



# The Sinister Spire™

Adventure

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# THE SINISTER SPIRE

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# Introduction

Damp, cool air blew across Darend's face. He blinked several times. At least he thought he did. Black was his whole world—a blank nothingness, hollow for its unknown depths—eyes open or closed.

The chilly air brushing his cheeks tickled his nose with dust and the musty smell of old rot, reminding him of the cellar below his grandmother's home. It was like that, but somehow wider, wilder. What a strange place to wake. . . .

He'd fallen! The memory burst upon him with images of the startled faces of his companions flashing by, a hoarse scream filling his throat. The rope had failed, and he had plunged down the narrow chimney they'd discovered near the forgotten king's tomb.

How far had he dropped? He tried to lift his hands, but pain flared in answer. A bone or two were cracked, that was certain.

He strained his head one way, then another. "Gods be thanked," he croaked. At least he wasn't completely broken. If he just waited here, his comrades would find him.

How long had he already lain in the dark depths of the earth? Somehow, he had the impression considerable time had passed. Why hadn't they already found him?

"Hello?" he called out. Perhaps they were looking even now but couldn't find him in the dark. "Angelu? Jamarch? I'm down here!" He heard the desperate edge of fear in his voice. Hold it together, he told himself. He tried a few deep, cleansing breaths.

His call echoed into a vast distance before failing. If he was in a cave, it must be gigantic. Dread gripped him. Had he fallen all the way into the Underdark?

At a sudden clatter, Darend jerked his head forward. No matter how wide he opened his eyes, they couldn't gather any light in the unrelieved darkness.

"Angelu?" he called, hopeful.

Nothing. His heart thundered; his mouth dried.

Another clatter came, closer this time. A strange chitter followed. Then a roiling swarm engulfed him.

DD2: *The Sinister Spire* is a DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® adventure designed for four 5th-level characters. Player characters who complete this quest should advance one or two levels, depending on where they started in experience and how successful they are in defeating the threats presented herein. Although *The Sinister Spire* is a stand-alone adventure, it is also part of a series, so the end of this journey could lead to a connecting quest.

## WHAT YOU NEED TO PLAY

*The Sinister Spire* is intended for use with the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game. You need the *Player's Handbook* and *Dungeon Master's Guide* to play, and even though this book includes statistics for all the monsters in the tactical encounters, the *Monster Manual* remains a helpful resource.

## PREPARATION

The action in *The Sinister Spire* occurs in the Underdark, starting in a surface tunnel located anywhere convenient for you, the Dungeon Master (DM). If your players have just completed DD1: *Barrow of the Forgotten King*, the hole they discovered in the floor of the forgotten king's tomb leads to this tunnel. The PCs begin this adventure there.

This adventure assumes you have experience as a DM. It is likely you'll run the adventure over the course of several game sessions, so prepare to run the initial encounters the first time you play. In a typical game session, you should make it through three to five encounter areas.

## USING THE FORMAT

The encounter format used in this adventure uses keyed entries similar to other published adventures. However, tactical encounters are separate from story information.

**Tactical Encounters:** Numbered, or keyed, areas are described in the initial section of this text. Use the keyed entries as both a summary of the adventure and a flowchart. If a keyed entry involves combat or other action that places importance on position and movement, that entry refers you to a tactical encounter.

A tactical encounter's page or pages include a map of the area in which the encounter takes place, notes on setting up the encounter, monster statistics blocks, and text descriptions of how the terrain and features of the encounter affect play. Every aspect of an encounter need not be used—the players might not be interested in all the details of an area. Indeed, the characters might avoid whole encounters, either intentionally or unwittingly.

The combat encounters in this adventure are designed for use with *D&D Miniatures*. If you don't have the exact miniature to represent a monster, or you aren't using *D&D Miniatures*, just use whatever substitute you choose to run the tactical encounters.

## ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

A yuan-ti pureblood sorcerer named Xeron was part of an evil consortium known as the Vanguard of Sertrous. The Vanguard sent him in search of the tomb of the forgotten king, hoping he would recover the magic items said to lie with the king's body, as well as the king's bones. Xeron and his underlings succeeded, but their activities attracted too much attention.

A day ago, a party of adventurers confronted Xeron, defeating the sorcerer and his band. A couple of the robbers had moved through a small hole in the floor of the tomb, carrying with them the magic items and the bones. Where the opening leads, none now living know. The situation would be bad enough simply because the items stolen from

the tomb should not be allowed to fall into wicked hands. However, the actuality is even worse.

Prophecy has it that the forgotten king might return from beyond death to aid the realm in its most desperate hour. However, if his bones are not recovered, the prophecy might never be fulfilled. Worse, the prediction could be perverted to evil ends. (If the PCs are not playing this adventure as a continuation of *Barrow of the Forgotten King*, this information can be related to them by way of the King's Bones adventure hook; see below.)

## WHAT THE PCS KNOW

PCs know the information in the Adventure Background. They also know that the longer they wait to follow Xeron's underlings, the less chance they have of being able to catch up with them and retrieve the stolen items.

## WHAT THE PCS DON'T KNOW

Xeron's smallest servants descended the hole in the tomb of the forgotten king, and a hooded woman named Fadheela met them near a terrace in the dark tunnel below the hole. Fadheela demonstrated herself to be an emissary of the Vanguard of Sertrous by providing Xeron's minions with a golden key shaped into the proper identifying insignia. When Xeron's toadies still refused to give up their prizes and follow Fadheela downward, she slew them and took what they carried.

Fadheela descended from the terrace into the vertical shaft of a chimneylike cavern of exceptional size—an apparent dead end. In fact, the tear-shaped cavern is the focus of an earth node that allows passage between it and one other similar node. Using her knowledge of the node, Fadheela transported herself to the twin node far away and exited into the Underdark.

She then proceeded to her lair in the Underdark city of Pedestal, where she works as an agent for the local Assassins' Guild. She sent most of the items onward to the Vanguard's fortress through a magic portal, but she kept one of the legacy items for herself.

## ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

This adventure is divided into several sections.

**Earth Node (Area E):** When the PCs investigate, they discover the remains of Xeron's subordinates and a vertical natural chimney. Voracious insects nest at the hollow's lowest point, but an earth node there grants access to a twin node located in a gigantic Underdark cavern. All encounter areas associated with the earth node are coded with an E.

**Great Grotto (Area G):** Upon exiting the second node, the characters find themselves on the shore of a sunless deep called the Sullen Sea, beyond which they see a wide Underdark vista lit by pale light. The rest of the adventure

takes place in various locations throughout this area, which the local inhabitants call the Great Grotto. A duergar trader provides the PCs with information that leads them to cross the Sullen Sea, by way of a structure called the Oceanbridge, to the ruined city of Pedestal. All encounter areas associated with the Great Grotto are coded with a G.

**Pedestal (Area P):** This ravaged city is dangerous for surfacer and Underdark native alike, though habitable portions exist. To find what they seek and get along better in the alien environment of Pedestal, the PCs find an ally in the information broker Es Sarch. They must undertake a couple of missions for this unusual undead to gain his aid. All encounter areas associated with Pedestal are coded with a P.

**Rikaryon's Isle:** An island of luminescent fungus floats on the Sullen Sea. The PCs venture out to this living isle at Es Sarch's behest.

**Necromancer's Spike (Area S):** The natural column around which Pedestal is built, the Necromancer's Spike was once home to an infamous wizard named Maroe. Now Fadheela lives in part of the Spike. Inside, the PCs face the horrors left behind by Maroe and eventually confront Fadheela, gaining proof of her association with the Vanguard of Sertrous. Though the PCs manage to recover another item that was stolen from the king's tomb, they discover that the other items and the king's bones were already transported to the Vanguard's stronghold, the Fortress of the Serpent Order. All encounter areas associated with the Necromancer's Spike are coded with an S.

## ADVENTURE HOOKS

PCs can become involved in this adventure in a number of ways.

**Adventure Continues:** If the PCs completed DD1: *Barrow of the Forgotten King*, this adventure is specifically designed to pick up where that one left off. The characters descend through the hole in the forgotten king's tomb into the tunnel where this adventure begins.

**King's Bones:** A prominent citizen of the village of Kingsholm named Ian Turbrand contacts the PCs with a story about the looting of a venerated tomb, including the loss of a king's bones. He offers the PCs 500 gp apiece to return the missing bones—he doesn't care about the magic items that were also stolen. The bones are part of an ancient prophecy, Ian explains as he relates the information found in the Adventure Background, so they're very important. He directs the PCs to a tunnel recently discovered near Kingsholm's graveyard.

**Descent:** The PCs learn a way into the Underdark, and for campaign-related reasons provided by you, they choose to enter those subterranean depths. On the bodies of Xeron's minions, the characters discover a note that hints at powerful relics. They might then wish to find Fadheela in hopes of gaining one or more of the items she acquired.



## E1. CHIMNEY'S EDGE

When the characters reach the edge of the earth node, they come upon a terrace.

### When the PCs reach this point, read:

*The roughly hewn tunnel widens into a terrace, at least 20 feet wide and long, with a ceiling rising to 8 or 10 feet. The porch has no far wall, instead opening into a great, echoing hollow. This close to the cavernous rift, the air seems charged as if a great storm is imminent. The walls of the opening ascend and descend, moving closer together as they rise into darkness, forming a wider space as they go downward. Two humanoid forms lie unmoving near where the terrace drops off into the hollow.*

The PCs can make another DC 20 Spellcraft check or Intelligence check to recognize they've discovered an earth node. However, the benefits the earth node offers are not accessible to anyone outside E2.

**Corpses:** PCs who check the forms discover the corpse of a male halfling in violet robes and the toppled statue of a wide-eyed female goblin. A DC 15 Heal check is sufficient to determine the halfling was shot with several arrows, which were removed, and bitten in the face by a few tiny, fanged creatures. Two large bags lie nearby, though those bags are now empty. In his hand, the halfling yet clutches a message written in squiggly script. The language is Yuan-Ti, and the message reads:

*Fadheela,*

*I have been delayed. My servants carry the king's bones and all the items of his champions that I could find. Merthúvial I cannot locate. I shall spend a bit more time trying to find it, but I am sending these on so our rendezvous is not compromised. Please give the Vanguard my regards. I shall be along shortly.*

—Xeron

A DC 20 Search check (or a similar Survival check, made by someone who has the Track feat) is sufficient to discover faint tracks, apparently those of a Medium humanoid creature wearing boots. If someone who can follow tracks succeeded on the check, that character sees that the trail

leads off the edge of the terrace, as if the creature walked into empty space.

**Descending into E2:** The earth node is a vertical chimney, its width slowly narrowing as it rises, until it finally pinches off completely 40 feet above the level of the terrace. At the level of the terrace, the chimney is 15 feet in diameter. The smooth, vertical walls of the chimney descend through the utter darkness to the hard, flat floor of the node 150 feet below. There the diameter widens to about 50 feet, creating an elongated, teardrop-shaped hollow.

Successful DC 25 Climb checks are required to climb the wall of the chimney. Climbing a rope from the terrace brings the DC down to 15 (characters have no wall to brace against), while a knotted rope reduces the DC to 5.

## E2. WITHIN THE NODE

The characters descend the earth node to proceed.

### When the PCs reach the bottom of the node, read:

*The hollow's smooth floor is roughly circular. The air here is alive with energy and thick with the smell of developing lightning. Small holes puncture the walls near the floor, opening into a dozen small tunnels that run off into lightlessness. Dull dust is thickly heaped around the edges, thickest near the holes.*

The characters might believe they've reached a dead end, unless they are willing to navigate the narrow holes, 2-1/2 feet in diameter, that lead to the cockroach warrens (see E3). However, the nature of the earth node soon becomes clear.

**Dust:** PCs who sift through the dust discover that it is made up of thousands of disintegrating empty shells shed by insects (DC 15 Knowledge [nature] check to know the shells were left by cockroaches). If a character looking through the dust succeeds on a DC 10 Search check, that PC notes a few shell fragments indicate creatures that are a foot or more across.

**Earth Node Effects:** Spellcasters, manifesters, and characters who have spell-like abilities who stand on the floor of the node become aware of its power. Such characters sense that the power has been used within the last week. They also realize if they make a successful Intelligence check (DC 11 + spell level) when casting or manifesting within the node, the caster level or manifester level of the spell or power receives a +1 bonus. A failed Intelligence check means the spell or power functions normally.

Those same characters also realize that if they spend at least 8 hours resting in contact with the floor of the node, they can use a 2nd-level spell slot or 3 power points to instantly transfer themselves and willing allies to the earth node described in G1.

An hour after the PCs begin to rest to gain access to this effect, they trigger the tactical encounter, unless they already have done so by entering E3 (see that encounter).

**Tactical Encounter:** E2. Earth Node, page 34.

## EARTH NODES

If you have access to the FORGOTTEN REALMS supplement *Underdark*, the node described here and the one in area G1 are Class 1 nodes (*Underdark* 49), but with modifications. First, the effect stored in each node is a spell similar to *node door* (*Underdark* 59), except it is 2nd level and can be used only to make trips between E2 and G1. Second, the effect is available to any spellcaster or manifester, including creatures that have spell-like abilities, regardless of whether that creature has the Node Spellcasting feat (*Underdark* 26). In all other ways, treat this Class 1 earth node as described in *Underdark*.