

Advanced Dungeons & Dragons



The Dungeon of Death

A DUNGEON CRAWL™ Adventure

Jason Carl

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Introduction



elcome to *The Dungeon of Death*, a stand-alone DUNGEON CRAWL™ adventure for the FORGOTTEN REALMS® campaign. In the course of this adventure, characters will explore one of the most infamous dungeons in the Realms. The adventure can also easily be adapted to suit existing campaigns.

This DUNGEON CRAWL adventure is designed for three to six characters of 7th to 9th level. Dungeon crawling is a dirty and bloody business, so the DM should review this adventure thoroughly to ensure that the player characters will be able to face the challenges ahead of them with a reasonable expectation of success. Numerous traps and tricks defend the dungeon against intruders; the successful adventuring party needs brains as much as brawn.

History of the Dungeon of Death

The Dungeon of Death has an evil reputation. It was originally a dwarven gem-mine developed by intrepid dwarves of the Deepdelve clan. They took to this industry after the dwarven kingdom of Gharraghaur fell to invasions of orcs, trolls, bugbears, and worse (–3611 DR). The kingdom stood at the north end of the Dessarin River and stretched from the Spine of the World beyond the Lurkwood, northwest to the northern corner of the Savage Frontier, and southwest to the present site of the city of Neverwinter.

Most of the Deepdelvers were slain and the rest driven out of the mine by a band of medusae who claimed the place for their own. They in turn fell to a massive troll invasion.

The mine earned its present cheerful name during this period of troll occupation. A giant two-headed troll—Glarauuth by name—styled himself the “Troll King” and took up residence in the upper levels of the mining complex. He sent out raiding parties across the North to capture human slaves, who were imprisoned between enforced labor shifts in the old gem-mine. Because the slaves’ main purpose was to produce babies for troll dinner tables, the grim place gained the name “The Dungeon of Death.”

A small band of dwarves of the Foehammer clan attempted to reclaim the mines some ninety years ago, but their plans went awry and they were never heard from again; history does not record their ultimate fate. The place has changed hands many times since then, acquiring bone-chilling legends of crawling evil through the years.

The Dungeon of Death Today

The mine’s foul reputation is well deserved: Its depths have swallowed numerous adventuring parties whole. The few survivors of doomed expeditions speak of the dungeon’s curse. The place demands a toll of blood from all who pass its doors. Like most rumors, these tales spread and grow, embellished by the ignorant and speculative folk of the North.

Approximately three decades ago, a vile nest of cruel and hateful nabassu (a type of greater tanar’ri) arrived in the Realms and claimed the old mining complex as their abode. They used it as a lair from which they could spread their unique brand of malignancy across the North. Like the trolls before them, they sent minions out into the world to procure captives, but not as slaves: Nabassu devour humans and demihumans to increase their own demonic powers.

The nabassu’s most numerous servants were barbarians of the Blue Bear tribe. These humans served under the direct command of Tanta Hagara, an evil annis shaman who in turn served the nabassu. She propitiated the demons with human and demihuman captives for their dining pleasure. Sadly, the Blue Bears did not fully realize their leader’s true nature, nor the extent of her evil deeds, until it was too far too late. Tanta Hagara was killed and the Blue Bear tribe all but obliterated approximately one year ago (see the DUNGEON CRAWL adventure *Hellgate Keep*).

With their most able servant and her minions dead, most of the nabassu abandoned the mine for greener pastures, taking most of their own demonic servitors along with them. Only a single nabassu, Viscaris, remains in the mining complex today, lordling over what remains of





the once-vast demonic host. However, Viscaris is quickly discovering that being the ruler of the ruin is not all it's cracked up to be.

It's Not Easy Being Nabassu

At first, Viscaris viewed his fellow nabassu's departure from the mines as a golden opportunity to establish himself as a master of woe and terror in the North, thereby gaining much status among his kind. However, one small but vital detail stands in his way: He is still a fledgling demon. Alone among the tanar'ri, the nabassu go through two distinct life phases, fledgling and mature. While the fledgling form is not helpless, it is substantially weaker than the mature form. Viscaris will not inherit the standard tanar'ri abilities until he reaches maturity, which he cannot do until he personally slays and devours a total of eighteen suitable human or demi-human victims. To date he has slain and eaten fourteen. He is four victims shy of attaining his full demonic potential. His goal is complicated by the fact that Viscaris is something of a snob among fiends. He considers himself above gobbling down just any old passers-by, and wants to satiate his hunger only on those living beings whom he considers "worthy" to be devoured by a nabassu of his refinement. He disdains common folk as inferior, believing that obtaining quality food will mean higher status for him when he's finally done with this place and returns home.

His alu-fiend allies, Anderia and Estellia, have the foresight to realize that when Viscaris devours his eighteenth victim, he will mature and become considerably more powerful than he is now, and they look forward to receiving generous rewards when that condition comes to pass. Their patience is wearing thin, however: If Viscaris's plan to lure adventurers into the dungeon fails, they will seek their fortunes elsewhere.

What Is Viscaris up To?

Viscaris is understandably impatient to reach his mature form. Thus, he's trying to accelerate his maturation process by luring adventuring parties into the mines so that he might slay and devour them. Viscaris sent the alu-fiends out into the North to salt taverns and festhalls with rumors about the dungeon's now-unguarded wealth. These servants have just recently returned from their mission, but the plan has yet to bear fruit. The dire reputation of the Dungeon of Death still dissuades prudent adventurers from exploring its depths. Even if Viscaris's plan yields results and attracts heroes to the Dungeon of Death, his own snobbery makes achieving his goal more difficult. To be certain that he captures and devours only the very cream of the adventuring crop, Viscaris has set all the traps on the entrance level. Only those who make it past those diabolical devices alive are considered worthy to sit at his table (albeit as the main course).

The Shadow Curse

The Dungeon of Death is more than just a trap-and-monster-filled hole in the ground. Here, acts of profound cruelty and foulness have been perpetrated for centuries on end. The litany of evil deeds—from the trolls' breeding of human babies for meals, to the annis' sacrifice of living people to her tanar'ri masters, to the unspeakable horrors inflicted on the nabassu's hapless captives—is so long so as to almost defy belief, and so profound that the essence of this evil has penetrated and permeated the stonework itself. This evil lingers on long after the deeds themselves have been forgotten, and now manifests itself in a singularly insidious manner: the Shadow Curse.

Living creatures are affected by the Shadow Curse from the moment they pass the dungeon's doors. From that moment on, until they again reach the surface, they suffer the loss of 1 point from their prime requisite ability for every hour spent within the Dungeon of Death's walls (Strength for warriors, Intelligence for wizards, Wisdom for priests, and Dexterity for rogues). Thus, a warrior who spends 3 hours within the place loses 1 point of Strength per hour, for a total loss of 3 points of Strength; a wizard who spends 5 hours in the dungeon loses 5 points of Intelligence. The DM must track this loss of ability scores and carefully note the amount time the player characters spend in the Dungeon of Death.

The Shadow Curse affects living creatures only: Nonliving and extraplanar creatures are immune, so the indigenous fiends and undead are unaffected. The Shadow Curse may be held off temporarily by *protection from evil*, *bles*, and similar spells that defend the living from the powers of evil, but when the spell's duration ceases so too does its protection.

Perhaps the most insidious aspect of the Shadow Curse is that living creatures do not notice its effects until they have already lost fully one-quarter of their total natural ability score rating (not including increased scores bestowed by attribute-enhancing magic such as *strength* spells or *gauntlets of ogre power*). A character dies when his prime requisite ability score is reduced to 0. What remains of his life essence merges with the evil forces that produce the Shadow Curse, becoming a part of the very thing that slew him.

Inside the Dungeon of Death, the characters may eventually notice the only physical manifestation of the curse: All the areas of shadow that lie within the underground complex are visibly darker and denser than normal shadows. Worse, these shadows sometimes appear to writhe and move of their own accord—not far and not fast, but enough so that the characters catch hints of this movement out of the corners of their eyes as they traverse the shadowed stone corridors and rooms belowground. The effect is most distinct in those areas just beyond the edge of whatever source the party uses to light its way in the darkness. These shadows cannot attack or otherwise physically interact with living creatures, but the effect is unnerving to those who observe it.

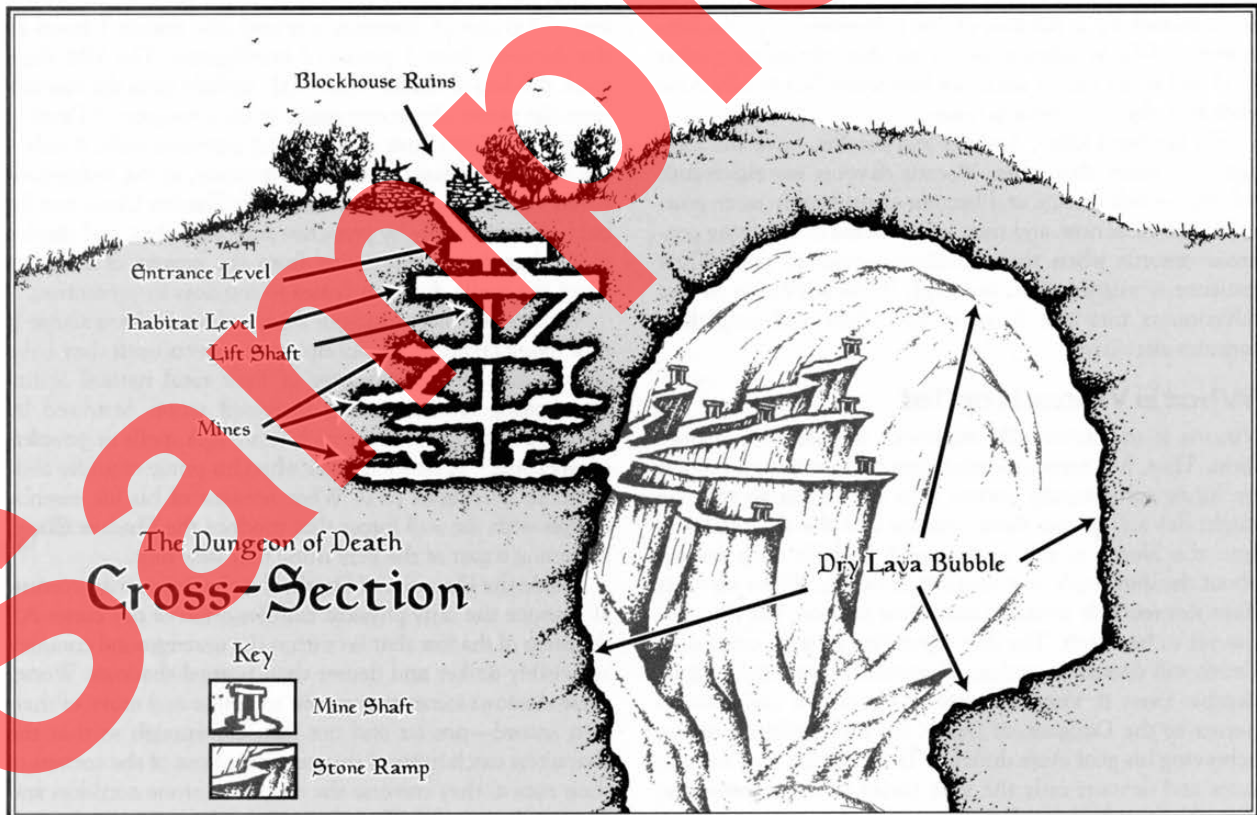
Living creatures who leave the Dungeon of Death regain lost ability scores at the rate of 1 point per day. Dispelling the Shadow Curse permanently is not within the scope of this adventure, but DMs can use that goal as a hook for further quests.

Getting Started

This adventure presumes that the player characters have the dubious honor of being the very first adventurers to visit the old gem mine since Viscaris started trying to attract some dining companions. Play begins with the PCs standing outside the surface entrance to the mines. How the characters learn of the site, and the details of their journey to its entrance, is a matter best left for the DM to determine. Establish a pretext for the adventure that meshes with your campaign and style. Adventure hooks might include the following:

- The characters hear the rumors that Viscaris's minions have been spreading, either in the North or elsewhere in the Realms, and decide to test their veracity.

- A friend or relative of one of the characters hears the same rumors. He visits the mine, where the lesser demons tear him apart before Viscaris has the chance to devour him; the characters are now on his trail and are trying to find out what happened to him.
- The characters meet a band of adventurers who were on their way to the dungeon after hearing the recent gossip, but have changed their minds and are now en route to a different site. They tell the characters what they know of the place.
- The characters discover ancient information pertaining to the site that paints a very different picture of the old mine than the one Viscaris is currently promoting. Their curiosity (or avarice) piqued by the discrepancies, the characters choose to locate and investigate the dungeon.
- Dwarves of the Deepdelve clan hire the party to examine the old mine and determine if it is worth reclaiming.





Entrance Level

The adventure begins with the player characters standing outside the ruined stone blockhouse that once protected the dwarves' main entry point into the mines. The Entrance Level map on the interior front cover shows this level.

Read or paraphrase the following to the players:

The weathered gray stones and shattered gate of the stone blockhouse speak of a time long past, when dwarven hands raised a mighty tower to mark and defend the entrance to their home far below. The place is now half-consumed by the encroaching forest, overgrown with weeds, shrubs, vines, roots, and moss. What isn't covered by vegetation is largely ruined. Chunks of rubble from shattered towers and tumbled walls litter the ground. There is evidence of recent habitation: Some of the nearby trees have been cut down to enlarge the muddy cart track that passes for a road. The trail has also seen some recent traffic. The area is still, devoid of all signs of life, and thus the silence around the ruins is profound and complete.

Play up the sense of stillness and silence as the adventurers explore the ruined keep. This is a creepy, lonely place and it should feel that way.

Notes on the Environment

The entire purpose of the entrance level was to delay, halt, and kill unwanted intruders, so its dwarven builders did not waste effort on decoration or adornment. All the rooms, chambers, corridors, walls, floors, and ceilings were carved from the earth and then smoothed. Almost all the floor surfaces are paved or tiled with smooth and flat flagstones.

Doors

Except where noted, all the doors in the dungeon are constructed of heavy wood and reinforced with bands of steel. Most doors are relatively well preserved and functional, though many no longer fit tightly in their stone frames and thus fail to muffle sound and light as they once did. A few doors now have gaps of more than half an inch between themselves and their frames, allowing anyone to peer through this space into the areas beyond.

Climate

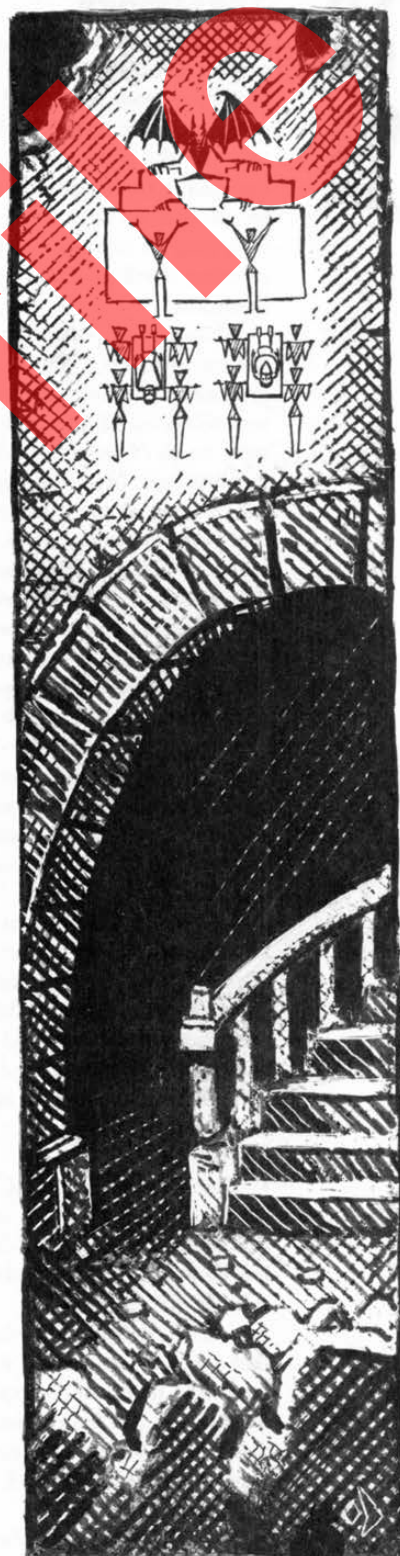
The air in the dungeon is cold, and many of the stone surfaces are coated with a thin sheen of moisture. The mine's proximity to a subterranean stream (which powers the waste disposal system in Room 7) contributes to the chill and damp.

Rectangular air vents were cut into the rock at the ceiling level of nearly every room and corridor in the complex. Though some of the air vents no longer function, enough remain clear to provide sufficient fresh air for the adventurers.

Lights and Magic

The rooms and corridors throughout the dungeon are dark, so the characters must provide a light source if they wish to see. Sources such as torches, lanterns, magic weapons, or continual light spells, allow the heroes to notice the dark, dancing shadow effects caused by the Shadow Curse outside their circle of light.

All spells function normally within the mine complex, including those the dwarves and other inhabitants prepared for intruders.





The Mephits

The most frequent encounter on this level involves Viscaris's mephit spies. Viscaris uses these horrid creatures as a covert espionage team. Stationed on the entrance level are a total of ten mephits: four fire, three ice, two mist, and one steam mephit, who is the nominal chief of the spy crew. When not engaged in their normal duties the mephits wait impatiently for adventurers to make their way here, idling away the time by spying on one another (just to keep in practice) and tormenting anything or anyone unlucky enough to attract their attention.

The mephits' purpose is twofold. Their principal duty is to spy on intruders ("dinner guests") and bring news of their progress to the steam mephit in charge. The steam mephit in turn relays useful information to Viscaris (whom the mephits refer to as "His Nibs," although never to his face). The mephits begin observing the adventurers the moment they hit the first trap on the entrance level and dog their progress from that point onward, passing messages to the steam mephit and hence to Viscaris. Their secondary duty is to lure or force any dim-witted or balky adventurers into the traps—otherwise, Viscaris won't be able to weed out the weak and unfit! The mephits also have standing orders to harass, torment, and attack adventurers at inopportune moments, such as when they are right in the middle of dealing with those traps.

If endangered, they also try to gate in more mephits to aid them in carrying out Viscaris's standing orders. When in doubt as to which type of mephit to use for a particular encounter, roll 1d6. A result of 1 indicates an ice mephit; a result of 2–4 indicates a mist mephit; a result of 5–6 indicates a fire mephit.

The steam mephit does not normally enter combat with adventurers. Its job is to remain in the secret chamber (Room 9) and relay information to Viscaris. But if the situation appears sufficiently dire—the dinner guests are making short work of the traps and the other mephits, for example—the steam imp steps in and attacks the adventurers.

Use these statistics for all mephits that appear throughout the adventure.

Fire Mephit (Imp): AC 5; MV 12, FLY 24 (B); HD 3+1; hp 20; THAC0 17; #AT 2; Dmg 1d3+1/1d3+1 (claw/claw); SA breath weapon, spell-like abilities; SD immune to fire, regeneration; SZ M (5' tall); ML average (8); Int average (9); AL CE; XP 420 each.

Special Abilities: SA—breath weapon 3/day, as either a flame jet 15' long and 1' wide, automatically hits one target for 1d8+1 points of damage (save vs. breath weapon for half damage) or as a fan of flame covering a 120-degree arc to a distance of 5', any creature in the arc suffers 4 points of damage (no saving throw); SD—regenerates 1 hp/turn while in contact with fire.

Spell-like Abilities—1/day: *heat metal*, *magic missile* (two missiles). Once per hour a fire mephit can attempt to gate in

another mephit with a 25% chance of success (equal probability of fire or steam mephit).

Note—touching a fire mephit causes 1 point of damage (no saving throw).

Ice Mephit (Imp): AC 5; MV 12, fly 24 (B); HD 3; hp 18; THAC0 17; #AT 2; Dmg 1d2/1d2 (claw/claw); SA breath weapon, chill touch, spell-like abilities; SD immune to cold, regeneration; SZ M (5' tall); ML average (8); Int average (8); AL CE; XP 420 each.

Special Abilities: SA—breath weapon 3/day, volley of ice shards that automatically hits a single victim within 15 feet for 1d6 damage (save vs. breath weapon for half damage), any successful claw attack has a freezing effect that reduces the victim's hit points by 1 per hit in addition to the damage inflicted by the mephit's claws, effects are cumulative and last 3 turns or until the victim is healed to full hit points; SD—regenerates 1 hp/turn while in contact with ice or extreme cold.

Spell-like Abilities: Once per hour an ice mephit can attempt to gate in another mephit with a 25% chance of success (equal probability of mist or ice mephit).

Mist Mephit (Imp): AC 7; MV 12, fly 24 (B); HD 3+2; hp 21; THAC0 17; #AT 2; Dmg 1/1 (claw/claw); SA breath weapon, spell-like abilities; SZ M (5' tall); ML average (9); Int average (10); AL CE; XP 420 each.

Special Abilities: SA—breath weapon 3/hour, ball of mist that automatically envelopes one victim within 10 feet, victim must make a successful saving throw vs. poison or suffer 1d4+1 points of choking damage and be blinded for 1d4 rounds.

Spell-like Abilities—*gaseous form*, *wall of fog* 1/day (at a 3rd-level ability). Once per hour a mist mephit can attempt to gate in 1d2 other mephits with a 25% chance of success (equal probability of ice or mist mephit; if two are summoned, they are of the same type).

Steam Mephit (Imp): AC 7; MV 12, fly 24 (B); HD 3+3; hp 25; THAC0 17; #AT 2; Dmg 1d4+1/1d4+1 (claw/claw); SA breath weapon, stun, spell-like abilities; SD—immune to fire and heat; SZ M (5' tall); ML average (10); Int average (10); AL CE; XP 420.

Special Abilities: SA—breath weapon once every other round, scalding jet of water that automatically hits its target within 20 feet, victim suffers 1d3 points of damage (no saving throw) and is 50% likely to be stunned for 1 round; successful melee attacks from the mephit's claws are also 50% likely to stun its victim for 1 round per claw hit, cumulative.

Spell-like Abilities—*contaminate water* 1/day. Once per hour steam mephits can create a rainstorm of boiling water over a 20-by-20-foot area, which inflicts 2d6 points of damage to all victims within the area of effect (no saving throw). Once per hour a steam mephit can attempt to gate in 1d2 other mephits with a 30% chance of success (equal probability of fire or steam mephit; if two are summoned, they are of the same type).