

THE DM TOOL CHEST

# THE SECRET OF WHITE MANTLE



A DORMANT VOLCANO HAS AWAKENED AND AN ELEMENTAL CULT  
WISHES TO HARNESS ITS POWER TO SUMMON THEIR GOD





## THE SECRET OF WHITE MANTLE



*The Secret of White Mantle* is a Fifth Edition adventure intended for **three to five characters of 8th to 10th level** and optimized for **four characters with an average party level (APL) of 9**. The long-dormant mountain has awoken,

and with it, the high priest to an ancient elemental god. The villagers of the Hinterlake are ill-equipped to deal with something like this and seek aid to put an end to whatever plan is being enacted within the newly revealed shrine. This adventure takes place in the [FREELANDS CAMPAIGN SETTING](#) and fits any existing campaign with only a few modifications and name changes.

### BACKGROUND

Zhe'ctma was an ancient deity whose power to command the natural elements was sought after by both intellectuals and craven, power-hungry fools alike. The most devoted followers would seek places where the convergence of the natural elements could be found, none more coveted than a volcano. White Mantle is such a place, though it has lain dormant for nearly a millennia—long enough for the rain and snow and ice to mask the lava flows that tell of its violent past. The most prominent summit in a small range

known as the Chiltarn Peaks, its inky colored rock lies hidden beneath the perpetual cap of snow that gives the mountain its name.

In the eastern foothills of the Chiltarn Peaks, the small freshwater lake of Hinterlake collects the frigid waters that constantly run down from the mountains. The lake is well stocked with fish - enough to support the three villages nestled on its banks: Colts to the north, Bialdside to the south, and Timbermill on the west. The villages rely on fishing to feed themselves and trade with the caravans that come through the mountain pass on their way to the region's larger cities. The eastern road runs alongside the lake and through a waystation used by all three villages as a market.

The villages are filled with good-natured folk and home to the usual assortment of petty squabbles and big dreams that flourish wherever simpler lives are led. However, even bitter rivalries are quickly put aside in the face of any threat to the lake. In such times as is needed, a Full Meet is called at the waystation by lighting a bonfire of wet reeds sending a menacing plume of black smoke into the air visible from every bank of Hinterlake.



## ADVENTURE SUMMARY

The characters are hired to investigate the strange colored lights coming from the nearby mountain of White Mantle. A shrine to the elemental god Zhe'ctma was uncovered by a recent avalanche, and dark powers have been awakened within. As the characters enter, they find that a band of cultists has also come to investigate, and they encounter the failed experiments of Khazir, the high priest of Zhe'ctma. The characters must gain entry to the ritual chamber where Khazir has sealed himself away and disrupt his ritual before it's too late.

## ADVENTURE HOOKS

Here are a few ways to get your characters hooked into this adventure:

**Simple Travelers.** A caravan headed to the Hinterlake waystation hired the characters as escort guards. Murmurs break out amongst the drivers and passengers alike as a plume of black smoke is visible from miles away. Drawing closer, the waystation is undamaged but very busy. It's clear that some sort of important meeting is going on.

**A Call for Aid.** A message has been sent out to all the nearby towns, calling for adventurers to investigate a possible threat to the villages of Hinterlake. The communities have pooled their coin to offer a substantial reward to those courageous enough to brave the mountain. Interested parties are to report to Nythill Hereann, manager of the waystation.

**An Ancient Power.** There have long been rumors of a site of ancient power within the Chiltarn Peaks. Recently, there has been talk amongst the scholars of a porter brought back from Hinterlake. A caravan driver reported he had found the almost catatonic man by the side of the road. Whatever fateful expedition he was part of set out from the waystation, but only he was found alive.

## THE WAYSTATION

The waystation on the eastern bank of Hinterlake is the link to the outside world for the three villages surrounding the lake. It consists of a 100-foot-square single-story timber building, which houses various shops and merchant stalls. The only other building is a two-story thatched inn that sits on the other side of the road. Outside there is a semi-permanent caravan circle with simple wooden stalls for traveling merchants to use. There are posts anywhere there is space to tie up horses, wagons, and watercraft.

A nervous crowd is currently gathered at the waystation. People huddle together and speak in hushed voices as they look with concern towards the strange lights over the snow-capped mountain.

Many shops are selling all kinds of things at the waystation, including the following:

**General Goods.** The young man minding the general store looks visibly bored. Lox Ry is a human **commoner** who has been helping his father, who had to go to the Full Meet at the inn. His stock is basic - he only has mundane adventuring gear that costs no more than 2 gp.

**Smoked Fish.** Celine Emerson is a friendly human **commoner** selling many different types of smoked fish. She also has ready-made bundles of rations available for 5 sp containing jerky, cheese, smoked fish pate, and somewhat fresh bread.

**Tackle and Bait.** The wise-cracking halfling **commoner** Wiltmar Sammes smokes a loose leaf pipe. He has all manner of hooks, lines, and sinkers for sale.

**Traditional Remedies.** Gwaedhiel Stardraft sits almost hidden behind rows of brightly labeled bottles. She is a human **commoner** whose real name is Betty. She tries to sound mysterious and claims to have a potion for any purpose the characters enquire about for 2 gp. Anybody drinking a potion will feel a strange tingling warmth and have bad breath for the rest of the day. There is no other effect.

**Toys.** The laid-back Menelwen Saurwhirl is a retired dwarf **guard** that spends her days whittling toys to sell. She often doesn't seem like she's paying attention but knows the comings and goings within the waystation.

**Caravan Livestock.** Bert and Ernest are jovial human **commoners** usually found leaning on the inside of a fence they have erected to form a make-shift pen. They occasionally use reeds they are fiddling with as blow darts to fire sesame seeds at each other playfully. They have several goats, chickens, and pigs available for sale.

## RUMORS AT THE WAYSTATION

The characters can learn the following additional information by spending time speaking to others at the waystation. These can be revealed in any order:

- The mountains of the Chiltarn Peaks are cold, but only the White Mantle has snow cover all year round.
- Three days ago, a small earthquake hit the area. There was no damage to the waystation or any villages, but a large avalanche was triggered on White Mantle.
- Two days ago, strange lights started appearing over the top of White Mantle, changing color every few seconds.
- Yesterday a bald human in a blue cloak was asking questions about trails up to the White Mantle.
- The rivers flowing into Hinterlake have been flowing faster in the last few days.
- The lake is unusually high for this time of year.



- This morning there were tracks visible on White Mantle. There must have been a dozen or more folks to be able to see the tracks from here.

## THE ROD AND HOOK INN

The inn is a well-kept, two-story timber-framed thatched inn, with space for fifty people in the tavern area and rooms above that can be hired for the night. It has a good reputation for its welcoming atmosphere and fresh food and ales, including many specials bolstered by the traders that pass through the waystation.

### A “FULL MEET”

The inn has a large open lower level that serves as the tavern. Villagers often gather in groups of their respective villages. There is currently a loud, angry discussion happening here, but this is being kept in line by Nythill Hereann (LG human **veteran**), manager of the waystation. He is well known to all in the tavern, who all know him by name. The village groups will make suggestions and shout out rumors (see Rumors at The Waystation, page 3), imploring Nythill for answers. If Nythill leaves the village groups on their own, chaos erupts as dozens of people speak simultaneously, and nobody listens.

Nythill eventually speaks to the characters and asks them to end whatever is happening on White Mantle that threatens Hinterlake. He offers the characters 500 gp each for this service.

### TRAVELING TO WHITE MANTLE

While the weather around the lake has been warm, White Mantle itself is under the effects of cold weather. Characters can purchase cold weather gear at the general goods store for 5 gp each. Nythill Hereann will point out the need for the equipment if the characters do not think of it for themselves.

The trip to the mountain itself is uneventful and takes roughly 4 hours of travel. As the characters make their way up the slope, the temperature drops to below freezing. The trip up to the shrine takes an additional hour through the snow, and the characters must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or gain one level of exhaustion. Creatures with resistance or immunity to cold damage automatically succeed on the saving throw, as do creatures wearing cold weather gear and creatures naturally adapted to cold climates.

## THE SHRINE OF ZHE'CTMA

The entrance to the shrine is nestled within a craggy outcropping about halfway up the southern slope. The shrine was built over a millennium ago by a cult worshipping Zhe'ctma when the mountain was a volcano. They perished when, at the culmination of a

ritual, the volcano erupted one last time before becoming dormant and beginning to gather snow.

The shrine laid undiscovered for several hundred years until a devout hermit called Khazir was guided to it in a dream. Having fashioned an entrance himself, he spent decades trying to understand where those that had come before him had gone wrong. The last thing that he was missing was the raw energy from the lava that this place had possessed when it was an active volcano. As the end of his life drew near, Khazir bound his spirit to The Shrine of Zhe'ctma, to awaken when the mountain did.

## GENERAL FEATURES

Unless otherwise noted, The Shrine of Zhe'ctma has the following features:

**Ceilings, Floors, and Walls.** The whole shrine is rough-hewn from the dark and glassy rock of the mountain. Ceilings are 15 to 20 feet high, and the floors are dusty underfoot. Halfway up all intact walls is a strip of faded engravings approximately 1 foot wide.

**Doors.** Doors are 6 inches thick and hewn from the same rock as the rest of the shrine and set on iron pins within the doorways. Despite their size, they are perfectly balanced and open easily.

**Climate.** While the mountain's exterior is under cold weather effects, the interior of the shrine is warm.

**Lights.** The shrine is dimly lit with softly pulsing light emanating from the engravings on the walls. The light shifts seamlessly between various hues of blue, red, and yellow.

## KEYED LOCATIONS

The following descriptions correspond to the keyed locations on the provided map of The Shrine of Zhe'ctma.

### 1. ENTRANCE

The snow against the mountain face is deep and littered with boulders and loose rocks. A crack in the mountain face widens to reveal a short cave leading inside the mountain and into a room of worked stone. A single figure looms above you on a plinth in the entranceway - a black marble statue of a robed man with his hood swept back and clutching a staff topped with a glass orb. The air is warmer here and musty as if long undisturbed. Steps lead down either side from this raised dias into a place hewn from the dark, glassy rock of the mountain. Halfway up each wall are faded engravings that wrap around the whole chamber and into the corridors beyond—each one emitting a soft pulsing glow of ever-changing colors.





# THE SHRINE OF ZHE'CTMA

1 SQUARE = 5 FEET







Any grandeur that this shrine once held has long since fallen into disrepair. The stairways are cracked, and loose rocks have fallen from the ceiling in places. Characters who succeed on a DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check notice rivulets of waters on the rock floor from melted snow and mud. A successful DC 12 Wisdom (Nature) check reveals the tracks as having been made by ten or more humanoid. A character inspecting the engravings on the wall and who succeeds on a DC 12 Intelligence (History) determines that they are an ancient form of Dwarven; a character that understands Dwarven instantly recognizes the language. A character who spends 10 minutes reading the engravings learns that this is the Shrine of Zhe'ctma.

## 2. CORRIDORS

Several of the corridors end in piles of collapsed rock. A character who succeeds on a DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) check determines that the cave-in has happened in the last few days.

## 3. SUMMONING CHAMBER

When a character approaches the door to this area, read aloud the following:

The door is made from the same black rock as the surrounding walls. It clearly swings to this side and has done so recently as an obvious arc has been made in the thick dust on the floor.

The door can be pulled open as an action and held open as a free action. Otherwise, it magically returns to its closed position after 1 minute.

When the characters enter the room, read aloud the following:

The bodies of robed humanoid figures lie broken and bloodied around the room. Many have fallen in a loose ring around the edge of an engraved circle of symbols in the center of the floor, above which floats a large figure

that is ever-changing in both color and form. At times it appears humanoid, at others like something from the abyss - always faceless. Another of the mercurial figures stands next to a lectern on a raised level on the north side of the chamber.

**Encounter: Mistakes Were Made.** Two **elemental mistakes** (see Appendix) have been summoned against their will and were not bound to the will of another. They are creatures of instinct and attack whatever has shown itself to be the greatest threat.

The engraved circle consists of three concentric rings of ancient script. The outer ring is written in Auran, the middle ring in Aquan, and the inner ring in Terran. There is a blank space at the center of the inner ring. Each script translates the same as: "In time Zhe'ctma shall make us whole again, and we shall join them." The first time a character touches fire to the center of the circle by any means activates the *glyph of warding* it contains and immediately casts *hold monster* (save DC 17) at the nearest elemental. If there isn't an elemental in range, the spell targets the creature nearest the center ring.

The book on the lectern is written in Primordial, and a character who succeeds on a DC 16 Intelligence (Arcana) check recognizes this is as an incomplete summoning spell.

**Treasure.** One of the robed figures is clutching a gold coin the size of a human hand with a blue gemstone mounted in the center of it. This coin is one of the three needed to unlock the sealed door (area 7). A character actively searching the bodies who succeeds on a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check finds a *potion of remove curse*.

A character with a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 18 or higher or actively searching the walls who succeeds on a DC 18 Wisdom (Perception) check notices that a tiny patch of the engravings on the southern wall is not glowing like the rest. A character who succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check finds a small button on the engraving, which, when pressed, causes the wall to slide open and reveal area 4 beyond.

## 4. HOLDING ROOM

When the secret door to this area is opened, read aloud the following:

The hidden door recedes into the adjacent wall soundlessly. The chamber beyond has several cages, some of which contain the skeletal remains of humanoid figures with well-preserved clothing on them. A desk holding an extensive pile of notes and a chair sits in the middle of the room.

A character who can understand Primordial and takes 10 minutes to read the notes learns the following:



- The notes recount experimental progress and are dated from between 723 to 758 years ago.
- The notes are signed by Khazir, High Priest of Zhe'ctma.
- Khazir claimed to have been guided to this place in his dreams by Zhe'ctma.
- Khazir couldn't complete "the ritual." He needed a more significant source of fire. He tried to summon lava, but his attempts failed.
- Khazir knew that he was running out of time to solve the problem in his mortal shell and so planned on preserving his soul in the hopes that this ancient volcanic site might reactivate—and him along with it—allowing him to complete his work.

**Treasure.** A character actively searching who succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check finds a *wand of binding* that has fallen on the floor underneath the desk. The wand is made from the same dark rock as the mountain.

## 5. STORES

Archways to either side of the far end of the passage are visible, and a statue of a hooded figure points down the corridor towards you.

**Trap: Pressure Plate.** Characters with a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 19 or higher or actively searching for traps who succeed on a DC 19 Wisdom (Perception) check notice the rock underfoot looks slightly raised on the area just inside the doors. The trap activates when more than 35 pounds of weight is placed on the pressure plate, causing the statue to innately cast *sleet storm* centered on the square that triggered it. Wedging an iron spike or other object under the pressure plate prevents the trap from activating. A successful *dispel magic* (spell save DC 13) cast on the statue also destroys the trap.

### 5A NORTHERN ALCOVE

This alcove contains benches with all sorts of reagents, most of which appear stale or degraded, as well as vials and pouches used for storing them. A golden medallion hangs from a peg on the wall.

**Treasure.** A gold coin the size of a human hand with a yellow gemstone mounted in its center sits on the bench. This coin is one of the three needed to unlock the sealed door (area 7). A character who takes 5

minutes to gather materials can create a component pouch.

### 5B SOUTHERN ALCOVE

This alcove contains several small crates full of long-spoiled provisions and a wooden chest.

**Treasure.** The chest is locked and can be opened by a character using thieves' tools who succeeds on a DC 17 Dexterity check. It contains several empty potion bottles and a *potion of restoration* that restores 4d4 + 4 hit points when consumed.

## 6. KHAZIR'S CHAMBER

Sumptuous living chambers for a solitary and studious individual are in the process of being ransacked by four robed figures.

**Encounter: Ransackers.** Two **cult fanatics** and their two **veteran** bodyguards are ransacking the chambers of Khazir, the High Priest of this shrine. They are followers of Zhe'ctma that are trying to gain access through the sealed doors of area 7. They believe that they can summon an avatar of Zhe'ctma. The cult fanatics attempt to flee the shrine when they are dropped below half their hit points, dropping the coin (see below) in their possession in the process.

**Treasure.** One of the robed figures is clutching a gold coin the size of a human hand with a white gemstone mounted in the center of it. This coin is one of the three needed to unlock the sealed door (area 7).

## 7. SEALED DOORS

A set of double doors made from the same dark rock as the surrounding walls block the way forward. Inset in one door are three round indentations about the size of a human palm with a small recess in the center of each of them.

Any character touching the doors feels that they are warm. The doors swing open immediately upon all three coins (found in areas 3, 5a, and 6) being inserted into the indentations.

These magically locked doors operate like a *wall of force* spell and cannot be opened directly by any physical means, nor will a *knock* or *dispel magic* spell open them. Fitting the three coins is the only method of opening the doors directly. However, you can reward creative solutions such as using a *passwall* spell on the walls to either side of the door, especially if they have indicated they have finished exploring and don't have all three coins.



## 8. CAULDRON OF ELEMENTS

The corridor opens into a large circular chamber with a forty-foot-high ceiling supported by rock columns. A blast of hot air washes over you uncomfortably as you enter, stemming from the gash of magma you can see cutting across the hall. Four elementals are kneeling as if in prayer, facing inwards towards a wide circular platform. Hovering a few feet in the air above it is the pale, incorporeal spirit of a priest undertaking a ritual. The priest is being orbited by four red, white, blue, and yellow crackling energy rings. As you enter, the spirit spins slowly to face you and addresses you in Common. "Ah, I see we have an audience for the ascension of Zhe'ctma! Excellent."

**Encounter: Protecting the Ritual.** An **air elemental**, an **earth elemental**, a **fire elemental**, and a **water elemental** protect the spirit of Kazhir (see "The Spirit of Kazhir" sidebar) while he conducts the ritual. Their connection to this site of primordial power gives them advantage on saving throws against *banishment* and similar effects that would forcibly remove them from this plane. At the beginning of the second round of combat and each subsequent round, a strand of energy from each elemental is pulled into the rings surrounding Kazhir, and each elemental's hit points are reduced by 10 points.

Each ring fades when the corresponding elemental is slain or removed from this plane. When the last elemental is defeated, Khazir turns to look at the characters abruptly in horror before detonating in a harmless burst of colorful energy. The energy expands outwards to fill the hall and destroys the door that leads to area 9. Characters feel hot, cold, and tingly as it passes through them. The room cools noticeably, and the glow from the lava crack diminishes to the dullness of embers.

## 9. HALL OF RELIQUARIES

You sense an air of stillness emanating from this room. Two pedestals have cushions sat atop them—on one sits a beautiful pearl, shimmering with a shifting, oily blend of rainbow hues, and on the other, a small glass orb holding a flame suspended in the center. A chamber to the east has an ornate iron chest sitting in the center.

**Treasure.** The pearl is a *pearl of power*. The glass orb sheds dim light for 10 feet and, when shattered, summons a fire elemental as if by a *conjure elemental* spell. A character proficient in Arcana or who succeeds on a DC 12 Intelligence (Arcana) check can determine how the orb works. The iron chest contains 600 cp, 4000 sp, 1100 gp, a small bag of rare spices worth 25 gp, an ornately engraved leather belt with a silver wolf's

### THE SPIRIT OF KAZHIR

Kazhir is immune to all damage and conditions while conducting the ritual. He has an AC of 18, and any attack that hits him and would normally deal cold, lightning, fire, or thunder damage instead deals 7 (2d6) of that damage type to the attacker and any other creature within 10 feet of them.

head buckle worth 50 gp, and a black stone medallion carved with Primordial runes representing the four elements that can be used as a holy symbol.

## CONCLUSION

The journey down from White Mantle is cold but uneventful, and the characters return to the waystation without incident.

### THE RITUAL WAS STOPPED.

Nyhill Hereann pays the characters the promised reward at the waystation, as the flow of water coming down from the mountains has already begun to return to more normal levels. The people from all the villages are immensely grateful, which they express with full mugs of ale and hearty slaps of congratulation on the characters' shoulders.

### THE RITUAL WAS COMPLETED.

Khazir completes the ritual, harnessing the elemental powers and reigniting the dormant volcano. As magma builds beneath the earth, rivers of lava begin to run from the formerly snow-capped peak. Clouds gather and swirl around the now completely black mountain, with flashes of lightning illuminating the erupting lava heading through the Chiltarn Peaks inexorably towards the waystation and Hinterlake.





# APPENDIX

## ELEMENTAL MISTAKE

*Large elemental, neutral*

**Armor Class** 14 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 102 (12d10 + 36)

**Speed** 50 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	6 (-2)	10 (+0)	7 (-2)

**Damage Resistances** bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons

**Damage Immunities** cold, fire, lightning, poison, thunder

**Condition Immunities** exhaustion, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained, unconscious

**Senses** blindsight 30 ft., darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

**Languages** Aquan, Auran, Ignan, Terran

**Challenge** 7 (2,900 XP)

**Proficiency Bonus:** +3

**Illumination.** The elemental mistake sheds bright light in a 20 ft. radius and dim light in an additional 20 ft.

**Immutable Form.** The elemental mistake is immune to any spell or effect that would alter its form.

### ACTIONS

**Miasmic Touch.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) bludgeoning damage, plus 10 (2d6 + 3) cold damage, plus 10 (2d6 + 3) fire damage, plus 10 (2d6 + 3) thunder damage.

**Uncontrolled Energy (Recharge 6).** The elemental mistake casts one of the following spells (roll a d4 or choose one) without the need for components (spell save DC 15):

#### d4 SPELL

- 1 *fireball*
- 2 *shatter (at 3<sup>rd</sup> level)*
- 3 *sleet storm*
- 4 *spike growth*



# CREDITS

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