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ADVENTURE



RETURN TO THE TOMB OF HORRORS

Sample file

BY BRUCE R. CORDELL

WITH FOREWORD BY E. GARY GYGAX



Advanced Dungeons & Dragons®

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RETURN • TO • THE TOMB OF HORRORS

RETURN TO THE TOMB OF HORRORS

Credits

Design: Bruce R. Cordell
Editing: John D. Rateliff, Skip Williams, and Steve Winter
Creative Directors: Thomas M. Reid & Steve Winter
Illustrations: Arnie Swekel and Jean Michael Angus
Graphic Design: Tanya Matson
Typography: Angelika Lokotz
Art Director: Dawn Murin

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to the HK Cavaliers: Bob Baxter, Richard Bue, Bret Holien, J. D. Peterson, and Monte Cook, without whose encouragement and support I would still be "dreaming by night in the dusty recesses of my mind."

Concerning this manuscript in particular, I would like to draw your attention to the editors. Great editors rarely receive their due, but the editing of Skip Williams, Dr. John Rateliff, and Steve Winter is what differentiates an average product from *The Return to The Tomb of Horrors;* thank you all!

—Bruce R. Cordell

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0-7869-0732-0

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U.S., CANADA,
ASIA, PACIFIC, & LATIN AMERICA
Wizards of the Coast, Inc.
P.O. Box 707
Renton, WA 98057-0707
+1-206-624-0933

EUROPEAN HEADQUARTERS
Wizards of the Coast, Belgium
P.B. 34
2300 Turnhout
Belgium
+32-14-44-30-44

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FOREWORD

It was a long time ago when the *Tomb of Horrors* first made its appearance. Before I put it into manuscript form for publication, I carried the scenario around with me in by briefcase, so as to be ready for those fans who boasted of having mighty PCs able to best any challenge offered by the AD&D game. After an hour or so of time spent within the weird labyrinth of Acererak's final "resting place," the players whose characters were survivors typically remembered suddenly that they had pressing engagements elsewhere. Clutching their precious character sheets, they fled the table. Those who had already lost their vaunted PCs had previously departed, muttering darkly about "impossible death traps." Had I been mean and cruel, I would have required participants to hand over their character sheets upon the demise of a PC, torn them up, and then smiled wickedly as I asked for the name and address of their DMs so as to pass on the news of the sad loss. But I am very kind at heart . . .

Why then the scenario in the first place? Thank Alan Lucien for conceiving of such a horrid little adventure. From his basis I developed the material that was to become the *Tomb of Horrors*, and I admit to chuckling evilly as I did so. There were several very expert players in my campaign, and this was meant as yet another challenge to their skill—and the persistence of their theretofore-invincible characters. Specifically I had in mind foiling Rob Kuntz's PC, *Robilar*, and Ernie Gygax's PC, *Tenser*. To make a pair of long tales truncated, Rob, by expending a lot of orc servants, managed to get through to the final encounter, and as the skull of the demilich rose to assail the one daring violation of his sanctum, Robilar swept all immediately visible treasure into his *bag of holding* and escaped. Ernie likewise managed to attain the ultimate, destroyed Acererak, and likewise left laden with loot.

So I learned a lesson as a Dungeon Master. Even truly demanding scenarios with PC destruction lurking at every turn of the maze can be overcome by expert players. The PC level and abilities must match the challenges posed, and material resources in spells or magic items or both sufficient to deal with the demands of the adventure have to be available. Those given, there is no such thing as "impossible." Subsequently, the initial version of the scenario proved that true. Although most who dared the hazard failed, at least on the first go-round, there were those exceptional few who managed to play through and succeed to some degree. In one tournament use of the setting, a team managed to triumph by using the crown and scepter found earlier as the ultimate tool against the demilich. As Acererak's skull levitated, one PC set said crown firmly upon the bony pate; another tapped the regal adornment with the "wrong" end of the scepter. Poof! Scratch one demilich, and give the tournament's first place to the innovative team of players who thought of this novel solution. Russ Stambaugh, the DM for the group, was stunned. "Could that work?" he asked. I shrugged, admitted I certainly hadn't thought of it, but that it was a stroke of genius that deserved reward. Indeed, the worst of situations brings out the best in playing ability.

Well tested and already a legend, the adventure was then illustrated to make it easier for the Dungeon Master to manage. The pictures told much . . . and little. With them, and a few suggestive words, the DM could create the sense of deadly menace and lurking death that pervaded the setting. S1, the first of the adventure "modules" offered by TSR Hobbies Inc., was a nonesuch that soon became a classic. There was never another done like it, and there isn't likely to be one coming in the future.

Hold on! Isn't this, the *Return to the Tomb of Horrors*, a sort of rehash of the original? Surely it is in the same class then. Well, no . . . and yes.

The recounting of the creation and development of the basis for this work was not for nostalgia alone. What was stated gave a clear précis of the scope of the initial scenario. *The Tomb of Horrors* was a sort of stand-alone test of player ability and PC status. This enlarged, enhanced, and much augmented module is something altogether different. As you will soon discover, the "no" answer above is not meant in any way to demean this work. Actually, *Return to the Tomb of Horrors* is a broader adventure than the original. It is a campaign, not a single adventure scenario. What a campaign setting it is! Take a measure of *Against the Giants*, add a pinch of *Ravenloft* for flavor, mix in mystery and detection, leaven with some of the essence of *Dark Shadows*, seed with incredibly insidious traps and deadly encounters, and blend with the ingenuity and creativity of its designers. No, this is not your father's old standby . . .

A "yes" answer is also possible, qualified by the following: If for some reason the GM *wanted* to diminish the adventure to have nothing more than a brief, albeit exceptionally demanding and deadly dungeon crawl, the bulk of the work can be discarded. Given such abridgment, however, the remaining "Tomb" will be something hauntingly

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Foreword

familiar but subtly altered to deceive and discommode. Even a GM veteran of the old, daring to venture into the new, would have no assurance of survival if relying on former knowledge. Former players, then, whose characters have succeeded in mastering the original, with only their more limited recollection, will need to perform as heroically as was done in the past to enable their PCs to emerge into the clean sunlight once again.

In short, *Return to the Tomb of Horrors* is a whole new cat. If the old model was a lurking leopard, this one is a cunning feline that has aspects of even more ferocious nature. It is fitting that the adventure is being released in the Year of the Tiger.

When first approaching this I admit to having some trepidation. Having written the original work, then designing what I thought of as the ultimate in such adventures (the *Necropolis* campaign adventure scenario for the *Dangerous Journeys, Mythus* game), it seemed likely to me I wouldn't be able to say much in the way of a rave. (A lesson to me not to assume too much.) Take what is written above to heart, Perspicacious Reader. Here is a very different, multi-environment adventure of great scope. It offers more by far than did the old *Tomb of Horrors,* and it is more deadly, too. If you must seek to relive the glories of eld, then even your hands will discover that the new funerary site has different and more hair-raising challenges, sufficiently so as to make it worth more than the price of admission. When treated as a whole, this module is as demanding and thrilling as can be asked.

If you are reading this after having purchased the work, feel good. You are going to have some great times Game Mastering it. Should you be perusing it in contemplation of its acquisition, hesitate no longer. Lastly, if you are a player "sneaking a peek," this is far enough. Buy it and give it to your DM as a present. Maybe that will earn your PC some divine intervention later on. Odds are it will be needed.

Gary Gygax
Lake Geneva, Wisconsin
1998

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INTRODUCTION

The *Tomb of Horrors* by Gary Gygax is an AD&D classic. It was the first of the modular adventures published by TSR, and to this day it remains a favorite for many long-time gamers. My memories of playing through this adventure in the early '80s engender fond nostalgia. I enjoyed this adventure as a player so much that I used it myself, in whole or in part, with each new group of gamers that I served as Dungeon Master. When the opportunity to design this product presented itself, I was absolutely ecstatic. However, there would be no *Return to The Tomb of Horrors* if the original was not so well received. A generation of gamers recall the product as one of the first times that they were actually *frightened* within the confines of a role-playing game. I hope that you, the DM, find that the material presented in these pages complements the milieu, setting, and feel conveyed in the original, but at the same time believably expands the story originally told in just twelve pages of text! Read on, and discover the strange developments since the original tomb became known to the world.

Using This Adventure

The original *Tomb of Horrors* gave six widely varying possible locations for Acererak's Tomb, all of which were in the GREYHAWK® world. In the interests of continuity, *Return to the Tomb of Horrors* is also a GREYHAWK adventure; however, the DM is free to substitute any of the names given for those that already exist in his or her campaign world, especially if this allows the adventure to be seamlessly inserted into an ongoing scenario.

As with all adventures, the DM should take the time to get familiar with the contents of *Return to the Tomb of Horrors*. In so doing, the DM may well realize that, in the tradition of the original, this adventure has a high probability of killing off many of the PCs. Even though the adventure is designed for a party of four to eight characters from 13th to 16th level, the deadly traps, monsters, and Acererak himself could well prove the downfall of even the most experienced adventurers. The DM may wish to have the players roll up characters specifically for use with this adventure, or, if players insist on bringing beloved characters into the tomb, the DM can elect to tone down the dangers or prepare the party for some of the trials that they will face. For example, make certain that at least a couple of the party members have magical means of surviving supernaturally cold conditions, seeding such items into the preliminary stages of the adventure if necessary. Of course, the DM may feel that the obstacles presented herein are in line with what one might expect to find in the true abode of Acererak and let the casualties fall as they may. The reputation of the tomb is such among players and characters alike that the fate of any PC who ventures therein after fair warning should be on his or her own head.

What Has Gone Before

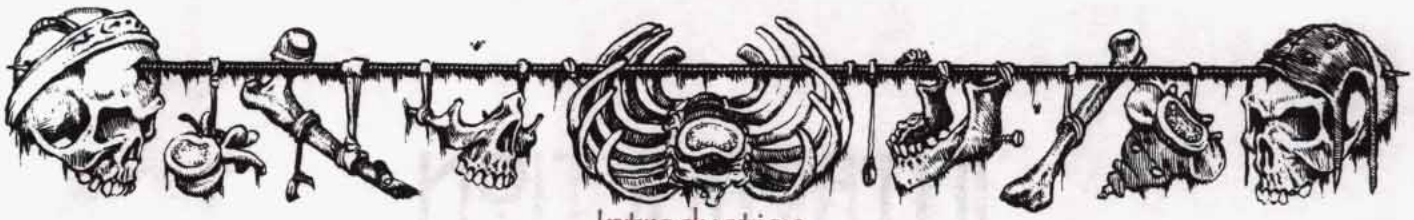
The legend of the tomb first trickled into civilized lands centuries ago. Whispers of lost treasure and undisturbed burial catacombs lured scores of adventurers over the years to cross unmapped lands in search of fortune and glory. Few ever found the tomb, and fewer still ever returned; the legend of Acererak's last resting place remained a vague rumor of wraith and danger.

Then, some twenty years ago, reports of the tomb spread far and wide, for reasons that were unclear at the time. Ironically, its reputation as a dungeon from which few if any explorers ever returned tempted those who considered themselves exceptionally skilled, clever, or lucky. Undeterred by warnings of lethal traps, labyrinthine mazes, and the malevolent sorcerer who lingered beyond life to guard the crypt of his final rest, they came from many lands to match themselves against Acererak's challenge. Those who found the tomb and penetrated its grim darkness soon realized that the legends had not been wrong; death was the reward for the cautious and the foolhardy alike. Some turned back, and many more perished during their explorations. Very few successfully navigated the tomb to find the husk of Acererak's physical form: the demilich. Only then did these brave few discover their true peril; the demilich could wrench their eternal spirits from their corporeal flesh through the malevolent power of its gaze alone!

What Has Happened Since

Those who survived the horrors finally emerged from the tomb. Some were missing companions, or limbs, or both, but all felt lucky to see the sun once more. From these hardy souls the tale of Acererak's unyielding crypt spread, frightening away some but enticing still others to venture into the darkness. As time went by the flow of adventurers slowed; some considered the quest achieved, while other would-be heroes decided to seek safer paths to fame and glory.

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Those who were drawn to the area were less and less interested in exploring the depths of the tomb. Instead, they were drawn by the legend of Acererak himself, who by all accounts was a being of surpassing power, holding secrets over Death itself. As time wore on, a community of the like-minded grew up around the mound of the tomb located in the Vast Swamp. This was not a city of pure-hearted seekers of knowledge nor a collection of mere tomb robbers. Instead, those who gathered in this new city of grim aspect sought to understand the forbidden arts of unlife. They were, in fact, almost all practitioners of the foul dark arts: necromancy. Thus was Skull City born.

The inhabitants of Skull City are obsessed with the power that the dark arts can bring them. Following this philosophy, their reverence for Acererak and his achievements has developed into an almost theological worship of the powerful lich in his aspect as "The Devourer." They have built a massive academy surrounding the entrance to Acererak's tomb and engage in weekly ceremonies to garner the attention and favor of the demilich below. However, for all their evil rituals and dark knowledge, and in spite of their professions of communion with the spirit of the demilich, not a single resident of Skull City possesses a glimmer of the truth. Acererak's true guise, the location of his final stronghold, and his ultimate sinister goal remains utterly unknown, a black mystery to all.

The Current Situation

The world at large has been blissfully ignorant of the existence of Skull City until the present time. This naiveté is becoming dangerous in light of a recent string of evil occurrences. These events include undead incursions into civilized regions, increased hauntings, kidnappings, and outright disappearances. In the surrounding lands it is rumored that all these events have a common perpetrator, although this is not proven. It is *suspected* that all of these afflictions have their source in the Vast Swamp.

This suspicion is partially correct; the inhabitants of Skull City (who sometimes irreverently name themselves Skulkers) have increased their foul activities dramatically of late. Their activity is in turn a response to a strange effect that recently began to saturate the air, seemingly localized within the Black Academy. The Skulkers call the effect the Dark Intrusion. Among other things, the Dark Intrusion enhances necromantic spells and spells dealing with the Plane of Negative Energy in its vicinity. In fact, the spontaneous generation of undead creatures from the bodies of the recently slain has been observed throughout the region. (Most undead incursions in nearby areas are the result of local cemetery's inhabitants suddenly getting restless.)

The full implications of the Dark Intrusion remain undiscovered by the Skulkers, but they take it as a sign from Acererak that great things are soon to be revealed to them. Because of this, they have stepped up their sacrifices, foul rituals, and evil rites, requiring them to initiate frequent raids for fresh victims from the communities both near and far. The true nature of the Dark Intrusion is explained later in the text.

Getting the Characters Involved

The adventurers first learn that things are amiss when they stumble upon the effects of the Dark Intrusion on their own. If the characters (not the players) have themselves never ventured within the Tomb of Horrors, there is nothing that immediately suggests that the source of the evil effects might be Acererak's tomb. (The title of this product not withstanding!) Even if one or two of the adventurers are old, grizzled campaigners who actually ventured into the tomb twenty years ago, they remember the place as a passive crypt, unlikely to be responsible for active deeds of evil, even though they may remember that the tomb is nearby. Only investigation and research should finally lead the PCs back to the tomb, as information vital for the success of the adventure (**Desatysso's Journal**) can only be gathered through preliminary adventuring. The scenes and investigations are arranged in a series of encounters that eventually provide the party with the information they should have before embarking on a journey into the tomb.

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KALSTRAND AND ENVIRONS

The adventure begins in the city of Kalstrand (see Map 1: Greyhawk Area). It is up to the DM to devise a plausible reason for the PCs' presence in the area, but perhaps their motive is straightforward: they are on their way to investigate the rumors of the recent strange occurrences caused by the Dark Intrusion. Kalstrand is a fair-sized city of 8,000 people. It lies at the confluence of the Thelly and Greyflood Rivers. The Thelly is often thick with traffic passing up and down the broad waterway from the seaport of Pontylver to the southeast. Many overland caravan routes intersect Kalstrand as well, making the city an energetic trade town.

This brisk trade has brought culture, learning, and resources usually only available in a larger city. Allow the PCs to have a good chance of finding any mundane item they seek in the riverfront bazaar and shops. Also, sages, wise individuals, and seers have dwellings nearby and offer their services for the right price. The shops stay open till midnight, lighted by multiple brands, torches, and the occasional rare *continual light* on a high pole. The city guard quickly responds to any disturbance in the riverfront district, particularly in the bazaar.

The PCs are staying at Khale's Place, an inn and tavern of large size on the Greyflood riverfront near the bazaar. Khale is an old riverman himself, and this is reflected in his choice of decorations, which include riverboat replicas, thick hawsers arranged decoratively, supporting columns made up to look like sail masts, paddles on the wall, and the like. The bar itself resembles the prow of a riverboat.

Dead Men Walk

One evening while some or all the PCs are taking their ease in the tavern, an unseasonable chill blows up from the south, accompanied by a mist that seems to blanket the river and its banks for many miles. Characters who make successful Wisdom checks just happen to see the fog roll in as the light of day fades. The mist soon reaches all of Khale's windows, blotting out further vision. The fire in the hearth is warm and cheery, however, and a bit of fog on the river is nothing new to the regulars; none of the NPCs assembled take undue notice of this phenomenon. Members of the party who immediately check out the fog discover nothing strange at all about it (unless they possess some way to detect a sudden spike in ambient negative energy—note that negative energy is not evil in and of itself). Nothing untoward occurs immediately, and total darkness falls in the space of half an hour. A few minutes beyond nightfall, an NPC dressed in common garb (a dockworker named Caspan) pays his bar tab, opens the door, and steps out into the fog. Read or paraphrase the following boxed text to the PCs as this occurs:

> You happen to glance up as a large fellow in dockworker's garb opens the door to exit Khale's. Beyond the doorway lies a dense fog like a physical barrier. The man waves a brief goodbye to the barkeep, then steps out into the foggy night. His form is dimly visible for a few seconds as he stands just outside, still illuminated by the light of the tavern. Suddenly, the man's figure is *jerked* forward, drawn almost instantly out of sight into swirling whiteness by an unseen force! What can only be the man's voice screams out, "What the . . . By the Lords of *Light*! No, let *go* of me! Oh no, no, NOOOOOO . . . ." His last piercing scream seems cut off as if by a knife's edge, plunging the tavern and the night beyond into utter silence.

All assembled NPCs sit stunned for a few seconds, after which a frightened babble of voices breaks out: "What was that?" "Did you see that?" "Something's out in the fog!" "It got Caspan!" It's up to the heroes to check out the fog, as none of the NPCs can in any way be motivated to do so. They will say that, while thick fogs are common, this one is unusually dense.

Characters who strike out into the fog can only see a few feet in front of them, and then only if they are carrying a light source. Those with infravision (and out of range of a light source) are similarly constrained, due to the particular chill quality of this mist. Only the nearby light emanating from the tavern's door and windows is visible as a dim glow through the clammy fog; everything else is shrouded in darkness. Sound is muted, and the cold mist immediately gets under the collar, cooling the PCs to an uncomfortable (but not dangerous) temperature.

Only 10 feet out from the doorway lie the grisly remains of the dockworker, at the bank of the river; in the darkness the PCs may well literally stumble over it. The body lies in a pool of spreading blood. One leg has been torn out, and the corpse's head looks to be half bitten off. The PCs don't have more than a moment to note this as multiple dark shapes suddenly resolve out of the mist, surrounding the party. **Display Illustration #1**. It doesn't take more than another heartbeat to see that the attacking figures appear to be the rotting remains of drowned

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humans. They swarm the party with mindless fury. Note that this encounter is primarily designed to set the mood and to involve the PCs directly into the plot, but it certainly has an element of real danger and may cost unwary characters a few levels.

Wights (10): AC 5; MV 12; HD 4+3; hp 27 each; THAC0 15; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4 + special (bite or touch); SA energy drain (touch or bite drains one level); SD harmed only by silver or +1 or better magical weapons, undead immunities (unaffected by *sleep*, *charm*, *hold*, cold, poison, and death magic); SW holy water (2d4 points of damage per splash), can be turned; SZ M; ML elite (14); Int average (9); AL LE; XP 1,400 each.

The fight concludes before the Kalstrand guard can respond. These wights were spontaneously animated by an outlying finger of the Dark Intrusion. They have been lying dead at the bottom of the river for a week and have only now gained the impetus to rise again. From whence came these bodies is explained under the next encounter.

After the party has quelled this undead uprising, they may elect to search the bodies and the surrounding area for clues as to this strange and unsettling event. The bodies of the destroyed wights are waterlogged and rotted and give every indication of having been immersed in water for some time. Their clothes are unremarkable, but a successful Wisdom check allows the investigating PC to find a tattoo on one of the rotting arms that reads "Payvin's Pearl." A successful tracking proficiency skill roll reveals that there are multiple damp trails leading from the water's edge to the tavern doorway, and thence to the location of the PCs' recent conflict. Nothing else is revealed in the search, even if the PCs can manage to search the riverbed below the waterline.

PCs returning from the fog to the tavern are inundated with questions. The NPCs are frightened when confronted with the knowledge that undead are seemingly rising from the river. None wish to leave the confines of the inn, even those who have homes nearby.

If the PCs reveal that one of the undead had a tattoo on its arm that read, "Payvin's Pearl," Khale the barkeep looks visibly shaken. If prodded by the PCs, he reveals the following boxed text. Note that if the PCs do not gather this information from Khale, questioning of random NPCs along the piers concerning the name on the tattoo reveals the same basic information.

> "The Pearl? You sure? Why, that's Payvin's barge. His whole crew deserted him a week past, now. Yes, that's right, his whole crew! I heard it first-hand from the pierwatch. Payvin, he likes his crew aboard the night 'afore castoff. Payvin hi'self was taking care of last-minute cargo in the bazaar. They says that when he got back to his boat, 'twas plumb empty! Can you believe it? 'Twas said that the crewmen must have all thrown in together. Decided to leave off and find a new captain—'least that was what people was sayin' . . . "

If asked, Khale thinks that it was about ten crewmen who had gone missing, but this exhausts his information about the incident. The PCs should quickly make the connection between the undead and the missing crewmen. None of the assembled NPCs know where Payvin is now but suggest that the PCs could inquire after him down at the piers in the morning, "after this evil mist burns away wit' the morning sun."

Unless the heroes dump all of the undead bodies back into the river or otherwise dispose of them (perhaps they have been turned to dust by clerics turning undead), officials of the town constabulary attempt to seek out the party on the following day to question them regarding the nature of the corpses (to the constabulary, Caspan's death is of little moment; there are many seasonal dockworkers at the piers and one more or less is certainly no tragedy). The questions are of the sort to determine exactly what transpired. If the party is truthful, the constabulary can verify the story with Khale. In this case, the constables commend the PCs for their brave act in defending the town from evil wights.

The Piers

The piers of Kalstrand extend for over 1,000 yards along the Thelly, just east of the influx of the Greyflood. Vessels of all types are at dock, but most of those assembled here are large river barges. Inland from the piers, a large complex of buildings includes bunk houses for seasonal dockworkers but mostly consists of warehouses owned by various wealthy merchants. The piers are bustling with activity on almost every day, whatever the weather. Boats constantly come in or cast off, and dockworkers, guards, and merchants scurry everywhere, each engaged in his or her own specialized work. Behind the piers to the north lies the Kalstrand bazaar.

Sample file

PCs who question people at the pier concerning unusual happenings of late get mostly strange looks for their trouble. If they inquire about the missing crew, they are told that, "Crews got to look out for themselves. Better pay is a good incentive to jump ship; it's happened before."

Inquiries after Captain Payvin of the Pearl have a 25% chance per person approached (noncumulative) of uncovering a vague report that Payvin has been spending his days with the "Master of the Pier." Further questioning determines that the "Master" can be found in a tower at the extreme western end of the pier district. Further *careful* questioning reveals that this "Master" is not a person but a tavern that does a good business serving ale to off-duty dockworkers and riverboat crewmen.

Master of the Pier Tavern

The entrance at ground level opens into a large, round room, filling one level of the tower. The semi-circular bar situated in the center of the room appears to be built upon a walled spiral staircase leading up to the higher levels. During the day and most of the night this room is filled with carousing rivermen engaged in heavy drinking and smoking.

If the barkeep, Tara, is questioned about Payvin, she points out a man sitting at a small table pressed up next to a curved wall; he looks to be deep into his cups. Tara volunteers the following to anyone who expresses an interest in the solitary drinker: "Poor Payvin. Ever since his crew up and left him, he's done nothin' but sit there at the table and brood. I can see how it might get to a man, havin' his crew desert, but if he don't sign on a new crew soon, he'll lose his ship!"

Payvin is a man in his mid fifties, going to gray but still in good physical shape. However, he currently looks pale, haggard, and slightly drunk. His blood-shot eyes dart about nervously, and he jumps in fright when the party initially approaches him. At first the riverboat captain attempts to ignore the party, but with enough prodding (buying his next ale or telling the captain their own story would be a good start), Payvin can be coaxed into telling the party what he knows about the disappearance of his crew. He speaks in a clipped, frightened manner. The following boxed text is Payvin's story, to be read or paraphrased to the players:

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"Yeah, my crew. They're gone. Now, don't you go believin' what everyone else says, that they jumped ship for better pay. My crew, they was loyal. Especially m' mate Henry. He been with me since th' Drought o' '43. They din't leave on their own, no sir! They was taken. By some evil beast! That's right, some fiends got 'em or I'm no riverboat captain. Tell you what I saw. You can judge for yourselves.

"After I seen every man onto th' *Pearl*, had Henry draw up th' board. Orders to let none offload, nor any to board 'til I returned. Walkin' away, could see a cold mist. Flowin' in from 'cross th' river, blanketin' th' water. Din't think much of it, then. Night come on thick by th' time I finally finished up m' business with th' Merchant's Guild representative. Stopped in here for a quick nip. Then headed back t' where th' *Pearl* was tied.

"When I got to th' pier's edge, th' mist was so thick couldn't hardly see m' hand in front of m' face. Called out to Henry to lower th' board. Silence. Called again. More silence. Figured th' boys was havin' their fun with me. And I wasn't liking it too much. Thought I'd show 'em. Could just make out th' lantern at th' stern. So just took a runnin' jump! Made it across, yes Sir, I did. Wish now I'd fallen straight into th' drink.

Started lookin' 'round. Yellin' out, 'Henry! Where you be, man? Fun's fun, but we's got th' manifest to go over!' Silence. Got a little spooked when found no one a'tall on th' upper deck. No one in th' big hold below, neither. Then I just got mad. I was alone; m' crew had jumped ship. So I goes back up on deck. Began rantin' at th' top o' my lungs.

"That's when I thought I seen it. Movement above. That's when I seen *it*. In th' misty riggin' above me there was eyes. Hangin' in the air. Eyes like twin pits to th' fiery depths o' th' Abyss! And them eyes, they had a voice. Like two tombstones rubbin' together. Said, "Do you also seek your end, mortal flesh? We find your blood sweet, but th' Devourer will consume your soul itself!" Fear hit me then, hard. Threw m'self off the ship into th' water. I tell you, I never *been* so scared in all m' born days! Heard laughin' as I thrashed for breath in th' icy water, lost in that cursed mist. Swore right then and there—if I lived, never set foot on a ship again. So here I am."

Although Payvin doesn't know this, and the PCs do not discover it for some time (if at all), the creature that he saw in the mist was only one of three creatures present on the ship. These three, called Blaesing, Absalom, and Harrow, are vampires, the elite servants of the Mistress Ferranifer of Skull City. They are based near the tomb but range widely, harvesting the blood necessary to fuel the frenzied rituals of Skull City. Mistress Ferranifer often simply, if ominously, refers to them as the Dim Triad.

The night the Dim Triad attacked the crewmen of the *Pearl* was the first time they had traveled so far from their usual harvesting grounds (in the County of Sunndi), but they were following a surge of the Dark Intrusion north along the river, drunk in its black currents. They took the crew of *Payvin's Pearl* with stealth and magic, drained their blood, then dumped the corpses into the concealing waters of the Trelly River. Payvin is alive only because they were just leaving as he came aboard, and it amused them to terrorize him. The bodies of the crew remained beneath the river for a week (a vampire's victims must be buried to become vampires themselves) before another surge of Negative Energy spontaneously animated them into evil wights. The party could meet the Dim Triad themselves later in this adventure, see page 29.

Payvin doesn't know much beyond what he described in the boxed text above. What is certain is that he really intends never to set foot on a watercraft again and, if he has his way, never to leave the confines of the bar. The most significant piece of knowledge that the party should take away from this tale is the reference to the Devourer.

Ahrens The Sage

The "Devourer" of Payvin's tale is a name that should be new to the party. It has been referenced in only the oldest of mystic texts, and usage of the term has fallen out of the vernacular, save in Skull City. It is important that the PCs attempt to determine the meaning of this word. The following text provides the DM a guide in case the PCs decide to hire a sage to help them in their investigation. Don't be afraid to hint around to the PCs (through NPC channels, perhaps), that there are a number of sages in town, and perchance one of them might be able to discover something of the meaning behind the name. If the PCs use a *legend lore* spell on the name of the Devourer, give them the rhyme found under entry 1 in "The City That Waits" section (see page 57).

Sample file



Characters who ask around can easily discover the names of a few well-respected sages who live in town. The first name upon the list is that of the sage Petre. Petre lives in a residential district filled with many fine houses of stone, merchants' homes by the rich look of them. When Petre learns the nature of the PCs' question, he informs the PCs that study of language and meanings is outside his area of expertise (Petre specializes in the study of bugs). However, for a small finder's fee of only 25 gp (a fellow has to eat), he would be more than happy to direct them to a sage of the appropriate expertise. Upon receipt of such payment, Petre tells the party they must speak with the venerable Ahrens, who specializes in the study of words, both modern and ancient. Petre provides directions free of charge.

The abode of Ahrens lies within the merchants' district. It is a single thin tower constructed of stone that has the strange shade of light purple. An open arch provides easy entry into a foyer, where stone benches are placed along a wall. Flowering plants and bushes are arranged in an artful garden in a central, circular plot. A woman of indeterminate age is tending the garden and looks up with dark eyes as the PCs enter. She raises a single brow, "Yes?" This is Ibell, who owns the tower and supports the sage. If the party mentions Ahrens, Ibell asks the PCs to have a seat upon the benches and enjoy the tranquillity of the garden while she fetches "the old fool." After only a few minutes, Ahrens returns alone. He appears to be in his mid-forties and is dressed in practical-looking work clothes and wears wire-rimmed spectacles.

The party can now contract Ahrens to determine the meaning of the name "the Devourer." Ahrens informs his prospective clients that it could take him as long as a couple of weeks to research the meaning of the name, and that his services do not come cheap; his rates are 750 gp a day. Assuming the party agrees to the contract, it takes the sage three full days to discover some meaning behind the words. The following boxed text contains the story he finally relates to the PCs.

"A mouth, it is used for eating, yes? Of course it is. This was the simple track I began with my entomological search for your Devourer reference. I soon exhausted this line of inquiry, however, finding nothing associated with the words other than the simple meaning with which I began. I was forced to turn to more esoteric searches. After an afternoon of unrelieved study, I finally found a

The Memoirs of Didro Eightfingers

In the summer of 1998, some booksellers offered a promotional sheet showing rooms 14 and 15 of the Black Academy (see pages 47 and 48), along with some notes about their contents. If your players have one of these sheets, they probably will try to decipher it. Here is the story behind the sheet:

Years ago, Didro Eightfingers, a thief, discovered and explored Skull City. Most of Didro's group perished, but Didro spent a few hours in room 15, observing the comings and goings of Mistress Ferranifer and her staff. Didro escaped from the city and settled in Kalstrand, where he worked as a fence and instructor to aspiring young thieves. When in his cups, Didro spun tales derived from his more hair-raising adventures. Eventually, Didro's stories gave rise to some comical plays.

The Dim Triad (see page 29) got wind of the plays and did away with Didro and everyone who had ever performed in one of the productions. The disappearances went unnoticed, as fences and traveling actors are apt to vanish from any locale at the drop of a hat.

This turn of events left Amos Jakobi, a scribe from Kalstrand, with a pile handbills once intended to promote a performance of the plays. Jakobi began selling the handbills as curios.

If the PCs inquire about Didro Eightfingers, they're likely to hear that he is a fictional character, though a few thieves in the Kalstrand area remember Didro.

Amos Jakobi is easily found. The scribe is still annoyed about being stuck with several dozen of the handbills. If the PCs question Jakobi, the scribe remains evasive unless the party offers to buy out the stock (at the cost of 20 gp). Jakobi knows that Didro is a retired adventurer who disappeared a few years ago. He says that the customer who ordered the handbills was a fellow who called himself Mevil. Mevil wanted to promote a play but vanished before the performance. Jakobi has the original documents Mevil left for him to copy, but these are merely cruder versions of the sheet the players already have (Mevil created it after hearing one of Didro's stories).

Sample file

text that made mention of something called the Sign of the Devourer.

"I pursued this lead into strange regions of my library. Finally, in a crumbling scroll penned in ages past I found an ambiguous phrase. The scroll was a treatise on the plane of Negative Energy, claiming that everything—life, light, and knowledge—is ultimately drawn into the Final Void of the Negative Energy Plane. The phrase that caught my eye was "And when the Devourer is truly one with the Final Void, all knowledge will be his, and he shall be like unto a god." This reference was unexplained, but it inspired my searches in other specialized texts.

"In the end, I discovered only these two things. The first is a rendering of what is supposedly the Sign of the Devourer. **Display Illustration #2.** There was no accompanying text.

"The other item I discovered was a name. There are not many details here, but it seems that well over two decades ago, there was a powerful mage named Desatysso who was apparently interested in the Sign of the Devourer, as you are. Desatysso was known among those of power as a powerful but secretive wizard who rarely troubled himself with concerns of the outside world. There is no record here as to what, if anything, Desatysso discovered concerning the sign, or at least no further record has ever been made regarding the mage."

Ahrens possesses no more information than this. He suggests that if the party wishes to learn more concerning the Sign of the Devourer, they might wish to locate this Desatysso. Since Desatysso has not been seen in these parts for over 20 years, Ahrens took the liberty of digging out the directions to the supposed site of Desatysso's old stronghold:

"Start directly south out of Kalstrand, across the Kelly River and thence into the foothills of the Glorioles mountain range. From this vantage, the heights of Panther Peak and Mt. Kroonburzh are both visible. A day's trek further south into the Glorioles will finally cause Panther Peak to perfectly eclipse the view of Mt. Kroonburzh to the

Sample file





west. When this occurs, put the two peaks at your back and head directly east up the steep scree slope of tumbled rocks and boulders. At the top of this slope is a mountain valley, and at the eastern end of this valley is the purported site of Desatysso's private dwelling."

If the PCs inquire further about Desatysso from Ahrens or from other Kalstrandians, they discover only that the mage was said to be very powerful and that he hasn't been seen in many years. Because of this reputation for power, people were content to leave him pretty much to himself, ignoring his infrequent trips into Kalstrand for supplies or news. The directions provided by Ahrens are not general knowledge, although most suspect that Desatysso must have dwelt fairly close by. Those who suspect that he lived in the Glorioles range have never been able to confirm it; no one wishes to poke around in the ogre- and giant-infested hills to the south. Since the mage has not been seen in recent years, most assume that he has come to an evil end, as dabblers in magic often do.

A Trip to the Glorioles

If the PCs follow Ahrens' advice to seek out Desatysso, they will need to leave town and head for the Glorioles. The foothills of these mountains are approximately 30 miles from Kalstrand, almost a full day's travel at standard movement rates across the grassy plains. Even from a distance, the two landmark peaks mentioned in the directions are visible amidst the generally blunted and worn appearance of the surrounding heights. The foothills and lower peaks of the Glorioles are heavily forested in dark coniferous woods; only the two tallest spires show bare rocky surfaces to the empyrean vastness of the sky.

Once the PCs enter into the mountain range proper, random encounters with wild mountain creatures becomes a definite possibility. The PCs' level of power will likely make most dangers negligible; however, random encounters with mountain giant foraging parties are a possibility. For every 8 hours the PCs spend within the Glorioles mountains, they stand a 20% chance of encountering a creature or monster according to the table on this page. Note that during the PCs' trip back from Desatysso's Stronghold, they are still in danger of running into random encounters.

The heroes also pass by a large mound covered in grass, possibly the site of an ancient conflict, now

Random Encounters in the Glorioles

1 pack of wild dogs (2d10)
2 skunk (1)
3 brown bear (1)
4 tribe of wild ogres (2d10)
5 hunting wyverns (1d6)
6 mountain giant foraging party (1d4)

Wild dogs (2d10): AC 7; MV 15; HD 1+1; hp 4 (average); THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4 (bite); SZ S; ML champion (15); Int semi- (3); AL N; XP 35 each.

Skunk: AC 8; MV 12; HD ¼; hp 2; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg 1 (bite) or special; SA stench (on a failed saving throw vs. poison, causes nausea and loss of ½ Str and Con for 1d4 rounds); SZ S; ML unsteady (6); Int semi- (3); AL N; XP 35.

Cave bear: AC 6; MV 12; HD 6+6; hp 40; THAC0 13; #AT 3; Dmg 1d8/1d8/2d6 (claw/claw/bite); SA bearhug (inflicts an additional 2d8 points if both claws hit in the same round); SD fights on for 1d4 rounds after being reduced to 0 hit points or less; SZ H; ML steady (11); Int semi- (3); AL N; XP 650.

Ogres (2d10): AC 5; MV 9; HD 4+1; hp 17 (average); THAC0 17; #AT 1; Dmg 1d10 (fist) or by weapon +6; SZ L; ML steady (11); Int low (8); AL CE; XP 270 each.

Wyverns (1d6): AC 3; MV 6, Fl 24 (E); HD 7+7; hp 41 (average); THAC0 13; #AT 2; Dmg 1d6/1d6 (talon/talon) or 2d8/1d6 and poison (bite/sting); SA poisoned sting (victim dies on failed saving throw vs. poison), dive (in total silence, imposes a –2 penalty to opponents' surprise rolls), +4 attack bonus (when airborne, against targets held in its talons); SZ G; ML elite (14); Int low (6); AL N; XP 1,400 each.

Mountain giants (1d4): AC 4; MV 12; HD 15+3; hp 86, 83, 74, 67; THAC0 5; #AT 1; Dmg 1d8 (fist) or 4d10+10 (giant-sized club); SA hurl rocks (2d10 hp); SD catch rocks (30%); SZ H (14' tall); ML champion (16); Int average (10); AL CN; XP 7,000 each.

Sample file



long forgotten. If the heroes pass back this way, there is a chance that the mound figures more significantly in their travels (see the Forgotten Down encounter described under Back to Kalstrand).

If the PCs follow the directions given them, they make their way through the rough mountainous terrain, along the forested sides and bottom of a broad valley, until they do indeed come upon a massively tall and wide talus slope on the east side of the bank when Panther eclipses Kroonburzh. By eye, the ascent up the rocky slope doesn't appear to be particularly hazardous, but only a fool would consider the ascent to be risk free. To the north and south of the slope are wall-like cliffs of bare stone, unassailable to those without special climbing gear.

Characters proficient in mountaineering or rogues with the climb walls ability have their normal chances to mount the loose, rocky slope; all others must attempt Dexterity checks at a –4 penalty. Each PC scrabbling over the scree must make three successful rolls: one at the bottom, one 600 feet up the steep slope, and the last when the PC has almost made it to the top 900 feet above the base of the boulder-strewn incline. Those who fail a check slide and tumble back down the slope 1d100 feet, suffering 1 point of damage for each 10 feet tumbled. Additionally, each failed check has a 35% chance of starting a mini-avalanche; all PCs below the point of the avalanche's origination are pelted with tumbling rocks and boulders causing 2d10 points of damage, and they must also make Dexterity checks at a –4 penalty or tumble down the slope in turn.

What makes the ascent more dangerous are the two hill giants at the top of the slope; they guard the mountain vale beyond. The two hill giants wait in hiding until PCs are 200 feet from the top; at that point they leap out and begin throwing nearby rocks at the puny invaders. **Display Illustration #3.** The giants also hurl rocks at any PCs who come into range (between 3 and 200 yards) via flying magic or other esoteric means. If any rocks strike a PC, that character must make a Dexterity check at a –4 penalty or begin a sliding tumble back down the boulder-strewn slope as described above. When the PCs reach the top of the slope, the giants grab up their large clubs and engage the PCs in melee.

Hill giants (2): AC 3 (hides); MV 12; HD 12+2; hp 72, 68; THAC0 9; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6 (fist) or 2d6+7 (giant-sized club); SA hurl rocks (Dmg 2d8); SD catch rocks (30% chance); SZ H; ML elite (13); Int low (6, 7); AL CE; XP 3,000 each.

Desatysso's Stronghold

Surrounded by cliffs that tower over a thousand feet high on all sides, save to the west where the talus slope drops steeply away, is a small mountain valley, approximately 700 feet by 700 feet. Against the eastern cliff wall is what was once a multi-chambered abode of stone that served as Desatysso's stronghold. **Display Illustration #4.** While the mage was in residence, the place was like a small fortress, filled with magical servants and traps capable of withstanding rare giant attacks or rarer human incursions. However, since his disappearance over two decades ago, his automatic defenses have slowly eroded, and the miniature keep was finally overrun by vengeful giants; Desatysso used to dominate the giants to use them as guardians of his vale. The giants chafed under the magical command of Desatysso, and after his disappearance they wasted little time in destroying the domicile of their oppressor.

A tribe of hill giants lives within the broken walls of the stronghold now. They and Desatysso's remaining traps serve as the first line of defense for the entry tunnel in the cliff wall that finally leads up to the lair of the more powerful mountain giants. Although it is probably not immediately apparent to the PCs, the mountain giants have looted most of Desatysso's items. They keep the spoils with the rest of their giantish treasure in their lair in the cliff walls high above. This lair can be accessed directly by the tunnel (area 9) leading from room 4 in Desatysso's stronghold.

Unless noted otherwise, all the ceilings in the stronghold are 15 feet tall (making them a bit cramped for giants), and all the doors are 10 feet wide and tall.

1. Flagstone Paving

A wide semicircle of cleared meadowland abuts the reddish-gray cliff face. The clearing surrounds an old stronghold, single-storied save for one ruined tower on its right edge. The building is constructed of stone, but it has obviously seen better days. The cleared area has been paved with red flagstone. Chest-high weeds and thick bushes grow profusely up through cracks in the pavement.

None of the visible windows are large enough for a PC to crawl through, and all are grimed to the extent that nothing can be seen through them without breaking the glass. Even from a distance, it is obvious that the tower roof has long since collapsed (the mountain

Sample file



giants smashed it in by tossing boulders from the ledge above). The massive double doors of black iron that lead to area 2 stand open, and four hill giants lurk within, waiting to rush forth and begin pelting stones at any PC who closes to within 200 feet of the door. If the PCs are able to return significant long-range attacks (via magic or missile fire) so as to reduce two or more giants to half their hit point totals or below, or if they seem about to achieve melee range, the four giants retreat back into area 2, closing and barring the doors after them from the inside. From here, they wait to engage any PCs who attempt entry.

2. Foyer

The bivalve iron door leading into the stronghold is 10 feet wide and 15 feet high and is carved with many runes and glyphs. Black enamel covers the exterior surface, and there are a few rusty spots where the coating has worn or chipped off. The power that energized the glyphs has long since fled, however, and the doors are now held physically closed by a wooden bar placed there by the hill giants currently inhabiting the structure. Characters need a successful bend bars/lift gates roll to force open the barred doors. Should determined PCs try to chop their way through, the sturdy, reinforced doors can withstand 80 points of damage before giving way; the doors have an Armor Class of –3. Up to three human-sized characters can work together to force open the doors at any one time. Read the following boxed text once the PCs have entered the chamber:

> Everything in this chamber shows the signs of neglect and the stamp of unrelenting time. Cracks run rampant in jagged zigs and zags across the flagstone floor and tiled walls. The plaster upon the ceiling, once apparently depicting a subtle underwater scene, has peeled and fallen away to such an extent that it is impossible to see what the subject of the painting once was. Beyond the plaster is the cracked stone of the ceiling. In the very center of the chamber is a low circular basin, in the center of which is a chipped and broken marble statue of a leaping dolphin. It looks to have once been a fountain, but no water runs now; instead, stagnant green liquid pools just below the lip of the basin. West of the fountain, a large fire burns in a rough firepit built with debris, providing dim light for the chamber.

Once the foyer to Desatysso's stronghold, this chamber now serves as a guard bastion for four of the hill giants who inhabit the place at the command of the mountain giants living in the high caverns above. If the PCs have gained entry without drawing attention to themselves, they discover the four giants conducting impromptu wrestling matches, their large clubs set to the side. If the giants have been alerted to the party's presence, they stand with clubs ready to ambush anyone so foolish as to force entry through the iron doors. The giants here attempt to prevent any PCs from moving into room 4 but allow characters to run through the doors leading to either room 3 or 6. The mountain giant in room 4 will not come through to aid the hill giants in the event of a conflict, mostly due to the size of the room. However, she does crack the door to observe the conflict; the PC closest to the door can attempt a Wisdom check at a –4 penalty to notice this.

The fountain was enchanted in Desatysso's time; those who drank from it were magically refreshed and restored as if after a full night's sleep and a good meal (invaluable after a late night's spell research). In the present, the fountain has been damaged by the giant's constant roughhousing in the chamber, and the brackish water now inflicts a bacterial contagion that affects any PC who drinks from it within a day or two. The contagion lasts 24 to 48 hours, with symptoms that include nausea, diarrhea, and weakness: subtract 10 points from Strength, Constitution, and Dexterity (to a minimum of 1) for the duration. A *cure disease* spell instantly cures any PC suffering from the effects of this bacteria.

The spells *slow poison* and *neutralize poison* have no effect on the malady. The characters can make the water safe to drink simply my removing some from the fountain and boiling it for a few minutes. The water seems clean and pure to most characters, but druids of 4th level and higher and characters with the survival proficiency can note the taint of disease if their players think to ask about the water's purity.

Hill giants (4): AC 3 (hides); MV 12; HD 12+2; hp 64, 71, 76, 49; THAC0 9; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6 (fist) or 2d6+7 (giant-sized club); SA hurl rocks (Dmg 2d8); SD catch rocks (30% chance); SZ H; ML elite (13); Int low (5–7); AL CE; XP 3,000 each.

3. Guest Room

> This small, rectangular room contains the shattered and smashed remains of what was probably a bed and a bureau, and perhaps one or two other wooden items that have been so reduced to their

Sample file



component parts that it is now impossible to say for certain what purpose they fulfilled when they were whole. Rotting tapestries hang upon the walls, and a large yellowed and insect-eaten bear skin covers most of the floor, perhaps once serving as a plush carpet but now just a matted mess.

Nothing of real value can be discovered in this room, which Desatysso had put aside for the rare times that he entertained a guest or two; only personal items including a brush, a comb, hard soap, and similar items can be retrieved amid the litter.

4. Cavern Access

The eastern portion of this chamber appears to abut the actual rock of the cliff face against which the stronghold was built. A rough tunnel, perhaps 15 feet wide and 10 feet tall, opens in the center of the native rock wall, leading into darkness. The remaining walls and ceiling of the chamber are stone blocks, showing massive untended cracks. Small bars hold the upper portions of what were once ceiling-to-floor tapestries. The southern extent of the room contains a large heap of debris made up of dried grass, animal pelts, and torn and ripped tapestries obviously salvaged from the walls of this very room. Against the north wall, a bonfire provides flickering illumination in the chamber.

A single young adult mountain giant rests in this chamber. In the event of conflict in room 2, she ceases whatever activity she was previously engaged in (combing her hair, playing mumbly peg, or napping upon the soft bed she has made for herself) and opens (just a crack) the door leading to room 2 to gauge the fight. If it appears that the PCs might win, the giant silently closes the door, bars it with a large wooden beam, then runs into the tunnel and up to the mountain giant lair to warn her family to expect company. The main tunnel leading off this chamber is just wide enough to allow giants to move through it single file.

The tapestries from the heap are too stained and yellowed to determine what they once may have portrayed. A thorough search through the filth turns up a set of beautifully worked silver goblets (each worth 100 gp), a gold chain clasping a ruby (300 gp), and a small mirror framed with intricately worked wood (120 gp).

Mountain giant young adult: AC 5; MV 12; HD 13+3; hp 73; THAC0 7; Dmg 1d8 (fist, kick) or 3d10+10 (giant-sized mace); SA hurl rocks (Dmg 2d10); SD catch rocks (30%); SZ H (13' tall); ML champion (15); Int very (12); AL N; XP 6,000.

5. Storage

This tunnel branching off the main passage is only 5 feet wide and 8 feet tall, insufficient to allow one of full giantish stature to pass through. Even though normal giants were unlikely to gain entry, Desatysso still trapped the entrance against unauthorized entry; the mage found that some of his more crafty servants could gain the service of smaller creatures to raid the contents of the chamber. The magical trap is still functioning and is aided by elemental magic of the earth: anyone who passes through the corridor has a 90% chance to step on the large concealed rocky pressure plate that covers a 5-foot-by-5-foot section of the floor. If the plate is trod upon, the rocky walls of the tunnel magically constrict in the space of a heartbeat, almost like the mineral analog of an organic sphincter muscle, pulping anything in the passage and causing 2d10+20 points of damage. Any thief checking the floor for traps has the normal chance of detecting the pressure plate. If any pass the trap to reach the room beyond, read or paraphrase the following description:

This chamber appears to be undisturbed, a thick patina of dust having settled on all its contents. Every available wall supports a wooden rack of thin, diagonally crossing wooden beams, each piece exquisitely carved in the semblance of a leafy vine. Suspended on almost every point of wooden intersection are dark wine bottles, so dust-covered that their labels are hidden. This chamber appears to be a long-abandoned wine cellar.

Desatysso was quite a connoisseur of wine, and this chamber holds only the finest vintages available to him from twenty years ago. Although some of the bottles have gone over, most of them are in excellent shape due to the cool conditions of the cavern. To someone who appreciated such a treasure, each bottle could fetch as much as 100 gp. There are 87 bottles of wine in all stored here.

6. Dining Room

Smashed flat against the floor and broken into three separate pieces is the top of a large oak table. The finely carved legs are splayed out. A crys-

Sample file



talline chandelier that looks to have once been suspended from the ceiling now lies shattered upon the floor. Piled into the four corners of the room are the broken remnants of wooden chairs.

Before this room was despoiled and looted by the giants, the table was enchanted so that it would provide a feast for up to twelve people three times a day. Sadly, this enchantment no longer functions. Everything of value has been stripped from this room and now resides in the mountain giants' lair.

7. Chamber of Recreation

The eastern wall of this room appears to be composed of native rock. Elaborately carved into the rock is a huge fireplace fully 10 feet wide and deep. A large marble mantle has been affixed above the fireplace, the entire affair bordered with immaculately laid black tiles. Even with the apparent absence of fuel, a large fire burns and flickers within the hearth. Scattered about the rest of the chamber are the remains of leather furnishings. The southeastern corner of the room protrudes in a concave curve of black stone, in which is set a bivalve door of stone. There is a gaping hole in the roof at the room's southwest corner.

Sample file

This chamber served as a place of relaxation when Desatysso wearied of research and experimentation in his attached Tower of Sorcery. However, the giants have pretty much stripped the room of any relaxing features by this date. The stone doors providing entry to the tower (area 8) are magically triggered to release the fully empowered fire elemental bound within the hearth. Desatysso kept the elemental bound for utilitarian purposes, but the elemental serves double duty as a guardian of the tower. The fire elemental is not released if a giant seeks entry through the stone doors (because they were servants of Desatysso), but any other creature seeking entry (or even approaching within 5 feet of the stone door) must contend with the elemental when it suddenly explodes out of the hearth with its full size and power. The fire elemental attacks until destroyed. Note that the trap is set off from both directions; thus PCs who may have entered through the broken roof of area 8 and exited into this chamber through the stone doors are also subject to attack by the fire elemental. The doors themselves are also trapped; see the description of area 8 for details.

Fire elemental: AC 2; MV 12; HD 16; hp 128; THAC0 5; #AT 1; Dmg 3d8 (punch); SA sets things on fire (any flammable item struck must save vs. magical fire at a –2 penalty or ignite); SD harmed only by +2 or better magical weaponry; SW cannot cross water or other nonflammable liquids; SZ H (16' tall); ML fanatic (17); Int low (7); AL N; XP 10,000.

8. Tower of Sorcery

Unless they climb the outer wall and enter through the collapsed roof, those intent upon gaining entry to the tower must first contend with the fire elemental in room 7. The doors to the tower are additionally trapped so that anyone who pulls upon the ring without first turning it a full 180 degrees clockwise is subject to attack by the scything swing of a razor-sharp pendulum blade that depends from a hidden compartment in the ceiling. The PC who pulled upon the ring and anyone standing next to him or her must make a Dexterity check at a –5 penalty or be hit by the pendulum for 1d10+10 points of damage. If the doors are finally pulled open and someone has a chance to see within, reveal the following information:

The roof above has been smashed in by massive boulders that now lie scattered amid the ruin of what was at one time at least three and maybe four separate tower stories. It is difficult to say what this tower may once have housed; now it is a broken, gutted, burned, looted hollow, serving only as a roost for several doves that coo and strut among the broken beams that once supported the ceiling.

It is within this tower that Desatysso did his research and magical experiments, and it is also here that he kept his secrets and items of power. The clue that the PCs need for the continuation of their adventure once resided in the study on the tower's second story. The piles of splintered timber and crumbled stone speak eloquently to the fact that little is now likely to be found here. The mountain giants who once served and guarded Desatysso's sanctuary have defiled and broken the place in the mage's absence. They also looted what items of value that they could recognize, and those items now reside in room 15 of their lair, high above the valley floor. Desatysso's ornate and valuable desk, containing the clue concerning the Devourer that the PCs seek, was carried away in just this fashion, and they must penetrate the giants' lair to recover it.



Hopefully, the PCs will be able to deduce by the evidence before them that the place has been looted and that they need to track down the looters to learn all that they can regarding Desatysso. A search through the mess reveals little of value, but many items that were once valuable: a few broken wands, many dozens of broken vials, a few flasks containing desiccated potions, a broken staff, a shattered sword that once apparently had potent runes of power engraved upon it, etc. However, the one item that may be found (with a successful roll to find secret doors) is a small silver key, hidden from casual scrutiny, that has fallen into a crack in the floor. This is the key to Desatysso's desk in room 15; locating it here will save the party much grief.

DM Note: A search for secret doors succeeds on a roll of 1 on 1d6 after a 10-minute search; elves and half elves succeed on a roll of 1–2 on 1d6. It takes 10 minutes examine a 10- by 20-foot area.

9. Passage

From the level of Desatysso's Stronghold, the passage begins a very steep ascent, spiraling up and up a total of 1,000 feet before opening out onto the ledge at area 10, a giddy height above the valley floor. The tunnel remains 10 feet wide and 15 feet high throughout its steep length, and giant-sized creatures may only pass through it single file. If the lookout in room 4 made good her getaway, she first warns her giantish family that intruders are on the way and then, as they assembled in area 10 behind her, kneels at the top of the passage ready to roll a very large, specially rounded boulder down the passage at the first sound of the party's approach. The passage is smooth enough so that the stone sphere (which fills the passage from side to side) will roll all the way down to room 4, crushing anything in its path. Note that she actually places the stone in the passage and holds it in place—a primitive but effective "deadman's switch"—so that PCs who silently sneak up the tunnel and unleash attacks at her will cause the boulder to be released and begin its rapid descent.

Unless the party is taking pains to move silently (as the thief skill) or are advancing up the passage with the protection of a *silence* spell, read the following boxed text when the characters are 20 feet away from the last bend in the tunnel before it opens onto the terrace detailed under entry 10.

> A horrible sound begins above and ahead of you around the bend of the tunnel: a booming echo that starts low but rapidly grows in volume until you can feel a sickening vibration in the soles of your boots. Suddenly from around the corner wheels a huge, spherical boulder, filling the entire width of the cavern, rolling toward you with ever-greater momentum!

Display Illustration #5. The PCs have but a single round to react from the time the boulder rolls into sight: begin counting down from 10 to add dramatic tension to the encounter. The boulder's movement rate is 18, so most PCs who try to outrun the rock will quickly be overtaken by their remorseless pursuer. There is 5 feet of clearance between the top of the spinning boulder and the ceiling of the tunnel; any PC who can manage to reach this height during the single round of preparation should be safe (*slippers of spider climbing*, anyone?). Alas, a failed climbing roll drops the poor PC right down into the path of the oncoming boulder. Take special note of the height of any character who attempts to jump straight up (either through use of the jumping non-weapon proficiency or *boots of striding and springing*): anyone 5 feet tall or more who succeeds in clearing the boulder will crack his or her head on the low ceiling and fall prone in front of the rolling stone. A halfling or gnome PC who dives for the corners and specifically states that he or she is lying down on the floor pressed against either wall can escape damage; any larger PC who tries this trick receives a mere 2d10 points of damage as the boulder thunders past. PCs who are unable to get to safety of any sort (or can't decide upon a course of action before the countdown runs out) are run over by the boulder and crushed, suffering 12d10 points of damage.

10. Overlooking Terrace

> The steeply ascending tunnel finally gives out onto a wide ledge overlooking a vertical drop into a small mountain valley some 1,000 or so feet below. Three separate tunnels give off the ledge, leading back into the side of the cliff face, that reaches its summit a mere 30 feet above. The ledge seems an ideal place to study any activity in the valley below, and the many large piles of stones nearby would make excellent ammo for those of sufficient strength of arm to cast them.

Sample file