

The Dwarven Debt

An Adventure for Fate's Edge - Aeler

Adventure Overview

Title: The Dwarven Debt

Region: Aeler - Crowns & Under-Vaults

Theme: Underground exploration, dwarven law and custom, ancient bargains

Level: Seasoned to Veteran (Tier II-III)

Length: 4-5 Sessions

1 Premise

A dwarven merchant house has called in a debt owed by one of the player characters, demanding they retrieve a sacred artifact from a dangerous section of the Spine Underway. The artifact, a ceremonial hammer known as the Forgefather's Voice, was pledged as collateral decades ago but was never properly transferred according to dwarven law. Now, with the house facing financial difficulties, they're enforcing the ancient contract, forcing the players into the deep places beneath the mountains where ancient dangers still stir.

2 Hook

The adventure begins when the players encounter one of the following scenarios:

- Clan-Speaker Thrain Ironhold arrives with a formal delegation to collect on the debt, presenting ancient contracts and demanding immediate compliance under dwarven law.
- The players' patron sends an urgent message warning them that a dwarven house is making claims on their behalf, and they need to resolve the situation before it escalates.
- A dwarven prospector approaches them in a tavern, desperately seeking help to recover the same artifact for reasons he won't fully explain.

3 Key Factions

3.1 House Khaz-Vurim

One of the oldest and most respected dwarven houses, known for their masterwork forges and strict adherence to ancient customs. Currently led by Vault-Queen Thora Stonebeard, they are facing financial pressure from surface trade disruptions and need the artifact to fulfill an important contract with a human kingdom.

Strengths: Master craftsmen, extensive underground knowledge, legal expertise

Motivations: Honor ancient contracts, maintain financial stability

Methods: Legal proceedings, measured pressure, traditional dwarven justice

3.2 The Deep Stirrings

Ancient entities that dwell in the deepest parts of the underground realm. They were disturbed when the Forgefather's Voice was originally taken from its resting place, and they've been waiting decades for its return. They view the players as potential agents to restore what was stolen.

Strengths: Ancient knowledge, supernatural abilities, patience

Motivations: Restore balance, reclaim sacred objects

Methods: Subtle influence, dreams and omens, manipulation through dwarven customs

3.3 Edgewalkers Guild

A collective of dwarven prospectors and explorers who specialize in mapping new passages and recovering lost artifacts. They have their own interest in the Forgefather's Voice and may become competitors or allies depending on the players' approach.

Strengths: Exploration expertise, underground survival skills, flexible ethics

Motivations: Profit, knowledge, guild solidarity

Methods: Competition, information trading, "accidental" discoveries

4 Key NPCs

4.1 Vault-Queen Thora Stonebeard

The stern but fair leader of House Khaz-Vurim. In her sixties, she's a master smith who values honor and tradition above all else. She's reluctantly enforcing the debt because her house faces ruin without the artifact, but she respects those who face their obligations with courage.

4.2 Clan-Speaker Thrain Ironhold

A middle-aged dwarven diplomat who serves as the primary representative of House Khaz-Vurim in surface dealings. He's knowledgeable about both dwarven and human law, and genuinely wants to resolve the situation without violence, though he's prepared to enforce his house's rights.

4.3 Forge-Master Durin Emberheart

The elderly master smith who originally forged the Forgefather's Voice. He knows its true nature and the consequences of its removal from its sacred resting place. He's torn between his loyalty to his house and his knowledge of what's right.

4.4 The Stone-Singer

An ancient entity that dwells in the deep places, neither fully dwarven nor entirely alien. It speaks through the stone itself and has been waiting for the right agents to help restore the balance disturbed by the artifact's removal.

5 Key Locations

5.1 Khaz-Vurim Halls

The ancestral home of House Khaz-Vurim, carved from a single massive stone formation. The halls are a testament to dwarven craftsmanship, with perfectly fitted stonework, intricate metalwork, and the constant sound of distant forges. The atmosphere is one of solemn dignity and ancient tradition.

5.2 The Spine Underway

A vast network of ancient tunnels that connect the various dwarven holds. These passages are older than the current kingdoms and contain remnants of civilizations that predate the dwarves themselves. The tunnels are well-maintained in places but ancient and dangerous in others.

5.3 The Forgefather's Crypt

The sacred resting place of the Forgefather's Voice, located in a remote section of the Spine Underway. The crypt is protected by ancient wards and contains the remains of the original forge-father who created the artifact. The place resonates with deep power and ancient memories.

5.4 Vault of Whispers

An ancient archive deep in the dwarven realm where the most sacred and dangerous knowledge is kept. The vault contains records of the original agreement regarding the Forgefather's Voice and may hold clues about how to properly resolve the situation.

5.5 The Living Stone Gallery

A section of tunnel where the stone itself seems to be alive, responding to sound and movement. This area is connected to the Deep Stirrings and becomes more active when the

Forgefather's Voice is near. The gallery serves as a threshold between the mundane dwarven realm and the deeper mysteries.

6 Plot Structure

6.1 Session 1: The Debt Called

The players are confronted with the debt and must decide how to respond. They should:

- Learn about the history of the debt and the Forgefather's Voice
- Meet key dwarven NPCs and understand their motivations
- Explore the legal and social implications of the situation
- Make initial decisions about how to proceed

6.2 Session 2: Into the Deep

The players begin their journey into the Spine Underway to recover the artifact. They should:

- Navigate the complex underground environment
- Encounter the first signs of supernatural disturbance
- Deal with obstacles created by the passage of time
- Begin to understand the artifact's true nature

6.3 Session 3: The Deep Stirrings

The players reach the area where the Deep Stirrings are most active and must deal with the supernatural elements of the quest. They should:

- Experience direct contact with the ancient entities
- Learn the true history of the Forgefather's Voice
- Face moral choices about the artifact's fate
- Navigate dwarven customs and ancient laws

6.4 Session 4: Resolution

The players must resolve the conflict between the various factions and decide the artifact's ultimate fate. They should:

- Present their findings to the dwarven authorities
- Negotiate a solution that satisfies all parties

- Deal with the consequences of their choices
- Determine their future relationship with the dwarven realm

7 Key Mechanics

7.1 Debt Resolution Clock [8]

Tracks the urgency of resolving the debt situation. Advances when:

- House Khaz-Vurim faces increasing financial pressure
- Legal proceedings move forward
- Players fail to make adequate progress
- Supernatural disturbances escalate

7.2 Ancient Ward Stability [6]

Represents the integrity of protective wards around the Forgefather's Crypt. Degrades when:

- Unauthorized entry is attempted
- The Deep Stirrings become more active
- Players use force instead of proper ritual
- Dwarven customs are violated

7.3 Stone-Song Resonance [4]

Measures the artifact's connection to its original resting place. Increases when:

- Players approach the crypt area
- Proper dwarven rituals are performed
- The Deep Stirrings influence the area
- Players demonstrate respect for dwarven customs

7.4 Dwarven Honor Track

Tracks the players' standing with the dwarven community:

- **Honored:** +1 die to all dwarven interactions
- **Respected:** Standard interactions
- **Doubted:** -1 die to social rolls with dwarves
- **Shamed:** Hostile reactions, legal consequences

8 Possible Resolutions

8.1 Proper Restoration

The players discover the correct way to resolve the debt while respecting both dwarven law and the artifact's supernatural nature:

- Perform the ancient ritual to properly transfer the artifact
- Negotiate new terms that satisfy both parties
- Gain the blessing of the Deep Stirrings

Consequences: Honor restored, valuable dwarven allies, potential for future cooperation.

8.2 Legal Victory

The players find a loophole in the ancient contract or prove that proper procedures were never followed:

- Demonstrate that the original transfer was invalid
- Present evidence of procedural violations
- Win a judgment in the dwarven courts

Consequences: Debt canceled, but potential enemies in traditionalist dwarven circles.

8.3 Supernatural Compromise

The players negotiate a solution that satisfies the Deep Stirrings while providing value to House Khaz-Vurim:

- Offer an alternative artifact of comparable value
- Agree to perform services for the Deep Stirrings
- Create a new arrangement that benefits all parties

Consequences: Mysterious allies, ongoing supernatural connections, unique magical benefits.

8.4 Forced Acquisition

The players take the artifact by force, dealing with the consequences:

- Face the full wrath of dwarven law
- Deal with the artifact's supernatural backlash
- Navigate the political fallout

Consequences: Powerful artifact, powerful enemies, ongoing supernatural complications.

9 Rewards and Consequences

9.1 Immediate Rewards

- Key-Writ for operating a named lock
- Underway Pass for travel between vaultmouths
- Engineer Shoring for stabilizing corridors
- Assay Mark for dwarven metal recognition
- Crypt Asylum for temporary sanctuary
- Vault Inventory License for removing items

9.2 Long-term Consequences

- Permanent relationships with dwarven houses (positive or negative)
- Access to dwarven crafting expertise and resources
- Supernatural connections that may prove beneficial or dangerous
- Reputation that affects dealings throughout the dwarven realm
- Potential for future quests involving dwarven politics and ancient mysteries

10 GM Notes

10.1 Dwarven Culture

Emphasize the importance of honor, tradition, and proper procedure in dwarven society. Every interaction should reflect these values, and players who respect them should be rewarded while those who flout them face consequences.

10.2 Underground Atmosphere

Create a sense of the vast, ancient dwarven realm. The underground environment should feel alive with history and mystery. Use sound, stone quality, and architectural details to differentiate areas and create atmosphere.

10.3 Legal Complexity

Dwarven law is intricate and ancient. Make the legal aspects of the adventure feel real by having multiple precedents, specific procedures, and the potential for unexpected interpretations. The players should feel like they're navigating a complex system rather than dealing with simple rules.

10.4 Supernatural Elements

The Deep Stirrings represent a different kind of supernatural than typical fantasy. They're ancient, patient, and tied to the fundamental nature of the underground realm. Their influence should be subtle but pervasive, felt more than seen.

10.5 Player Agency

Provide multiple paths to resolution that respect different player approaches. Some players may prefer legal solutions, others direct action, and still others negotiation with supernatural entities. All approaches should have realistic consequences and potential for success.

10.6 Story Beats

Use the underground environment and dwarven customs to generate Story Beats that complicate the players' efforts while advancing the plot. Cave-ins, ancient guardians, procedural violations, and supernatural manifestations should keep the adventure dynamic.