

The Forgotten Gate

CNGH Playtest Edition
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Playtest Edition

This version of the Forgotten Gate adventure for the World of Aetaltis campaign setting is provided for playtesting v0.03 of the Cool Name RPG Game System.

You will likely come across rules or rule references that do not appear in the playtest rules. These represent rules we have not fully fleshed out yet. More information will be provided in future releases.

Action Checks and Attributes

Throughout this adventure, you'll find text like:

Allow each character to make a DS 5 Awareness action check.

The attribute listed is simply the suggested attribute. If a character comes up with a clever way to use a different attribute that makes sense, let them!

Actions Checks and MOs

You'll notice that none of the action checks listed in this document include information about which MO, focus, or specialization to use. It's up to you and the players to decide when these scores come into play.

5E Edition of the Adventure

The 5E edition of the Forgotten Gate, which includes art and the dungeon map, is [available for \\$4.99 on DriveThruRPG](#). Since this playtest is still using Theater of the Mind, you don't *need* this, but some of you might want a copy. And the team at Mechanical Muse would certainly appreciate your purchase!

Welcome to the Forgotten Gate

The Forgotten Gate is a World of Aetaltis adventure for four to five beginning characters designed for use with Cool Name RPG. This short, focused adventure has a mix of combat, puzzles, and traps that aren't especially deadly, but careless characters can find themselves in quite a bit of trouble.

In the Forgotten Gate, players are introduced to a number of important concepts from the World of Aetaltis campaign setting. They will experience the danger of corruption, encounter bound undead, battle the minions of Endroren, and help to reseal one of the ancient Wards of Alantra. They will also learn a bit of the backstory that defines the World of Aetaltis.

The adventure is also designed as a springboard for future expeditions into the Deeplands. The tower, once cleared, makes a fantastic base of operations for a group of adventurers that want to delve deeper into the dangerous world beneath the surface of Aetaltis.

What You Need

To play this adventure you should be familiar with the Cool Name RPG playtest rules, and you will want to have access to those rules during the game. We also recommend you have access to the World of Aetaltis core setting books, including the ***World of Aetaltis: Adventurer's Guide***, the ***World of Aetaltis: Player's Guide***, and the ***World of Aetaltis: Gamemaster's Guide***.

Adventure Summary

If you are a player, stop reading now!

In the Forgotten Gate, the adventurers accompany an elderly Warder of Alantra to a nearly forgotten dwarven

ruin suspected to contain an unsealed entrance to the Deeplands. Their mission is to keep the warder safe so he can reseal the entrance.

During their adventure, the characters fight their way past a number of dangerous foes, including corrupted blights, dark oozes, a bound undead, and a giant skulk. They will also have an opportunity to show their devotion to the Enaros by cleansing a defiled shrine while bypassing some simple traps. In a climactic final battle, the adventurers are pitted against a warband of endrori.

But there is a twist! Either during the final battle or immediately afterward, the players discover the elderly warder is really a doppelganger who is using the characters to get past the tower's inhabitants in his effort to return to the Deeplands. The real warder, meanwhile, is stashed inside the strange trunk the fake has been dragging around.

In the end, the heroes defeat the monsters, save the warder, and reseal the entrance to the Deeplands. What happens next is up to you and the players.

The Adventurer's Goals

The adventurers are expected to accomplish the following goals over the course of the adventure:

1. Destroy any evil creatures inhabiting the ruins.
2. Keep the (false) warder and his trunk safe.
3. Save the real warder from the doppelganger.
4. Protect the real warder as he reseals the Deepland entrance.

It is fine to spell out these goals for the players, especially as they reach certain milestones of the game where it makes sense. This is not a mystery where the players are supposed to puzzle out what their characters should do. Their mission should be clear and straightforward. The challenge in this adventure is not figuring out the answer, but rather overcoming the obstacles.

Adventure Location

This World of Aetaltis adventure takes place in the foothills of the Donarzheis Mountains in the land of Agthor. The ruins lie about 5 days west of Dunbury Castle or 3 days south of the town of Thornwall. You can learn more about Thornwall and Dunbury in the World of Aetaltis setting books: *The Heroes of Thornwall* and *Defenders of Dunbury Castle*.

Timing

This adventure was originally designed for convention play. This means you can typically complete the entire adventure in about 4 hours. This assumes, of course, the players do not do anything crazy—and they *always* do something crazy. If you are playing in a weekly home campaign, it is fine if the adventure takes longer. If you are working with a hard time limit, however, the adventure is designed so you can manage its length and reach the epic final battle before time runs out.

The Forgotten Gate is a linear adventure, meaning the heroes go room by room in a relatively straight line until they reach the story's conclusion. This design lets you easily remove portions of the adventure to control its timing. In addition, although the encounters that precede the climactic final battle are cool and fun to play, they are not strictly necessary. You can drop any of these as needed to manage how long the game takes. The story will still make sense.

If you are working with a time limit, we recommend you leave an hour for the final battle and the closing scenes. When there is an hour left in your game time, make sure that the next door the characters open leads to the stairs down to area 12. This gives you enough time to complete the fight and roleplay the end scene where the characters seal the entrance.

Roleplaying Opportunity

Admittedly, there are not a lot of roleplaying opportunities built into this adventure. To put it simply, it is not that kind of adventure. It is primarily about discovery, combat, and survival. Any roleplaying that

occurs will be between the players and occasionally with the warder (both the false warder and the genuine one).

In some ways, however, this is appropriate for a first adventure. It does not put a lot of demands on the players in terms of their characters' as yet undeveloped personalities. It allows them to explore who their characters are and establish relationships between the characters.

As a gamemaster, you can encourage this development using the warder. Between battles, have the warder ask the characters questions that will help the players shape who their character is. This will encourage the player to come up with creative responses and help folks get to know one another's characters. It also creates a more natural way of sharing their backgrounds than long, elaborate speeches at the start of the game.

Here are some examples of questions the warder might ask to help this sort of roleplay and character development:

- "How did you become an adventurer?"
- "How is it you came to adventure with these other heroes?"
- "What did you do before you started adventuring?"
- "Why are you adventuring? Are you in it for the money? Is there some goal you hope to accomplish?"
- When the character makes impressive use of an ability, the warder acts impressed and asks, "Where did you learn to do that?"
- If the character isn't Agthorian, he might ask, "Why did you leave your homeland? And how did you end up here?"
- "That's a fine blade/bow/axe you're carrying. Where did you get it?"

Even if the players don't know the answers, that's okay. It gets them thinking about these things, which is the first step toward developing that aspect of their character.

Adventure Background

Not long ago, a pod of doppelgangers living in the Deeplands discovered an unsealed exit from those subterranean lands at the ruins of an old dwarven hunting tower—ruins that are the focus of this adventure. They sent one of their kind out to explore the exit and find out what lay in the surface lands beyond.

During the scout's explorations, it encountered an aged Warder of Alantra who was wandering the wilds of Northern Agthor searching for Deepland wards in need of repair. Using its shape-changing abilities to lower the warder's guard, the doppelganger attacked and subdued the unsuspecting old man.

The doppelganger, however, did not kill the warder. Rather, it made a plan to take the warder back as its captive. Perhaps the pod could use the old man to remove other strategically important Deepland seals, or even force him to teach the pod the spells used to remove the seals. The monster stuffed the warder into the old man's own traveling trunk and placed him in a state of suspended animation using dark magic.

It loaded the trunk on the warder's mule, and returned to the ruined tower with its prize. To its dismay, it found a rude surprise waiting for it. While it was off exploring the surface, a warband of endrori had discovered the exit into the tower and occupied the ruins. The endrori hate the doppelgangers, who regularly use their shapeshifting abilities to steal from the endrori. The doppelganger knew there was no way it could get past so many enemies alone.

Cursing its bad luck, it returned to the surface with the trunk and made its way back to a nearby settlement. While pondering its next move at a small tavern, it encountered the adventurers. Thinking quickly, it used its guise as a warder to convince the young heroes to

join it under the pretext of helping to seal a Deepland entrance. In truth, the doppelganger planned to use the adventurers to help it defeat the endrori guarding the gate.

Launching the Adventure

The Forgotten Keep is designed to plunge the characters straight into the action. This is especially important when running this as a con event, since everyone will be eager to roll some dice and kill some monsters! As you'll see from the opening sequence, the adventure begins right at the entrance to the tower and just moments away from the first combat.

If you're using this adventure as part of your home campaign, you might want to start things out in a more traditional fashion. If so, the obvious answer is to have the characters encounter the faux warder at a tavern. Since the ruin is located a little more than a day's march west of Leegen's Hold, the makeshift tavern in the village is a good candidate for a launch point. If the party is based in Thornwall or Dunbury Village, the adventure could begin when a merchant who traveled to Leegen's Hold recently brings word of the warder there who is looking for adventurers.

More information about Leegen's Hold, Thornwall, and Dunbury Village can be found in the World of Aetaltis setting books, *The Heroes of Thornwall* and *Defenders of Dunbury Castle*.

You shouldn't need to convince the players to bite at this hook, since it's pretty much the definition of what adventurers do in the World of Aetaltis. Don't hesitate to come right out and tell this to the players, especially if they're new to the setting. If additional motivation is still required, however, the doppelganger has a stash of old Deepland coins it brought to the surface as well as a number of healing potions stolen from the warder. It will offer these to the characters in exchange for their assistance.

Location Entries

The following entries describe the locations, creatures, and challenges the characters will encounter over the course of their adventure. Location entries in Aetaltis adventures consist of the following parts:

- **Room Number** The encounter or room's numbered location on the map.
- **Room Name** The name of the location or encounter.
- **Summary** This is a short summary of the room describing what happens and why it's important to the adventure.
- **Room or Building Attributes** When appropriate, a location may list the standard room or building attributes such as Quality or Condition. Complete rules for these attributes are found in the *World of Aetaltis: Gamemaster's Guide*.
- **Read Aloud Text** You can read this boxed text aloud to the players when they first enter the room or initiate the encounter. This text may be accompanied by additional clarifying headers such as Exterior or Interior. If the read aloud text describes creatures or NPCs found at the location, it will also include the Encounter header. If the Encounter header isn't used, it's up to you to decide if, when, and how the characters encounter any NPCs or creatures in this location.
- **NPCs and Creatures** This is a listing of any NPCs or monsters found at this location. Listings in red are creatures and NPCs that are potentially hostile. Encounters with such creatures will likely lead to combat. **Stat blocks for creatures are found at the end of the book.**
- **Details** These labeled sections provide details about specific elements of the location, its contents, or its inhabitants.
- **Combat** If the location is likely to involve combat, this section provides information about

the battlefield, the opponents and their tactics, and potential complications.

- **Goods and Services** If the inhabitants of this location have items they're actively selling or services they are willing to perform, these items and services are listed here.
- **Treasure** These are notable valuables found at the location. These may be the personal belongings of the inhabitants, and their presence doesn't mean the characters should help themselves to the items. This also isn't a comprehensive list of everything the characters might loot and sell—only the most important, valuable, and interesting items.

0. The Adventure Begins

This introductory text launches the adventure, providing the players with the backstory, their goals, and how they got to this point.

Read this to the players when you're ready to begin:

Exterior

Our tale begins in the heavily wooded foothills of the Donarzhis Mountains. You are a party of intrepid adventurers and have agreed to accompany an elderly Warder of Alantra to the site of a possible Deepland entrance. You must keep the warder safe until he can ascertain whether or not a Deepland entrance still exists and the state of the wards that keep the creatures of darkness locked in the caverns below. If the wards have failed, it is up to you to ensure the warder's safety as he restores the powerful protective spell that holds the evil at bay.

Using a copy of an ancient dwarven map (the original, he explains, remains safely back in the archives of the High Temple in New Erinor,) you've picked your way through the wilds of Agthor to the place you now stand. Before you, a sheer cliff rises out of the heavy pine forest. Gnarled cliff-pines cling to its face and vines hang

from cracks and crevices where they've somehow managed to take root.

Behind the foliage, you make out the hint of a tower. It is built in the old dwarven architectural style, showing hints of the brutalist aesthetics popular among the dwarves of Malador today, but softer, and bearing more decoration. On further observation, you realize it wasn't actually constructed, but rather carved directly into the side of the cliff. At the base of the tower is a gaping black hole. Lying on the ground before the hole are the shattered remains of a pair of stone doors.

1 The Hunter's Tower

The characters are thrown straight into the action! They only have time to perform a single action each before the corrupted plants around the entrance attack.

Exterior

You stand before a dark tunnel leading into the side of the cliff. Behind the vines and other foliage, you can just make out the old tower. The air is strangely still, and there is a putrid, mulchy scent. At your feet lay the shattered remains of two massive stone doors, partially hidden beneath the leaves and overgrown with vines.

Creatures 1 corrupted vine

Allow each of the characters to take a single action, such as examining some detail of their surroundings or preparing a light source. Once they've all taken a turn, the corrupted vines attack.

Tower

Access to the tower and the Deeplands below is by means of the **tunnel** in the tower's base. It's difficult to see very far inside, in part due to the shadows but also because of the vines hanging down over the entrance to the passage. What is clear, however, is that the floors, walls, and ceiling are all worked stone. Carved over the tunnel entrance, unobscured by the vines, is the Old Dwarven word *turjagon*, which means "The Hunter's Tower."

Despite the tower's four-story height, there are no **upper floors**—just false windows and doors looking out over balconies. It's not clear if there was ever an intent to finish the upper levels or if they were merely for decoration.

The **architectural style** is similar to the blocky, brutalist forms favored by the dwarves of Malador today, but the lines are softer and there is far more decoration. In addition, the pillars and moldings are carved with animals: harts, hares, wolves, foxes, pheasants, and more frolic across the stone, giving a hint of the tower's original purpose.

Doors

Examination of the six-inch thick broken stone doors lying in front of the entrance reveal they were battered down from within. The amount of plant growth suggests this occurred many years ago. If the characters ask, the doors are too damaged to hold a ward, even if restored to their original position.

Vines

The vines and other plants around the entrance have the dark green color of rot, shot through with veins of red and crowned with fleshy bulbs the color of raw meat. Black, sticky sap seeps from the stems and leaves. The sap stains the skin and has a putrid odor. The plants appear otherwise healthy.

In fact, the plants, and the vines in particular, are corrupted. A character making a successful DS 6 Intellect action check will realize this. If the character has knowledge of magic, religion, or arcana, they receive +1 AS to this action check. Characters with essence sense may detect the corruption with a successful DS 8 Awareness action check, but to do so they must touch the plants with their bare flesh. There is no ambient corruption in the local essence.

Footprints

There are no footprints leading into or out of the tunnel. The doppelganger hid its tracks after passing through, and the endrori (11) haven't ventured out yet.

Combat

Once each character is given a chance to take an action the **corrupted vines** attack. This assumes there are characters close enough to attack. If not, the vines wait until a character is within reach before launching their attack.

Surprise

Allow each character to make a DS 5 Awareness action check. Characters that succeed notice some telltale movement that warns them of the attack. Those that fail are surprised and may not move or take an action during the first round of combat.

Tactics

The vines **target** any living creature in range that is not corrupted or of the dark monster type. They ignore endrori, as well as characters or NPCs (such as the doppelganger) with corruption scores greater than 0.

The vines' **goal** is to entangle the characters, put them to sleep, and haul them up to the third floor where they can drink their victims' blood in peace. They only drag characters up if the character is asleep or unconscious. They are not intelligent, and they are easily fooled by characters who play dead.

Treasure

Lying on the third-floor balcony, not visible from below, is the desiccated corpse of the vines' last victim, a male human solo adventurer who ran afoul of the tower's guardians. A successful DS 6 Intellect action check tells the characters the body's been there at least a few months.

Most of his equipment is not worth taking or is damaged beyond repair, but he is carrying the following:

- 23 cp, 12 sp (Agthorian coins)
- *potion of healing*
- necklace (silver chain with a holy symbol of Aelos on it, also wrought in silver) worth 8 sp

2 The Entry Hall

The tower's original purpose is further illustrated and the characters confirm that this is, indeed, a ruin from the Dwarven Age.

The floor of this long disused passage is littered with debris. Drifts of fallen leaves lean into the corners and a layer of dirt and stones cover the floor. The walls are decorated with faded, peeling murals of dwarves hunting in the forests beneath the snowcapped peaks of the Donarzheis Mountains. At the far end of the passage, a dark opening leads to a spiral staircase that descends into darkness.

This is the main entrance to the tower and the Deeplands beyond. In ancient times, its murals celebrated important hunts, trophy kills, and prominent visitors. The doors originally opened inward and were once barred from within.

Murals

The murals depict dwarves hunting a variety of creatures. Some are easily recognizable, such as deer, bears, boars, and owlbeards, but others are strange and unfamiliar. Most notable among the unfamiliar creatures is a thick-limbed bovine-like creature with an unusually long neck, a scoop jaw, and thick horns shown wading in the murky waters of a swamp.

One scene, partially obscured by water that leaked down from above and washed away some of the paint, shows a dwarf wearing a crown, depicted using gold leaf, riding a gray cat while she chases down a huge boar. Her coat of arms has peeled away so it is unclear who this royal figure might be.

In another panel, rows of dwarves march into the tower, heavily laden with hides, fresh meat, antlers, and other trophies. They are followed by a cluster of dwarves in flowing green cloaks, armed with bows and carrying long spears.

Tracks

A character making a successful DS 11 Awareness check can spot tracks from a single individual going both into and out of the tunnel. Any character with training in survival or tracking can identify them as belonging to a human-sized individual wearing boots, but no other information can be gleaned from the tracks. These were left by the doppelganger who made an effort to hide them after he passed.

Staircase

There is nothing particularly interesting about the staircase. It spirals down into darkness, descending about forty feet vertically before it opens onto the Customs Hall (3).

Treasure

If one of the characters digs around in the leaves or dirt, they discover a long-forgotten gold earring (4 sp) from the Dwarven Age.

3 Customs Hall

A pair of corrupted gray oozes lurk in this large room, surprising unwary characters as they make their way through the chamber.

The spiral stairs open onto the southern end of a fair-sized hall. It is 20-feet wide from east to west, 35-feet long from north to south, and 20-feet tall. There are a pair of stone doors in the center of the north wall, a simple wooden door in the south wall, and a heavy, barred wooden door in the west wall.

Broken, rotting, and collapsing tables are scattered around the room. Water drips occasionally from above and runs down the wall in rivulets, forming pools on the flagstone floor. Black mold grows up the walls and a few gnarled roots have broken through the ceiling in a number of places.

Creatures **2 corrupted gray oozes**

In days gone by, this is where hunters paid taxes on whatever they brought back from the forest above. It also served as a guard post to keep trespassers out, a small barracks for the soldiers that guarded the tower,

and a makeshift jail where the dwarves locked up troublemakers.

Pools

Most of the pools of water are just water, but hidden here are two corrupted gray oozes. They wait patiently for prey to approach and then lash out with their pseudopods (see Combat section for this entry.) The real water is cold and slightly slimy. Although the floor is relatively level, an almost imperceptible slope to the north drains the water off and keeps it from building up in the room. Any dwarf will notice this if examining the floor thanks to their stonessense ability.

Tables and Debris

The tables are extremely ancient, and what remains of them will collapse with a touch. During the Dwarven Age, hunters piled their hides and other trophies on these tables for inspection and taxation. Also among the debris is the wreckage of the original wooden doors that once stood on the north end of the room.

South Door

The door to the south is an ancient door made from oak. It is largely intact and the ring handle, while rusty, can still be used to open the door. It is not locked but the wood is swollen, requiring a successful DS 5 Strength action check to get it open.

West Door

This door is also in decent shape and although the iron bands are heavily rusted, they still serve their purpose to reinforce the door. There is a rusty lock plate in the door with a keyhole in it, and it is locked (**Break:** DS 6 to hit, 7 damage to break, **Pick Lock:** DS 11 Dexterity action check). The keys to the door are in the Barracks (4). Picking the lock is difficult due to the amount of rust on the mechanism. Hitting the lock a few times with a hammer shakes the rust loose reducing the Dexterity Action Check to DS 5.

North Doors

As characters approach these doors, they hear the unmistakable sound of rushing water. One of these two massive stone doors is slightly ajar, just large enough

for a human-sized creature to slide through. For anything larger, such as a drothmal or an orog, a successful DS 5 Strength action check is needed to haul the door open further.

Examining the doors reveals they were once warded, but the wards are inactive. Furthermore, the doors are riddled with fine cracks. The damage makes it impossible to reapply or restore the wards on these doors.

A character with an appropriate background or specialization will easily recognize that these are not the original doors. They replaced the original doors when this entrance was first warded during the Age of Shadow.

Combat

The gray oozes only attack and reveal themselves if a target steps close enough for them to hit with their pseudopod. Otherwise, they remain hidden. If a target does get close, the second ooze doesn't automatically reveal itself. These are not intelligent creatures, and they don't coordinate their attacks. Each acts independently of the other.

Surprise

Unless the characters come up with some especially ingenious idea that detects the oozes, they automatically gain surprise during the first round of combat.

Difficult Terrain

The slippery floors count as difficult terrain. In addition, characters that move faster than half-speed across the floor risk losing their footing. These characters must make a successful DS 6 Dexterity action check or fall prone halfway through their movement. Drothmal characters can ignore the effects of the difficult terrain thanks to their ice walking ability.

Cover

The ruined tables are usable as half-cover providing +1 DS to attacks against characters fighting from behind them. Unfortunately, they are in such an awful state of

decay, the character only benefits from this bonus during a single attack. After that the table collapses and the cover is lost. There are four such ruined tables in the room.

Treasure

In the northwest corner of the room, beneath the wreckage of one of the original doors, lies the crushed remains of a small chest. The chest is ruined, but scattered amid the water-logged splinters and rusted fittings are 20 sp (Deepland coins).

4 Barracks

A ruined barracks where the characters have a chance to find the keys to the locks on the Jail (5) and fight some giant centipedes.

The passing years have taken their toll on the contents of this 10-foot by 20-foot room. The bunks on the east wall have almost entirely collapsed, a long table lies in a rotting pile in the center of the floor, and only one of the two benches beside it is still standing. In the northwest corner of the room is a small hearth carved into the wall, and beside it on the west wall is short, shoulder-width door.

Creatures 4 giant centipedes

The dwarves guarding the tower's entrance lived in this room. It had space for four dwarves: three soldiers and their commander. It was a small, simple space intended for short-term assignments rather than long-term habitation.

Bunks

Age and rot have taken their toll on the bunk beds. The wood is soft and crumbles when touched. Partially hidden beneath a layer of wreckage is the skeleton of a dwarf. It's clear the skeleton lays here undisturbed for an exceptionally long time. Its clothing has completely rotted away and even the bones are largely decomposed, but a successful DS 6 Intellect action check reveals the dwarf suffered from some rather grievous injuries, including a broken arm, broken leg,

multiple cracked ribs, and (likely the killing blow) a partially crushed skull. Anyone that takes time to examine the skeleton will discover a metal ring near the dwarf's waist with the **keys** to the Jail (5) door and the two cells.

Table and Benches

These were exceptionally well-made but they are little more than a pile of kindling now. Even the one standing bench collapses the moment any weight is placed on it.

Hearth and Kitchen

The dwarves used this small kitchen to prepare their meals and the hearth to both cook food and warm the room. The chimney is clear most of the way up, but about five feet from the top where it exits near the top of the cliff, it is completely blocked by leaves, twigs, and other debris thanks to birds and wasps that made the chimney their home at different times over the years. Anyone can clear the blockage with a bit of work. Fires built in the hearth without clearing the blockage start to fill the room with smoke about 10-20 minutes after the fire is started.

West Door

This undersized door leads to a privy. The chamber beyond only has enough room for two dwarves to sit side-by-side on the stone seat carved into the west wall. If someone with darkvision or a strong enough light source looks down the holes they see they lead to a cesspit 50 feet down. Hiding in the holes, however, are four **giant centipedes**.

Combat

The four giant centipedes aren't looking for a fight. They'd much rather remain hidden until the characters leave, but if anyone disturbs, startles, or endangers them, perhaps by leaning in to look down the hole or dropping objects down the hole, they attack.

Tactics

The giant centipedes are fighting for survival. If they take damage and survive, they immediately attempt to flee back down the hole and continue out through a tiny crack in the cesspit below.

Treasure

Aside from the keys beside the skeleton on the bunks, if a character somehow gets down the cesspit hole, spends a bit of time digging through the hardened filth that covers its floor, and succeeds at a DS 6 action check, they discover:

- 7 cp, 2 sp, 1 gp (Deepland coins)
- simple gold ring (12 sp)

5 Jail

The characters face a bound undead and have the potential to recover a few valuable treasures.

Beyond the iron bound door is a passage that leads to a 15-foot by 20-foot room. The western half of the room is taken up by two 10-foot by 10-foot barred prison cells. Both cell doors are closed. The cell to the north appears empty except for a bench carved into the natural stone wall. Curled up at the back of the south cell is a mummified corpse. Scattered around the floor of the room are the desiccated carcasses of a half dozen rats.

Creatures 1 lesser bound undead

These cells held poachers, thieves, or other criminals until they could be transferred to the halls below for trial.

Cells

The bars of the cells are as strong as the day they were forged thanks to extraordinary old dwarven forging techniques. The same holds true for the cell doors and their locking mechanisms (**Break:** DS 9 to hit, 12 damage to break, **Pick Lock:** DS 11 Dexterity action check). It's not realistic that the characters can bend or break these bars without a lot of work and an appropriate set of tools, or some sort of powerful magic.

Rat Carcasses

The carcasses of these rats range in age from a few years to a day or two old. The bound undead in the cage has been subsisting on the life force of rats whenever

one wandered too close to the undead's prison. The carcasses are effectively mummified thanks to the bound undead's life draining ability. A successful DS 11 Intellect action check reveals the true cause of their deaths.

Corpse

The corpse is actually a bound undead. It holds completely still at the back of the cell until a character gets close enough for it to attack. At that point it strikes. See the Combat section for this entry for details.

How a bound undead found itself locked in this cell, however, is a curious tale indeed. During the final evacuation of the Deeplands at the end of the Age of Darkness, before the halls were sealed by the warders, a dwarf thief named Podenkrey Geldenkett tried to slip out with a chest of treasures looted from the Deepland ruins. He might have gotten away with it, had the guards not noticed the inclusion of the crown of King Hethkett III, the last High King of the Donarzheis Mountains, among his treasures. How the crown came into his possession is a twisted tale, too long to cover here, but the guards were not amused. They confiscated his belongings and locked him in this cell.

Sadly for the guards, a day later a warband of endrori attacked the tower and killed the soldiers. Even worse for Podenkrey, the endrori didn't notice him, leaving him locked away in his cell. With no way out, Podenkrey slowly died of thirst over the next few days.

For a time, Podenkrey's ghost roamed the tower, unnaturally bound to the place due to the traumatic nature of his death. As he slowly went mad from despair over his fate, one of his last cogent thoughts was, "At least things can't get worse." This proved incorrect.

Six months after his death, well before the warders came and sealed this entrance, an abomona, fleeing the avatars who hunted it, used the tower to enter the Deeplands. As it passed through, its essential form collided with Podenkrey's spirit, resulting in a terrible and unexpected outcome. The abomona's corruption

energized the few threads of essence still binding Podenkrey to his corporeal form, rebinding his spirit to his decomposing corpse. To his utter surprise and horror, Podenkrey returned to the world of the living—or in his case, unliving—as a bound undead.

For the past few centuries, Podenkrey lay in his cell, unable to escape, going more mad with each passing decade. After a time he went into a hibernation of sorts. Every now and then a rat passes too close to the cell and awakens Podenkrey, who drains it of its life—assuming he can catch it. When his feeding is complete, he returns to his hibernation state.

Combat

At this stage of his deterioration, Podenkrey is little more than a skeleton with a few bits of flesh and sinew holding him together. This, combined with his madness, means he fights with desperate savagery.

Tactics

Podenkrey has just enough of his wits about him to try to wait until the cell is opened before he attacks. If he thinks his prey is going to leave without opening the cell, he'll attack anyhow, trying to reach his victims through the bars. If the cell is open and he is reduced to less than half his hp, he will try to escape past the characters and up to the surface.

Adventure Seed

Should Podenkrey escape or if the characters take pity on him, the characters might encounter him in the future in a far healthier and restored state. Although they may or may not recognize him, he will certainly recognize them. If they treated him poorly, he can serve as a dangerous recurring enemy for the party.

Treasure

In the chaos of the evacuation, Podenkrey was locked in his cell carrying a few items of value, including:

- *ring of comfort*
- 5 gp, 10 sp (Deepland coins)

6 The Bridge

A bridge scattered with signs of ancient battle provides passage across a rushing river, but a giant skulk lurks in the shadows beneath the bridge.

A mighty 10-foot-wide stone extends to the north over a 50-foot-wide canal. The water in the canal thunders through the room from east to west in a raging torrent. It enters from a pair of 20-foot-wide barred tunnels on east side of the chamber and exits through two matching barred tunnels on the west side. Every now and then a rogue wave strikes the bridge's support pillars, sending a spray of water into the air and across its surface.

At the center of the bridge is what looks like the remains of a broken barricade, while on the far side of the bridge are another pair of stone doors. To either side of the stone doors on both sides of the room are staircases that lead down from the bridge into the dark, churning water. The ceiling is around thirty feet high and the water is just a few feet below the surface of the bridge.

Creatures 1 giant skulk

Before the Age of Darkness, boats brought dwarven hunters to this river port from elsewhere in the Deeplands. Unfortunately, the rune-scribed machinery that controlled the flow of water failed long ago, and the water in the canal rages out of control. It's also significantly higher than it was, leaving the old docks completely submerged.

A **giant skulk** is nesting in the hollow under the north end of the bridge. It's been feeding on goblins up until now, which is part of why the endrori haven't left the tower yet. The moment a character gets within 15 feet of the north door, the skulk races out and attacks.

Canal

Characters can easily tell the canal was hand carved through the living stone of the mountain. The water is around 15 feet deep and it runs so fast characters attempting to swim against the current must make a successful DS 11 Strength action check to make any

progress. Even on a success, the character swims at half their normal swimming speed. If the character stops swimming or critically fails their check, they are swept along by the current and slammed into the bars of the west tunnels for 5 damage.

Even standing on the stairs is dangerous, requiring a successful DS 6 Strength action check to keep one's footing. On a failed check, the character falls into the water and must swim back to the stairs using the swimming rules described previously.

Characters that enter the water or step down the stairs can see there is a hollow beneath the bridge on the north side.

Barricade

The barricade at the middle of the bridge was a last-ditch effort by a group of dwarven warriors to hold off an advancing endrori warband during the Age of Darkness. Unfortunately for the dwarves, the endrori broke through, and although they were eventually defeated, only two of the dwarves survived. They tossed the dead endrori into the canal and carried away their dead companions.

Scattered around the floor are the remnants of that long-forgotten battle. Broken spear tips, a bent sword, and even an ancient orc skull lie among the wreckage. The characters should get the impression that a furious and bloody fight occurred here.

Any character that has military or engineering training or experience can repair the barricade with about thirty minutes of work. See the Combat section for this entry for more information about the barricade.

Barred Tunnels

The bars across the tunnels used to raise and lower, but the mechanisms are all broken, leaving the tunnels permanently barred. Pinned against the west tunnels are a pair of boats, one at each tunnel. The one to the north barely juts above the surface, and sharp-eyed characters may spot it. The boat to the south is below the surface near the bottom of the canal. Both are

severely damaged and would take significant work to repair, even if the characters managed to pull them out of the water.

Hollow

The hollow beneath the north end of the bridge is just above the water line and forms a long low cave, about 20 feet long and 3 feet high. There are only a few ways to get to the hollow. One is to wade down the stairs a few steps with a successful DS 6 Strength action check to avoid falling into the water, and then climb along under the bridge to the hollow, requiring another successful DS 6 Strength action check to avoid falling off into the water. The hollow contains the remains of three goblins killed by the skulk as well as a few items of value as described in the Treasure section for this entry.

North Doors

The stone doors on the north end look just like the south doors. Like their counterparts, they are riddled with fine cracks making them unsuitable for warding. They are closed but not locked.

Combat

The giant skulk is hunting for food. It doesn't want to kill the entire party. It just wants a good meal.

Tactics

The skulk's goal is to paralyze a character and then haul the character back into the hollow to eat them. It begins combat by leaping out of the water and grabbing onto the railing with its arms. It will attack the nearest character, and as soon as a character is paralyzed it grabs them with its tail and starts dragging them away. If more than one character is nearby, it targets the smallest character. It moves at half-speed when dragging a paralyzed victim.

If it can manage it, the skulk will try to fight from the side of the bridge rather than crawling all the way up onto it. This gives it an easy path to escape if things get too dangerous. It will also take advantage of its swim speed to drop off the rail, swim under the bridge, and leap out elsewhere to attack some unsuspecting new target.

If the skulk is reduced to 5 Vitality or less, it retreats to the hollow and hides. It won't emerge again until it is fully healed.

Hollow

It's possible the party will end up engaging the skulk in its lair. If it manages to drag a paralyzed character back, it starts leisurely chewing on the character causing 2 damage each round. If the character fights off the paralysis, the skulk stops eating and starts fighting again.

The hollow is so small that medium characters need to squeeze while in the space. Movement costs double for squeezing characters. They also have +1 DS for all action checks that require free movement, such as attacking the skulk.

Treasure

A variety of treasures lay scattered among the bones and bits of rotting flesh. These include:

- 2 leather pouches containing 1d8 bird feet each
- 8 sp, 2 gp (Deepland)
- An exquisitely crafted **magic dagger** (+1 *Attack score*) from the Dwarven Age made from a black metal with the dwarven word *Svernoth* inscribed on the blade, which translates to "Nightblade"

7 Trapped Hallway

A pair of disabled traps hint at the danger in the Shrines (9), and secret doors to the Control Rooms (8).

A worked-stone hallway extends 20-feet north and ends at a pair of closed stone doors.

Experienced gamers will immediately grow suspicious of this simple description. That's desirable, since it will likely lead them to search for traps. The disabled traps fit the story of the tower, but they also serve a meta-game purpose, providing a clue to the players that there are more traps to come.

A secondary purpose is to suggest that, if there are permanent mechanical traps in this complex, there is likely some sort of control for activating, deactivating, and resetting the traps. Although it isn't strictly necessary for the characters to find the Control Rooms (8), it's a nice reward for characters that think to search and they're a useful tool if the characters decide to setup a base of operations in the tower later. Clever characters might even make use of the traps to defeat the warband in the Main Hall (11).

Doors

The doors on the north end of the hall are intact and closed. They open into the hallway, are undecorated, and are mounted with iron rings. There are brackets for barring the doors, but there is no bar in the area. The doors are too small and thin to hold a ward.

Secret Doors

There are secret doors in both walls on the south side of the hall leading to the Control Rooms (8). The doors blend almost perfectly into the wall, requiring a successful DS 11 Awareness action check to find. The mechanism for opening the door is a barely noticeable depression in the rock to the left of the door. Pressing on that depression opens the secret door.

Traps

The hallway features two traps: a simple pit trap in the northern 10-foot by 10-foot section of the hallway, and a swinging blade trap in the southern 10-foot by 10-foot section of the hallway. Neither trap is activated, so characters can pass safely. Once the trap is discovered, a successful DS 5 Intellect action check reveals the trap is deactivated. The gamemaster should consider automatically sharing this information if characters search in an especially clever way of detecting, examining, or testing the trap.

TRAP: PIT TRAP**Type** Mechanical **Trigger** Pressure **Detect** DS 7**Disable** DS 7 **Disarm** Controls **Reset** Controls**Effect*****Spiked Pit*** 4 bludgeoning damage from the fall and 2 piercing damage from the spikes.**Description**

This is a 20-foot-deep pit with iron spikes mounted at the bottom. When activated, pressure greater than fifty pounds triggers the trap, causing doors hinged on the east and west walls to swing down, dropping anyone in the 10-foot by 10-foot area of the trap in the pit below.

If you feel it's appropriate—for example, a character with a focus in Acrobatics or with some other trait or background that might help—you may allow a DS 7 Dexterity action check. On a success, the character grabs the lip of the pit as they fall, saving themselves from the plunge down onto the spikes.

The pit is reset, activated, and deactivated using the controls located in the Control Rooms (8).

TRAP: SWINGING BLADES**Type** Mechanical **Trigger** Pressure **Detect** DS 7**Disable** DS 7 **Disarm** Controls **Reset** Controls**Effect*****Swinging Blades*** *Melee Weapon Attack:* AS 6 to hit against all targets in the area. *Damage:* 4 piercing damage.**Description**

Blades are hidden in the walls, floor, and ceiling of this 10-foot by 10-foot area of the hallway. The trap is pressure activated if more than 50 pounds of pressure is applied to any portion of the area. When triggered,

multiple blades spring out, slicing through the space and anyone in their way.

Most players won't care about the details, since swinging blades are pretty cool and they don't need more than that. If they do push for details, however, you can divulge that if a blade hits something it cannot slice through, it simply retracts back into the wall. The blades swing out from hidden slots between the stone blocks. They make very little sound, so if it is dark, there is a chance the victims won't know the attack is mechanical. A successful DS 11 Awareness action check, however, reveals the sound of gears clicking away somewhere beyond the walls.

The blade trap activates once before needing to be reset in the Control Rooms (8).

8 Control Rooms

A pair of rooms containing controls for the various traps in the complex as well as the mechanisms that raise and lower the canal gates. Also, a hidden treasure to reward characters that find these rooms.

A short, narrow passage leads to a 10-foot by 10-foot chamber. Dust coats everything and from the state of the room, it's clear you are the first people in centuries to set eyes on it.

On the far wall is an enormous 6-foot-diameter wheel with a heavy chain looped over it. Both ends of the chain extend down into the floor. The mechanism looks similar to those used to raise and lower the portcullis on a castle gate. Beside it, protruding from the wall, are a series of four heavy levers.

Along the south wall at roughly eye-height to a dwarf are a row of horizontal arrow slits with sliding panels. On the north wall is a weapons rack designed to hold two crossbows and dozens of bolts. From this side, the elaborate mechanism that opens the door to the hallway is visible.

These rooms served a dual purpose when the tower was occupied. First, they acted as guard posts, providing a point from which dwarven guards could observe and

defend both the canal and the hallway. They also contain the mechanisms for controlling the tower's various traps.

Each room contains a treasure, but the placement of these treasures (east room or west room) is up to you, depending on which you want the characters to find (in case they only find one of the two rooms). For details on the treasures, see the Treasure section for this entry.

The first treasure is on the skeleton of a long dead dwarf that took cover here after suffering a fatal wound.

Leaning against the wall in the corner of the room is the skeleton of a dwarf garbed in the decaying remnants of once fine robes. An arrow, clearly of endrori make, protrudes from the skeleton's chest, and one boney hand still clutches at it as if trying vainly to pull it out. Its other hand grips a 10-inch long, 1-inch diameter ivory cylinder with silver caps on each end.

The second treasure is in the weapons rack of the opposite room.

The weapons rack still holds one of the crossbows once used to defend the tower. It's a heavy crossbow, clearly built in the style of the old dwarven kingdoms, and other than the coating of dust it looks brand new. Also stored here are a dozen crossbow bolts, also of old dwarven design.

Wheel

This wheel once operated the complex mechanism used to raise and lower the iron bars that block the canal today. It is made from thick oak and held together with massive iron plates. The chain links are massive. Each is as thick as a dwarf's wrist.

The mechanism the chains connect to—an elaborate gearworked system of gears, pulleys, and other mechanical devices—is hidden away in the walls. Neither the east nor the west mechanism works today, leaving the canal blocked on both ends.

If the characters try the wheel, it turns easily, making it clear that whatever it once connected to is broken.

Levers

The four levers protruding from the walls operate the tower's four traps, including the two pits in front of the Shrines (9), and both the pit and swinging blade traps in the Trapped Hallway (7). Each lever has three settings: set, triggered, and locked. When set, the trap is primed to spring when the trigger is met, and once triggered the lever drops to the triggered state. When locked, anyone can pass the trap without triggering it.

Two levers, those controlling the pits in the Shrines (9) are in the set position. The other two levers, those controlling the two traps in the Trapped Hallway (7), are in the locked position.

Weapon Racks

One rack is mounted on the wall in each room, placing any weapons stored there within easy reach of a dwarf. There is room for two heavy crossbows and a row of containers to hold bolts. The rack in one of the rooms is empty, but a single crossbow and a dozen bolts remain in the other room.

Secret Door

The secret door isn't secret from this side. The door is carved from stone and a gearworked mechanism mounted on this side allows it to open and close silently. It's possible to lock the door from this side by spinning an iron wheel in the center of the door. This operates an elaborate mechanism that slides heavy iron bars into the wall on either side to prevent the door from opening. There is no way to pick this lock from the outside, although a character could try to batter the door down (DS 8 to hit, 15 damage to break down).

The only weak point on the door is a thin section, about 1-inch by 6-inches, at dwarven eye-level. It is an impossibly thin section of stone that becomes translucent when lit from the other side, giving a relatively clear view into the hall.

Arrows Slits

The dwarven eye-level arrow slits provide a view into the canal. They have sliding panels to cover the openings. When closed, as they are when the characters discover them, the arrow slits are nearly invisible from the outside, requiring a successful DS 11 Awareness action check to notice.

The slits allow a clear line of fire on anyone in The Bridge (6) room, from the bridge to the point where the canal passes through the wall on the side where this room is located.

Treasure

There are two treasures that the characters may discover in these rooms, one in each of the control rooms.

Ivory Cylinder

The ivory cylinder (120 sp) gripped by the skeleton is a scroll tube of aristocratic craftsmanship. The exterior is carved with a scene representing dwarves frolicking in what looks for all the world like a mushroom forest. In fact, it is a representation of a mushroom forest found in a large cavern many levels beneath the tower.

The silver caps are worked with geometric designs. They conceal a clever locking mechanism requiring a successful DS 9 Intellect action check or some fantastic roleplaying to puzzle out. Smashing the case is relatively easy, but it completely destroys the value of the artifact.

The cylinder itself is a fine treasure, but it contains a potential adventure seed for future delving into the Deeplands beneath the tower. It contains a piece of ancient parchment covered with notes written in old dwarven and a number of diagrams. The writing and illustrations describe the means of opening an extremely elaborate locking mechanism on a massive vault door. Where the door is located and what lies on the other side is up to you to decide.

Heavy Crossbow

The exquisitely made dwarven heavy crossbow is actually a **magic heavy crossbow** (+1 attack score, +1

damage). The 12 bolts in the container beside it are not magical, but they are extremely well made.

9 Shrines

Two shrines offer the characters an opportunity to demonstrate their piety and earn a blessing—assuming they get past the pit traps.

Mounted on a tall pedestal in the center of this high-ceilinged, octagonal chamber, stands a larger-than-life marble statue of a proud dwarven nobleman. He looks thoughtfully off toward the horizon, one hand on his hip, the other grasping a mighty hunting bow. At his feet is a menagerie of dead animals. Unfortunately, it appears someone has carved up his once handsome face, chipping off his nose and cracking off parts of his beard.

Directly across the room are another pair of stone doors. To the east and west are passages leading off to what look like small shrines.

The dwarf noble who funded the construction of this tower is immortalized here before a pair of shrines, one dedicated to Vale and the other to Grethken. In days gone by, hunters could stop to pray to Grethken and Vale for good hunting and safety, or thank them for the same upon their safe return.

Doors

The stone doors on the north side of the room are just like those on the south side. They open into the octagonal chamber, have a slot for a bar, and they are too small to hold a ward.

Noble Dwarf Statue

The goblins and orcs came up and defaced this statue when they were first exploring the ruins. Characters that look closely will find dwarven runes carved into the pedestal which give the name of the tower's benefactor, a dwarf named Othengrad Erith Faldenkett. The animals carved at his feet include hares, ducks, beavers, and the prize of the hunt, a hart with an impressive rack of antlers.

Eastern Shrine

The shrine to the east is for Grethken, Keeper of the Wilds. He is portrayed here as a tall, mature dwarf with vines growing in his large beard and flowing hair. He holds a staff of yew wood in his right hand, and a sprig of mistletoe in his left. The statue stands upon a pedestal of dark green marble and there is a small altar before it, where one can assume hunters once left their offerings.

Unfortunately, the statue is splattered with filth. The goblins, failing to get near the statue thanks to the pit trap, simply threw feces at it instead. There are also a number of rocks lying on the ground as well as chips of marble from the statue where they hit.

Western Shrine

The shrine to the west is dedicated to Vale, Enaros of Animals. She too is portrayed as a dwarf, although she is leaner than most dwarven women and poised as if ready to run, giving the impression she might dash away into the darkness at any moment. The statue stands on a pedestal of red marble.

Like the statue of Grethken, this one is covered with filth and chipped from the rocks and feces thrown at it.

Cleansing the Shrines

Characters who make it past the pit traps may choose to cleanse the two shrines. This will involve a decent amount of water, at least three waterskins worth, and some serious scrubbing. Note that although the endrori warband is not far from here, sound doesn't travel past the closed doors and the warband is unlikely to come up from the Main Hall (11). The characters should be allowed to take as long as they like. Doing so is one of the requirements to gain grace at the end of the adventure, as described in the Wrapping Things Up section.

Traps

There are pit traps in the small hallways leading to each of the shrines. Although they are only five feet across, they are twenty feet deep and reset ten seconds after they are set off, trapping anyone that falls in.

In fact, there is the rotting corpse of a goblin at the bottom of the eastern pit trap, a fact the characters will become immediately aware of if the eastern pit is opened, since the smell that floats up out of the pit is truly vile.

The controls for the pit in the Control Rooms (8) may be used to lock the pit open or closed, or reset the pit trap as the characters choose.

TRAP: PIT

Type Mechanical **Trigger** Pressure **Detect** DS 7

Disable DS 7 **Disarm** Controls **Reset** Controls

Effect

Pit 4 bludgeoning damage from the fall.

Description

This pit is not wide, but at twenty feet it's still quite deep. The pit doors do not swing open, but rather slide into the wall. The motion is swift and silent, giving the characters who step on the pit no time to react. The door remains in the wall for ten seconds at which point it snaps shut again.

When the pit snaps shut, any character half in or half out of the pit must make a DS 6 Dexterity action check. If they succeed, they may either pull themselves the rest of the way out of the pit or drop down into the pit as they choose.

If they fail, the pit snaps shut on them causing 6 points of damage and trapping them there. If someone else sets off the trap again, the trapped character falls into the pit and takes the normal amount of damage from falling unless an effort is made to prevent this. Attempts to pry the pit open also trigger it to open again. If the character chooses to stay trapped, they take no further damage but it is exceptionally painful.

The pit may be reset, activated, and deactivated using the controls located in the Control Rooms (8).

Treasure

The only treasure in this area are 5 gp (Deepland) in a pouch hanging from the belt worn by the bloated goblin corpse at the bottom of the eastern pit.

10 Grand Staircase

This long staircase connects the shrine to the Main Hall (11) below. Although the staircase is empty, character actions here may alert the warband below.

A wide staircase descends north for about 10 feet before turning to the east. It continues down another 25 feet to a landing and another pair of stone double doors. One of the doors is just slightly open, and a thin ray of firelight shines through from the other side. Although muffled, you can just make out the sound of rough, angry voices echoing up from the room below.

There is no real danger that the characters will be discovered as they descend the stairs. The orcs and goblins in the Main Hall (11) are busy shouting and arguing, and as long as the characters make at least a basic effort to stay quiet, they won't be detected.

Only require a Stealth check if the party sends someone down to scout out the room beyond the doors by peeking through the crack. An especially bad roll might alert the orcs and goblins. Even if this happens, they'll send one goblin up to investigate, and if the goblin doesn't immediately see anything beyond the door, it'll go back down and report there is nothing there.

Give the characters time to create a plan of attack. You could even let them take a short rest back in one of the rooms they've already cleared if you like. The goal of the Main Hall (11) isn't to finish the party off, but to provide an exciting and climactic final battle.

Doors

Like the others before them, these doors are too small and thin to hold a ward.

11 Main Hall

The party confronts the endrori warband in what they will think is the final battle of the adventure.

The following is a physical description of the room:

The doors open onto a balcony overlooking a large, round hall 70-feet in diameter. Twin staircases curve down the wall of the balcony to the floor below. The walls of the room extend up 20 feet and then curve inward to form a dome that rises another 35 feet. The dome is painted to look like a blue sky dotted with puffy clouds. In the center of the dome is a large honey-colored crystal.

Evenly spaced along the north side of the room are three banded oak doors, and there are three more identical doors to the south. There is a faded sign over the middle south door.

Directly across from the balcony you see a pair of enormous stone doors. They appear hewn from a single block of stone. You can just make out some sort of pattern carved on the doors.

In the center of the room is what looks like a 5-foot-diameter well.

This next section describes the room's inhabitants and their camp:

Unfortunately, the room is not empty. The room contains what looks like a rough camp with a campfire on the east side of the room past the well. The fire blazes brightly, and black, foul smelling smoke curls up to the ceiling where it spirals around before disappearing into the cracks between the crystal and the stone.

Four goblins and two orcs circle the fire, and their harsh, bickering voices echo off the dome. The orcs are larger, but they are outnumbered by the goblins. It doesn't look like the disagreement will come to blows, but it's clear neither side is happy.

Creatures 4 goblins, 2 orcs

This is where hunters coming up from the Deeplands camped when not out hunting on the surface. The double doors on the east side of the room once held a

ward to hold back the endrori, but it failed around three years ago.

Goblins and Orcs

The four **goblins** and two **orcs** are the Aetaltan variety as described in the ***World of Aetaltis: Gamemaster's Guide***. They are all dressed in leather armor. The goblins' armor is roughly made and poorly tanned, while the orcs' armor is finely crafted, dyed black, and ornamented with tooled images of skulls and monstrous creatures. From the rats skewered on sticks and the fact that none of the endrori are carrying their weapons, it is clear they were lounging around the fire when the argument started.

If any of the characters can speak Endrori they discover the argument is about the skulk on the bridge. The goblins want the orcs to go up and kill it so they can get past it and start scouting the surface. The orcs insist their orders are to wait at camp until the others return and that's what they're going to do.

For more information about the endrori in combat, see the Combat section for this entry.

Camp

The endrori camp consists of 20 fur blankets serving as bedrolls, three barrels still tangled in some sort of sling device used to carry them filled with bitter ale, a pile of recently killed rats, and the campfire. The fire was built by smashing up old furniture found in the dormitories.

Sharp-eyed characters will realize there are more bedrolls than there are endrori. This is because most of the warband, consisting mainly of orcs, left to report to their chieftain about what they found. The plan is to gather additional supplies and reinforcements and launch an expedition to explore the surface.

Dome

The dome is beautifully painted, but sadly much of the paint has yellowed and peeled over the years. The edges of the dome, where the dome meets the wall, are carved in bas relief like the tops of trees with stone trunks that stretch down to the floor along the wall. The

treetops contain cleverly hidden torch sconces. When lit, they give the room and dome a warm glow, like the sky at dawn.

Crystal

The crystal is a rune-scribed device that once glowed like an artificial sun. Furthermore, it would brighten and darken to the same rhythm of the real sun, helping the hunters, many of whom spent very little time outside the Deeplands, to acclimate to the light of the surface world. Sadly, the runes burnt out at some point over the years, and the crystal no longer functions.

Balcony and Stairs

The balcony is 10 feet by 10 feet with 5-foot-wide staircases descending down along the wall to the north and south. There is a railing, but it's quite short—only about 2 feet tall.

Well

The well is 5-feet in diameter and has a 2-foot-tall wall around it. It used to have a winch, rope, and bucket, but the endrori tore it apart and burned it on their fire a few days ago. The bucket sits on the ground beside the well and the endrori attached a new length of rope to it for bringing up water.

The water is 20 feet below the lip of the well. An underground stream used to help feed the well, but it silted up a century ago. Today the well fills from water seeping in through the walls. For details on falling into the well, see Battleground in the Combat section for this entry.

Doors (North and South)

All of these are stout, oaken doors banded with iron. Despite their age, they are in remarkably good condition. The three doors on the north side and two of the doors to the south lead to Dormitories (12) where visiting hunters once stayed. The central door on the south side leads to what was once a Small Tavern (13) which served both the hunters and the guards stationed here.

The sign on the south door once had writing on it, but the paint peeled away long ago. There is a picture on the sign as well, and while also chipped it is still visible. It depicts a dwarven hunter holding a frothing mug of ale while riding a leaping hart through the forest.

East Doors

The massive stone doors on the east wall are each 5 feet wide and 10 feet tall. The hinges are cleverly designed so they are unseen from either side of the doors when they are closed. Each door has an iron ring mounted on it. The rings are forged into the shapes of dragons biting their own tails. Despite their size, a single person can easily open or close the doors thanks to the incredible dwarven engineering.

The only decoration on the doors are the intricate designs etched there by the warders when they warded this entrance to the Deeplands. More on reactivating the wards is found in the Wrapping Things Up section at the end of the adventure.

Combat

This battle should be exciting and action packed, and the characters should remain uncertain about whether they'll come out as the victors until the very end.

Battleground

The **balcony** allows characters with ranged weapons a clear line of fire on anyone in the room below. Consider allowing archers or spellcasters on the balcony to fire at enemies in melee with no negative modifiers. Unfortunately, the railing is too short and open to provide any cover.

The **well** is a potentially dangerous piece of terrain. The short stone wall around the well is perfect for tripping up enemies and shoving them over the side. A successful shove attack against an enemy backed up to the edge of the well automatically pushes them over the edge and down into the water below. Characters and creatures shoved into the well take 2 damage on the way down as they bounce off the walls.

Characters take no damage from hitting the water, but if they can't climb out they need to make a successful DS 5 Strength action check to tread water. On a failed check, the character must hold their breath until they make their next successful swimming check. Characters in heavy armor have +1 DS on this check.

Climbing out is difficult. If the character doesn't have a rope to climb out they must make a successful DS 9 Strength action check to scale the slippery stone walls. Goblins trying to climb out of the well must still make a check to climb out, despite their Climb speed, but they have advantage on the check.

The **campfire** is burning brightly. Clever combatants can easily grab a burning brand from the fire (treat it as a torch in combat), kick it to spread it around the battle field, or sweep a cloud of sparks into an enemy's eyes. Combatants shoved into the fire must make a successful DS 6 Dexterity action check or suffer 2 fire damage.

Before the Battle

Encourage the players to come up with a combat plan for their characters before they burst in the door. Four 1st-level characters will have a tough time winning if they don't come up with a good strategy for taking on the endrori.

When the Battle Begins

Unless the characters do something to alert the endrori to their presence, most likely the attack will surprise the warband. They're so wrapped up in their argument, they won't notice the characters until the door opens and the first character enters.

If the characters prepared an especially clever ambush plan, give them a surprise round at the start of the battle. During that round, the orcs and goblins just stand there looking shocked. On the other hand, if the characters' strategy was more along the lines of "Get 'em!" go ahead and roll for initiative normally.

When the goblins are able to start fighting, they dive straight into battle. They have their daggers on their

belts, and their teeth and claws are formidable weapons on their own.

The orcs, however, are not holding their weapons when the battle starts. Their greataxes and javelins are leaning against the wall. As a result, they'll spend the first round they can act grabbing their weapons. This gives the characters an extra round to take down a goblin or two before the orcs wade into the fight, helping to make an otherwise challenging battle a little more balanced.

Tactics

The goblins use their usual strategy of ganging up on the nearest target and trying to take the opponent to the ground before they begin attacking in earnest. If the characters rush in as a group, however, they'll likely split up into two pairs to attack two different enemies.

The orcs fight as a team, targeting spellcasters first then the larger, more dangerous opponents. If a foe is especially well armored, one orc will use the help action to give their compatriot advantage on their attack.

If the Battle is Too Easy

If it seems like the characters are going to mop up the endrori with little effort, consider having an orc and a couple more goblins come dashing out of one of the dormitory rooms. Perhaps they were sleeping there and heard the commotion. The idea isn't to beat the characters, but to give them enough of a challenge that the victory is something to truly celebrate.

If the Battle is Too Hard

If it looks like the endrori might defeat the characters, consider having one or more goblins flee the battle. They are cowardly creatures and might take the opportunity to run out the double doors and back into the Deeplands. They might even take a stab at one of the orcs as a final bit of revenge before escaping.

The Doppelganger

The doppelganger is a **greedy opportunist**. If it sees a chance to sneak through the door, it'll take it. At the same time, it'd prefer to take some treasure back with

it—especially the trunk with the warder inside. If the characters leave any valuable belongings lying around when the fight begins, the doppelganger might grab those as well.

The doppelganger is reduced to half speed when dragging the trunk behind it, giving the characters ample opportunity to notice their “frail” warder making a break for the Deepland door. This should clue them in that something isn't right. If confronted before it escapes, it drops the trunk and makes a break for the Deeplands.

You can also use the doppelganger to even the odds if the fight seems too easy or too hard. If the fight is hard, the doppelganger might get a few attacks in on the orcs or goblins before it flees. If the fight is too easy, it might make a surprise attack against one of the characters in the back, showing its true colors and trying to get in a kill or two before it flees.

If for some reason the doppelganger is unable to sneak off into the Deeplands during the fight and it hasn't revealed its true nature, the characters are in for a shock when it comes time to restore the ward. See *Wrapping Things Up* for more information.

Treasure

The orcs and goblins have a small stash of valuables, most of which they found along the way to the tower, but some they brought along with them from their Deepland encampment.

- 2 *potions of healing* (foul tasting, endrori-made concoctions, but if consumed they allow a Toughness action check against a DS equal to the total severity of all the character's wounds, reducing the severity of all wounds by 1 on a success)
- 35 cp, 22 sp, 9 gp (Deepland)
- 8 silver spoons (12 sp each)
- ring, seal (for marking sealing wax) (17 sp)

- small decorative gold buckle (45 sp)

12 Dormitories

Each of these small chambers contains the ruins of old dwarven furniture. A few pieces might still be serviceable, but for the most part it's good for little more than kindling.

The rooms are not important to the adventure, but they're included on the map as spaces for private chambers and storage in case the characters decide to make this a base of operations for future forays into the Deeplands.

13 Small Tavern

The rooms of the tavern are largely cleaned out and the little furniture that remains is dilapidated and unusable. Only the bar remains intact. In point of fact, it's actually in amazing condition considering its age. Constructed from a fungal wood harvested from Deepland fungus forests, it looks like oak but has aged to the hardness of stone.

Like the dormitories, this space is on the map in case you decide to launch further adventures into the Deeplands from the tower. Perhaps the warder decides to stay and sets up a shrine or temple in the abandoned tavern, or maybe when the characters start to sell their treasures in town, an enterprising dwarven brewer asks to setup a small tavern as a service to the characters—for a share of the treasure of course.

Wrapping Things Up

If you're playing this as a one shot, all you need to do is reveal the truth about the warder to the players, congratulate everyone on a job well done, and call it a day. On the other hand, if you're using this as part of an ongoing campaign, there are a few things that will need wrapping up before you're truly finished.

The Doppelganger

It's possible that the doppelganger will still be around when the characters reach the end of the battle with

the endrori. Perhaps it couldn't get to the exit or maybe it tried and failed to rob the characters. Whatever the case, at this point in the adventure, the doppelganger has one thing on its mind, and that's escape. It has no desire to fight the party on its own.

That isn't to say there aren't other possibilities. If one of the party dies during the fight, it might try to hide the body and take the character's place. This could create a fun roleplaying opportunity for the character's player. If truly cornered it might plead for its life, offering to act as a guide to the party on further forays into the Deeplands.

Contents of the Trunk

There is very little of value in the trunk other than the warder (see the detailed description of The Warder). Most of what the characters find are the warder's personal effects, all neatly stored in a backpack which is stuffed beneath the warder's head. These are everyday items like a bedroll, a couple of candles, and personal grooming items. If there are other items you wish the characters to have, the trunk is a perfect place to introduce them as treasures the doppelganger collected during its explorations.

Aside from the warder, the other important item in the trunk is a scrap of paper found beneath the backpack with the word *omnayasus* scribbled on it. This is the activation word for the *charm of suspension*. The word has no meaning beyond activating the magic item. The doppelganger scribbled it down after extracting the information from the charm's original owner.

The Warder

Assuming the doppelganger doesn't escape with the trunk, the characters will likely look inside. When they do, they'll find the old warder curled up as if sleeping, except he appears strangely blurry and has a strange silver disk over his heart (see the rules for the *charm of suspension* in the Magic Items section). Upon examination, it is clear he isn't breathing. At the same time, he doesn't look dead. Allow the characters to work out the truth on their own.

Once awakened, the warder is extremely thankful. If any characters are wounded, he uses his magic to heal them back to full health. If characters have died, he cannot bring them back to life, but he is willing to perform last rites if the characters desire.

Restoring the Ward

The warder's primary desire is to restore the ward on the massive stone doors. Fortunately, the doors and their sigils are fully intact. All the warder needs to do is shut the doors and cast the Ward of Alantra spell. Once completed the doors are sealed, endrori cannot approach the tower, and the doors cannot be opened without first lowering the ward.

The warder will not, under any circumstances, leave the doors unwarded. The characters might, however, convince him to stay for a time if they wish to make further forays into the Deeplands. The sigils on the door are extremely ancient and the warder is interested in studying them further. If the characters are pious and good, and if they treat the warder well, he will agree to set up a camp in one of the dormitory rooms. He'll stay as long as you need him to, raising and lowering the ward for the characters as needed, and providing basic healing when they return from adventures.

Awarding Grace

The characters have an opportunity to gain a point of grace. To earn this point of grace the characters must have:

- Cleansed the shrines
- Saved the warder
- Restored the ward

If they have completed all three of these tasks, give each character 1 point of grace to add to either Vale or Grethken as they choose.

Minions and Monsters

The following are statblocks for the monsters and NPCs found in this adventure.

AWAKENED VINES (CORRUPTED)

Large Plant

Defense	Armor	Vitality
6	1	15

False Appearance While the awakened vine remains motionless, it is indistinguishable from a normal plant.

Corrupting Strike Whenever the corrupted awakened vine inflicts a wound on an opponent with its slam or grab attacks, it also inflicts 1 point of corruption on the target.

Actions

Slam Attack Score: 4 (d10) *Damage:* +4 bludgeoning damage.

Constrict Attack Score: 4 (d10) *Damage:* The target is grappled (escape requires a Strength DS 6 action check) and while grappled, the target is restrained. Until the grapple ends, the target takes 3 bludgeoning damage at the start of each of its turns. Only rigid armor reduces this damage. The vine has Defense 6 and can be severed by inflicting 3 or more slashing damage in a single successful attack. Severing a vine in this way doesn't inflict damage on the plant but does end the grapple. The vine may hold up to three targets at one time.

Writhing Mass As its action, the plant can cause grasping roots and vines sprout out in a 15-foot radius centered on the vine, withering away after 1 minute. For the duration, any action which require freedom of movement, including attacks, suffer +1 DS.

Secure Food As a minor action, the vine can drag incapacitated prey up to 10-feet in any direction, to a maximum of 60-feet from the center of the vine to secure the body for later consumption. The vine may only move one body at a time.

Awakened vines are natural plants brought to pseudo life through magic. Sometimes this is purposeful, the work of mad wizards or angry druids. Other times it is simply a result of long exposure to magic, whether it be ambient essence, spell residue, or extended exposure to corruption.

DOPPELGANGER

Medium Shapechanger

Defense	Armor	Vitality
7	2	26

Attributes Presence 4, Empathy 2

Languages Common, Endrori

Shapechanger The doppelganger can use its action to polymorph into a Small or Medium humanoid it has seen, or back into its true form. Its statistics, other than its size, are the same in each form. Any equipment it is wearing or carrying isn't transformed. It reverts to its true form if it dies.

Ambusher In the first round of a combat, the doppelganger has advantage on attack rolls against any creature it has surprised.

Surprise Attack If the doppelganger surprises a creature and hits it with an attack during the first round of combat, the target takes an extra 5 damage from the attack.

Actions

Multiattack The doppelganger makes two melee attacks.

Slam *Attack Score: 5 Damage: +4*

Read Thoughts The doppelganger magically reads the surface thoughts of one creature within 60 feet of it. The effect can penetrate barriers, but 3 feet of wood or dirt, 2 feet of stone, 2 inches of metal, or a thin sheet of

lead blocks it. While the target is in range, the doppelganger can continue reading its thoughts, as long as the doppelganger's concentration isn't broken (as if concentrating on a spell). While reading the target's mind, the doppelganger has advantage on Wisdom (Insight) and Charisma (Deception, Intimidation, and Persuasion) checks against the target.

GIANT CENTIPEDE

Small beast, unaligned

Defense	Armor	Vitality
6	1	2

Actions

Bite *Attack Score: 4 (d10) Hit: +2*, and if the target takes damage they must succeed on a DS 6 Toughness action check or take 5 poison damage. If the poison damage reduces the target to 0 Vitality, the target is incapacitated for 1 hour, even after regaining hit points, and is paralyzed while poisoned in this way.

GOBLIN (AETALTAN)

Small humanoid (endrori), chaotic evil

Defense	Armor	Vitality
6	1	4

Attributes Dexterity 4

Safety in Numbers Aetaltan goblins benefit greatly from the proximity of their allies. If the goblin has a number of conscious allies greater than half the number of adversaries, attempts to scare or intimidate the goblins has +1 DS.

Sunlight Sensitivity While in sunlight, the goblin has +1 DS on attack checks, as well as on any action checks that rely on sight.

Actions

Multiattack Goblins may make one attack with their bite, one attack with their dagger, or two claw attacks. If attacking with claws, the second attack action check has +1 DS.

Bite Attack Score: 4 (d10) Damage: +2

Claw Attack Score: 4 (d10) Damage: +1

Dagger Attack Score: 4 (d10) Damage: +2

GRAY OOZE (CORRUPTED)

Medium ooze (corrupted), neutral evil

Defense	Armor	Vitality
4	0	11

Damage Resistances Damage from acid, cold, or fire is halved

Amorphous The ooze can move through a space as narrow as 1 inch wide without squeezing.

Corrode Metal Any nonmagical weapon made of metal that hits the ooze corrodes. After dealing damage, the weapon takes a permanent and cumulative -1 to its Damage score. If its Damage Score drops to -3, the weapon is destroyed. Nonmagical ammunition made of metal that hits the ooze is destroyed after dealing damage. The ooze can eat through 2-inch-thick, nonmagical metal in 1 round.

False Appearance While the ooze remains motionless, it is indistinguishable from an oily pool or wet rock.

Corrupting Strike Whenever the corrupted gray ooze causes a wound against an opponent, it also inflicts 1 point of corruption.

Actions

Pseudopod Attack Score: 4 (d10) Damage: 2 bludgeoning damage plus 4 acid damage, and if the

target is wearing nonmagical metal armor, its armor is partly corroded and takes a permanent and cumulative -1 penalty to its Armor score. The armor is destroyed if the penalty reduces its Armor score to 0.

ORC (AETALTAN)

Medium humanoid (endrori), chaotic evil

Defense	Armor	Vitality
6	1	8

Relentless If the orc takes 4 damage or less, and that damage would normally reduce its Vitality to 0, it is reduced to 1 instead.

Sunlight Sensitivity While in sunlight, the orc has +1 DS on all action checks, including attacks.

Actions

Greataxe Attack Score: 4 (d10) Damage: +5

Javelin Melee or Ranged Attack Score: 4 (d10) Damage: +3

SKULK, GIANT

Large monstrosity, unaligned

Defense	Armor	Vitality
6	0	20

Prehensile Tail The giant skulk can use its tail to grab, push, pull, and drag objects. It does not have enough control over its tail to attack with it, using it primarily to drag paralyzed prey back to its lair. The giant skulk may grab an object as a minor action then move at full speed. It may attack while dragging an object.

Swimming Leap The giant skulk's long jump is up to 30 feet and its high jump is up to 15 feet, with or without a running start, as long as it begins its turn in the water.

Amphibious The giant skulk can breathe air and water.

Actions

Multiattack The giant skulk uses its Paralytic Spit, if available, to subdue a target, then makes one attack with its bite to any target not paralyzed if unable to escape with its prey.

Bite Attack Score: 5 (d12) Damage: +4

Paralytic Spit Ranged Attack Score: 5 (d12) Damage: +2 acid damage, and the target must succeed on a DS 6 Toughness action check or be poisoned for 1 minute. Until this poison ends, the target is paralyzed. The target can repeat the action check at the end of each of its turns, ending the poisoned condition on a success.

The giant skulk is an amphibious, snake-like creature with two legs on the forward portion of its body. It grows to between 10-feet and 15-feet long with a body up to 3-feet in diameter. It prefers to ambush its prey from the water, striking quickly, paralyzing the victim with its Paralytic Spit, and then using its prehensile tail to drag the doomed individual back to its lair.

UNDEAD (LESSER BOUND)

Medium undead (bound), chaotic evil

Defense	Armor	Vitality
6	1	20

Damage Resistances The lesser bound undead suffers half-damage from bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing non-magical attacks

Damage Immunities The lesser bound undead is immune to poison damage

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Damage Vulnerabilities The lesser bound undead takes double damage (after all modifiers) from fire damage

Absorb Life When the bound undead inflicts damage, it recovers half that amount of Vitality up to its maximum. Any excess Vitality beyond its maximum is tracked in a pool that is used after combat, assuming it survives, to determine its bound undead evolution.

Unnatural Aura Animals, whether wild or domesticated, will sense the unnatural presence of a bound undead at a distance of 30 feet with a successful DS 5 Empathy action check. They do not willingly approach nearer than that and are subject to the frightened condition if forced to do so. A frightened animal remains so as long as it is within 30 feet of the bound undead or until a handler succeeds at a DS 11 Empathy action check.

Actions

Multiattack The bound undead makes two attacks: one with its sword and one with its sickle.

Longsword Attack Score: 4 (d10) Damage: +4

Sickle Attack Score: 4 (d10) Damage: +3

WARDER OF ALANTRA

Medium humanoid (human), lawful good

Defense	Armor	Vitality
5	0	24

Spellcasting The Warder of Alantra is a 9th-level spellcaster. Their spellcasting attribute is Empathy. They have the following cleric spells prepared.

Cleric's Spells Powers

Since we haven't finished magic rules yet, the GM should give the cleric any powers or spells they think are appropriate. The cleric does little damage in a fight, but he can certainly cast healing spells as needed and perhaps buff or protect the characters with magic.

Actions

Quarterstaff Attack Score: 4 (d10) Damage: +1

Magic Items

The following are the attributes and rules for the new magic items that appear in this adventure.

CHARM OF SUSPENSION

Sense DS 6 **Analyze** DS 8

Price 5,000 sp **Weight** 1/2 lb.

Description

The charm is a silver disc the size of a human's palm inscribed with magical symbols and infused with powerful magic. It is oddly cold to the touch, so much so that in a warm, humid climate, small amounts of water may condense on its surface.

To use the charm, it is placed over the heart of a willing creature and the activation word is spoken. The magic of the charm freezes the creature in time, protecting them from mundane harm and temporarily halting the normal life process. Touching the charm a second time and speaking the activation word again, ends the effect. While in operation, the charm remains firmly attached to the creature under its power.

The charm places a single, willing, living creature of medium size or smaller in a state of suspended animation; the target does not require food, water, or air, and it doesn't age. The creature appears as it did prior to activating the device, but has a slightly blurry look about them, as if seen through wet glass. As long as the magic is in effect, the creature gains immunity from all forms of non-magical damage.

Once the charm is deactivated, it loses all magical power. The silver disc without its magic is worth 100 sp.

RING OF COMFORT

Sense DS 8 **Analyze** DS 6

Price 500 sp **Weight** NA

Description

The *ring of comfort* is a ring made from a tiny strip of wondrously soft, nut-brown hide. It is crafted from the hide of the eberas, a small woodland creature from the wilds near Selentheia that is suspected to have gone extinct during the Age of Darkness. When a person attunes to and wears a *ring of comfort*, they may ignore the negative effects of extreme heat and extreme cold.