

STAGMIRE'S JUDGE

AN ADVENTURE FOR CHARACTERS OF 9TH TO 11TH LEVEL



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STAGMIRE'S JUDGE IS A FIFTH EDITION adventure for three to six characters of 9th to 11th level, optimized for a party of four 10th-level characters. A fearsome black dragon known as Nirangor the Judge rules over the sodden lands of the Stagmire as its self-appointed sovereign. Scion of the ancient black dragon that destroyed the elven city-state of Silvathalion, Nirangor believes that the Stagmire is her birthright. Can the dragon be slain so that the land may be reclaimed? This adventure takes place in Cartosia, but the names of people and places can be changed to place this adventure in any swampy environment across a variety of campaign settings.

BACKGROUND

Centuries ago, the region now known as the Stagmire was a verdant forest and home to the thriving elven city-state of Silvathalion. Though isolationist and secretive, Silvathalion was renowned for its mastery over restorative magic and animated architecture. Its prosperity, however, was shattered with the arrival of a dragon known as Vorastrix, an ancient, malevolent force whose presence marked the beginning of a dark era and quickly began to corrupt the essence of the land.

As Vorastrix's influence spread, the once lush forest began to decay, slowly sinking into a swamp. Thriving trees withered into husks and the air grew thick with despair. The elves, led by their bravest warriors and most powerful mages, waged a relentless war with the dragon, a conflict that lasted centuries and saw the gradual decline of Silvathalion.

The climax of this struggle was mutual destruction. The elves, at great cost, managed to slay the dragon, but victory was bittersweet. Silvathalion lay in ruins, its people decimated, and their homeland warped into a landscape they no longer recognized. As the elves abandoned their fallen city, they left behind a domain permanently scarred by conflict.

Draconic presence, however, remained. Unbeknownst to the remnants of the elven kin, Vorastrix had, years earlier, laid two eggs, one of which had recently hatched and was named Nirangor. The second egg remained inert, a silent reminder of what could have been. Nirangor, a whelping now alone in the world amidst the ruins of Silvathalion, had inherited what her mother had died fighting for.

Nirangor embraced her self-appointed role as guardian of Stagmire, which she deemed her domain by birthright. As she grew, so too did her attachment to her twin egg, which remained unmoving and unbroken. This attachment developed into an intense, irrational passion—Nirangor perceived the egg as a symbol of lost lineage and the

enduring legacy of her mother, Vorastrix. She erroneously believes that the egg will one day hatch.

Today, those few with any familiarity with the dragon refer to her as Nirangor the Judge, for her rule over Stagmire is absolute. She lords over the swamp with a draconian sense of justice as its judge, jury, and executioner, subjugating what few populations remain after the exodus of the elves. She fiercely protects the inert egg of her assumed sister and would sooner die than see it stolen by another.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

There are numerous reasons the party may be compelled to confront Nirangor within her lair. A few of these reasons are outlined below:

The Lost Twin. Rumors and legends have circulated for years in nearby settlements about a precious dragon egg guarded by Nirangor the Judge. Treasure hunters, scholars, and rulers are intrigued by the possibility of recovering such a rare object. The party might be enticed to retrieve it themselves so they can either sell it for an inconceivable sum or use it as a bargaining chip for potential extra-planar dealings.

Elven Heritage. A descendant of the Silvathalion elves approaches the party, seeking their assistance in exacting revenge against the draconic line that stole their homeland. Though it would be impractical for the land to be resettled, Nirangor's death would be of symbolic significance. They offer the party 1000 gp for proof of the dragon's demise, such as a scale or a tooth.

The Doomed Party. The disappearance of two ambitious adventurers in the Stagmire has stirred concern in a nearby settlement. Known for their daring exploits, many believe that the pair had ventured toward Nirangor's lair. A good friend of the duo is a wealthy benefactor, and is willing to pay the party handsomely for recovery of the presumed bodies. gp up front, and another 200 gp upon completion of the heirloom's recovery. Furthermore, the party is encouraged to expand the scope of the heist and take whatever they can carry for themselves. Though Lady Solvayne seeks nothing more than her heirloom and believes stealing is wrong, too much suspicion may be drawn to her if only the heirloom goes missing.

NAVIGATING STAGMIRE

As a result of draconic presence, Stagmire is brutally difficult to traverse. The area is subject to the following lair effects:

- The land within 6 miles of the lair takes twice as long as normal to traverse, since the plants grow thick and twisted, and the swamps are thick with reeking mud.



- Water sources within 1 mile of the lair are supernaturally fouled. Enemies of Nirangor that drink such water regurgitate it within minutes.
- Fog lightly obscures the land within 6 miles of the lair.

Few creatures call Stagmire home. Among them are small, scattered lizardfolk tribes, trolls, mushroom folk, blights, and a smattering of the undead. Nirangor's lair rests in the heart of Stagmire, which takes approximately two days of travel to reach from its perimeter given the harsh conditions. GMs, at their discretion, can consider encounters from the Stagmire Encounters table as the party navigates toward the lair.

STAGMIRE ENCOUNTERS

d8 Encounter

- 1 A diseased **treant**, sickened by the draconic corruption, pleads with the party to put it out of its misery.
- 2 A warband of **lizardfolk** from a tribe loyal to Nirangor stalk the party for a time and eventually engage in hit-and-run combat if not confronted.
- 3 A mysterious, dense mist envelops the party. Every so often, structures of the lost city of Silvathalion appear in the mist, but vanish once again before party members can get too close. After an hour or two, the mist fades.
- 4 The party encounters a circle of mushroom folk performing a strange, hypnotic dance. Approaching or interrupting the mushroom folk, who wish to be left alone, makes them likely to attack, unless they are calmed with a successful DC 16 Charisma (Persuasion) check.
- 5 The party discovers the sunken, waterlogged remains of a three-wagon caravan. Investigation of the site reveals the caravan to be several years old and a likely target of a black dragon's breath weapon. A character who makes a successful DC 18 Wisdom (Perception) check notices a chest just below the surface of the water; the chest contains 250 gp.
- 6 The spirits of several fallen elves rise as **wraiths** consumed by madness. They attack the party, fighting until they are destroyed.

7 The party comes across an ancient, half-submerged statue of an elven deity. Touching the statue triggers an ancient defense mechanism that functions like a *glyph of warding* charged with the *lightning bolt* spell.

8 The party encounters a towering tree, leafless and twisted into odd angles and significantly taller than the other foliage of the swamp. If they come within 30 feet of the tree, it disassembles itself into a horde of **blights** that swarm the party.

NIRANGOR'S LAIR

A small temple in the heart of Stagmire is inexplicably the single remaining free-standing structure of Silvathalion. Originally constructed to honor an elven deity of vengeance and rebirth, its crypts host the bodies of forgotten heroes of the former city-state. Nirangor has claimed it as her lair, filling the top of its tower with the most prized items of her hoard. Unless otherwise stated, the temple's features are described as follows:

Ceilings, Walls, and Floors. Built many centuries ago with blocks of hewn marble, what remains of the ceiling in the temple's main chamber is 20 feet high. The ceiling in the tomb below is 10 feet high, and as well the ceilings of the lower levels of the temple's tower. Walls are a foot-and-a-half thick. Rubble is scattered throughout the temple, creating difficult terrain where it is densest; primarily in the northwestern portion of the main chamber as well as the lowest floor of the tower.

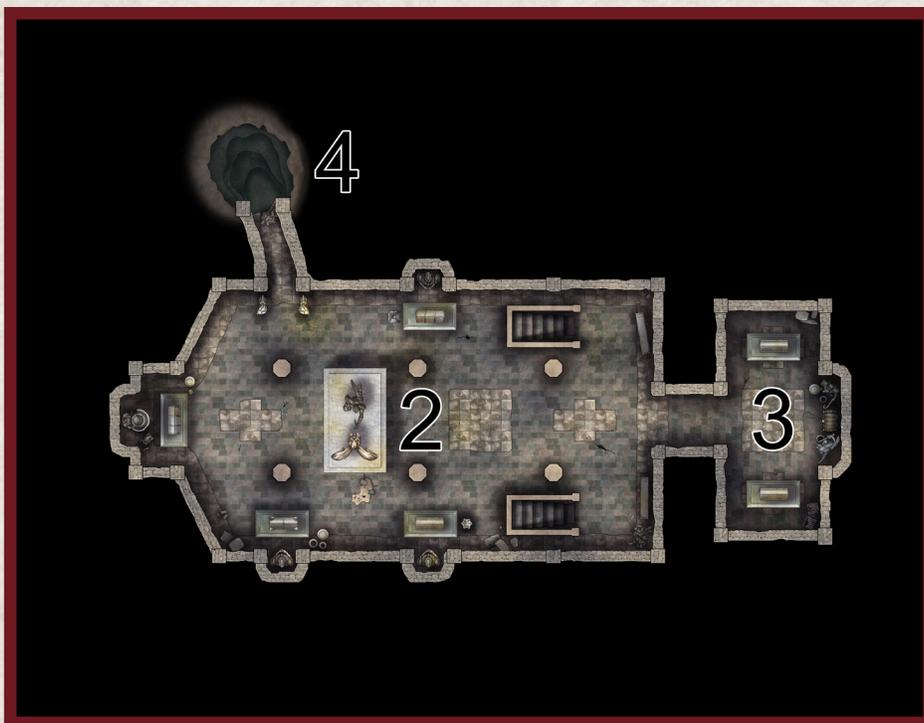
Unsafe Stonework. After the passing of centuries and the forest's descent into swampland, the structural integrity of the temple's walls, ceilings, and archways has been severely compromised in most areas. As a result, some spells of activities may have consequential effects. A spell such as *fireball* or *thunderwave* has a 20 percent chance to cause a ceiling collapse twice the size of the spell's area, dealing 16 (3d10) bludgeoning damage to all creatures in the area. This collapse might block or bury objects or exits.

Doors. The main double doorway to the temple still has a single door hanging loosely from its hinges, but there are otherwise no other functioning doors within the temple.

Light. The temple is lit only by whatever sunlight filters through its collapsed ceiling. During the day, this means all above-ground areas of the temple are at least dimly lit. At night, the temple is shrouded in darkness.

Buffeting Miasma. The air within and around Nirangor's lair is thick with a supernatural miasma, a lingering effect

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of the dragon's presence and the temple's ancient magic. This miasma is heavy, humid, and carries a strong acrid scent that clings to the nostrils. Characters within the lair who do not cover their mouths and nostrils with a piece of fabric or similar to mitigate its effects must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw for every 10 minutes spent in the lair. On a failed save, a character becomes nauseated and suffers a level of exhaustion. This exhaustion cannot be removed until the affected character spends at least 1 hour in fresh air.

NIRANGOR THE JUDGE

This adventure proposes that Nirangor (an **adult black dragon**) is elsewhere as the party arrives at the temple, and that she returns to her lair at a dramatic moment, presumably as the party is climbing the steps to the tower's perch, where her twin egg and hoard are present. This section outlines Nirangor's personality and motivations so that GMs are able to use the dragon flexibly to suit their own tastes and adapt to the actions of the party. For example, GMs may wish to change the moment of Nirangor's arrival at her lair, or have Nirangor harass the party with fly-by assaults on their way through Stagmire before a fulsome confrontation.

Personality: Nirangor possesses a philosopher's mind, though one clouded by her own hubris. She often muses about the nature of justice and the inevitability of time. Her demeanor is contemplative and melancholic, reflecting on her solitude and the burden of her guardianship. Despite her intimidating appearance, Nirangor shows an unusual level of empathy towards those who respect her domain. However, this empathy explodes to acidic fury if her lair or the egg is threatened.

Appearance and Mannerisms: Nirangor's scales shimmer in a spectrum of dark hues, reflecting the swamp's eerie lights in an iridescent display. Her eyes, a deep violet, convey a depth of ancient wisdom and a piercing, almost hypnotic gaze. She is unusually slender and graceful for a black dragon; her movement an elegant warning of imminent violence. Ideal: Nirangor believes that those who are best able to self-actualize their will onto their surroundings are fit and morally justified to rule.

Bond: Nirangor considers her unhatched twin egg a sister, convinced it will one day hatch. She speaks to it often, and would die to protect it.

Flaw: Nirangor's affinity for the egg is single-minded and irrational, for it will never hatch and certainly doesn't speak back. Her belief in her inherent worth and capability, above that of all other beings, prevents her from critical self-reflection.

There is one thing Nirangor may want from the party, if the party can convince Nirangor not to kill them within moments of first meeting them with a successful DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion or Deception) check: destroy the elven ghost in the temple's crypt. She can explain the following to the party:

- An elven ghost named Lorithal occupies the temple's crypt. Nirangor doesn't spend as much time as she would like in her lair because Lorithal harrasses her incessantly with endless debates and accusations; challenging her right to occupy the temple and condemning her actions from a moral standpoint. He appears often throughout the temple when she is present.
- Destroying Lorithal's ghost requires desecrating his remains, but Nirangor cannot do this herself—some ancient magic, surely prepared by the elves, prevents any draconic essence from entering the crypt. Nirangor suspects the same magic has contributed to the temple's miraculous status as the swamp's only free-standing structure of Silvathalion.
- None of her minions are capable enough to destroy the ghost. If the party can, she offers each member 2000 gp or an item of equivalent value (as determined by the GM) from her hoard.

Characters who make a successful DC 18 Wisdom (Insight) check can infer that Nirangor is likely being truthful and will keep her word. If the party asks Nirangor for more history on the conflict between her and the elves, she is willing to explain the story of her mother and her own birth, as well as deliver an extended sermon on the will to power, the nature of inheritance, and her "might makes right" moral framework. As long as the party remains respectful, they can argue Nirangor's positions without her deciding to destroy them. Refusing her quest, however, means they must immediately leave her lair and the swamp. Failure to do so promptly results in her attacking.

The following areas are keyed to the provided map of Nirangor's lair:

I. MAIN CHAMBER

The main chamber of this temple lies in solemn ruin. Broken pillars and scattered debris cast long, forlorn shadows across cracked flagstones. In the center, a colossal statue, once perhaps the temple's patron deity, lies broken in several pieces atop a stepped dais. Two parallel staircases descend to the temple's lower level. To the east, a corridor extends to the adjoining tower. Steady drips of water echo in the air.

Encounter: Hanz'Ok, Manz'Ul, and Franz'Gor. There are three trolls within this chamber named Hanz'Ok, Manz'Ul, and Franz'Gor. One of these trolls, Hanz, his gnarled form hunched over in pain, sports a heavily bandaged leg—a crude splint fashioned from the remnants of a shattered pillar. The two other trolls, Manz and Franz, larger and with demeanors that vacillate between concern and irritation, are attempting to apply a pungent salve to the wound, eliciting grunts and growls from their kin. Their conversation, should any party members who speak Giant overhear it, hints at a sibling relationship strained by the constant peril of their service to the dragon. The trolls are inclined to attack any intruders on behalf of Nirangor, but can be persuaded to

entertain a tenuous parley with a successful DC 16 Charisma (Persuasion or Deception) check. A character who offers to assist with Hanz's wound by providing healing magic makes this check with advantage. Manz, loud and arrogant, does most of the talking on behalf of his brothers. The trolls cannot be intimidated and will not deliberately act against Nirangor. They may be persuaded or deceived into sharing any of the below information with the party, however, as long as they plausibly believe Nirangor is under no serious threat:

- Nirangor spends much of her time in the skies above the swamp. She can sense, however, the party's presence at the temple. They live only because she presently allows them to.
- The primary job of the trolls in service to Nirangor is to ensure the local lizardfolk populations are kept in line and provide regular tribute to the dragon.
- Their sibling, Hanz'Ok, was injured after an altercation with a lizardfolk warband. They are not optimistic about the wound, nor the improvised salve they are using to treat it.
- Nirangor's most prized possession is her twin egg that never hatched. Nirangor is confident that it will hatch one day, despite how long it has been. She speaks to the egg often.
- Spirits of the elves that used to live in the area before it became a swamp linger in the crypts below the temple. The trolls generally avoid the area.

If combat breaks out here, the trolls fight viciously, but not to the death; they attempt to flee if reduced to one-quarter of their hit points or fewer. They use **troll** statistics, though each has 16 AC and 120 hit points.



2. CRYPT

The tempo of dripping water echoes throughout this spacious crypt. Multiple sarcophagi lie atop daisies; silent statues, chipped and faded, overlooking them, as if to protect them from plunder. In the middle of the chamber, a knight kneeling before a winged figure is sculpted from marble. Miraculously, the sculpture shows no signs of damage. A passageway extends to the east into a large alcove.

The magic of the temple has prevented Nirangor from entering the crypt. Angry spirits have protected its contents from any minions that Nirangor has sent in efforts to retrieve its valuable contents. As a result, it has remained mostly undisturbed.

Encounter: Guarding Spirits. The warped, angry spirits of Silvathalion elves lurk in this chamber, ready to manifest and attack any who would dare disturb its contents. If any of the four sarcophagi in this room are opened, three **wraiths** and a **ghost** appear in a violent display of sound and light. They fight until they are destroyed.

Treasure: Silvathalion Sarcophagi. There are four sarcophagi in this chamber; each containing the remains of a prominent Silvathalion elf as well as the 400 gp worth of funerary offerings they were interred with.

3. ALCOVE

Two sarcophagi are positioned at opposite ends of this alcove. The ground below the northern sarcophagi has swelled, leaving open and askew, a skeletal shoulder slouching over its lip. In the chamber's center, two statues lock blades above an iron chest resting below them.

Environmental change, including subsurface earth movements caused by Nirangor, have popped open the northern sarcophagi.

Lorithal Silvershade. The northern sarcophagi belongs to Lorithal Silvershade, once a high-ranking mage and guardian of Silvathalion's most sacred spaces. His prowess in magic was matched only by his stubborn pride and unyielding loyalty to the elven city-state. He played a pivotal role in the creation of the enchantments that preserve the remnants of the temple, and was killed a few years before Silvathalion's final battle in an earlier attempt to confront Nirangor. Lorithal is boisterous and headstrong in his convictions, making sweeping gestures with his hands as he speaks. He appears to the party when they enter this chamber. If the party has attempted to plunder the temple, he is furious, and will scold the party before ultimately disappearing unless the party apologises and agrees to return anything they've taken with a successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check. If the party has not disturbed the temple, however, the very first thing he asks of them is if they would be so kind as to tuck his body back into its resting place and close the lid.

He follows this request with an introduction. In addition to a brief overview of his history, Lorthal can provide the elven perspective of the oppressive draconic occupation. He is proud of their fight but laments Nirangor's continued presence, and is just as willing as Nirangor is to have an extended, philosophically-charged discussion about the right to territory. He revels in exacting the limited revenge that he can; his continued moralistic harassment of the dragon. He ultimately makes the party a similar appeal to the one that Nirangor may have already made: destroy the dragon so that the elves may rest in peace. He offers the party no reward beyond the hoard that they would be free to plunder, choosing instead to attempt to appeal to their sense of what is right and just. Should they refuse on the basis of personal danger, Lorthal ultimately understands. Regardless of how conversation with Lorthal goes, he does not resort to violence. If he becomes sufficiently disappointed or dismayed either because the party stole from the temple or indicated sympathy for Nirangor, he explains that he finds himself simply overcome by sadness and despair before ultimately vanishing.

Desecrating Lorthal's Remains. Should the party decide to side with Nirangor, Lorthal can be expelled from the temple through the desecration of his remains. There are countless ways to do this; but simply pulling them free from their sarcophagi and smashing them to bits would suffice. Throughout any attempt to interfere with his remains, Lorthal appears, panicked and incredulous, and makes anguished pleas for the party to cease such violence. As desecration reaches its climax, Lorthal cries in despair and vanishes for the last time, banished to eternal purgatory in the Ethereal.

Treasure: Chest and Sarcophagi. The chest in this room is unlocked; it contains eight pieces of jewellery worth 100 gp each. Each sarcophagi contains 500 gp worth of funerary offerings.

4. COLLAPSED TUNNEL

The passageway from the crypt opens into a flooded tunnel that dives deeper underground. Extending for over a mile, it eventually provides access to the subterranean world of the Underdepths.

5. TOWER BASE

Remnants of grandeur lie in ruins; shattered columns and splintered benches tell of a place once used for congregation or counsel, now surrendered to decay. Rubble litters the floor, some of it small enough to crunch under foot, and otherwise piled high enough to obstruct free movement through the chamber.

The floor of the level above has fallen through to obstruct much of this space.

Hazard: Hidden Acid Pit. A pit of acid bubbles beneath the floor of this chamber; a physical manifestation of Nirangor's influence. The interlocking stones of the floor directly in front of the staircase in a 10-foot-by-10-foot area (marked with an 'X' on the map) sag ever-so-slightly and will collapse into the pit below under the weight of a Medium-sized creature or larger. Any creatures in the area during this collapse must make a successful DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or fall five feet into the pit and take 20 (5d10) acid damage, plus an additional 10 (2d10) acid damage for each round they remain in the pit. The walls of the pit can be climbed with a successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check. Characters with a passive Perception of 20 or higher notice the sagging flagstones upon entering the room. A character who investigates further and makes a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check can determine they will collapse under moderate pressure.

6. SECOND STORY

Broken glass and crumbled stone litters the floor here, in the center of which is a jagged opening which looks down into the shadows of the lower level. A staircase, miraculously intact, ascends to the tower's peak.

There is nothing of value here.

7. PERCH

The miasma here is accented by the metallic scent of precious metals. A hoard of glittering coins, gemstones, and artifacts sprawls across the chamber. Amidst the wealth, a solitary, massive egg rests upon a nest of gold and fine silks—a stark contrast to the surrounding decay. Its shell is a glossy obsidian, absorbing any and all light around it. The weight of history presses close, tangible in the silent watch of stone statues whose gaze seems fixated upon the egg.

This chamber holds the most prized artifacts of Nirangor's hoard. It does not represent, however, a complete collection, as much of Nirangor's wealth lies scattered throughout Stagmire, the whole of which the dragon considers her domain.

Treasure: Nirangor's Hoard. The total non-artifact value of the hoard within this chamber is approximately 30,000 gp, reflected in loose coins, ingots, and precious gems. GMs are encouraged to place magic items of their choice within the hoard, however many artifacts among what Nirangor has collected are likely to have originally been possessed by the elves of Silvathalion, such as a *staff of the woodlands*, *boots of elvenkind*, a *ring of spell storing*, and a *helm of telepathy*.

Nirangor's Egg. Nirangor's egg is nearly three feet tall and weighs approximately 100 pounds. Though it is inviable, a dragon egg would be considered priceless by many potential buyers; should the party decide to take the egg for themselves

and try to connect with a buyer, they could make themselves fantastically rich.

AFTERMATH

Should the party kill Nirangor, with or without ever speaking to Lorithal, the draconic occupation of Stagmire is finally expelled. Though it will remain swampland and will not ever be reclaimed by the fallen elves of Silvathalion, it may yet host new, softer life and communities. If Nirangor remains alive, either because the party retreated or sided with the dragon herself, her presence continues to spread gradually, and the borders of Stagmire creep ever outward; a few feet every year. Siding with Nirangor and desecrating the remains of Lorithal brings the dragon the peace that she seeks, and she holds up her end of the bargain to deliver the party their reward. Should the party be able to live with what they've done, they may find themselves haunted by other spirits of Silvathalion who witnessed their evil.

REFERENCES

This work includes material taken from the System Reference Document 5.1 (“SRD 5.1”) by Wizards of the Coast LLC and available at <https://dnd.wizards.com/resources/systems-reference-document>. The SRD 5.1 is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode>.

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