence on this matter for close to a month now, and I think that a nest of them may be at this very moment hiding in plain view, disguised as humans or demihumans and interacting with the citizens of Cumbert. Of course, the only way to incontrovertibly prove this is to ferret them out, but danger lies along that path, and I dare not risk it alone. If you know anything at all about beholders, then you know that they can be a wizard's worst nightmare.

"I want to hire you to help me investigate. I will not lie to you; the risk is great. But I am willing to give you whatever treasure we confiscate. All I am interested in is the information to be gained. What do you think?"

Allow the players a chance to discuss the situation and decide what their characters are going to do, but regardless of what they decide, others in the tavern have taken notice of the PCs' interaction with Velinax and are preparing a meeting with the heroes later.

Wrap up whatever role-playing is necessary to conclude the agreement, then have Velinax excuse himself. He heads upstairs as if going to a room, but once out of sight, he casts *teleport without error* to leave the premises. Once the characters leave the Grumbling Goblin, go to Ambush, below.

# An Old Mystery

This event is designed to continue the action begun in *Eye of Pain*; it takes place shortly after the characters have finished exploring the hidden lair of the death tyrant. The exact amount of time depends on several factors. First, the characters need some time to advance an experience level after completing *Eye of Pain* (how much depends on how you handle training for new levels). If the characters have not gained quite enough experience to bring them in line with the prerequisite level ranges for this adventure, consider a brief mini-adventure or two in between.

Second, Qeqtoxii needs some time to prepare his plans and lure the characters into investigating the Unblinking Eye. Not too much time should pass, however, or the players may lose interest in the story thread. Ideally, this event should occur when the characters are in the town of Cumbert, but it could be adjusted to work with the PCs in another locale. Read the following aloud, adjusting as necessary:

The end of an uneventful day finds you relaxing in your quarters, not quite ready to retire for the night, yet lethargic enough not to want to go out after dinner. It seems as though you will while away another evening in quiet leisure when a note slips under your door.

Once the characters retrieve the note, read the following aloud:

The note, written in a smooth, clean hand, is short and simple:

"The one you seek known as Velinax the Vermilion is in the common room of the Grumbling Goblin at this very moment. If you hurry, you may catch him."

At last, a lead! You reflect back for a moment over the last several days. After returning to

Cumbert to meet the mysterious wizard, you discovered that he had vanished once again. A week of fruitless searching turned up no clues, and you had almost given up hope. Now, though, he seems to have resurfaced.

The note is *not* in the handwriting of Velinax (in case the PCs compare this writing with that on some of the notes they found in the wizards' room at the Knotty Pine in Burke's Crossing). The characters have several choices here. They may try to open the door immediately (perhaps even before they have read the note) to see who delivered the message. However, there will be no one there, for Qeqtoxii (in human form) slid it under the door and then immediately cast *teleport without error* to disappear. The heroes may decide to ignore the note, in which case Qeqtoxii will try to pique their curiosity again in the near future. See the notes at the end of this event for more information.

If the characters head straight for the Grumbling Goblin, Velinax is nowhere to be found, and no one has seen him all night. Hopefully, once they realize he has slipped away again, the characters will begin asking other patrons and employees in the establishment if the wizard has been seen.

Qeqtoxii's own part in this elaborate scheme is simply to watch and gather information. The elder orb, still disguised as a human (its alias is a bard by the name of Vanauer), used its *teleport without error* spell to return to a private room at the Grumbling Goblin and now waits casually on a balcony overlooking the second floor. Vanauer/Qeqtoxii watches the heroes and reads their thoughts using an *ESP* spell from this position. In order to continue manipulating the characters into following its plan, it wants to get inside their heads and become more intimate with the way they think. It will use this information to customize its next set-up for them. (and so will you, as you will see later in the adventure).