

The tunnel continues for what feels like forever before the ceiling suddenly begins to rise. The walls frame an impossibly tall canyon that slowly widens, the air becoming hot and heavy with the scent of sulfur. Glowing vents of magma fill a huge cavern with a dull red glow. From somewhere ahead, you hear a deep, echoing caw, sounding like the call of some great bird. It repeats periodically, always far off in the distance.

Set into a large cleft in the canyon wall is an enormous nest of sticks, bones, paper, and other debris. An immense black form resembling a crow shelters in the nest. It has a beak that comes together like mandibles, large enough to grasp a horse. Even more unsettling are the multitude of eyes clustered on its forehead, though those are thankfully all closed in sleep.

The **ancient deep crow** in the nest (see appendix B) is only pretending to sleep. Any character studying the creature and succeeding on a DC 18 Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Perception) check notices one of its eyes opening momentarily to a glowing red slit. The deep crow's name is Raah, and it (thankfully) has things on its mind other than eating adventurers, as the characters soon discover.

APPROACHING THE NEST

As the characters draw closer, they see a broad expanse of detritus and guano spread out below the nest. With a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check, a character notes that a great amount of that detritus appears to be shredded parchments and bound books—all works destroyed by Raah in various fits of pique.

Either before or after the ancient deep crow awakes, any character can draw close enough to the pile to investigate the destroyed works. These bear such titles as *Twenty Ways to Gain Your Lover*; *Crazy Little Thing Called Love*; *What is Romance?*; *Men are from Abeir*; *Women are from Toril*; and so forth. Passages on nearly every ruined page are crudely underlined and circled with guano-based pigment.

WAKING RAAH

At whatever point is convenient as the characters inspect the ruined books or try to skirt past the ancient deep crow's nest, Raah angrily "wakes up."

A sense of doom pervades the cavern around you as the ancient deep crow suddenly rises up. Its great wings unfurl, its multiple eyes blazing red as it lets loose a caw that shakes the cavern walls.

Any character who succeeds on a DC 14 Wisdom (Insight) check intuits that despite its aggressive display, at least some of the ancient deep crow's outrage is feigned, and that it appears to be in a deep state of melancholy.

I dislike deep crows immensely. But their eggs when cooked up with cheese are delicious.

—Jim Darkmagic

Other characters can note that as Raah shifts around its nest, books and scrolls are knocked out to drift to the ground, all focused on the same subject matter as the destroyed works.

THE HARD WAY

The characters are free to engage Raah in battle. It has a lot of pent-up rage these days, and is happy to have someone to direct that rage against other than itself. An ancient deep crow is a formidable foe, and Raah does not hold back in combat, opening with its Shadow Caw and carving up characters who dare attack it. Even as the battle unfolds, however, the characters should have the chance to realize that there are other options.

During the fight, Raah shrieks angry epithets in the Deep Crow tongue, such as: "I'll kill you all! Because what else am I good for? No one cares!" If none of the characters understands Deep Crow, a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check detects a note of self-recrimination in the creature's savage caw. At the same time, as the ancient deep crow swoops around or a character's *fireball* spell catches the edge of the nest, more parchments might dislodge, revealing underlined passages filled with humanoid dating advice.

At any point at which the characters offer to cease hostilities, or if they are clever enough to negotiate with Raah from the outset, proceed as follows.

DATING ADVICE

Having a character able to speak Deep Crow with the use of a *tongues* spell or similar magic makes dealing with Raah a lot easier. But if not, don't be afraid to explore the comedic value of negotiating with a deadly lovesick monster by way of pantomime and crude art scratched on cavern walls. (The books in the nest are evidence that Raah can understand at least a bit of Common, which might also give the characters a leg up.)

If the characters ask Raah about the books, the ancient deep crow threatens again to kill them all, but holds back from attacking. Give the characters free rein as they attempt to communicate with an otherworldly creature stricken with all-too-worldly relationship woes, using the following points and ability checks as guidelines.

If the characters are supportive and sincere in their attempts to engage the deep crow, you can decide that successful roleplaying and a reasonable number of successful ability checks let them gain Raah's trust. On a badly failed check or in response to a snide comment, Raah might attack again for a round before calming down.

Understanding Raah. A successful DC 14 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals that Raah is feeling emotionally wounded and unsure of itself. The threats it can manifest in battle are deadly, but the ancient deep crow gets no satisfaction from its combat prowess.