

## The Ransacked Relic Draft (alternative Beginner's Box working title) by Ian Speidel/AyeSpydie

*This adventure is meant to work as a prelude to Sky King's Tomb, similar to how Menace Under Otari can be run as the introduction to Abomination Vaults. To facilitate this, details surrounding the villain, Frain, have both a SKT version and a "spoiler free" version, intended for use if the GM does not plan to run Sky King's Tomb following this adventure and/or does not want spoilers for that adventure.*

**SKT SPOILER VERSION:** Recently cave worm activity has unearthed a small trove of dwarven artifacts dating to the era of the Quest for the Sky. Though most are simple mundane tools and weapons, old coins, etc. there is one artifact that appears to potentially be incredibly significant- an intricately designed Warhammer which may have once belonged to General Rholdammen (a Storm Hammer aka the Electric version of Smoking Sword). **Frane**, a caligni and minor agent of Narseigus working to sow discord in The Depths of Highhelm, has learned that the hammer is being sent to the gnome historian Ria, who intends to determine its provenance and historical significance. Believing such an artifact could be brought to Highhelm more safely above ground and without drawing too much attention, she has arranged for a merchant to convey it to the city. Frane hopes to win Narseigus' favor by supplying him with a powerful artifact, and so arranges to have the hammer stolen en-route to Highhelm by The Grim Reminders, a group of Orc Indiana Jones types named for the Battle of Basalt Grim, who steal Dwarven treasures to ransom them off in exchange for stolen orc relics.

**SKT SPOILER FREE VERSION:** Recently cave worm activity has unearthed a small trove of dwarven artifacts dating to the era of the Quest for the Sky. Though most are simple mundane tools and weapons, old coins, etc. there is one artifact that appears to potentially be incredibly significant- an intricately designed Warhammer which may have once belonged to General Rholdammen (a Storm Hammer aka the Electric version of Smoking Sword). **Frane**. Frane is a caligni living in The Depths of Highhelm who has many grudges against the people of the city. He's been on the lookout for a way to cause strife and discord, and has learned that the hammer is being sent to the gnome historian Ria, who intends to determine its provenance and historical significance. Believing such an artifact could be brought to Highhelm more safely above ground and without drawing too much attention, she has arranged for a merchant to convey it to the city. Frane hopes that having such a powerful artifact in his possession will make him a true force to be reckoned with, and so arranges to have the hammer stolen en-route to Highhelm by The Grim Reminders, a group of Orc Indiana Jones types named for the Battle of Basalt Grim, who steal Dwarven treasures to ransom them off in exchange for stolen orc relics.

Ria arranged to take delivery of the Hammer at Zelgin's before then meeting

with the party (intro of SKT), however the delivery should have occurred before either of these meetings and its delay has her concerned. The route the delivery was to take was more direct than taking the main roads and was intended to keep the hammer away from prying eyes by then bringing it into the city through a rarely used smuggling route. However the road is rather remote and little used, so if something were to have happened on the way it could be days if not weeks before anyone finds them. Rio requests that the party head out to meet the couriers on the road, offering that it was likely only a simple delay but it would put her mind at ease.

Unfortunately, the hammer was stolen. Frane pretended to be sympathetic to The Grim Reminders' cause, gave them the information he had on the hammer and informed them of a good place to stop the wagon carrying it. However, he never intended to allow The Grim Reminders to take the hammer, and instead lied in wait with an ambush of his own. Striking just as the group of Grim Reminders stopped the cart carrying the hammer, his group killed everyone and setting up the scene of the ambush to make it look like the orcs were simple thieves and the whole thing had been a botched roadside robbery, hoping to destabilize relations between the dwarves and orcs in Highhelm, **causing mistrust and perhaps even violence between the groups/(SKT) weakening the city ahead of Narseigus' invasion.** These events took place late in the evening prior to the adventure's start.

Frane arranged for the ambush to happen near a small cave he discovered while planning smuggling routes which connects to Highhelm through an old tunnel. He forced the resident goblins to act as servants, threatening them with violence or death for disobedience. When the ambush party returned with the hammer but short one member, he realized that his entire plan could be jeopardized if anyone realized discovered a caligni had been involved, and sent the remaining goblins to burn the bridge and any evidence left behind. The goblins arrive shortly after the PCs do. When eventually confronted, Frane throws his journal detailing his plans into a fire in the cave. After defeating him, the PCs are able to recover the journal but it is badly burnt. They are only able to determine that he arranged the theft of the hammer and that he intended **to use the theft to cause trouble for the people of Highhelm/(SKT) to give it to someone named Narseigus, but the rest is too burnt to be legible.**

**Area A:** Abandoned passage into Highhelm, serves as a shortcut to the road the hammer was to be brought on. Roadway was rarely used and eventually abandoned following an earthquake triggered by a caveworm attack in the Darklands below several years ago. The earthquake opened up access to a series of caverns. Highway area ceiling is 100 feet, caves all 15 feet except for the Slurk nest in area **A8** which is 50 feet to the ceiling from the cave center. Highway walls made of carved stone; caverns natural stone.

1. **A1 [Perception; Recall Knowledge - Basic Combat; Saves]** Way to Portcullis (40xp Low; **Flashbeetle** x2) - Flashbeetle x1 has already used **Light Flash** for the day; on approach to a bend, characters see

something casting light on the cave wall. **XP Total (rolling): 40xp**

- DC10 Perception to notice light source is moving around slightly. On a Critical Success, they also hear faint chittering and scraping noises indicating the presence of multiple creatures.
- Flashbeetles separated from PCs by some stone steps, and do not react to them until they come down the steps. Are hungry and fight to the death.
- Recall Knowledge (Before fight) DC13 Nature or DC11/8 Lore check to realize they are flash beetles and that one can still use Light Flash + what it does.
  - ◆ The Beetle with Light Flash only uses the ability after it has taken damage.

## 2. **A2 [Skill Checks]** Stuck Portcullis

- DC15 Athletics Check to lift a stuck portcullis or DC15 Crafting to fix the lift mechanism.
  - ◆ On a failure, the portcullis only partially raises and requires a DC10 Acrobatics check to Squeeze under it, or a DC20 Athletics to unwedge it.
    - ◆ Small or smaller creatures automatically critically succeeds the Acrobatics check.
- Second working lift mechanism easily spotted once on the other side, no check.
- A character who investigates the area finds a second control mechanism labeled with a sign that is no longer legible. It once activated a spear trap similar to the one in area **13**, but the trap was destroyed when the bridge collapsed, so this mechanism now does nothing. A character who moves the lever finds that it can be switched on and off freely with no seeming resistance or sounds made by it.
- **Loot:** *On Crafting Success*; the mechanism was jammed due to a **Mesmerizing Opal** (7gp) being wedged into the lever. **Total Value (rolling): 7gp**

## 3. **A3 [Skill Checks; Hardness]** Abandoned Storeroom (40xp Trivial; **Animated Broom** x2)

- Locked door off of portcullis appears to be a storeroom containing numerous boxes and clutter that were seemingly abandoned, with two brooms leaning against the wall.
  - ◆ DC15 Thievery or DC20 Athletics to open the door
- One of the last people to work this guard post before the earthquake which destroyed the bridge was an apprentice wizard who animated the brooms in order to both practice her ritual casting and to have some company on boring guard shifts. She never returned after the road closed, and so the brooms have sat unused ever since. The brooms were trained to regard anyone not stationed at the post at the time of their creation as intruders, and

animate to attack 1 round after a PC has opened the door to area **3**.

- **Loot:** a variety of mundane tools fill crates stacked in the room; players can find any combination of gear from the table on Player Core 1 p291 worth up to 6sp in total as well as a crate with

**Alchemist's Fire** (3gp) x2. **Total Value (rolling): 13gp, 6sp**

- DC17 Perception to notice scuff marks on the floor that indicate a shelf can be pulled out, revealing a hole in the wall leading to **4**.

4. **A4 [Weakness, Resistance, Immunity; Swarms, Saves]** Smuggler's Tunnel (60xp Moderate; **Spider Swarm** x2) - tunnel ceiling is low (7 feet) so bats can never fly too high for players to reach. Bats do not follow players who retreat back to **3**. PCs automatically see "dozens of bats". **XP Total (rolling): 140xp**

- Narrow passage leads to a small, low tunnel. Tunnel ends in rubble indicating a collapse. A skeleton can be seen sticking out from the rocks with a small bag. Party can see a web containing hundreds of spiders coating the floor of the cavern, but the spiders do not react to the PCs unless a PC steps on the web (it is not difficult terrain).
- Roll a Secret Recall Knowledge check (DC15 Nature; DC13 or 11 lore) for all PCs. A character who succeeds knows that this many creatures would make up a swarm, and that area of effect damage is effective against swarms. A creature that critically succeeds learn one of their resistances. (Phrased as "you know that slashing damage will injure individual spiders, but won't be as effective against so many of them at once".)
- **Loot:** Sack with the skeleton contains precious stones (5gp), an **Everlight Crystal** (15gp), and a **Marvelous Miniature (Ladder)** (3gp). Lying on the ground in front of the body is a **Pick** (7sp). **Total Value (rolling): 36gp, 13sp**

5. **A5 Broken Bridge**

- A stone bridge used to span this gap, but it collapsed years ago and due to this path being rarely used, no one cared to repair it.
  - ◆ A character who succeeds a DC18 Society Recall Knowledge knows this information. On a critical success, they know that the lack of traffic through here makes these caverns beneficial for anyone looking to enter or leave Highhelm without drawing too much attention. On a Critical Failure they believe that the bridge was intentionally sabotaged to assassinate visiting Orc dignitaries.

6. **A6 [Difficult Terrain; Abilities]** Earth Scamp Nest (40xp Trivial; **Earth Scamp** x1) **XP Total (rolling): 180xp**

- A cave-in blocks the road out of Highhelm, but a side passage offers another path- through an Earth Scamp's nest. The path is littered with stones and gravel that make the entire passage

difficult terrain and also conceal the Earth Scamp.

- ◆ A player who Seeks (DC12 Perception) sees the Earth Scamp hiding in the rocks.
  - ◆ If character speaks to the scamp in Petran and/or holds out the Mesmerizing Opal from **A2**, the Scamp will take the offered treasure and allow the party to pass unmolested. Party earns the XP as if they'd defeated it in combat.
- ◆ Scamp attacks the party if anyone enters the difficult terrain and it wasn't spotted and placated with treasure as above, rolling Stealth for initiative.

#### 7. **A7 [Foreshadowing]** Dead Halfling

- A dead halfling lies in the middle of a cave, covered in and surrounded by a crusty material.
  - ◆ The halfling was killed by a Slurk that sometimes lurks in this cavern as he made his way to the Makeshift Guard Post.
    - ◆ DC15 Medicine to realize it was gored by a tusked creature, and DC16 Nature to determine that the crusty material is dried slime.
      - ◆ A critical success on either check reveals the attacker to have been a Slurk.
      - ◆ **Loot:** The Halfling was a laborer attempting to take a shortcut to his job site and was woefully unprepared for what he encountered. He carried only his lunch (one day's worth of rations for one person) wrapped in a simple linen cloth (4sp), and a coin pouch with 2sp, 13cp. **Total Value (rolling): 36gp, 19sp, 13cp**

#### 8. **A8 [Miniboss; Status Conditions]** Slurk Den (60xp Low; **Slurk** x1) **XP Total (rolling): 240xp**

- The Slurk is currently resting in its cavern after a successful hunt into the Darklands from area **A5**. It prefers to rest here due to the relative safety of the area, and by sheer coincidence everyone who has passed through its den since it began resting here has traveled through while it was out hunting. The Halfling in area **A7** was the first person to have encountered it here.
- The slurk is awake but resting (prone) after a long hunt, and has the Fatigued condition. If they party does not draw its attention it does not react to them until a character moves halfway down the ramp or otherwise enters the area at the base of the cliff.
- If the slurk goes first it uses all three actions on its first turn to use its **Belly Grease** ability. Otherwise it moves up to to use its **Slime Squirt** ability, only attacking if a creature moves close enough for it to reach them with one action. If there is any character standing at the top of the cliff, it climbs the cliff to attack that creature. Similarly, it pursues any character that flees into **A7** or **A10**, but does not pursue creatures who flee beyond those points.

- The ramp and cliff are 20 feet high and gradually decline around the southeast corner of the cavern. Climbing up or down the cliff requires a DC20 Athletics check.

9. **A9 [Puzzle]** Hidden Grotto (80xp) **XP Total (rolling): 320xp**

- DC18 Perception to notice the entrance (Secret Check). A portion of the wall of this cavern looks like the natural stone around it, but a successful check reveals that the stone is not exactly the same as its surroundings. A player who investigates finds a small indentation in the wall ~2 feet from the ground that, when pressed, causes the stone to slide away into the ground.
- A narrow passage slopes downward into a small, worked stone cave. Long ago a clever kineticist and her party created this chamber to hold their treasures, though ultimately the last surviving member of their group used it as a memorial to their times together, having taken the treasure elsewhere.
- Four irregular stone pedestals with indentations at the top are arranged in a diamond shape. Each pedestal leans slightly towards the center and is painted with bright, pastel tinted paint. The north pedestal is white with light blue waving patterns running down its sides, the east pedestal is blue with white swirls, the south pedestal is a light brown with simple red flame shapes, and the west pedestal is a light green with triangular arrangements of three brown circles decorating it.
- Carved into the stone on the west is dwarven text that reads, "Something special can be found/in the flowing brooks and blowing breeze/resting in the dirt under shady trees/gathered around the fire."
- Players may believe they need to place those elements into the indentations on the pedestals, such as pouring water into the north one or a lit torch in the southern one. However, the designs of the pillars are red herrings. The true answer to the text on the wall is "friendship", and the treasure is revealed by having each person in the room place their hand on the indentation, symbolizing the friendship of the creator's party.
- **Loot:** Once the puzzle is solved, the words "something special" in the wall carving slide away to reveal a small compartment. Inside is a woodblock carving of the faces of two dwarves, an elf, and a goblin. On the back, carved into the wood in different handwritings are the names Olbrek, Therra, Willowseer, and Kindle. Beneath the woodblock carving is a single sheet of aged vellum on which there is a short note written in Elvish, "Therra passed this last moon, and now only I remain. To think those three would mean all the world to me. Kindle was the first to go, her people live such short lives that it seemed we'd only been traveling together a few months as we watched her grow old before our eyes. Olbrek was next, taken

before his time, as happens to so many in our line of work. Therra and I built a wonderful life together in Iadara. Placing her in the Tolorr Crypt was the hardest of all. I am alone here now, but I carry them all with me still in my heart. To you who find these words, treasure well those you love, for they are the greatest treasure of all. Signed, Willowseer Veldollow the last remaining, in the memory of my beloved Therra, Olbrek, and Kindle, may we all meet again. 16th Desnus, 4187". These items are not of any particular value, but Ria would pay 10gp for the pair of items to put them on display as historic artifacts.

- ♦ If a player desires to learn more about any of these individuals, a character who succeeds a DC23 Society check recalls that there was once a popular story about a dwarf and elf who were adventurers together and eventually married, and that after the dwarf had passed the elf lived out the rest of her days in Highhelm as an honorary member of her wife's clan, and believes that this cave may have been built by one of them.

10. **A10 [Difficult Terrain]** A cavern slopes gently downward terminating in a ruined storeroom. The area is strewn with rubble, making it difficult terrain.

11. **A11 [Actions]** Ruined Store Room

- The earthquake that destroyed the bridge also tore away the walls of this room and created the cavern in area **A10**.
- A character can Leap or Long Jump from here to area **A12**, a check is not necessary.

12. **A12 [Affecting NPCs]** South Portcullis (30xp for activating the trap)  
**XP Total (rolling): 350**

- An abandoned cart hangs precariously over the edge of the bridge as it was beginning to cross when the earthquake struck. Others have looted most of the cargo it held, but a single chest remains in it as previous looters didn't think it was worth the risk to claim it. The chest belonged to an alchemicals merchant and bears a brass plate that reads "Beetlespore's Bombs and Elixirs" arching over a stylized stamp of a Kobold's face.
  - ♦ Canny players may find a way to secure the cart in place, or otherwise attempt a DC25 Acrobatics check to Balance on the cart to reach the chest. On a success they are able to grab the chest and return safely. On a failure the cart's precarious balance comes loose, and the character falls back onto the ground as the cart tumbles off of the edge into the darkness below.
- **Loot: Lesser Blasting Stone** (3gp) x1, a **Lesser Eagle-Eye Elixir** (4gp) x1, and **Lesser Elixir of Life** (3gp) x2. **Total Value (rolling): 46gp, 19sp, 13cp**
- The portcullis seems to have been intentionally sealed shut, with

the metal fused together, requiring a DC35 Athletics check to Force Open (likely not possible for most characters). Similarly, the mechanism to open the door is non-functional; a character who attempts to open the gate that way finds the lever floats freely, similar to the trap activation in area **A2**.

- Unlike area **A2**, the trap activation mechanism here does work, and the sign above the mechanism reads "Defense" and is set to the off position. Switching it to "on" activates the Bollards trap in area **A13**. The Bollards trap was not originally hazardous, but over time the bollards have shifted and are stuck in place, so activating the trap appears to do nothing. See trap entry in area **A13**.

### 13. **A13 [Checks - Victory Points Systems; Saves, Enemy Buffs]**

Makeshift Guard Post (Moderate 80; **Giant Centipede** x2, **Mitflit** x2) - PCs find a makeshift "guard post" with a sign that has "Pay Toll" written poorly and misspelled in Sakvroth. The Mitflits are both sleeping at the post while the centipedes are preoccupied with eating a dead Flashbeetle. **XP Total (rolling): 438**

- In combat, the mitflits try to attack the smallest or weakest looking PCs while directing the Centipedes to attack anyone stronger looking.
- The party can attempt to sneak past the mitflits without waking them by making one DC10 Stealth check per player (or DC14 if the Bollard Trap was triggered as the noise wakes the mitflits from their deep sleep but does not fully rouse them or alert them to the PC's presence. This uses the rules of the Victory Point system on GM Core p185.
  - ◆ A PC earns 2 "Stealth Points" on a Critical Success, 1 on a Success, 0 on a Failure, and -1 on a critical failure. If the party earns at least 1.5 times as many "Stealth Points" as there are players (usually 6 for a party with four players), they sneak past the guard post without issue and earn the full xp as if they had defeated the encounter.
  - ◆ If the party earns fewer "Stealth Points" than the number of players, the Mitflits are startled awake and demand the party stop to pay a Toll of either 3gp per PC or a valuable item of equal price (usually 12gp) to pass. If no PCs share a language with them, they get frustrated and attack.
- If the Mitflits are woken and the party are unwilling to pay the toll, they can attempt to Coerce the Mitflits into letting them pass (Intimidation DC10), Make an Impression (Society DC10) then Request (Society DC8) or Lie to them about the worth of an item (Deception DC14) to be allowed to pass.
  - ◆ On a critical success the Mitflits allow the party to pass, either scared into submission (Coerce), feeling generous (Request), or believing the item offered to be worth the cost of the toll



(Lie).

- ◆ On a successful Coerce, the Mitflits are sacred into letting the players pass. On a successful Request they allow the party to pass for 5gp total.
- ◆ On a failure or critical failure the Mitflits are convinced they can defeat the party/angered into attacking the party.
- **Bollard Trap:**
  - ◆ Notice DC20 Perception to see the circles on the floor the (tops of the bollards)
  - ◆ Disable DC18 Thievery (trained) on the triggering tiles
  - ◆ Bollard Barrage [reaction] When a creature moves off of the bollards trap area, the shift in weight allows the bollards to spring up. The trap rolls a Bollard Strike against each creature in the area, including the triggering creature. The area is then difficult terrain until the trap is reset.
  - ◆ Strike: Bollard +10, Damage 1d8+4 bludgeoning
  - ◆ Reset: The bollards sink back into the ground after 1 minute
- **Loot:** If the Mitflits are defeated, the Mitflits allowed the party to pass due to a critical success on Coarse, or the party snuck past the sleeping Mitflits with at least twice as many "Sneak Points" as party members, the party can take all of the "tolls" the mitflits have collected.
  - ◆ **Loot: +1 Shortsword (35gp), Shining Ammunition (arrow) (3gp) x2, Travel Magazine with an Orc on the cover (1sp), several nice looking stones (1 gp), 2gp, 10sp, 13cp. Total Value (rolling): 91gp, 30sp, 26cp**

**Area B:** Backroad to Highhelm; a minor backroad the hammer was being carried along, leads to the site of the cart ambush and eventually Frane's hideout. Dirt road mostly open to the sky, cutting through the forest which has been cut back from the road. Some areas muddy due to recent rains, exposing footprints at ambush site.

**14. B1 [Skill Check] Bend in the Road (40xp Low, Riding Horse x1) XP Total (rolling): 478**

- The horse that was pulling the ambushed wagon broke loose in the scuffle and has been wandering the road ever since, spooked and skittish. If combat breaks out, the horse is permanently Frightened 1.
- The horse runs up to its speed if a player approaches the horse outside of combat, unless they succeed a DC14 Nature check to calm it. (Award them the 40xp as if they'd defeated it in combat).
  - ◆ On a success the horse realizes the players mean it no harm, and will follow them or allow them to hitch it somewhere to reacquire later.
  - ◆ If the player critically fails this check or if the players corner the horse so that it cannot run without moving adjacent to a

player, it becomes hostile.

- In combat, the horse uses its Hoof attack against any creature adjacent to it at the start of its turn. If no creature is adjacent to it it first strides up to the nearest creature and uses its hoof strike twice. One subsequent turns, it uses one hoof strike against an adjacent creature if applicable. It uses all remaining actions to Gallop away from the players (and then strides if it did not make a hoof strike) and then flees combat.
  - ◆ If combat starts and the players do not wish to fight the horse, they can reattempt the Nature check (DC17) with a -2 circumstance penalty. If this check also fails, the horse can no longer be calmed and will behave as above.

15. **B2 [Checks - Aid; Buffs/Debuffs]** Roadside Shrine - a small shrine overlooks the road, but the stairs leading up to it have crumbled away

- DC15 Athletics to clamber up the broken stairs; aid reduces to DC10
- DC15 Religion to realize the shrine is a multi-faith shrine to gods who protect travelers.
  - ◆ On a critical success they recognize symbology related to Desna, Abadar, and Gozreh.
- **Boon/Bane-** There is a small donation box in the shrine containing 13gp, 29sp, 72cp **Not included in rolling total.**
  - ◆ A character who donates at least 1gp to the shrine gains the boon **Safe Travels** - You gain 5 temporary hit-points that last until your next daily preparations.
  - ◆ A character who takes any amount of money from the box must make a DC20 Will save. On a failure, they feel a sense of foreboding as if someone is watching them, like bandits lying in wait for an ambush. The next time you roll initiative, you must roll twice and take the worse result as you jump at the shadows of more imagined enemies. This is a Misfortune effect.
    - ◆ On a DC15 Religion check, players realize they can remove this debuff by returning all of the money they stole, and then making a sizable donation (5gp or more). This does not grant them the benefits of **Safe Travels**.
- **Loot:** A previous traveler left behind some tools she thought would help future adventurers, a **Jade Cat** (6gp) x1 and a **Scroll of Deja Vu (1st Rank)** (4gp) x1 placed inside a **Walking Cauldron** (12gp) x1 (added to final loot value tally but not here)

16. **B3 [Tiny Creatures; Alternate Solutions]** Shrine Rest Area (40xp Trivial; **Viper** x2) **XP Total (rolling): 518**

- In addition, the shrine has a small campground behind it which is hidden from the road but can be seen when at the shrine, it provides a safe place for PCs to rest for the night if they wish to do

so. However they must first deal with the small viper nest living there.

- The vipers are more frightened of the PCs than hostile, and hiss to warn away any PC who approaches them, attacking only if a player comes within 5 feet.
  - ◆ In combat, each Viper uses its Slink action the first time it is triggered. Afterwards/otherwise, Readies an action with the same trigger as Slink, with the action being to move into that creature's space. On its next turn, it uses as many actions as it can to Strike that PC. If it starts its turn with neither Slink nor a Readied action triggered, the Viper flees combat.
- Players may come up with a variety of ways to scare off the snakes without entering combat. Any reasonable idea they come up with, such as making loud noises to frighten them, throwing small rocks in their general direction etc. If they do so, the vipers flee. Grant the players 40xp as if they had defeated the Vipers in combat.

17. **B4 [Investigation]** Scene of the Ambush (80xp for determining the Orcs were set up) **XP Total (rolling): 598xp**

- Players can find a variety of clues through investigation:
  - ◆ A player who checks a body (cart drivers or orc) finds that they have nothing on them aside from their weapons/armor.
    - ◆ DC12 Perception to notice footprints around each body indicating someone going around to each after they died.
  - ◆ DC15 Medicine - all orcs and the dwarves on the cart were killed quickly with knife wounds
    - ◆ (No check) none of the scattered weapons/loot are knives
  - ◆ DC17 Crafting (or DC 10 with an appropriate Lore skill such as Smithing Lore or Warfare Lore) to realize that the Orcs' were armed with blunted training swords.
  - ◆ DC13 Perception - Obvious signs that the Orcs clearly hid in wait on the far/Highhelm side of the bridge, but footprints rush up from *behind* the wagon
  - ◆ Pile of clothes
    - ◆ DC19 Society During the ambush, one of the caligni was killed when by an orc who managed to grab a knife to defend himself, and when it died it turned to shadow leaving its clothes behind. A PC who succeeds the society check notices the hole through the shirt where the caligni was stabbed and realizes that whatever was wearing these clothes vanished when it died. On a critical success they realize that it may have been a caligni, shadowy humanoids from the Darklands who vanish in a burst of light and shadow when they die, leaving their possessions behind.
  - ◆ Footprints lead away from the bridge down into the stream bed, appearing to lead to the north along the stream.

- Once players have at least attempted three of the clues, move to **18.**

**18. B5 [Combat Tactics; Getting Information]** Scene of the Ambush (80xp Moderate; **Goblin Warrior** x4) **XP Total (rolling): 678xp**

- Goblins noisily appear in the distance, singing a song that steadily grows louder and closer. Party rolls initiative and has one round to act before Goblins can see the party. Goblins appear from the same area the Caligni previously waited; during the first round they all spend their three actions reaching that area and do not have line of sight on the bridge. On the second round each Goblin begins its turn at [ROCK OR WHATEVER].
- Goblins attempt to Flank to benefit from Backstabber on their weapons or hang back and shoot short bows if they can't safely flank.
- The Goblins fight to the death (hoping to win their cave back from Frane), but the players may be able to capture one of the Goblins and question them.
  - ◆ DC13 Intimidation or DC20 Diplomacy to convince the Goblin to talk.
    - ◆ **Critical Success** As success, and the Goblin tells them that "the nasty shadow man" gave the orders to burn the bridge.
    - ◆ **Success** The Goblin tells the party that they were promised "a reward" for setting fire to the bridge.
    - ◆ **Failure** The Goblin laughs and tells the party he thinks the party would burn good, too.
  - ◆ If pressed further after a success, the goblin will answer to the best of its ability. Some possible questions and answers the goblin provides include:
    - ◆ **Who promised the reward/is the shadow man?** Mean, nasty longshanks. Bosses the others around, stole our cave.
    - ◆ **What was the reward?** Don't know, but better be good. Maybe he'll give our cave back.
    - ◆ **Where is you cave?** (Goblin points up the river) Up stream in the woods.
    - ◆ The goblin does not know much more than this and ignores further questions, instead complaining about the "nasty dogs", "big, mean dogs", and "stupid, evil dogs" that Frane has placed outside the goblins' cave. If asked about the dogs he only expresses hatred (and fear) towards them.
      - ◆ **Cave Password:** The goblin's ranting about the dogs reveals a password to enter the cave safely: "Ugly dogs, stupid mongrels! Says if we use a password they won't attack, but I don't trust it. 'Pugwampi?!' Stupid!

Stupid dog gremlin for stupid dogs!"

- ◆ These goblins lived in a cave up steam (entrance at area **C5**) but while setting up the ambush Frane and his followers decided to use it as a temporary hideout as it contains a safe Darklands path back to Highhelm and provides them a chance to lay low in case anyone tries to investigate the theft. The goblins were press-ganged into helping Frank, but do so very reluctantly and are given almost no information. They do not know why Frane set up this ambush, what he stole, or what they plan to do with it. Any goblin allowed to live follows behind the party out of view, watching but unseen, hoping that the party might deal with Frane so that they can have their cave back.

- **Loot:**

- ◆ Goblins: **Oil** (1cp) x3, **Torch** (1cp) x2
- ◆ Caligni: **Masquerade Scarf** (30gp) x1, **Dagger** (2sp) x1
- ◆ Cart: most of the goods in the cart have been destroyed by the Caligni as they were searching for the hammer, but a pewter mug with an intricate design (3gp) survived. **Total Value (rolling): 117gp, 26sp, 18cp**

19. **B6 [Simple Hazard]** Slippery Creek Bank (8xp) **XP Total (rolling): 686xp**

- Rain the previous day (before the ambush) left the banks down to the creek incredibly slippery with mud
  - ◆ DC15 Perception to Notice
  - ◆ Disable: DC13 Survival to spread gravel or grass on the path to provide stable footing or DC18 Acrobatics check to carefully move down the path.
    - ◆ Survival disables the Hazard for everyone; Acrobatics is per creature.
  - ◆ Trigger: Medium or larger creature enters the trail down. DC15 Reflex save to avoid losing balance.
    - ◆ **Failure** The creature falls prone and slides down the bank.
    - ◆ **Critical Failure** As failure, and the creature takes 1d6 bludgeoning damage.

20. **[Exploration Mode: Tracking]**

- The footprints disappear into the creek but can be quickly spotted again.
  - ◆ DC15 Survival to Track the trail along the creek.
    - ◆ In the event of a critical failure, a Secret DC10 Perception check allows a PC to notice a bloodied knife which one of the Caligni accidentally dropped while walking alongside the stream, indicating that the party is headed the right way.

**Area C:** Stream and forest path to Frane's hideout. Clearly a wild area not

typically traversed by humanoids. Path to hideout is more a game trail than a footpath, overgrown with tall grass, bushes, and tree roots (though not to the point of being difficult terrain). Area slopes up from the stream bank before sloping back down to the caves.

21. **C1 [Peaceful Monsters]** Hunting Reefclaw (40xp Low; **Reefclaw** x1)

**XP Total (rolling): 726xp**

- After 20 minutes of following the stream, the party comes across a single reefclaw hunting in the stream near its nest.
- The creature is Neutral towards the party, and only attacks the party if they attack it first.
- DC15 Occultism Secret Check to know that Reefclaws have powerful claws which can crush prey. On a critical success, they know that reefclaws are intelligent enough to understand simple speech, though they are unable to speak themselves.
  - ◆ A character trained in Nature can make a DC17 Nature check instead.
  - ◆ If no characters succeed at these checks, the reefclaw might still react to things the party says, indicating it can understand them.
- Characters can make a DC14 Diplomacy check to Make an Impression with the Reefclaw, and a character who offers it any food while doing so gains a +1 circumstance bonus to the check.
  - ◆ On a failure, the reefclaw ignores the party, not interacting with them again unless they are hostile towards it. On a critical failure, the reefclaw is annoyed with them and wanders further down the stream to wait for them to leave.
  - ◆ On a success or critical success, the reefclaw does its best to answer simple questions asked of it, splashing the water with its claw to indicate "yes" or a positive response, and slowly waving its claw back and forth to indicate "no" or a negative response. If it does not understand the question, or otherwise does not know how to indicate an answer, it simply stares at the person who asked it. Possible questions the party might ask:
    - ◆ **Did anyone come this way recently?** The reefclaw splashes the water with its claw and then uses it to point to the bend in the stream where there is a hidden path which the caligni used to reach their hideout.
    - ◆ **How many are there?** The reefclaw splashes its claw into the water three times.
    - ◆ **When did they pass through?** If anyone has visual representations of the moon or stars on their person, the reefclaw points at it to indicate that it was last night. Otherwise it does not know how to answer this question and stares at the person who asked.

- ♦ **Did the have the hammer?** The reefclaw slaps the water with its claw.
  - ♦ **Who were they?** It does not know who the caligni are so it stares at the person who asked while waving its claw.
  - ♦ **Will you come with us?** It waves its claw and then snaps it.
  - If the party are able to gain information by speaking with the reefclaw, award them 40xp as if they had defeated it in combat.
22. **[Tracking 2] Forest Trail (30xp on Completion) XP Total (rolling): 756xp**
- Second DC15 Survival check to follow the changing trail. A character who received help from the Reefclaw gets a +2 circumstance bonus to the check, and if they get a critical failure it's treated as only a Failure instead. Success sees the tracks lead to area **C2** and eventually to **C5**.
23. **C2 [Combat; Ferocity] Forest Trail (80xp Moderate; Weak Boar x2) XP Total (rolling): 836xp**
- A pair of territorial boars regularly roam this section of the forest and charge the party upon spotting them. Each boar uses Boar Charge and then Strikes with its tusk attack on their first turn, each targeting a different player.
  - A boar reduced to 10HP or which uses its Ferocity ability flees combat.
24. **C3 Overlook**
- A short path leads to an overlook which allows the PCs to see the **C5** from another angle than described in C5. The overlook is 40 feet above C5. Climbing down from the overlook requires a DC30 Athletics and is especially difficult for those who do not have climbing gear. A character without expert proficiency or better in Athletics automatically fails any attempts to do so without climbing gear. The use of Climbing Gear lowers the DC to 20, though it is still difficult as the cliff face is slick with moisture.
    - ♦ If any character attempts to climb down, the dogs in area **C5** automatically become alerted when a character has moved 20 or more feet down the cliff face and will wait at the base of the cliff to attack any character who enters their reach, though they may be dealt with as described in area **C5**.
    - ♦ A character who falls from the cliff lands prone on the ground and takes bludgeoning damage equal to half the distance of their fall (20 damage if falling from the top of the cliff)
      - ♦ To prevent the fall a character may Grab an Edge with a DC of 18.
25. **C4 Secluded Clearing**
- A secluded clearing off of the path provides a safe space for players to rest for the night if needed.

26. **C5 [Recon; Pack Attack; Alternate Solutions]** Hideout Entrance

(Low 60xp; **Guard Dog x3**) **XP Total (rolling): 896xp**

- When initially scouting out the ambush site, Frane came across a pack of wild dogs and was able to easily gain their loyalty by offering them food. Though Frane is cruel to most, dogs are an exception. He is kind to them and feeds them generously, so the dogs now guard the entrance to the cave loyally to defend their new master.
- The players come to a low ridge looking over the cave entrance, giving them the chance to decide what to do before the dogs are aware of them.
  - ◆ Many players may feel uncomfortable with the idea of killing or even harming dogs. Before this encounter, make it clear that violence is not the only the only solution to this encounter. As such, a number of other options are available.
    - ◆ The players may bribe the dogs with food and a successful DC18 Nature check.
    - ◆ If the players heard the password "pugwampi" from the goblin, they can say it to the dogs, changing their attitude from hostile to friendly.
    - ◆ Using a spell such as Summon Animal to summon a small animal such as a squirrel will cause all of the dogs to chase it off.
      - ◆ Similarly, a familiar or a spell such as Pest Form or even Figment can be used for the same effect.
      - ◆ If the party was able to discern that their enemy are Caligni, a player can disguise themselves as one using Illusory Disguise or a Masquerade Scarf. The only Caligni the dogs have ever seen are Frane and his allies, so they believe a PC disguised as a Caligni is with Frane and do not bother them or anyone accompanying them.
    - ◆ These are not the only options available. If the players come up with a method of luring the dogs away, deceiving them, befriending them, or any other means of avoiding combat, allow the players to do so and grant them 60xp as if they had defeated the dogs in combat.
  - If combat does ensue, the dogs make use of Pack Attack whenever possible and try to focus on the smallest or weakest looking PC. If your players are hesitant to fight, a dog flees into the forest when reduced to half HP or less.
  -

**Area D:** Once an escape passage created by a wealthy and paranoid merchant, this cave has served as the den for many animals and monsters over the centuries. Most recently, a group of goblins had been living here before Frane



discovered the cave and decided to use it for himself. Entrance is mostly natural before leading to a staircase down into the earth, with further staircases and passages slowly sloping back down to the Depths in Highhelm.

**27. D1 [Complex Hazard] Cave Entrance (80xp Moderate; Drowning Pit x1) - GM Core p106. XP Total (rolling): 976xp**

- Centuries ago, this cave served as a secret escape passage for a Highhelm merchant who was paranoid about enemies attempting to assassinate him. While that never came to pass, he prepared many traps to harry any would-be assassins who might follow his flight. Most of these traps have long since been triggered, disabled, or fallen into disrepair. When Frane took over this cave he discovered this trap, disabled by some adventurer long ago. Thinking it perfect to deal with anyone who might stumble upon his plans, he repaired and reactivated it.
- Frane and his followers are deeper in the cave and do not investigate the noise of the trap activating, assuming that one of the Goblins has fallen in if they hear any commotion.

**28. D2 [Major Mooks] Cave Interior (80xp Moderate - Severe; Caligni Dancer x2) XP Total (rolling): 1056xp**

- The room was once a trap which filled with poison gas when a hidden pressure plate in the doorway to **D3** was depressed after another plate in front of the door from **D1** had been depressed, allowing the owner to poison any potential pursuers- the thick stone doors would slam shut trapping anyone following him. Earthquakes in the centuries since long since dissipated all of the gas, however, and the pressure plates have been disabled or fallen into disrepair. Either pressure plate can be repaired with a DC20 Crafting check taking 10 minutes if a player wishes to reengage the door portions of the trap. Buttons visible on the outside of each door can be used to unseal the room from the outside and are still functional.
- The two caligni dancers are impatiently waiting for the goblins to return so they can bully them more, and so are watching the door in anticipation if the trap in area **24** was triggered, otherwise they are lounging and playing cards. In either case, they do not have their weapons drawn when they first encounter the PCs.
  - ◆ If the trap was triggered, each spends the first action of their turn drawing a weapon, otherwise each spends their first action to stand and then their second to draw a weapon.
- The first caligni in the initiative uses an action to cast Courageous Anthem on their first turn, and either will cast it if they can set up a Sneak Attack.
- The caligni try to set each other up for Sneak Attack whenever they can, and target whoever seems to be the biggest threat first.
- Both fight to the death, as they fear Frane will do something far

worse to them if they fail him.

- **Loot:** This room contains some loot left behind by the original owner as well as some things stolen by the Goblins living here before Frane began using it. A character with Thieves Tools and trained in Thievery can attempt a DC20 Thievery check to open the chest they are stored in, and each of the caligni had a key which could open it. **Scroll of Heal - 1st Rank** (4gp) x2, **Potency Crystal** (4gp) x1, **Darkvision Elixir** (6gp) x1. **Total Value (rolling): 135gp, 26sp, 18cp**

29. **D3** Twisting Tunnels

- These passages were designed to confuse anyone who might be pursuing the original merchant owner, buying him more time to flee. Several passages end in dead-ends, while others have collapsed over the centuries.

30. **D4** Viewing Platform

- This secret passage (DC23 Perception to spot the entrance in D1) allowed the merchant to double back and view the final moments of anyone trapped in **D2**. Both the door and the wall to D2 feature magically transparent viewports in the stone which cannot be seen from the opposite side, allowing him not only to watch D2 but also see that the coast was clear to leave into D1 which are activated by pressing in a prominently jutting out stone in the wall.

31. **D5 [Major Boss Fight]** Cave Interior (120xp Severe; **Frane- Variant Caligni Hunter** x1) - Neither has Darkening Poison **XP Total (rolling): 1196xp** (If the Party is Level 2 for this fight, add **Caligni Skulker** x1 to this room)

- The PCs should be level 2 by the time they reach this room, however you may wish to run Sky King's Tomb or another adventure after this one and/or use milestone leveling, in which case the party may remain level 1. There are different versions of this encounter depending on the level of the party when they reach Frane.
- Hearing the commotion in the other room, Frane has set fire to his journal containing the details of his plan as he no longer has need of it and doesn't like leaving loose ends. He is ready for battle when the PCs confront him. He has forgone the use of his shortwords, wearing both in their scabbards, and instead opts to test the strength of the Storm Hammer against the PCs. Convinced that he can easily defeat them and blinded by his own ambition, he fights to the death.
- Before combat begins, the PCs may try to speak with Frane. Believing he will be able to kill them easily, he is somewhat free with his words though sarcastic and taking joy in toying with the PCs, and he never makes any specific mention of Narseigus or direct allusions to his plans.

- ♦ A player who wishes to know more about Frane may Recall Knowledge (DC24 Society) to learn the following information about him.
  - ♦ **Critical Success** As success, and they know that Frane has recently been rumored to be stirring up trouble between the dwarves of Highhelm and the city's marginalized communities.
    - ♦ **SKT Version:** As success, and they know that Frane went from being a no-name figure to someone of interest very recently, and rumor has it that some larger power is backing him from the shadows.
  - ♦ **Success** Frane is a smalltime bandit and crook who has some dealings around The Depths in Highhelm. The theft of this hammer might be a power play to gain more recognition.
  - ♦ **Failure (Dubious Knowledge only)** Frane is known as a smalltime bandit and crook in The Depths of Highhelm, but that is actually a cover for his real identity: an art thief and fence who deals in high value artifacts and auctions them off to the highest bidder.
  - ♦ **Critical Failure** Frane is rumored to be the secret leader and benefactor of The Grim Reminders, a group of Orcs who steal dwarven cultural artifacts and ransom them in exchange for the return of orc cultural artifacts held in museums and private collections.
- ♦ Some potential questions the PCs might ask are:
  - ♦ **Who are you?** My name is Frane and I am but a humble merchant. Why have you come here and murdered my associates? The authorities in Highhelm will demand answers, you know!
  - ♦ **What do you want with the hammer?** What, this? It's mine, purchased for a fair price! Though if you wish to inspect it up close I'll be happy to oblige you!
  - ♦ **Did you/Why did you kill the orcs and the cart driver?** You think I did that? I could never! It's just terrible what happened there, isn't it? A bunch of orcs attacking a poor defenseless caravan of dwarf travelers and kill them all. Just terrible. Thank goodness those mighty dwarves were able to slay a few of their enemies too. But so terrible that all of those artifacts would be lost... What will the people of Highhelm think of this when they find out those orcs did? (At this he chuckles with a wicked smile.)
  - ♦ **Why are you doing this?** That, I'm afraid, is need-to-know.
  - ♦ **Did you send the goblins to burn the cart?** I did; unfortunately I needed them to tie up some loose ends.

Loose ends which it seems now includes you lot as well.

- **Level 2 Fight:**

- ◆ On his first turn, Frane casts Darkness in the room, centered on himself. Afterwards, he tries to benefit from Sneak Attack in the darkness, activating the effect of the Storm Hammer the first time he could use it with Sneak Attack. If one of the PCs has Darkvision, he focuses his attacks on them and attempts to use Figment to make the Off-Guard against him, but does not re-attempt this strategy if it fails at any point. He uses Encircling Command if it would allow him to make a darkvision PC Off-Guard. He uses the Storm Hammer exclusively, only drawing his swords if he is first disarmed of the Hammer in some way. If he draws his swords, he uses Double Slice when possible.
- ◆ The Skulker attempts to Tumble Through the space of the nearest enemy to gain Sneak Attack if Darkness has not been cast, otherwise he goes after anyone with Darkvision so that Frane can harass characters without it. When Frane is reduced to half health, he instead focuses on attacking whoever last attacked Frane. Should Frane die first, he attempts to flee combat. If captured, he knows nothing of Frane's plans that the PCs haven't already discovered.

- **Level 1 Fight:**

- ◆ On his first turn, Frane casts Darkness in the room, centered on himself. Afterwards, he tries to benefit from Sneak Attack in the darkness. If one of the PCs has Darkvision, he focuses his attacks on them and attempts to use Figment to make the Off-Guard against him, but does not re-attempt this strategy if it fails at any point. He uses the Storm Hammer exclusively, only drawing his swords if he is first disarmed of the Hammer in some way. He activates the Storm Hammer the first time he is able to do so while striking an Off-Guard opponent. If he draws his swords, he does not use Double Slice unless reduced to less than 1/4 hitpoints.

- **Loot: Storm Hammer (60gp) x1, 13gp, 112sp, 238cp ;Total Value (rolling): 232gp, 138sp, 256cp (248ishgp)**

- ◆ **Burnt Journal (Only present if running SKT as a followup adventure):** Frane's journal is severely burnt, but if the flames are put out the players can save enough of the journal to quickly read the following.

- ◆ *"...a stroke of genius to use The Grim Reminders...everyone will think they were murderers and thieves, helping to sow discord in Highh...st importantly the hammer. Doubtless it is a powerful relic from their so-called Quest for the Sky, and with it...the hammer in hand, there is no doubt that I*

*will gain Narseigus' favor. Once he... I'll be sure to be rewarded handsomely."*

- ♦ The journal is so badly burnt that it then crumbles to ash. A canny player may attempt to cast Mending on the book to restore the text. Doing so restores the journal itself to pristine condition, but the text from the burnt pages is irrevocably lost to any means the party currently has to restore them. If the party remembers later to restore the journal, they find that the majority of the journal is a detailed ledger of Depths residents who seem to bear grudges against the Dwarves of Highhelm and potential means of leveraging those grudges to recruit those individuals. Frane used codenames of his own design for each individual listed, preventing the need to come up with NPCs for the party to investigate needlessly. The portion functioning as a private journal is revealed to read as follows: *"It was a stroke of genius to use The Grim Reminders to steal the hammer. The theft will look as though some bandit orcs ambushed a respectable dwarf merchant- everyone will think they were murderers and thieves, helping to sow discord in Highhelm and weaken their position for what is to come. We've gained much from this operation and most importantly the hammer. Doubtless it is a powerful relic from their so-called Quest for the Sky, and with it we can further demoralize the people of Highhelm. When I return to him with the hammer in hand, there is no doubt that I will gain Narseigus' favor. Once he sees the value of what I've brought, I'll be sure to be rewarded handsomely."*

- **What if the players loose?** If Frane defeats the players he leaves them for dead and returns with the hammer to Highhelm, potentially to appear as an NPC or enemy during the events of Sky King's Tomb or another adventure. Fearing the something may have happened to the party as well, Ria sends out a search party who track the party down and revive them; the players reawaken at Zelgin's, banged up but alive where Ria explains that another party was sent out to rescue them and that Frane escaped capture and then disappeared.

### 32. [Wrapping Up]

- Upon returning to Highhelm and delivering the hammer to Ria she gasps in astonishment. "Heavens, do you know what this is? This could only be the lost Warhammer belonging to General Rholdammen! During the Dwarves' Quest for the Sky she was general for none other than Kind Taargik himself— or so I thought! This hammer resembles on that was said to have been lost during

a particularly brutal battle where the Dwarves suffered a major defeat at the hands of an orc war band in the Darklands, but this one appears to be a reproduction of the original, I believe made in remembrance of the battle. It's certainly an interesting find, though!" Ria declares that one of the PCs should wield the hammer as it may bring them luck, and she believes it only fitting that a modern dwarven hero (or their ally!) should carry the replica of an ancient dwarven hero's weapon.

- If Frane was captured alive, the authorities believe him to be a simple smuggler trying to fence stolen dwarven artifacts, and Frane himself plays into those suspicions. Even if the party vouches otherwise, the public and the authorities believe the matter to be settled at that.