

Advanced Dungeons & Dragons[®] Monstrous Arcana[®]



A Darkness Gathering

by Bruce R. Cordell

Dedication: This adventure is dedicated to Jessie Campbell (Sue Weinlein Cook), Chet Muller (Ray Vallese), Professor Eric McAndrews (Keith Strohm), Randall Deveraux (Jeff Quick), and Monte Cook, whose campaign (*Millennium Fever*) serves as a weekly source of fun and personal inspiration.

Table of Contents

Chapter The First		Chapter The Fifth	
Introduction	2	The Corner of Maple & Ten Alders	19
Psionic or Arcane Mind Players?	2	Inside the Yellow Warehouse	19
Running <i>A Darkness Gathering</i>	2		
Chapter The Second		Chapter The Sixth	
DM's Background	3	The City Guard	23
PCs' Background	3	Captain of the Guard	23
The Story Unfolds	4		
Sign of the Fair Warrior	5	Chapter The Seventh	
Defending the Oppressed	6	Shuluth's Web	25
Comforting The Mourner	6	The Cyst	26
Looking for Aleanor	7		
Chapter The Third		Chapter The Eighth	
Gathering at Quietshore Lane	8	Conclusion	30
Tower Enoch	9	Arcana	30
		Lamp Without Reservation	30
Chapter The Fourth		Hearthstone	30
Shanghaied	14	Stormport Encounter Table	30
The Stormport Sewers	14	New Monster: Phthisic	32
Using The Flowchart	14		
Into the Sewers	15		

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Chapter The First

"There was wheat that never would be harvested, trees that would not bloom when spring came round again, and on the [...land...] the words unspoken and the deeds undone and the sodden bundles that cried aloud the emptiness and the waste of death."

—Clifford D. Simak, *Way Station*

Introduction

A Darkness Gathering is the first of an adventure trilogy (continuing with *Masters of Eternal Night* and concluding with *Dawn of the Overmind*) that pits four to six player characters of levels 7 to 9 (36–54 total levels) against the designs of the illithids' dark agenda. Dungeon Masters can run this adventure by itself or link it together with *Masters of Eternal Night* and *Dawn of the Overmind* to form a seamless epic-length adventure that spans all three modules.

The illithid trilogy supports *The Illithiad*, a MONSTROUS ARCANAS[®] supplement. DMs do not need *The Illithiad* in order to play out the illithid adventure trilogy. However, the supplement does provide invaluable, fascinating, and immediately applicable information concerning illithid psychology and society, as well as new illithid psionic items and abilities.

The encounters detailed in this module do not necessarily have a specified location—though names and descriptions of places and individuals critical to the adventure appear within. DMs should, of course, change any and all names found herein so that they can insert *A Darkness Gathering* and its two subsequent adventures—into an ongoing scenario.

Finally, a word to the wise: Illithids are implicitly dangerous, heartless creatures whose terrible dietary requirements (brains) are overshadowed only by their ultimate goal to dominate all sentient beings. It should be a struggle for an average group of player characters to survive within the dark tunnels of the mind flayers' subterranean world, let alone successfully block the illithids' agenda in their own intellectual arena. Simply put, PCs cannot overcome every encounter merely through the use of brute force; diplomacy and intelligence are essential if the PCs hope to reach the end of this adventure.

Psionic or Arcane Illithids?

Although *The Illithiad* focuses on the psionic abilities of mind flayers, some sources suggest that illithids use arcane abilities and powers. Arguments exist concerning the forces tapped and manipulated by psionic devotions: Are psychic forces synonymous with the energy tapped by arcane spells? Whatever the truth, psionic effects are actualized according to a philosophy at odds with that used by spellcasters and arcane beasts. Of course, psionic abilities are not appropriate for every DM's campaign.

DMs whose campaigns do not employ psionics (as described in *The Complete Psionics Handbook* or *PLAYER'S OPTION™: Skills & Powers*) should substitute the abilities listed below for all illithid psionic powers appearing throughout the remainder of this adventure. Illithids can use each of the powers below at will, one per round, save for mind blast—which they can only use once per turn. DMs should also substitute these abilities for the listed psionic abilities of any other illithid-like creatures that possess psionic powers.

Arcane for Psionic Abilities Swap:
*Mind blast**, *suggestion*, *charm person*, *charm monster*, *ESP*, *levitate*, *astral projection* and *plane shift*.

***Mind blast (for arcane illithid):** The mind blast power, as differentiated from the unique illithid psionic attack described in *The Illithiad*, affects a cone shaped area 60 feet long, 5 feet wide in front of the mind flayer, and 20 feet wide at the far end of the effect. All within the cone must make a saving throw vs. wand or be stunned and unable to act for 3d4 rounds.

Running A Darkness Gathering

The PCs' involvement with *A Darkness Gathering* begins with one of four hooks. The four hooks appear in Chapters 3–6 as separate mini-adventures. One of these adventures serves as the initial hook that draws the characters into the overall plot of the module. However, the heroes must investigate each one of these mini-adventures as part of the entire scenario. Only the investigation of each hook provides the information and background necessary for the characters to proceed to *A Darkness Gathering's* culmination in Chapter 7.

To begin, the DM should read portions of the underlying story presented in the "DM's Background" section of Chapter 2. The Dungeon Master can, at her discretion, give all or part of the information presented in the "PCs' Background" section (also in Chapter 2) to the players. Once the DM relays this information to the players, she should finally proceed to "The Story Unfolds." In this section the PCs learn enough to choose one of the four mini-adventures that propels the adventure's action. The PCs may investigate each one of the mini-adventures in whatever order they choose. By the conclusion of the fourth mini-adventure, the PCs uncover their real enemy—as explained in Chapter 7.

Chapter The Second

Wherein the DM learns the module's background and discovers the skein connecting the four mini-adventures.

DM's Background

Mind flayers have an almost instinctual need to darken the light of suns, thereby ruling surface worlds as they rule subterranean depths. A plan long in the making (and longer in its execution) has finally come to the first hints of fruition; the illithids have discovered a method to extinguish all light from hundreds, perhaps thousands, of worlds across the breadth and depth of the multiverse!

From the vast power necessary to darken a sun to the minutia of conditioning a surface population for assimilation, the illithids' plan encompasses myriad parts. *A Darkness Gathering* highlights the activities of just one of the many cells of illithid conditioners charged with preparing a population for the coming of the True Masters. This particular cell takes its orders from a mind flayer named Shuluth. Shuluth and its agents have secretly infiltrated the city of Stormport by dominating several key personages, guilds, and institutions. Through the illithid's machinations, the city's population slowly prepares itself to accept the coming darkness and to obey the mind flayers when the sun disappears.

Within this adventure, the PCs have an opportunity to stop Shuluth's conditioning program, eradicate the illithid's dominated agents, and finally bring Shuluth and its fellow mind flayers to justice. Ultimately, the PCs will discover that Shuluth is just one prong in a far greater, more terrifying illithid plot. Do the heroes possess the mettle to halt the illithids' dark agenda?

PCs' Background

The DM can present the information contained below—one bullet point at a time—to the characters while they are still involved in a prior unrelated scenario. In this way, the Dungeon Master maintains a feeling of continuity in her campaign world. If any of the points below do not dovetail sufficiently with the DM's campaign, she can easily omit them.

If the DM runs *A Darkness Gathering* apart from an ongoing campaign, she can divide up the information and simply hand it out to the players (one or two bullet points to each character) when play begins. In this way, no single character knows the entire background, but the group as a whole can still piece together the necessary information. This provides the characters with a common ground on which to begin their adventure.

The foregoing winter was one for the record books. Massive snow accumulation cut off communication between many cities, villages, farms, and freeholds. The incredible plunge in temperature killed trees, livestock, and even people. The winter was so terrible that snow and cold weather linger still—even though spring is supposedly upon the land.

There is talk across the land of a strange dimness. Although not noticeable by those possessing average skills of observation, individuals sensitive to their environment claim a noticeable diminishment in the intensity of sunlight. PCs who examine the daylight sky in order to check out this rumor have only a 20% chance per day to notice that the sunlight is indeed dimmer. (A druid character or a character with an affiliation with a sun deity has a 40% chance.) Success indicates that the observant PC notices a thin, cloudy film filtering the sunlight—even on clear days. However, bringing an observation of the sun's general dimness to those in authority within the campaign world does not garner sympathy.

A sage named Gaston the Old appears in the streets forecasting the end of the world to any who will listen. His proof: Many stars in the sky have simply gone out. The end of the world must be near in the face of such apocalyptic omens. The general populace does not afford Gaston's claims much credence at this time. Note that Gaston has no affiliation with Master Enoch (see Chapter 3), but he may be familiar with Enoch's preaching, at the DM's option.

Characters who observe the night sky for themselves have a 20% chance per night of observation to notice that some stars no longer shine. (A character with the Astrology proficiency or a character with an affiliation with a star deity has a 40% chance.) However, none of these missing stars are part of any major recognized constellations (thus, bringing this information to those people in authority only draws strange looks). PCs who make a successful Astrology proficiency check note that 23 stars no longer shine.

Two or more of the PCs have the following disturbing dream (disturbing not only because of its content but also because of its similarity between the dreams of two or more PCs). Read or paraphrase the following:

3



The dreamer stands upon an undifferentiated plane of dead soil; silence and black earth stretch away in all directions. Looking up into the sky, only a few stars are visible, but just then, the sun rises tentatively. After some time, the bloated red disc dribbles above the horizon, only to suffer a cataclysmic change.

Something vast and unseen takes a monstrous bite out of the sun, leaving gaping teeth marks. The sun gutters and spits, finally plunging back below the horizon like a wounded bird in flight, dousing the plain in endless, stygian darkness.

As spring approached, a sense of hope suffused the city's population: People looked forward to milder weather and warmer temperatures, farmers planted crops, and the citizenry waited for trees and flowers to bloom. Now, however, the recent spate of late-season snowstorms threatens the crops, and therefore, the regional food supplies—or so say the farmers who frequent the local taverns. Are the crops in dire peril?

According to the historian-sage Ganeth the Wise, ferocious winters periodically howl across the land every 223 years. Recent reports of an unusually bad winter and late snowfall only validate Ganeth's prediction of a hard winter. In truth, Ganeth's explanation for the cold weather is wrong.

The Story Unfolds

A Darkness Gathering begins in the large city of Stormport (or whatever city is most appropriate to the DM's scenario). Stormport is a free city ruled by a succession of Lords and Ladies of the d'Allesandro Dynasty. Lady Elspeth d'Allesandro currently rules from the hereditary Storm King estate on a promontory overlooking the city.

The adventure opens as one of the PCs' acquaintances sends a message to the group. If an appropriate NPC does not exist in the DM's campaign, she can use Aleanor Pathsteader. Aleanor is an accomplished ranger, and it may be that one of the PCs owes his or her life (or some other debt) to Aleanor.

The PCs receive the following message from Aleanor. The message comes overland via caravan if the PCs do not currently reside in Stormport:

Meet me at the Sign of the Fair Warrior in Stormport at the next new moon. Something extraordinary is happening, and you need to know about it. The ranks of The Elect are swelling.

—Aleanor Pathsteader

If the PCs decide to roam around Stormport before meeting Aleanor, roll for a random encounter on the Stormport Encounter Table (page 30) every hour.



Sign of the Fair Warrior

The Sign of the Fair Warrior is an inn and tavern run by Handsome Jon. Jon once fought against other warriors for gold and glory in Stormport's Freeground Pit. Jon retired and opened a tavern more than two decades ago when he beat Luthor the Half-Giant and earned a great deal of money.

The Sign of the Fair Warrior reflects its owner's martial background. The inn's decorations consist of banners and favors, spears, swords, axes, daggers, slings, and other weapons mounted sturdily upon the walls, ceiling, and support beams.

The DM should read or paraphrase the following text when the party first arrives at the Sign of the Fair Warrior:

Coarse laughter follows on the heels of a raucous shout, only briefly competing with the mutter and drone of a tavern filled with commoners. Pipe smoke lingers in the upper air, sheathing the wide, round beams of the wooden ceiling in blue gloom and assaulting your nose with the burning leaves of over a dozen exotic herbs. Amidst the haze, the Fair Warrior's martial decor glints and shines in the flickering light of its large hearth and dozen blazing lanterns. Ale is served in wooden flagons carved with the Sign of the Fair Warrior: a swordswoman engaged with a lion rampant.

A central circular depression holds the bar and the bartender, a massive man whose gray hair seems at odds with his alert posture and massive shoulders.

Read or paraphrase the following boxed text once the party enters the establishment and approaches the bar to order a drink:

Two events draw your eyes. Near the hearth, a thin man with a shaved head and dark robe clutches a stack of parchment sheets to his chest, apparently trying to protect himself from the harassment of a much larger, drunken patron wearing rusted chain mail.

Nearer at hand, a woman spills her drink across her table and immediately bursts into hysterical tears. Her shoulders heave as her forlorn sobs sound throughout the tavern.

Based on the events above, the PCs can defend the oppressed man in dark robes, comfort the mourning woman and determine the reason for her anguish, do nothing and sim-

ply wait for Aleanor, or take some other unrelated action. The three subsections below individually deal with the consequences of each of the first three actions. The order in which the PCs take their actions is not important.

Barring specific individuals named in the following three subsections, the Sign of the Fair Warrior normally contains 7–16 (1d10+6) patrons engrossed in eating, drinking, game playing, or story telling. Each patron keeps a pouch of an average of 2–40 (2d20) sp. Handsome Jon keeps two dwarven enforcers, the surly Brothers Bleak, on retainer. The brothers often use their oiled battle axes to stop any physical conflict within the tavern. Both the brothers keep their earnings (135 gp each) close at hand.

Handsome Jon is not above vaulting the bar and aiding his dwarven enforcers with his enchanted two-handed sword, *Abridger*. Jon keeps the till safely hidden behind the bar in a locked and poison-needle trapped chest. Any character pricked by the needle must make a successful saving throw vs. poison or die. The chest contains 2,345 cp, 1,341 sp, and 309 gp.

A significant fight within the confines of the Fair Warrior draws the attention of the city guard after 10 full rounds of conflict. These guards will arrive 5 rounds later (at the beginning of the 15th round of combat). See "The City Guard" section on page 23 for more details on the city's response to armed conflict.

Patrons (1d10+6): AC 10; MV 9; HD 1; hp 3 (average); THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4; SZ M; ML Average (9); Int Average (9–12); AL Varied; XP 15 each.

Brothers Bleak, dm F7(2): AC 3 (chain mail and Dex bonus); MV 9; hp 57 each; THAC0 14 (13 with Str); #AT 3/2; Dmg 1d8+1 (battle axe + Str bonus); SA dwarven racial bonuses; SZ M (48 tall); ML Champion (15); AL CE; XP 420.

Notes: SA—Dwarves gain a +4 bonus on saves vs. poison and magic (including wands, staves, and rods), and they have 60' infravision.

SD—Ogres, ogre magi, trolls, giants, and titans suffer –4 penalties on their attack rolls against dwarves.

S 17, D 16, C 15, I 11, W 10, CH 9.

Handsome Jon hm F 14: AC 0 (chain mail +2 and Dex bonus); MV 9; hp 84; THAC0 7 (5 Str bonus, 3 two-handed sword +2); #AT 2; Dmg 1d10+6 (two-handed sword +2 and Str); SZ M (6'5" tall); ML Champion (15); AL CE; XP 8,000.

S 18/76, D 17, C 13, I 15, W 10, CH 9.

Special Equipment: *Abridger*, two-handed sword +2, nine lives stealer; chain mail +2.



Defending the Oppressed

The name of the man in the dark robe is Niall, a recent convert to a new belief system sweeping Stormport. Niall's oppressor is Kargan Fonkenpeek, a rude warrior hailing from the Grim Steppe. Kargan prods, pokes, and belittles Niall mercilessly, attempting to goad the dark-robed man into striking him so that the steppe warrior can "defend" himself. Handsome Jon ignores the harassment because Niall has been bothering the Fair Warrior's patrons with his ceaseless prattle—in spite of several warnings.

It seems that Niall has spent the last several months continuously exhorting the virtues of his new belief system to anyone within earshot. In Niall's words, "Master Enoch has wisdom for each and every one of us. Unstop your ears and open your mind to the wisdom of Master Enoch!" Niall also attempts to press informational fliers into the hands of anyone nearby. Information in the flier directs those interested to hear the word of Master Enoch (see below).

Apparently, Kargan Fonkenpeek has had as much wheedling and preaching from the thin man as he can take, and the warrior has decided to rid himself of the annoyance. He hopes to provoke Niall into a physical confrontation, at which time Kargan plans on skewering the little fellow in an act of self-defense. *In the absence of the party's intervention, no conflict actually comes to pass, and so the harassment continues while the PCs remain in the tavern.*

If any member of the party intervenes, Kargan instantly redirects his drunken ire to that individual. Use Table 59: Encounter Reactions in the *DUNGEON MASTER® GUIDE* to determine Kargan's reaction to the intervention. A threatening or hostile result on the part of Kargan indicates his immediate attack upon the peace-maker; otherwise, he sobers a bit and becomes more reasonable. If the PCs slay Kargan outright, they eventually gain the attention of Lucian (see Chapter 6 for more details on the Captain of the Guard). Besides his rusty chain mail and Ripper, a blackened *long sword +1*, Kargan carries 13 gems (worth 10 gp each) and 121 sp.

If the PCs decide to help Niall, whether through physical confrontation with Kargan or plain old diplomacy, the little man is extremely grateful and rewards the party by giving them his entire bundle of fliers. The fliers all read the same:

The Change Comes!

As predicted by Master Enoch, the Change approaches; don't be caught unawares when the True Masters arrive! For just a small contribution of gold you too can hear the revelations of Master Enoch and his inspired Ministry of the True Masters. Choose your own destiny: Remain in the dark or become one of The Elect, the chosen few guaranteed the grace of the True Masters! Hear Master Enoch speak at his nightly meetings at the end of Quietshore Lane, just after nightfall. See you there!

Perceptive characters may note that both Aleanor's message and Niall's fliers mention The Elect. Niall considers himself one of The Elect, but he does not possess any knowledge of Master Enoch beyond what appears in the fliers, nor does he have any real knowledge of the True Masters or the coming Change. Niall attends the nightly gatherings spoken of in the flyer, but following him to his home or pressing him for further knowledge proves fruitless; however, he does have hundreds of additional fliers at his residence.

If the PCs choose to attend one of the gatherings spoken of in the flyer, or if they wish to locate Master Enoch directly, proceed to Chapter 3 after resolving any remaining subsections in this chapter.

Niall, hm 0; AC 10, MV 9; HD 1; hp 3; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg 1d2; SZ M (58 69 tall); ML Average (9); Int Average (9); AL N; XP 15.

Kargan Fonkenpeek, hm F7; AC 3 (chain mail and Dex bonus); MV 9; hp 65; THAC0 14 (13 Str, 12 Ripper); #AT 3/2; Dmg 1d8+2 (Ripper and Str bonus); SZ M (68 tall); ML Champion (15); AL CE; XP 975.

S 17, D 16, C 12, I 9, W 8, CH 6.

Special Equipment: Ripper, long sword +1.

Comforting The Mourner

Johana Grethe, in her sadness, lost her drink and her composure. Her brother, Durgan Grethe, is missing and Johana suspects the worst. If the PCs ignore Johana, she continues to sob and cry quietly during the entire span of their first visit to the Fair Warrior.

PCs who approach Johana can get her story with a few kind words and perhaps a handkerchief to dry her tears. The DM can, at her option, relate Johana's story in whole as it appears below, or she can dole it out in parts as the PCs question the sad woman.