

HEART OF DARKLING PART 1 - RUTMUT'S RENDEZVOUS

There is a river that dips underground through a low-ceilinged cave before descending fairly gently under the grey hills to depths unknown. However, all it takes is a magic spell to lower the water level at the cave entrance to make this easily navigable by boat, as the river cave has a fairly high ceiling after the entrance... and at least one local merchant has been acquiring goods from someone along the underground river in this manner.

The very first structures along the river are attached to a small tower on the hills above and are now used by an upstart goblin tribe led by an orc named Rutmut and his two brothers.

The brothers are the only remaining survivors of a fearsome orc tribe that once plagued the area. Discovering the underground hideaway and the goblins therein, Rutmut saw the location as an opportunity to rebuild his tribe (even if it is with stinking goblins).

In order to fund the new tribe, Rutmut and his orcs recently led raids on a number of farms in the area, seizing commodities and animals. During one raid, Rutmut's brother Hurk kidnapped a farm girl. "Just like old times!" he bragged. Unfortunately, the girl was the constable's daughter. And now there's a sizable bounty on Rutmut's head: 500 gold pieces dead or alive.

ADVENTURE DETAILS

This is the first part of the *Heart of Darkling* series and a request from one of my patrons. I've been wanting to stock this map for some time, so I'm excited to take a stab at it. Hopefully, as time progresses I can work on filling out the other 9-10 maps that are part of this series.

Rutmut's Rendezvous is intended for 3-5 1st-level adventurers using Fifth Edition rules.

[If you have a request that you'd like to put in, be sure to check out my request page. It's FREE to put in requests and I try to get to all of them.](#)

GENERAL FEATURES

Unless otherwise stated in the area descriptions, the goblin mine has the following features:

Ceilings. The structure at the front of the river caves are fairly well built. The ceilings are 15 feet high and well supported by thick stone braces found at 10-foot intervals. The natural tunnel the river runs through is surprisingly high as well, easily 15-20 feet in some areas.

Floors. The floors in old bandit camp are made of hard tile. A few vines and roots have grown up through the stonework over the years, but overall, they are in decent shape.

Walls. While they aren't the most ornately decorated walls in the land, they are well-made. All walls are made of stone blocks laid out in a tile pattern. In some places, there are murals worked into the walls depicting the countryside.

Light. Rutmut's gang can all see in the dark. However, they prefer to work in light. As such, there are torches at enough junctions to at least provide dim light throughout most of the complex.

Doors. The doors in Rutmut's Rendezvous are sturdy, wooden doors, measuring 3 1/2 feet wide by 7 feet high. Each is fitted with iron hinges and hardware. Because the location is difficult to find in the first place, a majority of the doors in Rutmut's Rendezvous are left unlocked.

The River. The river that runs through the Darkling Cave Complex pushes northward at an easy pace, escaping through the mouth of the cave. Swimming against the stream requires a DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check to avoid being pushed further downstream (or injured), but unless otherwise noted its pretty easy to get through.

ENTERING THE HEART OF DARKLING

The river spill outs from the mouth of the cave. The cave entrance is fairly low, however. There are a few different ways to get inside.

Use Magic. A successful control water spell would do the trick. Of course, that's a spell only a 7th-level spellcaster can cast. However, there is a local druid name Armo that's been collecting fees for allowing access. Should the characters decide to go this way, Armo charges 120gp per casting of the spell (quite the deal). If the characters are traveling to the Heart of Darkling at the behest of the local constable, then the constable will cover the costs to get inside (but take it out of the reward money, of course).

Swim. The characters might swim under the river. Doing so requires them to hold their breath for at least 1 minute (PHB 183) and make a successful DC 12 Strength (Athletics) check. Failure results in the character injuring themselves on a rock, taking 2 (1d4) bludgeoning damage as a result.

Research. If the characters are crafty, they might do a little more research. If they take some downtime to do some research on the Darkling River (see rules for research downtime on page 132 of XGtE), they can discover the following lore:

- *One piece of lore.* There is an old tower that used to connect to an old bandit's hideaway below the hills. The characters will need to search the area, making a group DC 12 Wisdom (Survival) check to find it.
- *Two pieces of lore.* A well-tread hunter's trail goes right past the old tower. The characters won't need to make the Survival check once they learn where the trail is.
- *Three pieces of lore.* Rumor has it that a demon lives somewhere within the Darkling River's complex. For this reason, many of the locals have kept away from the caverns.

If the characters enter through the river, they start at area #A1. If they find the old tower through research, they start at area #A7 at the top of the stairs.

AREA DESCRIPTIONS

All the encounters listed here are keyed to the map of the Rutmut's Rendezvous:

A1 - STONE DOCK

If the characters enter via the river by way of the cave, read the following description:

Right away it's obvious where the orcs' hideaway is. Moments after you enter the cavern, just to your left you see a rickety rowboat tied to a post. The post is part of a stone platform that juts out from a hole cut in the cavern wall. Torches light the way inside this old hideaway. Recalling the descriptions offered up by the locals, you think that this has got to be the place.

In fact, you can even hear a few goblinoid voices bickering about something just down that hallway.

A small group of goblins guards the hallways in area #A2. Should the players be somewhat loud about their entrance, these goblins will immediately draw arms and attempt to deal with them. If the characters wish to sneak in, they need only make a group Dexterity (Stealth) check versus the goblins' passive Perception.

A2 - MAIN HALL

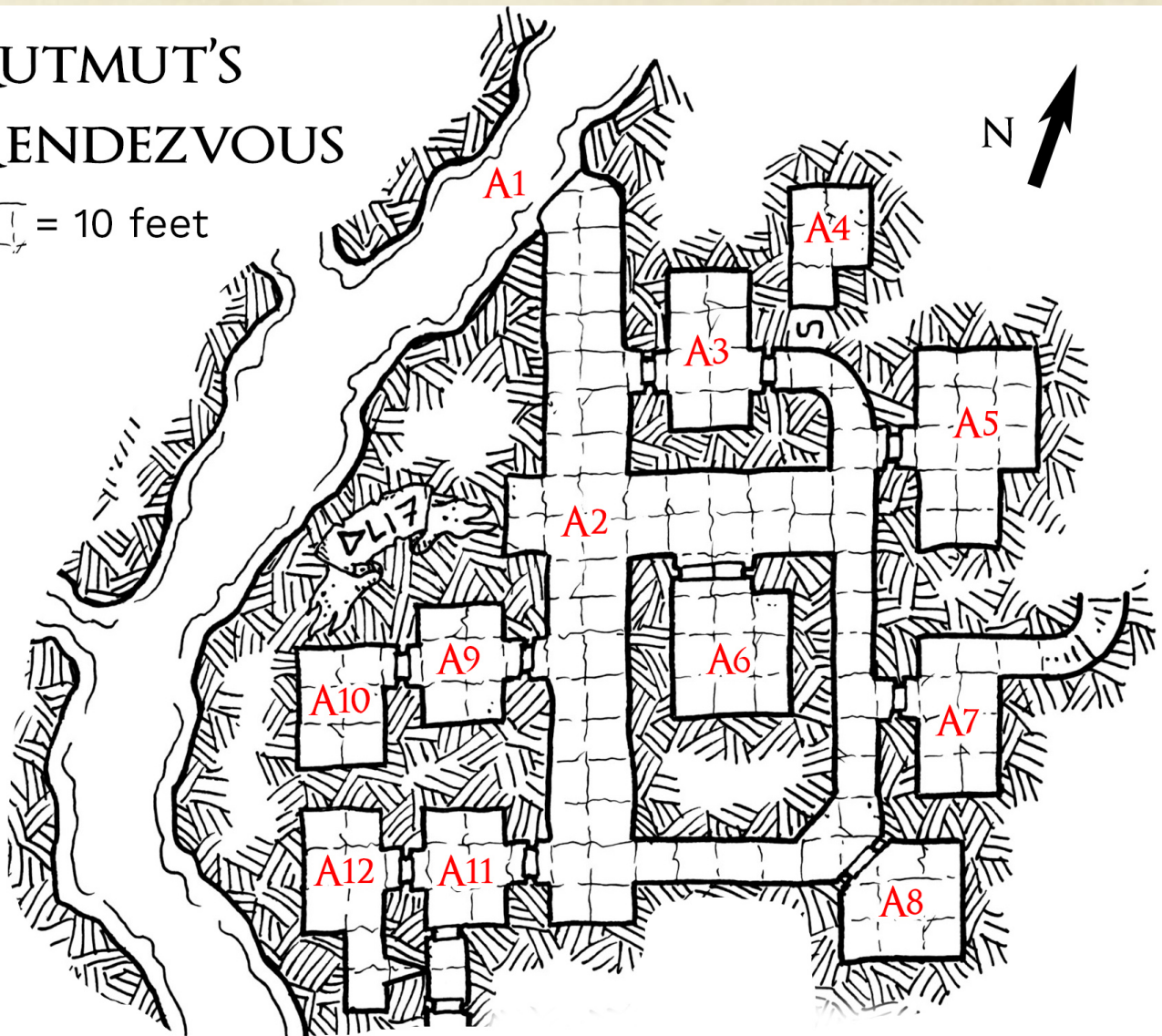
This wide hallway looks well-built, more than capable of holding the hill up above it. Other than a few cobwebs stuck to the corners and some roots that have snuck their way past the expertly laid tile floors, the old bandit hideaway hardly looks abandoned.

If the characters snuck in without drawing attention to themselves, there are three **goblins** arguing in front of the door to area #A3. However, if the goblins hear the characters when they arrive in area #A1, they will attempt to hide and ambush the characters.

You can make a single Dexterity (Stealth) check for the goblins versus the character's passive Perception to notice them. Any players that have lower passive Perception than the goblins' Stealth check are caught by surprise in the first round and won't get to act until the second round.

RUTMUT'S RENDEZVOUS

1 square = 10 feet



The goblins are cowards and will flee when it looks like the odds are against them.

TREASURE

The goblins carry 10 silver pieces between the three of them.

A3 - BONGO'S ROOM

Snoring. Loud snoring at that! This mess of an office has been converted into a crude bedroom. Against the northwestern wall on a pile of hay with a bundle of dirty rags under its head sleeps a huge bugbear; the obvious source of the snoring. At his side is a mangy-looking wolf that growls at you as you enter.

The **bugbear** is Bongo and he's fast asleep. However, his pet wolf, Fenz is not too keen on anyone entering his master's room while the bugbear sleeps. If the characters can't quiet Fenz (either using a successful Wisdom (Animal Handling) check to calm him down, feed him, or fight him) before Fenz's first turn, the wolf will bark and wake Bongo up who enters combat the next turn. Be sure to roll initiative for him.

TREASURE

Bongo has 7 gp on him.

A4 - SECRET SAFE ROOM

This secret room hasn't even been discovered by Rutbut and his goblins yet. Noticing it requires a successful DC 18 Wisdom (Perception) check. Then, a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) reveals how to open it; one of the tiles in the wall is false and can be pulled out, opening the door's latch.

Once the characters open the secret door, read the following:

Decades-old dust cascades down from the ceiling and the room is thick with cobwebs. Right away you notice a withered skeleton lying against the far wall, clutching its side as if to staunch an old wound. Next to the skeleton, you see a small, dry-rotten pouch, fat with coins.

The skeleton was a bandit who hid here during the final raid that cleared the old gang (the one before Rutbut's) out. Unfortunately, the old cutthroat died from his wounds.

Beyond the skeleton and its treasure, there is not too much else of interest in this old safe room. Most of the furniture stowed here has withered away.

TREASURE

The old bag of coins has 26 gp and 40 sp. Should the characters make a successful DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check of the body, they also discover a functional short sword and an old, crumbling map. The map is hard to read and may need an expert to reassemble it. A *mending* spell will work, as well.

ADVENTURE HOOK

The skeleton's map points to a long-buried treasure. The map can be a lead into your next adventure's map, another part of the *Heart of Darkling* cavern system, or something else appropriate to your campaign.

A5 - MESS HALL AND SCULLERY

The characters might be able to hear the goblins talking from the other side of the doorway.

The smell of cooking beans fills the air. This large room is split into two parts: at the north end is a simple scullery with a grill built over a stone oven. On top is the pot of beans. At the southern part of the room are five tables.

Two **goblins** are currently eating in this room and Rutbut's **orc** brother, Yurr is the one cooking. The moment the goblins and Yurr see the characters, they'll realize the jig is up and go for their weapons. Like many of Rutbut's tribe, these goblins value their lives more than they value the gang and will run if they think their lives are in danger. However, Yurr will fight to the death.

TREASURE

The goblins and Yurr carry 75 sp between the three of them.

A6 - THE STRONG ROOM

Rutbut's goblins keep their ill-gotten gains in this room. The double doors within are locked and trapped to keep the goods safe (mostly from the goblins themselves). Rutbut is the only one with a key to the door.

Picking the lock requires a successful DC 18 Dexterity check using thieves' tools or a DC 18 Strength check to break it open. Breaking the door open avoids the trap.

Noticing the trap requires a successful DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check. Disarming it requires a DC 15 Dexterity check using thieves' tools. Should the characters fail to disarm it before entering the room, it sets off a **poison darts trap** (DMG p123).

Decades ago, this room was probably the main office and counting room. Now it looks like it serves as the strong room for the new gang. There are at least three sacks full of coins here piled on an old, stone desk. There is also a number of confiscated weapons, random commodities, and even a fancy-looking hat.

TREASURE

Among the sacks of coins, there are 455 cp, 120 sp, and 85 gp. There are also roughly 250 lbs of random commodities all around, worth 25 gp altogether if sold in the open market. In addition, the characters can find three light crossbows (with 100 bolts), two longbows (with 30 arrows), two long swords, three spears, and a *hat of disguise*.

A7 - REAR ENTRANCE

If the characters enter through the old tower in the forest, then they will enter this room through the overgrown stairs at the northeastern side of this room.

As they approach the old tower, reading the following:

The hunting trail gives way to large, crumbling walls overgrown with vines and bushes. Already, you can see tracks leading into the center of this forgotten tower. Poorly hidden behind a few haphazardly placed shrubs is a set of stairs descending into darkness.

The stairs are somewhat overgrown, but enough has been cut away to offer access.

This entrance is trapped, however. At the base of the steps is a trip wire. Noticing the trip wire requires a successful DC 17 Wisdom (Perception) check. If the trip wire is snagged, a **spring-loaded arrow tipped with poison** launches out of the far wall. The character that set off the trap must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or take 1d8 piercing damage plus 1d4 poison damage.

If the characters wish to disable the trap, it only requires a successful DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check to see that if the wire is cut it ceases to function.

The door leading into the hall outside is locked with a deadbolt latched from the hallway (therefore, it's only locked for those who enter through the rear entrance). It requires a successful DC 13 Dexterity check with thieves' tools to open it from within area #A7.

A8 - BARRACKS

There are five bunk beds in this room. On one of the beds, you see a large orc sleeping.

Rutmut's **orc** brother, Hurk is asleep in this room. He is a pretty heavy sleeper, so unless the characters are loud, he will continue to sleep. If he does wake, Hurk is particularly aggressive and will fight to the death.

TREASURE

Performing a thorough search of the room, the characters will find 20 gp stashed in multiple locations.

A9 - RUTMUT'S OFFICE

Couches, chairs, tables, all gawdy, none matching, fill this room. Judging by the relative newness of the furniture compared to the rest of this hideout, you'd guess that it's all been stolen.

Rutmut, an **orc** with 22 hp, is here along with his two pet **wolves** and two **goblin** henchmen. Rutmut sends his wolves to do the fighting first. Meanwhile, he throws javelins from the western end of the room while using a large, ugly, red couch as cover. The goblins work as shock attackers, firing as they duck in and out of cover.

Rutmut is megalomaniacal and will fight to the death.

TREASURE

Rutmut doesn't have any treasure on his person as he keeps his stash in his chambers (area #A10), but he does have a key that opens the door and disables the trap to area #A6 and opens the door to the Elona's holding cell (area #A12).

A10 - RUTMUT'S CHAMBERS

A large bed dominates half this room, its sheets stained with mud and possibly blood. The whole place smells like an orc's armpit, too.

This is the room Rutmut claimed for himself when he first moved in. It's also where he keeps his personal stash.

TREASURE

There is a coin purse by the bed. Inside is 65 gp and a platinum ring set with blue quartz worth 60 gp.

A11 - OLD GUARD POST

This room was once an old guard post. The door leading south is not only locked but boarded up and partially bricked over. It leads to the old gate between the Demon Halls and the bandit hideout. Rutbut has ordered the rest of the gang to avoid going that way.

This path will be detailed in a future installment of *Heart of Darkling*, but feel free to use your own setting here.

A12 - TEMPORARY HOLDING CELL

The door is locked. It requires a successful DC 18 Dexterity check with thieves' tools or successful DC Strength 18 check to open it.

As you open the door to this room, a small voice calls out, "Hello?" followed by light sobbing.
"Can I go home now?"

Rutmut and his goblins are keeping Elona, the constable's daughter here. She hasn't eaten in a few days and is suffering from one level of exhaustion because of it. It won't take much for the characters to persuade her to leave with them.

ADVENTURE HOOK

The room where Elona is kept is an old guard post with an arrow slit at the southeastern corner. While the slit is far too small for her to escape through, she did witness some awful things through the old hallway leading to the south. In fact, she claims she saw some sort of horrible creature stomping around speaking a language she'd never heard in her life.



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