

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. (DV 4 Social encounter, Presence + Command)
- 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. (DV 3 Investigation, Wits + Lore)
- A dwarven prospector approaches them in a tavern, desperately seeking help to recover the same artifact for reasons he won't fully explain. (DV 3 Social, Presence + Sway)

3 Key Factions

3.1 House Khaz-Vurim

House Khaz-Vurim

Description: One of the oldest and most respected dwarven houses

Leader: Vault-Queen Thora Stonebeard

Strengths: Master craftsmen, extensive underground knowledge, legal expertise

Motivations: Honor ancient contracts, maintain financial stability

Methods: Legal proceedings, measured pressure, traditional dwarven justice

Position: Controlled (normal interactions), may shift to Desperate under financial pressure

DV for Negotiations: 4 (standard), 5 (under pressure)

3.2 The Deep Stirrings

The Deep Stirrings

Description: Ancient entities dwelling in the deepest underground realms

Strengths: Ancient knowledge, supernatural abilities, patience

Motivations: Restore balance, reclaim sacred objects

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

Position: Dominant in deep places, Limited influence in shallow areas

DV for Communication: 5 (requires proper ritual), 6+ (without preparation)

3.3 Edgewalkers Guild

Edgewalkers Guild

Description: Dwarven prospectors and explorers specializing in new passages

Leader: Guild-Master Thorek Deepdelver

Strengths: Exploration expertise, underground survival skills, flexible ethics

Motivations: Profit, knowledge, guild solidarity

Methods: Competition, information trading, "accidental" discoveries

Position: Controlled (normal), may become Desperate if their interests are threatened

DV for Cooperation: 3 (mutual benefit), 4 (neutral), 5+ (opposed interests)

4 Key NPCs

4.1 Vault-Queen Thora Stonebeard

Vault-Queen Thora Stonebeard

Role: Leader of House Khaz-Vurim

Age: 62

Skills: Command 4, Lore 3, Craft 3

Knowledge: Dwarven law, house finances, artifact history

Motivation: Honor house obligations while preserving tradition

Complication: Torn between legal duty and moral concerns

Position: Controlled (normal), Desperate (under financial pressure)

DV for Negotiation: 4 (standard), 5 (financial pressure)

4.2 Clan-Speaker Thrain Ironhold

Clan-Speaker Thrain Ironhold

Role: Diplomatic representative

Age: 45

Skills: Sway 3, Lore 3, Command 2

Knowledge: Dwarven and human law, contract procedures

Motivation: Resolve situation without conflict

Complication: Prepared to enforce house rights if necessary

Position: Dominant (legal expertise), may shift to Controlled under pressure

DV for Persuasion: 3 (mutual benefit), 4 (neutral), 5 (opposed)

4.3 Forge-Master Durin Emberheart

Forge-Master Durin Emberheart

Role: Elder master smith

Age: 89

Skills: Craft 5, Arcana 2, Lore 4

Knowledge: Artifact creation, true nature of Forgefather's Voice

Motivation: Restore proper balance

Complication: Loyalty conflict between house and conscience

Position: Controlled (normal), may shift to Desperate if pressed about secrets

DV for Secrets: 5 (reluctant), 4 (proper approach), 3 (mutual trust)

4.4 The Stone-Singer

The Stone-Singer

Type: Ancient Outsider (Cap 5)

Tags: [STONE], [DREAM], [ANCIENT], [WARD]

Abilities:

- Communicate through stone resonance
- Influence dreams and memories
- Manipulate stone and earth
- Ancient knowledge of underground realms

Weaknesses: Bound to stone, vulnerable to surface disruption

Tactics: Prefer manipulation to direct confrontation

Position: Dominant in stone-rich environments

DV for Communication: 5 (proper ritual), 6+ (improper approach)

5 Key Locations

5.1 Khaz-Vurim Halls

Khaz-Vurim Halls

Description: Ancestral home carved from massive stone formation

Features: Perfect stonework, intricate metalwork, distant forge sounds

Atmosphere: Solemn dignity, ancient tradition

Challenges:

- Navigating dwarven protocol (Lore + Presence vs DV 3)
- Understanding legal documents (Lore vs DV 4)
- Gaining audience with leadership (Sway + Command vs DV 4)

Security: Well-guarded, but respectful of proper procedures

5.2 The Spine Underway

The Spine Underway

Description: Vast network of ancient tunnels connecting dwarven holds

Features: Remnants of pre-dwarven civilizations, maintained and dangerous sections

Navigation Challenges:

- Map reading in three dimensions (Survival vs DV 4)
- Avoiding unstable sections (Athletics vs DV 3)
- Dealing with ancient mechanisms (Tinker vs DV 5)

Dangers: Cave-ins, ancient guardians,

Position: Controlled (familiar paths), Desperate (unknown areas)

5.3 The Forgefather's Crypt

The Forgefather's Crypt

Description: Sacred resting place of the Forgefather's Voice

Protection: Ancient wards, ceremonial locks

Features: Remains of original forge-father, deep power resonance

Challenges:

- Respecting sacred protocols (Lore vs DV 5)
- Dealing with disturbed wards (Arcana vs DV 6)
- Communicating with Deep Stirrings (Spirit + Lore vs DV 5)

Position: Desperate (sacred violation), may improve with proper approach

5.4 Vault of Whispers

Vault of Whispers

Description: Ancient archive of sacred and dangerous knowledge

Security: Multiple locks, guardian constructs

Features: Records of original agreement, true artifact history

Challenges:

- Gaining access (Sway + Command vs DV 5)
- Interpreting ancient texts (Lore vs DV 4)
- Avoiding dangerous knowledge (Spirit vs DV 4)

Position: Desperate (security violations), Controlled with proper credentials

5.5 The Living Stone Gallery

The Living Stone Gallery

Description: Tunnel section where stone responds to sound and movement

Connection: Threshold to Deep Stirrings' domain

Features: Sound-responsive stone, increased activity near artifact

Challenges:

- Moving without triggering responses (Stealth vs DV 4)
- Interpreting stone-song (Arcana vs DV 5)
- Surviving stone manipulation (Athletics vs DV 4)

Position: Controlled (careful movement), Desperate (loud/dishonorable actions)

6 Plot Structure

6.1 Session 1: The Debt Called

Opening Scene: Players encounter one of the hook scenarios. Establish the legal and cultural framework of dwarven society.

Key Objectives:

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

Sample Encounters:

- **Legal Consultation:** Clan-Speaker explains contract details. (Sway + Lore vs DV 4, Controlled/Standard)
- **House Tour:** Navigate dwarven protocol and customs. (Lore + Presence vs DV 3, Dominant/Limited)
- **Financial Crisis:** Witness House Khaz-Vurim's desperation. (Notice + Insight vs DV 4, Controlled/Standard)

Session End: Players understand the debt's validity but learn there may be complications. Advance Debt Resolution Clock +1.

6.2 Session 2: Into the Deep

Opening Scene: Players begin journey into Spine Underway. First signs of supernatural disturbance appear.

Key Objectives:

- Navigate complex underground environment
- Encounter first supernatural disturbances
- Deal with time-created obstacles
- Begin understanding artifact's true nature

Sample Encounters:

- **Ancient Mechanism:** Repair or bypass old dwarven security. (Tinker + Wits vs DV 5, Controlled/Standard)
- **Lost Prospector:** Edgewalkers Guild member seeks same artifact. (Social encounter, DV 3-5 depending on approach)
- **Stone Whispering:** First contact with Deep Stirrings' influence. (Spirit + Arcana vs DV 4, Desperate/Limited)

Session End: Players reach deeper areas, supernatural presence becomes clear. Advance Stone-Song Resonance +1.

6.3 Session 3: The Deep Stirrings

Opening Scene: Players reach area of maximum Deep Stirrings activity. Direct supernatural contact occurs.

Key Objectives:

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

Sample Encounters:

- **Stone-Song Communication:** Speak with The Stone-Singer. (Arcana + Spirit vs DV 5, Desperate/Great)
- **Ancient Guardian:** Deal with construct protecting sacred areas. (Combat/Skill challenge, DV 5)
- **Moral Dilemma:** Choose between dwarven law and supernatural justice. (Command + Insight vs DV 4)

Session End: Players understand all stakeholder positions. Advance all clocks +1.

6.4 Session 4: Resolution

Opening Scene: Players return to dwarven halls with knowledge and options.

Key Objectives:

- Present findings to dwarven authorities
- Negotiate solution satisfying all parties
- Deal with consequences of choices
- Determine future relationship with dwarven realm

Sample Encounters:

- **Legal Hearing:** Present case before dwarven council. (Command + Lore vs DV 5, Controlled/Great)
- **Final Negotiation:** Last chance to broker deal with all parties. (Sway + Insight vs DV 5, Desperate/Great)
- **Artifact Decision:** Final choice about Forgefather's Voice fate. (Extended ritual challenge, DV 6)

Session End: Resolution implemented, consequences determined. Clocks advance/retreat based on outcome.

7 Key Mechanics

7.1 Debt Resolution Clock [8]

Advance +1: House Khaz-Vurim faces increasing financial pressure

Advance +1: Legal proceedings move forward

Advance +2: Players fail to make adequate progress

Advance +1: Supernatural disturbances escalate

Advance +2: Key NPC becomes desperate or hostile

When Full: House declares emergency measures, immediate artifact retrieval required

7.2 Ancient Ward Stability [6]

Advance +1: Unauthorized entry attempted

Advance +1: Deep Stirrings become more active

Advance +2: Players use force instead of proper ritual

Advance +1: Dwarven customs violated

When Full: Wards collapse, supernatural dangers unleashed

7.3 Stone-Song Resonance [4]

Advance +1: Players approach crypt area

Advance +1: Proper dwarven rituals performed

Advance +1: Deep Stirrings influence area

Advance +1: Players demonstrate respect for dwarven customs

When Full: Artifact calls to return home, supernatural pressure increases

7.4 Dwarven Honor Track

Honored: +1 die to all dwarven interactions, access to special privileges

Respected: Standard interactions, normal access

Doubted: -1 die to social rolls with dwarves, limited access

Shamed: Hostile reactions, legal consequences, barred from holds

8 Possible Resolutions

8.1 Proper Restoration

Proper Restoration

- Requirements:**
- Perform ancient ritual to properly transfer artifact (Craft + Arcana vs DV 6)
 - Negotiate new terms satisfying all parties (Sway + Command vs DV 5)
 - Gain Deep Stirrings' blessing (Spirit + Lore vs DV 5)

Procedure: Formal dwarven ceremony with supernatural elements

Costs: Significant time investment, 1 segment Corruption for each participant

Outcome: Honor restored, valuable dwarven allies, potential for future cooperation

8.2 Legal Victory

Legal Victory

Discovery: Original transfer was invalid due to procedural violations

- Requirements:**
- Demonstrate procedural violations (Lore vs DV 5)
 - Present evidence in dwarven courts (Command + Sway vs DV 5)
 - Win legal judgment (Extended social challenge, DV 6)

Procedure: Formal legal proceedings with all parties present

Costs: Time, potential enemies among traditionalist dwarves

Outcome: Debt canceled, but enemies in traditionalist circles

8.3 Supernatural Compromise

Supernatural Compromise

Approach: Negotiate solution satisfying Deep Stirrings and House Khaz-Vurim

- Options:**
- Offer alternative artifact of comparable value (Investigation vs DV 5)
 - Agree to perform services for Deep Stirrings (Extended commitment)
 - Create new arrangement benefiting all parties (Sway + Insight vs DV 5)

Procedure: Complex three-way negotiation with ritual elements

Costs: Ongoing obligations, 2 segments Corruption for each participant

Outcome: Mysterious allies, ongoing supernatural connections, unique magical benefits

8.4 Forced Acquisition

Forced Acquisition

Approach: Take artifact by force, deal with consequences

Requirements:

- Overcome dwarven security (Combat/Skill challenges, DV 5+)
- Deal with supernatural backlash (Extended Spirit challenge, DV 6)
- Navigate political fallout (Social consequences, -2 Dwarven Honor)

Procedure: Violent resolution with immediate escape

Costs: Powerful enemies, ongoing supernatural complications, legal consequences

Outcome: Powerful artifact, powerful enemies, ongoing supernatural complications

9 Rewards and Consequences

9.1 Immediate Rewards

- Key-Writ for operating a named lock: Access to specific secured areas
- Underway Pass for travel between vaultmouths: +1 Position for underground travel
- Engineer Shoring for stabilizing corridors: Prevent cave-in once per session
- Assay Mark for dwarven metal recognition: +1 die to identify dwarven craftsmanship
- Crypt Asylum for temporary sanctuary: Safe haven in dwarven territories
- Vault Inventory License for removing items: Legal authority for future acquisitions

9.2 Long-term Consequences

- **Honored Resolution:** Permanent allies in House Khaz-Vurim, +2 Dwarven Honor, access to master craftsmen
- **Legal Victory:** Respect among progressive dwarves, -1 Dwarven Honor with traditionalists, potential for future legal work
- **Supernatural Compromise:** Ongoing connection to Deep Stirrings, unique magical abilities, 1 permanent Corruption segment
- **Forced Acquisition:** Enemies throughout dwarven realm, -3 Dwarven Honor, powerful artifact but constant supernatural pressure
- **Mixed Outcome:** Complex relationships with all factions, moderate standing, ongoing plot hooks

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:

- Players respecting customs gain +1 Position
- Violating protocols worsens Position by 1 step
- Proper titles and ceremonies matter for social interactions
- Legal procedures are complex but fair when followed

10.2 Underground Atmosphere

Create a sense of the vast, ancient dwarven realm:

- Use sound descriptions: distant forges, dripping water, stone settling
- Vary architectural details: smooth ancient stonework vs. rough natural caves
- Describe the weight of stone above, the permanence of underground construction
- Different areas should feel distinct: halls of state vs. working tunnels vs. ancient passages

10.3 Legal Complexity

Dwarven law is intricate and ancient:

- Multiple precedents exist for most situations
- Specific procedures must be followed for validity
- Contracts can have unexpected interpretations
- Legal experts (like Clan-Speaker) can find creative solutions

10.4 Supernatural Elements

The Deep Stirrings represent patient, ancient supernatural forces:

- Prefer manipulation to direct confrontation
- Communicate through dreams, stone-song, and omens
- Have waited decades for proper resolution
- Are not inherently evil, but have different priorities

10.5 Player Agency

Provide multiple paths to resolution:

- Legal approach: Navigate dwarven law system
- Social approach: Negotiate with all factions
- Investigation approach: Discover true history and find creative solutions
- Direct action approach: Force resolution through power

10.6 Story Beats

Use dwarven environment and customs for complications:

- 1 SB: Minor procedural violation, small legal complication
- 2 SB: Important NPC becomes suspicious, document goes missing
- 3 SB: Cave-in blocks path, ancient guardian activates
- 4+ SB: Major faction turns hostile, supernatural manifestation occurs

10.7 Session-Specific Guidance

Session 1 Focus: Establish dwarven legal/cultural framework. Players should understand the debt is legitimate but complex.

Session 2 Focus: Introduce supernatural elements and underground challenges. Players learn there's more to this than simple contract law.

Session 3 Focus: Deep supernatural contact and moral complexity. Players must balance competing legitimate claims.

Session 4 Focus: Climactic resolution and consequences. All previous elements converge in final choices.

10.8 Alternative Endings

If players fail to achieve clean resolution:

- **Partial Success:** Temporarily satisfy one faction while creating new problems
- **Compromise:** Artifact remains in limbo, ongoing tension between factions
- **Pyrrhic Victory:** Solve immediate problem but create worse long-term issues
- **Escalation:** Situation becomes larger conflict involving multiple dwarven houses

10.9 Scaling for Different Tiers

Tier II (Seasoned): Reduce entity Caps, simplify legal procedures, provide more NPC assistance.

Tier III (Veteran): Add political complications, increase entity power, complicate legal requirements.

Tier IV (Paragon): Introduce kingdom-level political implications, multiple simultaneous conflicts, entity gains patron backing.