

DUNGEON VAULT MAGAZINE

Orcish Takeover

No. 44



HIGH RESOLUTION MAPS
VTT - ROLL20 MAPS





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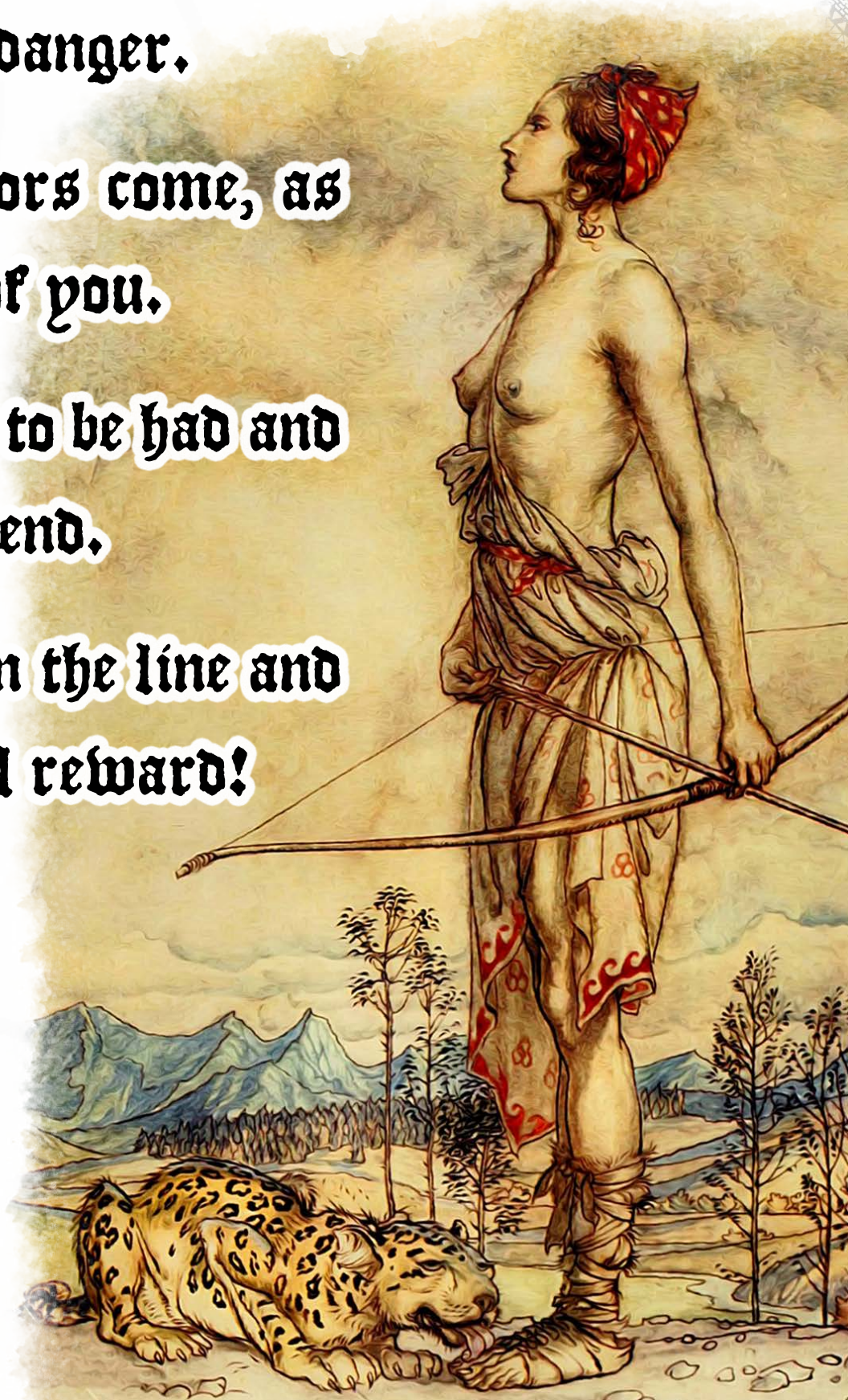
Heroes Wanted!

Our land is in danger.

Valiant warriors come, as
we are in need of you.

There is glory to be had and
gold coins to spend.

Put your life on the line and
earn a bountiful reward!



RED LEAF VALE

“Give everyone a blade and a helmet, for we shall defend our homeland from the orc invaders. Even if it costs us our lives and all we have built in this vale.”

Vassal Lord Arthur Reati



In the eastern reaches of a grand empire lies a land so far removed from the capital and its quarrelsome rulers that they are left to fend for themselves against adversity. Red Leaf Vale, named thus after the colorful shades of the forest in autumn, is a small seaside county. It is a small region a stubborn traveler can cross in a day or two at most. Its main settlement, Red Leaf, is a large, walled town surrounded by farmlands, forests, and hills. It is quite close to a river delta and the sea but it is no port town; the sea in this region is so treacherous and deadly that no mariner dares sail the waters of these territories. Life in the vale is dull and often uneventful. However, a new threat has crept from the uncharted southern lands; something that may change the fates of all in Red Leaf Vale.

SHARP-TEETH BAGARK

AN ORC CLAN, led by the cruel and despicable Sharp-Teeth Bagark, has taken advantage of the lack of defenses in the vale and its roads and set up a palisade fort near the south border. From this lair, named Crooked Teeth, Bagark leads its small host of orcs, goblins, and worgs to take over the county. Their ultimate goal is to take Red Leaf and the smaller settlement Torren's Square.

There was a bloody skirmish last week on the outskirts of Red Leaf. The city watch was decimated. Many brave peasants who took arms to defend their lands perished too. The orcs are loose on the vale now, looking for the first opportunity to infiltrate or storm any of the two settlements. The townsfolk are in dire need of help. A party of adventurers may become folk heroes if they help liberate Red Leaf Vale. It is a unique opportunity to rise from the shallows and into renown and glory.

Level 1-4 Region

► **Encounters.** Roll 1d8 for a **Road Encounter** when the characters move from one area to another. Roll twice if the characters choose to travel during the night.

► **Roads.** All paths are well-trodden but none are developed. The empire's influence does not reach this far.

► **Climate.** The sea is often agitated and deadly to sail due to the strange storms that come from the Spiral Peninsula, east of Red Leaf. Roll daily for climate (1d6): 1, clear and sunny. 2-4, outcast and rainy. 5-6 stormy.

RED LEAF

Once the seat of a proud king, Red Leaf is now but a part of a large, sprawling empire. The Vassal Lord Arthur Reati is the vale's current ruler. He has pledged allegiance to the emperor but the distance from the capital is such that the Vassal Lord has ample latitude reigning his territory. Arthur is, unfortunately, untrained in the art of war and, if the rumors are true, he is also a coward. He is at a loss about how to deal with the orcish menace.

Red Leaf has a population of under two thousand people. Most of them are farmers, miners, and laborers. Those brave enough to face the orc marauders in bloody combat have paid with their lives or are injured. An aura of despair threatens to take over the undefended town. A splinter faction of laborers and merchants consider the possibility of ousting Lord Vassal and opening the palisade gates to the orcs; thinking that negotiation with Sharp-Teeth Bagark cannot be any worse than trying to fight him. Alas, the town is on the brink of collapse, fueled by fear and cowardice. Sir Danley, the constable, still believes there is hope. He looks for mercenaries willing to risk it all for the townsfolk's freedom.

RUMORS

d6	Details
1	Many believe that the Vassal Lord colluded with the orcs and willingly fails to defend the vale and the town properly.
2	People speak of a cursed tomb near Red Leaf. A place where the remains of the kings of yore, before the empire, were interred. Some believe that a grand treasure is buried therein but no one dares approach. Orcs have been spotted near the area.
3	A purple pillar of light can sometimes be seen in the Spiral Peninsula, especially during terrible storms.
4	Survivors from the skirmish outside Red Leaf say that the orc chieftain, Sharp-Teeth Bagark, wears a necklace of finger-bones.
5	Against all odds, some people say that Constable Ciranna in Torren's Square is valiantly rallying up the townsfolk and peasants to fortify the town and oppose the orcs. Word is on the streets that she has summoned all mercenaries around to their side.
6	Rumor has it that the Southern Pass, the only road to Torren's Square, has been taken over by orcs or bandits.

Red Leaf Vale



CRYPT OF ASHEN BONES

A grim opening on the rocky hillside leads down to a tomb no one has delved into in generations. Little is known of it as all records from that time were burned when the empire reached Red Leaf Vale. A dynasty of warrior kings from that time was interred here. Their spirits, lingering for deliverance, seek a worthy soul to bestow their power onto; a way to inherit their prowess onto the world once more, even if it serves a new master.

CROOKED TEETH

The orcs of Sharp-Teeth Bagark found an abandoned mining site near the south border and made it their lair. They have used stones, ores, and metal beams from the mine to fortify their position. Their improvised base shall be tough to storm in an open battle. However, the old mining tunnels reach far and some believe there is a way to infiltrate the orc lair through them. Bagark's sister, Varena, has the only accurate map of these tunnels. She hides in the sewers of Red Leaf, plotting against him.

THE SOUTHERN PASS

The unpredictable weather in Red Leaf Vale causes the overflow of the river near the shore. This is why the only bridge is located so far away from Red Leaf. The Southern Pass is a canyon and the only road that connects both settlements. A band of human and dwarf brigands took advantage of the orc invasion to take over the pass. They allow the orcs to pass unimpeded in exchange for safety; a delicate truce between the two criminal factions.

OAKHELM FOREST

The small hamlet of fey creatures such as elves, satyrs, and faeries in the depths of Oakhelm Forest was attacked by orcs a week ago. The fey fled into the wild while the orcs made themselves at home. Gorlav, a lieutenant of Sharp-Teeth Bagark leads this group. They have abducted travelers and merchants and set them to work cutting the trees around the hamlet. Gorlav plans to build a stronghold here and oppose Bagark. He would then become the new chieftain and control Red Leaf Vale.

TORREN'S SQUARE

A quarter of the size of Red Leaf but with twice the courage, Torren's Square townsfolk date their ancestry to warring families of the olden kingdom before the empire. The small town is surrounded by a wooden palisade; several watchtowers with mounted crossbows dot the wooden wall. The town is particularly able to withstand a long siege as the locals have perfected the harvesting of edible mushrooms which they plant and harvest in many underground basements within the town.

The Orcs. They tried to storm the apparently harmless town only to be driven off back to the bridge and the Southern Pass. The group in Oakhelm Forest does not attack the town, hoping the locals shall get rid of Sharp-Teeth Bagark; this would strengthen the Gorlav's group.

The Constable. The de facto leader is Constable Ciranna, a middle-aged woman known for her bravery and her accuracy with the bow. She is a no-nonsense official with a deep-rooted disdain for the Vassal Lords of Red Leaf Vale. In the current chaos of the orc invasion, however, she sees an opportunity for personal growth. Constable Ciranna knows of Vassal Lord Arthur Reati's utter failure to defend the territory against the invaders and plans to campaign to convince the populace that the Vassal Lord is either incompetent or an orc sympathizer.

TEMPLE OF THE IRON MASK

North of Torren's Square, there is a stone door in the rocky plateau. The door is inscribed with ancient runes that no scholar in the county can decipher. All they can agree on is that the runes speak of a Mask of Power; an ancient device that appears in old draconic legends. Unbeknown to all, the artifact lies hidden therein, its power may be a crucial piece in the battle to liberate the vale.

PORTAL OF AGES

A gate at the very end of the Spiral Peninsula leads down a stone staircase that none has trodden in centuries. The strange underground compound therein contains an unfathomable artifact that eludes the comprehension of even the most knowledgeable scholars. The Portal of Ages is both a terrible weapon and a gateway to the secrets that lie beyond the veil of the Material Plane.

Sharp-Teeth Bagark ignores this exists, believing there is nothing of value near the storm-beaten shores. If the characters gain access to the Portal of Ages, it may prove instrumental in defeating the invading orc forces.

ROAD ENCOUNTERS

Most locations in Red Leaf Vale can be reached within a day or two of travel. This may occur on the way:

1. The characters stumble upon an orcish exploration party (4d6 **orcs**) at a distance of 6d6 x 10 feet.
2. Four merchants (**commoners**) believe the heroes are brigands (DC 14 Persuasion to change their minds). On a fail of 5 or more, they fight.
3. Six **thugs** emerge to rob the characters.
4. A terrible storm breaks out. DC 16 Survival check to find shelter or lose a pack animal to a flash flood.
5. Three **orcs** carrying a deer carcass journey toward Crooked Teeth. One has a broken arm.
6. 2d6 **orcs** trail a **rhino** peppered with arrows.
7. A **satyr** from Oakhelm Forest approaches the party and recounts how the orc raiders took over his hometown. He begs the characters for help.
8. A pillar of light emerges from the center of the Spiral Peninsula during a rainy night.



RED LEAF

“Surrendering the city to the orc marauders spells the doom of every person in Red Leaf. We must find a way to contend with the ouster splinter group.”

Sir Danley

The inescapable shadow of despair floods the town of Red Leaf; a bloody skirmish with the orc forces a week ago has left the town mostly undefended and on the brink of collapse. The townsfolk are fundamentally divided. Some plan an exodus to the west, some lick their wounds and wait for death, some steel themselves and prepare to defend the settlement again, and others even plot to oust the vassal lord to later strike a deal with the orc leader, Bagark.

Things slowly spiral into madness as the orc invaders get ready for a second assault. The locals blame Vassal Lord Arthur Reati for last week's massacre as he ordered all forces to meet the orc chieftain in the farmlands south of Red Leaf, instead of letting them clash against the stone wall. Due to the backlash, the vassal lord hides in the Red Fort and gives no audience. Constable Danley appears to be the only figure of leadership.



Level 1-3 Settlement

► **Danger.** Check for a **Random Event** when the characters visit a new area or exit town (4-in-6 chance).

► **Populace.** Despair and hopelessness run rampant in Red Leaf. The orcs were driven off a week ago but most people believe the town shall fall in the next assault.

RED FORT

Protected by a 20-foot-tall stone wall and four watchtowers, the Red Fort is the most defensible structure in Red Leaf. It is currently closed off to the public.

► **Leaderless.** In fear of the townsfolk's dissatisfaction, Vassal Lord Arthur Reati has holed up in the fort and ordered what remains of his guards to allow no one inside. For a week, no order has been issued and no audience has been granted. The town lacks a real leader.

► **Breaking In.** The garrison consists of one **knight**, eight **guards**, and ten **commoners**. Fighting the way in is feasible but a risky proposition. There is another way deep in the sewage waterways under Red Leaf. In the depths, there is a pipeline that leads into the fort, exploration of the sewers is necessary to find it.

► **The Ousters.** If the characters side with the ousters, a group of ten **commoners** accompany the party either on a frontal assault or to the sewers. The fort battle ends once the vassal lord is arrested. Baranter, the ouster leader, takes control of Red Leaf.

► **Treasure.** If the characters sack the Red Fort and are quick about it before the ousters take over, they may retrieve 200 gp, 780 sp, one *potion of healing*, one *potion of heroism*, two sets of chainmail, and a shield.

RANDOM EVENTS

d6	Details
1	Four ousters (commoners) demand that the characters join their cause or they shall be arrested and brought to their hideout.
2	A relentless storm breaks out. All the townsfolk hide in their homes for a day. A good opportunity for the party to break into the Red Fort or to attack the ousters' hideout and catch them off guard. Hiding checks are rolled with advantage.
3	A caravan of at least seventy people march toward the northern gate. They leave the town and plan to reach the empire's capital.
4	Riled up by the ousters, a crowd gathers by the Red Fort's gatehouse. They shout demands for the vassal lord for him to abandon his seat and let the ousters' leader, Baranter, take over. The gatehouse guards are nervous and fearful.
5	A scouting party of four orcs and three goblins has been spotted near town. A sortie party is assembled to go out and hunt them.
6	Scared townsfolk approach the party and beg for their help. They claim the town is soon to be attacked by the orc invaders.



BARRACKS

The edifice doubles up as a hospital for those wounded in last week's battle. It is a grim spectacle of gruesome wounds and suffering. When the characters arrive, they are sent to Constable Danley at once; he has ordered all mercenaries and fighting-able people to be sent to him.

► **Restoring Order** . The constable (**knight**) offers the characters 250 gp to stake out the ousters' hideout, find a way inside, and arrest them all. This allows him to restore order in town and organize the town's defense. He also mentions an odd rumor about a hooded orc that has been spotted near the sewers' manholes.

GENERAL STORE

The owner, a dwarf named Killin, has chosen to leave town and is gifting away commonplace items, rations, and odd trinkets. His wares are almost run out. Whenever the characters wish to acquire something, there is a 3-in-6 chance that the item is no longer available.

TWO PATHS

The characters can choose either of two ways forward. Siding with the constable requires defeating the ousters to allow the town's officials to retain control. Even if the vassal lord refuses to act, Constable Danley and the characters can manage most affairs. On the other hand, siding with the ousters requires the storming of the Red Fort to instate a new form of government. This incurs more risks because Baranter, the ousters' leader, is an opportunist and belligerent person who is unlikely to be recognized as a legitimate leader by the faraway empire. Nevertheless, both outcomes lead to the success of this campaign but the story dynamics change.

Either way, Constable Ciranna, from Torren's Square, is bound to confront whatever leader is in charge of Red Leaf. Alas, the general lack of stability is all the motivation she needs to aim for complete control of Red Leaf Vale. The orc threat must be dealt with before she makes a move against Red Leaf's leadership.

SKIRMISH SITE

Less than a mile from the south gate, the soil and farmlands are stained with the blood of orcs and men. The remains of a pyre where the orc corpses were burnt lie next to the barely-traveled road. Orc skulls are mounted on stakes. The orcs never retrieved their dead, unlike the hapless people of Red Leaf, two days after the battle.

HALL OF KINGS

The Hall of Kings is the largest tavern and the only inn in town. It is named after the legend of a place where the kings of yore were interred. That dynasty ruled the vale before the empire took over the entire region.

The characters can stay here. The owner, Baella, lets them stay free-of-charge if she learns that the characters work for Constable Danley. This is the perfect place to learn about local history, rumors, and job opportunities.

GIADA'S APOTHECARY

Giada is a middle-aged woman with an advanced knowledge of herbology and medicine-brewing. She can craft healing salves and potions for the characters if they bring her key ingredients from their quests. She can also identify and reverse engineer potions brought to her.

BARD'S ARMORY

A master craftsman of great renown; the emperor himself commissioned a suit of armor for his firstborn from his forge. Bard is an old man of incredible abilities. If he learns that the characters have sided with the ousters, he agrees to gift them a set of chainmail or plate mail. Common weapons and shields can be bought here.

OUSTERS' HIDEOUT

Operating from Baranter's house, the splinter group colloquially referred to as *'the ousters'* plots to break into the Red Fort to remove Arthur Reati from power. Baranter, a fletcher by trade, sees this as a unique opportunity to climb the ladder and become the de facto ruler.

► **The Ousting.** If the characters side with Baranter's (**thug**) band and his make-shift band of rebels, the ousters get ready to attack the Red Fort. If the characters know of the alternate entrance through the sewers, Baranter agrees to this idea as it may decrease casualties.

► **In the Name of the Law.** If the characters side with the constable and attack the ousters here, they must face Baranter (**thug**), and twelve **commoners**. The building is a barn-like location with a hay loft. Four peasants attack the characters from the loft with shortbows after pulling the only ladder. The ousters fight bravely but flee if Baranter or half their numbers are defeated.

► **Treasure.** Inspecting the building for 10 minutes yields 40 gp, 180 sp, and a *potion of healing*.

THE WATERWAYS

Despite the town's size, it features a complex sewage system. It was commissioned 6 years ago by Arthur Reati's father, Harland Reati. A mage was sent from the imperial capital to oversee the construction. The system consists of a device of clockwork and arcane properties that purifies waste and the river's water. The clean water is used for the town's consumption and for the farmlands that surround Red Leaf. Sharp-Teeth Bagark's sister, Varena, hides in these waterways, searching the city archives for a way to approach her sibling.

OUTCOME 1 - ORDER KEPT IN PLACE

The characters defeat the ousters; the town's authorities do not change. The vassal lord remains in hiding but allows Sir Danley and the party to act unimpeded. The heroes are asked to go to Torren's Square to secure the crucial alliance with the well-reputed Constable Ciranna.

OUTCOME 2 - NEW WORLD ORDER

The characters storm the Red Fort and help Baranter into power. The usurper values the alliance with the characters and tells them to visit Torren's Square to gauge whether the constable there is willing to bend the knee to his leadership. Inevitably, Baranter shall confront the empire's envoys. There is no way to predict how the capital shall react to his flagrant overreach of power.



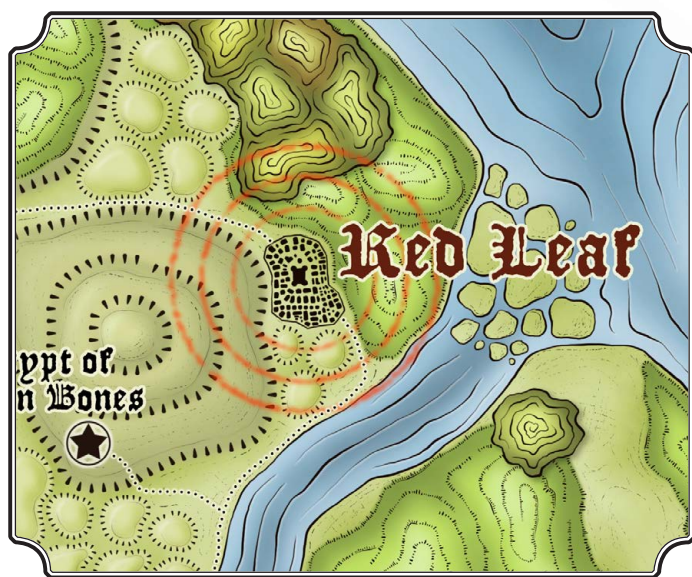
THE SEWAGE SORCERESS

“He murdered our parents in cold blood. It was so long ago but I could never forget. He must pay for the pain he has brought to so many innocents.”

Varenda

A shadow follows Sharp-Teeth Bagark everywhere. This elusive figure is an orc sorceress named Varenda, his sister. The sneaky sibling stalks the orc chieftain from afar, looking for an opportunity to strike him down. Varenda is consumed by a desire for vengeance after Bagark took their parents' lives decades ago. She could never match him in combat so she turned to the dark arts.

Days after the orcs arrived in Red Leaf Vale, Varenda set herself in the sewage tunnels underneath Red Leaf. She infiltrated the city's archives a week ago looking for maps of the abandoned mining site where her sibling built a fort. She has tried to pass unnoticed but some townsfolk have spotted her in dark alleys. Despite the bounty contract on her head, Varenda may yet prove to be a powerful, yet unlikely, ally to the locals.



ADVENTURE HOOK

Strange Sightings. The orc sorceress has been spotted near some sewer manholes; the locals demand Constable Danley to act. He hires the characters to track her. Constable Danley provides a rough map of the sewers; in its center, several chambers contain filtration devices and the flow wheel valves that control the entire system. He believes that if orc invaders hide under Red Leaf, they must be crawling in the sewers (400 gp).

Level 2 Adventure

► **Danger.** Unsafe. Check for a **Random Encounter** every 30 minutes and when resting (4-in-6 chance).

► **Light.** Some areas feature magical braziers with *light* spells. Underground denizens have **darkvision**.

► **Smells and Sounds.** The sewage stench and the sound of running water give disadvantage in all perceptible checks that rely on hearing and smelling.

► **Iron Grates.** There are three closed grates in the area (see map). Each grate can be lifted when two people pull the two levers nearby simultaneously.

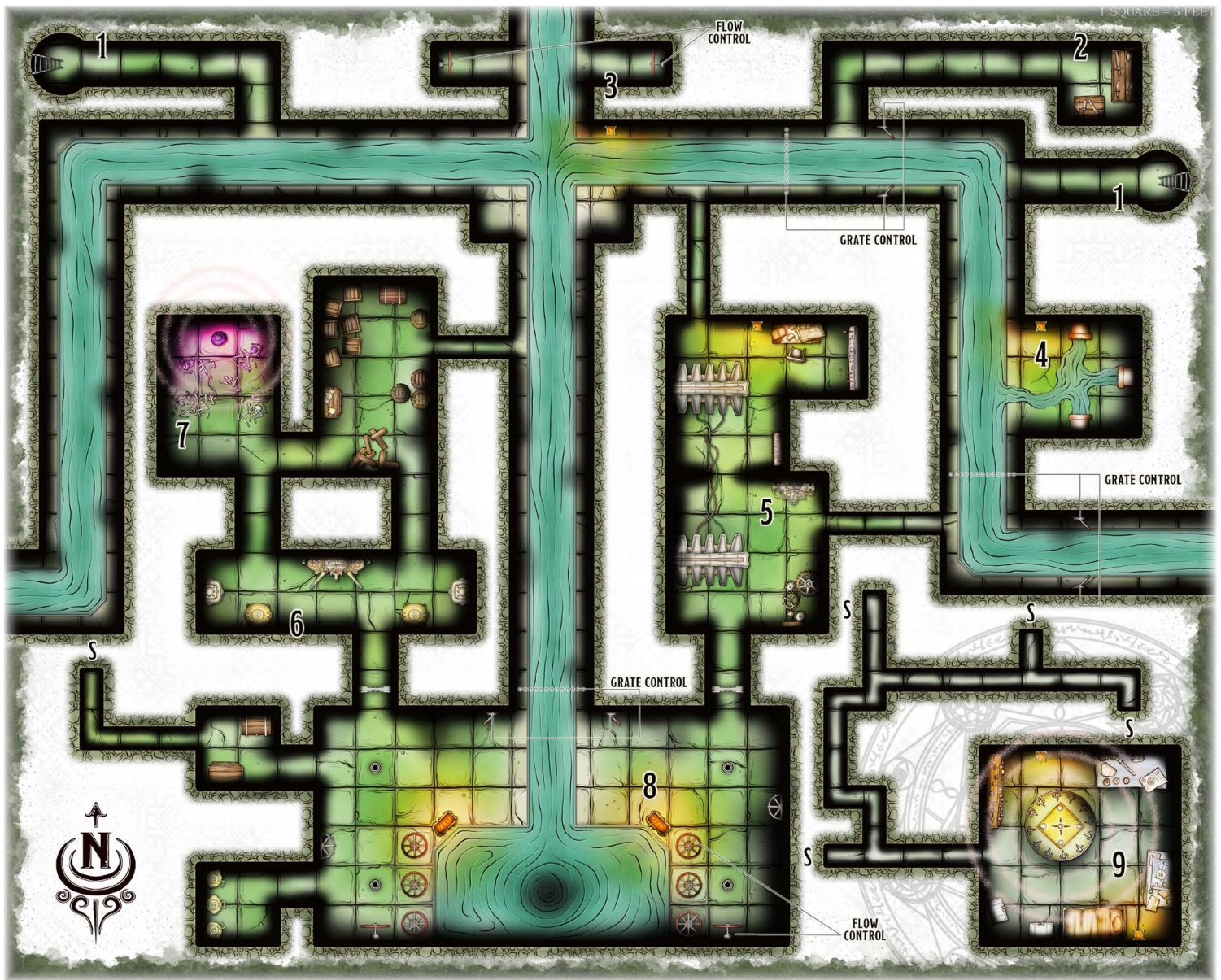
1. MANHOLE ENTRANCES

The two manholes closest to the control chambers can be used by the characters to enter this dungeon. The order of encounters of this adventure may vary depending on which entrance they choose and what route they take.

► **The Sorceress.** Varenda's location is left ambiguous in the adventure to account for the diversity of exploring routes. The sorceress makes her appearance when it is more dramatic for her to do so. Areas 5, 8, and 9 are recommended for a confrontation with Varenda.

RANDOM ENCOUNTERS

d6	Details
1	2d4 giant centipedes slither along the walls like snakes and approach the party guided by their smell.
2	Walls and floor crawl with countless arachnids. A swarm of spiders skitters out of the darkness and attacks.
3	The characters spot Varenda (mage) about to turn into a corner in the shadowed distance. The sorceress, trying to avoid an unfair confrontation, uses her <i>ice storm</i> spell to stall the party and makes for a swift escape toward area 9.
4	A sudden discharge of foul waters causes a flash flood that flows toward the whirlpool in area 8. DC 14 Athletics to hang on to the rail. Critical failure causes a character to be sucked by the whirlpool. They drown and are found by the sea a day later.
5	The heroes find Fargo, a dwarf (thug) whose child was killed by orcs recently. He may distrust the party (DC 11 Charisma).
6	A giant toad jumps from the foul water and attempts to pull a character into the water with its sticky tongue.



2. ARMORY

Close to the northeast manhole entrance is a small chamber that contains two wooden tables littered with weaponry. Unfortunately, the blades are dull and rusted (disadvantage to attacks). Sewage workers are aware that many dangerous creatures inhabit this area. These weapons are for their self-defense against the denizens.

SEWAGE CANALS

The canals are all 10 feet deep and flow toward area 8. They form a whirlpool before moving into the filtration system. Clean water is repurposed by the system. Waste is routed to the sea. The sewage system, powered by clockwork devices and magic, was commissioned 6 years ago by the Vassal Lord's predecessor, Harland Reati. An imperial mage oversaw the project. If the characters increase the flow in area 3 and then restrict the flow into the filtration system in area 8 (see flow controls in map), the entire dungeon floods in 10 minutes.

3. MAIN FLOW VALVES

The two 10-foot-deep alcoves flanking the main waterway house two flow control wheel valves. They can be operated to change the strength of the sewage flow.

► **The Valves.** There are three flow speeds (slow, medium, and strong). It is currently in the medium position. Operating the valves can change it (DC 12 Athletics). With slow flow, the canals' depth is reduced and characters can walk along the canals. The strong flow pulls all creatures toward area 8 (DC 14 Athletics). Also, if the flow is closed in area 8, the dungeon may flood.

4. OUTFLOW PIPES

Three pipes dump their contents on the stone floor. Varena has identified that these pipes are an isolated system for the Red Fort. While narrow, the pipes can be used to infiltrate the fort. The maps in area 9 reveal this. Such information is of great value for the splinter groups that want to overthrow the current Vassal Lord.

5. FILTRATION APPARATUS

A device that combines engineering, clockwork wonders, and arcane spells embedded in runes, treats Red Leaf's water waste and produces clean water.

This plant treats not only the town's waste but also all the residual water from the surrounding farmlands.

► **The Device.** There is no reason for the characters to meddle with this machine as it functions well. Tampering with or damaging the machine causes the filters to malfunction. The town suffers from contaminated water for 1 week until a scholar comes to fix the device.

6. STORAGE ROOMS

The two chambers adjacent to area 7 contain wooden crates and barrels, clay vases, and stone coffers. They contain an operation manual, spare parts for the devices in areas 5 and 8, lubricating oil, and cleaning salves.

► **Aura.** A *detect magic* spell reveals a strong aura of necromancy coming from area 7. The spell reveals that a necromancy spell is the source of this befoul energy.

7. CURSED GEM

Varennia, the sorceress, placed this deadly artifact here as a red herring should anyone come looking for her.

► **The Remains.** The spell *detect magic* reveals that the bones are fake; crafted with a polymorphism spell.

► **The Gem.** When a living being touches the stone, its soul is stripped from its body, killing it immediately (DC 17 INT save). The gem can be safely handled with metal.

8. THE WHIRLPOOL

A whirlpool of sewage waste surrounded by ten wheel-valves dominates the room. The loud sound of the water draining into it drowns everything else.

► **Valves.** Closing the ten valves in the room reduces flow to a trickle; it never fully closes to avoid a flood. However, it may still occur if the valves in area 3 are opened.

► **Tracks.** Among the footprints of a maintenance team, the characters also find leather boot tracks that lead to the secret passage to area 9 (DC 13 Survival).

9. VARENNA'S LAIR

Three narrow passages lead to Varennia's improvised lair. The room contains two working tables, a bookcase, a bed, two stone coffers, and a magical circle.

► **Documents.** Reviewing the documents for 1 hour reveals where the pipes in area 4 lead to and the map of the mining site where the Crooked Teeth fort now stands. Its tunnels can be used to infiltrate the orc's lair.

► **Treasure.** The stone coffers contain 450 gp, 740 sp, two *potions of healing*, and a *+1 javelin*.

DEVELOPMENT

THE CHARACTERS CATCH up with Varennia and confront her in one of the compound's chambers (see area 1). Varennia (**mage**) is a powerful spellcaster whose powers may decimate the party faster than they expect. Fortunately for them, the sorceress has reasons to avoid this:

- She wants to remain incognito in Red Leaf.
- Varennia has no quarrel with the locals and despises her sibling's disregard for others' lives.
- She still has not finished reviewing the maps and documents she stole from the city's archives.

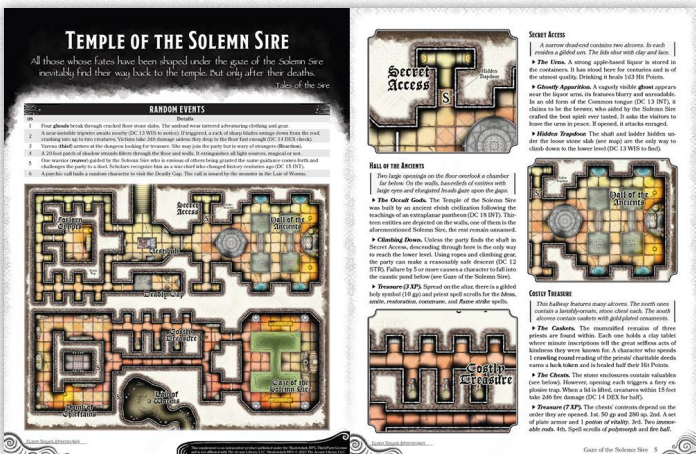
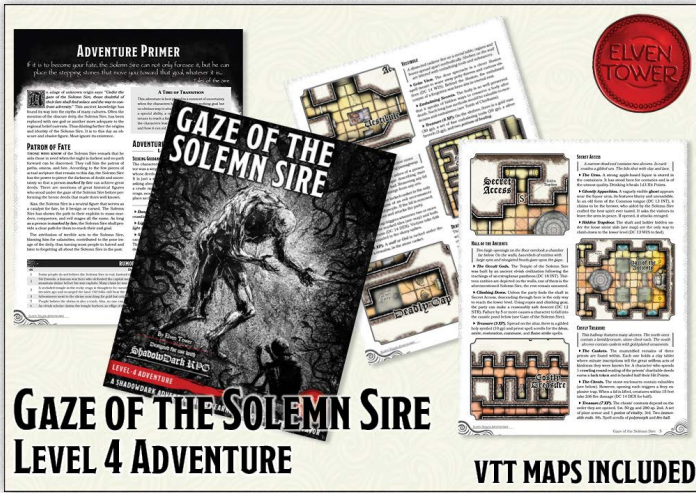
During combat, Varennia favors her controlling spells, reserving her deadly abilities only to save her life. However, if the sorceress suspects that the characters may be useful allies in her path to revenge, she offers a truce.

► **Unexpected Ally.** If the characters agree to hear her tale, Varennia explains that she is not part of Sharp-Teeth Bagark's host. She wants to slay her sibling to complete her vengeance but approaching him is not easy. She claims that her brother possesses an artifact capable of disabling her magic powers; hence the need to approach him undetected. If the characters sympathize with Varennia's goal, she shares all she learned about the mining maps and the pipes that connect with the Red Fort. She promises to join them when they storm Crooked Teeth.



Gaze of the Solemn Sire

Only it can grant what you seek.
Can you pay the ruinous price?



In this level-4 Shadowdark adventure, the characters find themselves at a crossroads with no clear path to advance in their overarching campaign. They require a powerful weapon, the means to reach a faraway location, or a piece of crucial information. They learn of an elusive entity, an obscure deity that is said to have aided those in need in the past. Those related to this being all managed incredible exploits that changed the world's fate in the distant past.

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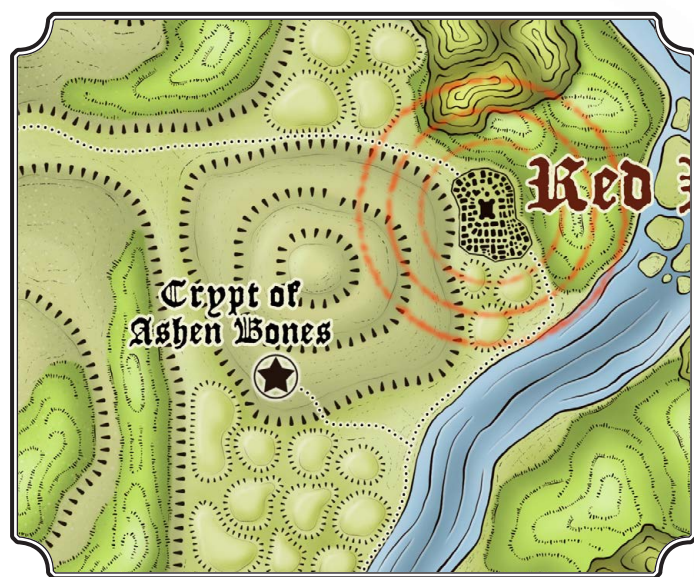
CRYPT OF ASHEN BONES

The silent kings of yore await a worthy soul's tread; in the befoul ashen crypts, their power lies dormant, a legacy of might for the living to wield.

Dungeon's Inscription

This crypt is the final resting place of a dynasty of warrior kings. Their legacy, once inscribed in the annals of history, was consigned to flames when the empire reached the verdant expanse of Red Leaf Vale. The conquering forces, fearing the resurgence of these mighty rulers, sought to erase all memory of their existence, burning scrolls, tomes, and records that bore witness to their reign.

Yet, the essence of these warrior kings could not be so easily extinguished. Their spirits remain, bound to the mortal realm by a yearning for deliverance. These spectral monarchs seek a worthy soul to whom they might bestow their accumulated power. This ethereal inheritance awaits one who possesses the courage, the strength, and the virtue to claim it. Whoever wields this power, may be able to shape the destiny of Red Leaf Vale and beyond.



ADVENTURE HOOKS

Explorers. Knowledge is power. Learning about the ancient rulers of these lands may help the heroes in their quest to liberate Red Leaf Vale from the orc invasion. Or perhaps gold and treasure are what they seek.

Level 1 Adventure

► **Danger.** Risky. Check for a **Random Event** every 20 minutes and after loud noises (4-in-6 chance).

► **Light.** Some areas feature magical braziers that stay ever-burning. The undead within have all **darkvision**.

► **Magic.** The crypt's incantations and spells remain intact. Some are meant to protect some areas from the passage of time while others aim to stop intruders or fool tomb robbers. Many explorers have perished within.

GETTING HERE

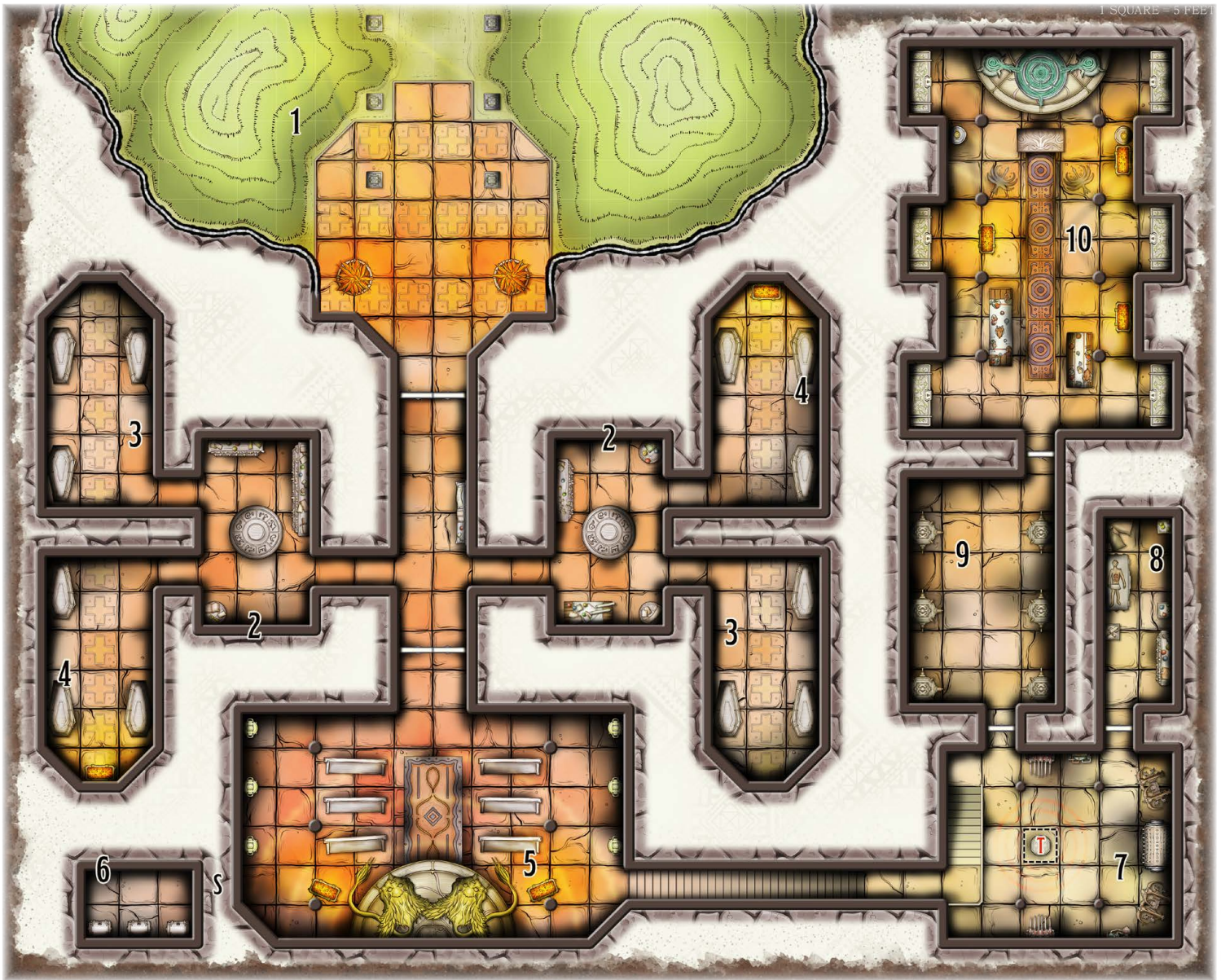
THE HEROES FOLLOW the river upstream. A small deviation west takes them to the mountain skirts. A good tracker identifies tiger dung and knows how to avoid the wild beast's path (DC 11 Survival). On a fail, the heroes encounter a hungry **tiger** before reaching the crypt. The strong feline flees when reduced to half its Hit Points.

1. VERDANT CLIFFS

Red Leaf Vale is a land filled with green and nature. Even this rocky section of the territories, and the mountains, are covered in grass. Three **orcs** camp outside by the large, ever-burning braziers. They seem to be waiting. The heroes can set up an ambush before attacking or talking to them (see **Unexpected Allies** below).

RANDOM EVENTS

d6	Details
1	The ghostly apparition of a king steps forth from the walls, he stares at the heroes, makes a disappointed face, and vanishes.
2	A group of four guardians (skeletons), armed with rusted blades, catch up with the intruders to defend the crypt's sanctity.
3	Whispered voices fill the crypt, reciting the old kings' deeds. Those who listen closely may glean wisdom from these spectral echoes, gaining advantage on their next save (DC 12 Charisma). On a fail of 5 or more though, they get disadvantage instead.
4	A current of air traverses the entire dungeon. It extinguishes all light sources. The dungeon's braziers turn back on in 1 minute.
5	The heroes experience a vivid vision of a beautiful font (area 10). There, the specters of three ancient kings float above the bright, clear waters. With a gesture, they bestow their blessings upon them, allowing them to take a magical artifact.
6	The heroes stumble upon an inscription on the wall. It reads: "And one day, a worthy successor shall continue our legacy.."



UNEXPECTED ALLIES

Sharp-Teeth Bagark, the orc chieftain, gave clear orders: “Explore the area, find the so-called Crypt of Ashen Bones, and retrieve all valuables.” Six orcs entered. However, the undead in the crypt were too much for them. Only half of their group escaped, and they are scared of returning to Bagark empty-handed. The orcs would rather parley. They offer to help and accompany the heroes if they allow it. Otherwise, they try to flee.

2. ANTECHAMBER

Beyond the main door, the dungeon smells nice, and the walls and furniture show no wear or tear. Both of these areas feature a magic circle. The rune sequence can be easily copied if the heroes take 10 minutes to do it.

There are shelves and tables with countless scrolls and books. The heroes can spend 10 minutes reading these documents to learn the history of this place.

3. SARCOPHAGI OF DARKNESS

These two areas have no light source. The absence of light for so long has corrupted the souls of the people interred here. One **shadow** coalesces in each area.

► **Treasure.** After the fights, the heroes may recover a *potion of invisibility* in one area, a bag with 29 gp, and a silver-and-gold circlet from the other one.

4. SARCOPHAGI OF LIGHT

These are mirrored counterparts of each area 3 but an ever-burning coal brazier illuminates each chamber.

► **Disturbance.** In one of the areas, one **skeleton** rises to fight intruders. In the second area, a **ghoul** does.

► **The Lost’s Blessing.** Markings and prayers to The Lost are inscribed all around. Reciting these prayers to bless the souls interred here grants a divine advantage on their next save; the heroes are free to not do this if they do not believe in The Lost or pray to a different deity.

5. CHAPEL OF THE LOST

Six wooden benches face south, toward a two-headed golden statue. Giant cat heads, lion manes, and sage's beards. This is only one of the many representations of The Lost. An ancient, foreign deity.

Three golden urns rest on each side of the chamber. They hold the ashen remains of dozens of people who were honored with burial among their kings.

► **Paganism.** The ancient rulers were not perfect. Their main religious figures were The Lost, considered by most a rather evil deity. These theosophical differences were one of the main reasons for the old war, and the beginning of the end for the former kings. Much of this is explained in the history books found in area 2.

► **Reading Between the Lines.** The heroes have seen enough. The old kings were followers of The Lost (DC 10 Intelligence). This information may help them in their interaction with the kings (see area 10).

6. SECRET VAULT

The heroes must notice the hidden lever behind the golden statue in area 5 to find this area (DC 13 Perception).

► **Treasure.** The heroes are free to take the following: a mithral shield etched with soaring dragons, a pair of silvered daggers, a set of leather armor dyed black, two *potions of healing*, and a large, green scarab encased in glowing amber, and a leather bag with 264 gp.

7. ANTECHAMBER

Beyond the long descending stairs lies a deadly gauntlet. Four menacing crossbows, hidden fire jets, and a colossal spiked roller loom threateningly, everything poised to crush the bones and spirits of the unwary.

► **Button.** The door to area 10 is magically locked. The only way to open it is by pressing the pressure-sensitive tile in the middle of this area. However, this also triggers the traps within the room (see below for each).

► **Crossbows.** Four bolts fly toward the center. Attack +3 (1d6) for each. They magically reload every minute.

► **Fire.** The fire jets burn everything 15 feet before them. Whoever stands in the room when they activate takes 1d10 fire damage (DC 12 Dexterity save for half).

► **Roller.** It rolls east in a straight line. It crushes whoever stands in the middle (2d8 damage, DC 12 Dexterity save). The roller returns to its original place at dawn.

8. LABORATORY

This area spells evil and darkness. A **ghoul** rests on the table. It looks asleep or unconscious. Any interaction with it startles it. The ghoul fights until slain. The embalming tools in the room can be sold for 250 gp.

9. ARCANE CHAMBER

The heroes lack the magical skill to understand these engines. Interacting with them has a 1-in-6 chance of causing an arcane burst: creatures in the area take 1d8 damage after a strong pulse. Attacking the engines starts a chain reaction; all engines explode, destroying the entire crypt, and taking the lives of all within 1 mile.

10. CELLS OF HATE

The chamber of kings. Six locked sarcophagi keep the remains of the six ancient kings, their specters floating above the shimmering waters. Two tables laden with magical, ever-tasty food. A hero's feast for those who reach the depths of this sacred domain.

The heroes must press the button in area 7 to enter. The characters are considered worthy only if: they learned the kings' history (area 2), they did not defile The Lost's golden statue (area 5), and they are (or claim) to be followers of The Lost. In case of a lie, (DC 12 Deception check to convince the kings). Being unworthy or caught in a lie summons the dead kings' anger. Their champion (**wight**) stands forward to remove the intruders. However, worthy heroes are bequeathed a *sword of sharpness*.

If the heroes defeat the champion and try to rob the crypt or open a sarcophagus, the kings (one **wraith** and five **shadows**) make them regret their decisions.



MOUNTAIN PASS CARAVAN

“Listen, we can do this the easy way or the hard way. I suggest you pay the toll and leave with both ears. Blades and axes are nasty things...”

Brogar Ironfist

The Southern Pass is a steep canyon. The road that connects Red Leaf and Torren’s Square passes through it before reaching the bridge. This bridge crosses the vale’s river east of the pass due to the harsh weather conditions; the relentless rains overflow the river, making constructions feeble.

Red Leaf authorities are currently busy dealing with the orc invasion that threatens the entire territory. The general commotion served as the perfect excuse for a band of brigands who call themselves ‘*The Anvil of Power*’. Led by Brogar Ironfist, a formidable dwarf with a steely gaze and a reputation as solid as the mountains, the Anvil of Power took over the Southern Pass and demand all travelers or merchants pay a toll, no exceptions. With most authorities busy with the orcs, only a group of kind-hearted, selfless heroes may help solve this.

ADVENTURE HOOK

Escort. The heroes are hired by Augustus Finn, a caravan owner in Red Leaf. They must reach Torren’s Square, located beyond the bridge. They must make sure all five carts make it. Augustus does not care how the job is done and cares little about punishing the brigands or bringing them to justice. He only cares about reaching his destination in one piece (400 gp).

Level 2 Encounter

► **Danger.** Risky. Check for **Random Events** in every phase (see below) of this encounter (4-in-6 chance).

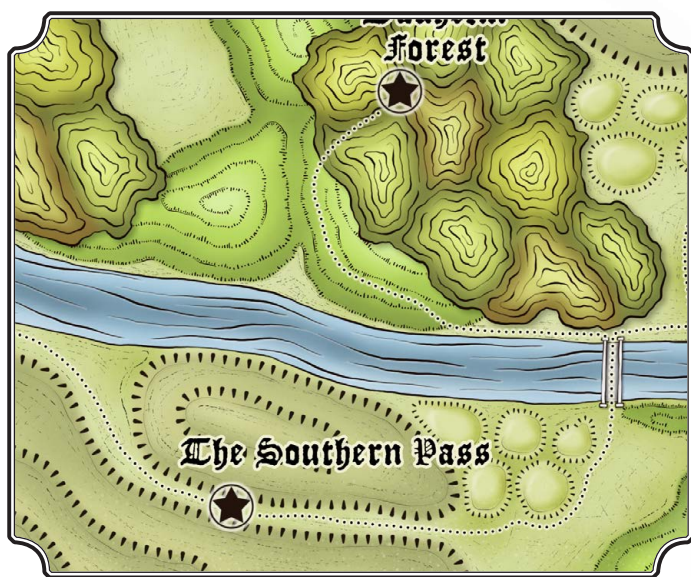
PHASES

This location has no areas to visit. The caravan advances through the mountain pass in the shown order (see map). Brogar plans to bring the caravan to a halt and force them to pay the toll via intimidation.

The Southern Pass is miles long. The heroes ignore where the brigands are. So, in each phase, the characters shall have an opportunity to realize they are about to be ambushed. Reaching **phase 4** without any hint of the Anvil of Power’s presence may be lethal for the heroes if they choose a path of violence. They must be smart.

PHASE 1 - ARRIVAL

Brogar’s scouts conceal themselves with brown cloaks, trying to blend with the ground. A good bodyguard pays attention at all times (DC 12 Perception). On a success, the heroes spot movement and notice the scouts. This allows for the caravan to prepare and avoid an ambush.



RANDOM EVENTS

d6	Details
1	Brandon (commoner) is a young, strong man in Augustus’s crew. He asks the heroes for a weapon in case things go sour.
2	Heavy rain hits the entire Red Leaf Vale. This makes the rocky roads muddy and more difficult to travel on. Movement speed for all individuals is reduced by half. Additionally, vision and hearing checks are made with disadvantage.
3	A pair of orcs arrive at the scene. They stand by in case a battle starts. They help Brogar and his men if this occurs.
4	A noble and his bodyguard (knight) catch up with the characters. The valiant armor-clad man helps the heroes.
5	Goblins used to have a small camp in these mountains but the orcs drove them off. Ten goblins come back to retake this position. They attack Brogar first, knowing he has befriended the orc invaders. But they turn against the heroes after this.
6	The number of people draws the attention of three cockatrices . The beast attacks whichever group attacks it first.



PHASE 2 - FIRST CALLS

If spotted, the two scouts (**thugs**) attempt to fall back to a safer position, closer to their teammates. Augustus asks the heroes to keep their positions instead of attacking or chasing the bandits. Still, the heroes have a decent window for a free shot (ranged spell or weapon).

► **Chase.** Going after the scouts is a risky choice. Whoever does this leaves the caravan behind and delves into enemy territory. The two scouts (**thugs**), aided by one **bandit**, attempt to overpower the brave intruder and take him as hostage. The prisoner is taken to Brogar Ironfist.

► **Outcome.** Sparing the scouts may help the heroes if they attempt a negotiation with Brogar Ironfist and his men. The opposite occurs if the heroes take them down.

PHASE 3 - TAKING POSITIONS

Regardless of the heroes' disposition, Brogar's troops know about their presence and take their positions.

► **Ambush.** In case the heroes did not spot the scouts, by the moment they see the rocks blocking the road, it is too late. Brogar's goons have their crossbows pointed at the caravan from all possible angles. Skirmishers stationed at strategic spots at the tall parts of the ravine, using the sun to blind their opponents below.

► **Outcome.** If the heroes are aware of their enemies, proceed to Phase 4. If the characters are ambushed, any negotiation check is made with disadvantage.

PHASE 4 - NEGOTIATIONS OR VIOLENCE

► **The Upper Hand.** Brogar ambushed the unsuspecting heroes. He asks them to lay down their weapons, pay the toll of 10 gp per individual, and a 25% tax on whatever the caravan carries to Torren's Square. Checks to negotiate (see below) have disadvantage. Choosing violence grants the enemies advantage on initiative checks. No blood needs to be shed; if the heroes accept, they must pay their share while Augustus, fuming with rage, surrenders 70 gp for himself and his six-man crew. The caravan passes safely (see **Development**).

► **Parley.** Both parties meet while aware of each other. The heroes may attempt a negotiation check to ask for a temporary truce, a reduction of the toll payment, or even an alliance (DC 11 to 15 depending on what they ask for). On a fail of 5 or more, **Reaction** with disadvantage.

► **Encounter.** Brogar (**thief**) is followed by four **thugs**, one **bandit**, and six **commoners**. If Brogar falls in combat or more than half of them are down, they surrender.

PHASE 5 - DEVELOPMENT

Depending on the results of these interactions, Brogar's men or the heroes remove the debris and proceed with their journey. Will they reach Torren's Square as body-guard heroes or as a group of knee-bending cowards? Even if he is safe, Augustus refuses to pay the heroes if they agree to pay the toll. If they fought bravely, he shall speak wonders of them to the town's constable, Ciranna.

GM ADVICE AND TIPS

There is no winning or losing, but rather the value is in the experience of imagining yourself as a character in whatever genre you're involved in...

Gary Gygax



Creating an unforgettable Tabletop gaming session campaign is akin to weaving an intricate tapestry, rich with lore, adventure, and the unpredictable nature of its characters.

As an aspiring Game Master (GM), you hold the quill that writes the destiny of worlds. Here are twelve tips to guide your hand, ensuring that your narrative is not only engaging but becomes a legendary saga in the annals of your players' memories; if their characters survive...

1. MASTER THE ART OF IMPROVISATION

The essence of TTRPGs lies in its unpredictability. While thorough preparation is key, the ability to improvise will elevate your game. Understand the core mechanics well enough to adapt on the fly, letting players explore their paths without feeling constrained. Embrace the chaos; sometimes the most memorable moments arise from the unexpected. Crafting an atmosphere where the unforeseen is not only expected but welcomed, will create a dynamic and engaging experience for all involved. When a player has an idea, it is often best to find a way to cater to it, embracing the unpredictability of the outcome.

2. KNOW THY WORLD

A deep understanding of the world you've crafted (or the one you're using) is paramount. Know its history, its conflicts, its landscapes, and its inhabitants. This knowledge allows you to weave intricate narratives and respond confidently to player inquiries, making the world feel alive and immersive. A GM's lore is the bedrock upon which the reality of the game is built, giving depth and authenticity to every tavern, dungeon, and shadowed alley. It is particularly important to have a grasp of the legal systems in the game world to deal with the characters' often unlawful actions during their epic quests.

3. FOSTER PLAYER AGENCY

Empower your players to shape the story. Encourage actions that align with their character's motivations and backgrounds, and let those actions significantly impact the world. When players feel their decisions have weight, they become more invested in the narrative, driving the story forward in unexpected and exciting ways. Crafting a world responsive to their choices creates a truly collaborative story. Systems like *Dungeon World* or *Mouse Guard RPG* have mechanics for character agency.

4. BALANCE CHALLENGE AND FUN

Finding the equilibrium between a game being hard enough and fun is crucial. Encounters, puzzles, and narratives should challenge your players, pushing them to innovate and strategize. However, keep in mind that the goal is collective storytelling and merriment. Adjust difficulty on the fly if necessary, ensuring that all obstacles are fair and fun. Aim to create a rewarding experience for both you and your players. If you use a GM screen, use the secrecy to fine-tune the adventure's difficulty.

5. EMBRACE THE RULE OF COOL

Sometimes, bending the rules for the sake of an epic moment can lead to the most unforgettable experiences. If a player wants to attempt a daring feat that, while unlikely, could add a thrilling twist to your narrative, consider allowing it. These moments can define a campaign, creating stories that will be recounted for years. Remember, the rules serve the game, not the other way around.

6. CULTIVATE AN ENRICHING ATMOSPHERE

Your words paint the world in the minds of your players. Use descriptive language to bring scenes to life, engaging the senses and emotions to immerse your players fully. Describe not just what the players see, but what they hear, smell, and feel. A vividly rendered world becomes a character in its own right, enriching the narrative and drawing players deeper into the adventure's world.

7. COMMUNICATE OPENLY

Open lines of communication with your players are essential. Discuss expectations, play styles, and boundaries before starting. Regularly solicit feedback to ensure everyone is enjoying the campaign. This dialogue fosters a collaborative environment where everyone feels valued and engaged, enhancing the overall experience. The OSR idea of telegraphing danger is worth considering.

8. DEVELOP MEMORABLE NPCs

Non-Player Characters (NPCs) are the soul of your world. They should be as varied and nuanced as the players themselves, with their own motivations, flaws, and virtues. Memorable NPCs can become beloved allies, dreaded enemies, or complex characters that exist in the gray areas in between, adding depth and richness. Take notes of your NPCs' personality traits and mannerisms.

9. ADAPT AND EVOLVE

A campaign is a living story, constantly evolving with each decision and dice roll. Be prepared to adapt your narrative as it unfolds, integrating player actions and the outcomes of their adventures. This dynamic storytelling approach ensures that the campaign remains engaging and responsive to the players' journey, keeping everyone invested in the unfolding saga. Games that include lore rolls can be used to elaborate and grow the campaign's deep lore. When a character rolls a successful lore check, you can take the opportunity to allow the characters to make a decision about the learned information. This gives the players agency in world-building too; something rarely seen in most tabletop games.

10. PATIENCE AND PERSPECTIVE

Being a GM requires composure and an open mindset. Not every session will go as planned, and that's okay. An entire session may even be derailed by an error or a faulty adjudication. Learn from each experience, celebrate the successes, and view challenges as opportunities to grow. Remember, the goal is to foster a shared experience of adventure, discovery, and camaraderie. Keep the focus on creating a memorable and enjoyable journey. This is instrumental for beginner tabletop gamers as both GM and players learn any game by trial and error.

In your role as a Game Master, you are both the architect of worlds and the guardian of adventures. By mastering these tenets, you ensure that your table is a place of wonder, challenge, and endless possibility. May your dice roll true, and your tales become legendary.

11. HARNESS THE POWER OF MUSIC AND SOUND

Incorporate music and sound effects to elevate the atmosphere of your sessions. Carefully selected background tracks can underscore the tension of a dungeon crawl, the majesty of a royal court, or the eerie silence of a haunted forest. Sound effects, when used sparingly, can bring a dragon's roar or the clash of swords to life, immersing players further into the world. Consider the mood of each scene and select audio that enhances the narrative, turning your campaign into a rich, multi-sensory experience. There are plenty of YouTube playlists for this purpose at your disposal. For advanced setups, there are GM apps that allow you to play designated effects with a button; like explosions, spell sounds, lighting, and all manner of situational sound effects.

12. FACILITATE ROLE-PLAYING

Foster an environment where players feel comfortable and encouraged to explore their characters' personalities, motivations, and growth. Offer opportunities for character development through challenges tailored to their backstories, moral dilemmas that test their beliefs, and personal quests that align with their goals. Recognize and reward good role-playing with inspiration points or other in-game benefits. By promoting deep character engagement, you not only enrich your players' experience but also add unforeseen layers to the narrative, making the adventure truly collaborative and dynamic. Systems with PC goals like *Forged in the Dark* or *Burning Wheel* RPG are recommended for players who love having a mechanical element for character motivations.



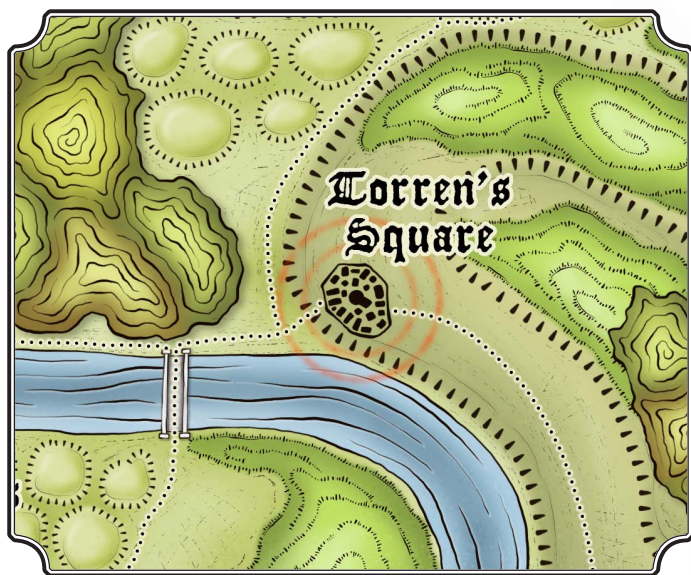
TORREN'S SQUARE

"Within these walls, we are more than defenders; we are the guardians of hope. Let our courage be the light that guides our home through the darkest nights."

Constable Ciranna

The townsfolk of this small town date their ancestry to warring families of the olden kingdom. They occupied these lands before the empire's possession. The town's structural defense consists of its wooden walls and eight watchtowers. The locals are harvesters, versed in the arts of underground veggies and mushrooms. This allows the brave people of Torren's Square the ability to withstand a siege against Sharp-Teeth Bagark's orcs.

Torren's Square, unlike Red Leaf, has not failed to defend itself and its people from the orc invasion. Constable Ciranna is the tip of the spear in the town's defense, forcing the enemies to retreat into the forest or the bridge at the river (see regional map). Her braveness, proactivity, and the feeling of safety she inspires have been a soothing certainty in stark contrast with the leaderless vale.



Level 2-3 Settlement

► **Danger.** Unsafe. Check for a **Random Event** every time the characters visit a new area in town.

► **Atmosphere.** Ciranna has done an exemplary job at organizing the town's defenses and keeping a high morale. People work, smile, and go on with their lives.

SIR DANTE'S FARMSTEAD

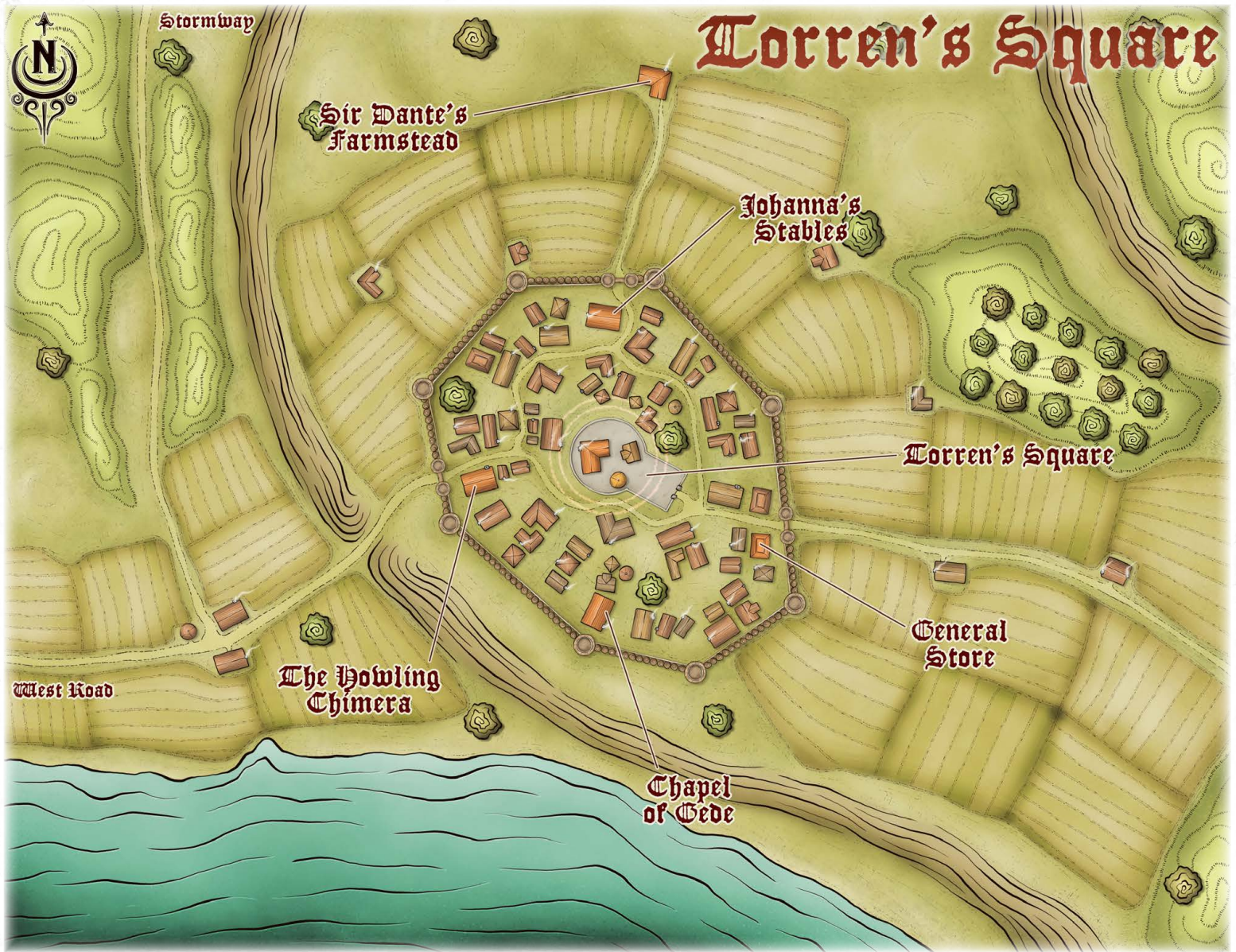
The former knight's home is located north, away from the orc attacks. Under the protection of Constable Ciranna, the many farms outside the walls thrive, embodying the spirit of defiance and survival that marks Torren's Square as unconquered. These brave farmers, Sir Dante among them, provide not only sustenance but also a symbol of hope and resilience against the orcish tide.

► **The Veteran.** Sir Dante was once a key figure in Torren's Square and popular in the entire Red Leaf Vale. If the heroes announce they wish to help the town and Constable Ciranna, he gladly welcomes them and offers them food and a place to stay. Shining by the fire, Sir Dante's armor and sword decorate his living room.

► **Possible Ally.** If the heroes ask the retired knight to join Ciranna's ranks or help them in their quest, the proud man claims he does not fight among weaklings. Nevertheless, he dons his armor and tests the heroes if they insist or wish to show their strength. He agrees to a one-on-one, non-deadly encounter. In truth, Sir Dante (**veteran**, AC 15 (breastplate), HP 35; no shortsword) does not wish to test the heroes but himself. He joins the heroes only if he comes out victorious. If the heroes defeat him, he says he enjoyed the experience, but explains that his bones are not the same and must decline.

RANDOM EVENT

d6	Details
1	1d6 commoners approach the heroes. They wish to join the party and help them however they can in their heroic endeavors.
2	The heroes witness a crowd of sixty people chant local rhymes in honor of Constable Ciranna. She is a folk hero.
3	A young man calls for help. His boss, a merchant with a three-cart caravan, was ambushed by orcs on the outskirts of town. If the heroes move fast, they find five orcs looting the caravan, two dead guards, and five sitting prisoners tied back to back.
4	The Chapel of Gede (see below) offers a boon to defenders of the town. The priestess blesses all souls who pledge their loyalty to Torren's Square and Constable Ciranna. The characters are free to receive this blessing (advantage on their next save).
5	A sudden, mysterious fog envelops Torren's Square, followed by several days of heavy rain. It is difficult to see and hear.
6	One of the locals approaches the heroes and gifts them a box with three <i>potions of healing</i> . He says "Thank you," and leaves.



THE HOWLING CHIMERA

An iconic tavern and inn within the heart of Torren's Square. Owned by Mirela, a descendant of a legendary hero from the olden kingdom, the tavern is renowned for its lively atmosphere, exquisite ales brewed from local recipes, and a calm haven for travelers and locals alike. The walls are adorned with artifacts and tapestries that depict the history of Red Leaf Vale, making it a treasure trove of lore and a center of communal town life.

Mirela is one of Constable Ciranna's strongest allies. The tavern owner informs her of everything that she sees and hears within her popular establishment.

► **Quest.** Mirela, seeking to expand her collection of historical artifacts, enlists the heroes' help in retrieving a rumored ancient banner lost in a place called *Temple of the Iron Masks*. It is believed to be from a time before the empire's possession. She says there is no rush to do this since she shall not pay until the party comes back with the item. She offers 400 gp, though.

CHAPEL OF GEDE

Towering with stoic grace amidst the wooden fortifications of Torren's Square, this chapel is a sanctuary dedicated to the deity of harvest and renewal, reflecting the town's deep agricultural roots. Overseen by Priestess Elowen, a gentle soul revered for her deep connection to the earth, the chapel serves as a beacon of hope, fertility, and strength for the community. The chapel backs up Ciranna, making her the local divine champion too.

► **Quest.** During the last attack, two orcs took advantage of the commotion to sneak into town climbing the unprotected sides of the walls. Priestess Elowen seeks the aid of heroes to recover a sacred relic, the *Horn of Gede*, stolen by the marauding orcs hiding in Oakhelm Forest now. It does not have any magical properties but it means a lot to their community. She begs the heroes to inform her when they have time for this task. Wanda (**acolyte**), one of her underlings, wishes to travel to the forest with the party and help if they agree (350 gp).

GENERAL STORE

This place is owned by the resourceful and ever-smiling Tarn, a former adventurer who settled down to share his love for oddities and essentials alike. The store has everything from rare spices and arcane components to practical tools and curios from distant lands.

JOHANNA'S STABLES

These stables are situated on the northern side of Torren's Square. They are a testament to Johana's lifelong dedication to the breeding and training of the vale's finest steeds. With her trusted assistant, Jude, a young but gifted animal handler with a special connection to the horses, Johana has built a reputation for excellence in equestrian care and training expertise.

► **Quest.** When a rare and prized stallion mysteriously disappears from the stable, Johana and Jude are distraught and turn to the heroes for help. They must find the elusive horse thieves believed to be using the neighboring woodland paths to evade capture (DC 12 Survival to track them down). Two **bandits** and one **thug** are responsible. They flee when reduced to half their HP.

► **Treasure.** Retrieving the stolen horse does not go unrewarded. The heroes are paid 100 gp for their job.

TORREN'S SQUARE

At the heart of town lies the eponymous town square, a spacious, cobblestoned area surrounded by a few oak trees. It symbolizes the unity and strength of the community. This vibrant hub is the venue for the town's most cherished events, from the weekly market to the annual Harvest Festival, which draws visitors from all across Red Leaf Vale. However, as preparations for this year's festival begin, the series of recent events with the orcs threatens to dampen the townsfolk's spirit.

WHO EVERYONE TALKS ABOUT

CONSTABLE CIRANNA FEELS uneasy due to the orcs hiding in Oakhelm Forest. She ignores the orcs she distrusts have gone rogue, and that they wait for Sharp-Teeth Bagark, their former leader, to lose enough troops in their attempt to raid the town. Instead, Ciranna believes the orcs in the woods may strike when they least expect it, or worse, during an attack from the south.

The heroes' actions, regardless of their intent, have not gone unnoticed by Constable Ciranna. If they helped others and made friends, Ciranna expects the same heroism and treatment the villagers received. She does not tolerate traitors or enemy sympathizers. Hence, she tells the heroes they must help and that she shall not take 'no' for an answer. She is fed up with the Vassal Lord's inactivity, weakness, and incapacity to defend Red Leaf Vale.

CHAMPIONS OF TORREN'S SQUARE

THE HEROES AGREE to help Constable Ciranna. She asks the party to go west to deal with the orcs in Oakhelm Forest. She gives the heroes enough rations for their trip, a lamp, three flasks of oil, a crowbar, two 60-foot ropes, a crossbow with enough bolts, and a *potion of healing*.

► **Reward.** Constable Ciranna offers the heroes 350 gp if they can eliminate all orc threats in the forest.

DEFENDING THE TOWN

THE HEROES ARE interrupted just before embarking on their trip to Oakhelm Forest. Or, if the heroes do not accept Ciranna's proposition, this occurs before they leave.

The orcs traveled at night and took their positions. Each gate is attacked simultaneously, which means three different attack vectors (see map). Ciranna orders the heroes to work as a unit and defend the north gate. She assures that the local guards, the brave people of Torren's Square, and herself will cover the other two entrances.

► **Battle.** The heroes arrive in time to see an **ogre** (half HP left) bring down the gate. The monster is accompanied by four **orcs**. All around them, more people and guards fight for their lives too. If victorious, the heroes become as popular as Constable Ciranna. Hers is without a doubt a powerful friendship in Red Leaf Vale.



TRAPPED IN THE FOREST

“Bagark shall soon be weakened by the pesky humans. When that happens, we shall strike with all our strength. I shall drink his blood and become chieftain.”

Gorlav

When Sharp-Teeth Bagark’s forces marched toward Red Leaf for the skirmish outside the settlement, a splinter group led by his second-in-command, Gorlav, marched east to Torren’s Square. After Constable Ciranna drove them away, most of them were rallied by Gorlav toward Oakhelm Forest. Those who did not follow eventually told Bagark that Gorlav went rogue. In the forest, Gorlav’s group attacked Hyacinth Bed, a small hamlet of fey. All but the hamlet’s leader, a dryad named Aarenal, fled into the wild. The orcs later abducted travelers on the road and put them to work cutting trees and constructing a palisade around the hamlet. Gorlav needs time to finish his fortification in case Sharp-Teeth Bagark comes looking for him. The hamlet is mostly defenseless now because the palisade is not ready. The characters can easily sneak into the currently orc-taken hamlet.

ADVENTURE HOOK

Rescue. The characters know that travelers have been kidnapped and a rescue bounty is offered. Alternatively, they may meet a homeless fey being begging for their help. The characters shall find the hamlet, Hyacinth Bed, in the depths of Oakhelm Forest (200 gp).

Level 3 Encounter

► **Danger.** Risky. Check for a **Random Event** every 20 minutes and after loud noises (3-in-6 chance).

► **Fog.** If the characters approach between midnight and dawn, the area is foggy. Vision is reduced to 20 feet and sneaking checks are rolled with advantage.

► **Smells and Sounds.** The sounds of cutting trees and constructions can be heard during the day. After sunset, the orcs chatter, drink, and play dice games.

1. REACHING HYACINTH BED

It takes the party half a day to travel from Torren’s Square or the bridge to the depths of Oakhelm Forest. A trodden trail circles south of the forested area and leads here.

A picturesque hamlet built from hollowed-out tree trunks stands ahead. Alas, dozens of trees in this otherwise forest settlement have been cut down. Exposing the small town to the relentless sun.

A botanist notices sun-burnt vegetation and bushes; it suggests that direct sunlight normally does not reach the forest soil here but the forest canopy was destroyed for fuel and building materials for the wooden palisade. Inspecting the tree stumps for 10 minutes reveals that most were cut down only a few days ago.



RANDOM EVENTS

d6	Details
1	Three satyrs and one centaur arrive from the north in a noble effort to retake Hyacinth Bed (DC 12 Charisma to befriend).
2	Four orcs arrive from area 1; they were sent by Sharp-Teeth Bagark to order Gorlav to return to Crooked Teeth. If they speak to Gorlav, he laughs in their faces and orders his followers to kill all but one. The survivor is sent back naked to Bagark.
3	During combat with the orcs, arrows fly from nearby trees as two elves valiantly aid the characters in their quest.
4	An awakened giant elk , Seven Leaves in Waiting, charges into the palisade gate, trying to bring it down (2-in-6 chance). It recognizes the characters as allies and joins them in their quest to liberate Hyacinth Bed. It flees when reduced to half its Hit Points.
5	Two orcs arrive from the east escorting two hapless merchants (commoners). They are beaten and imprisoned in area 6.
6	The prisoners in area 5, four commoners , break free from their cell and attempt to escape. They see the party as allies.



2. THE PALISADE

A 15-foot-tall palisade with a makeshift gate by the road impedes passage. It is useless as less than 100 feet of wall has been erected around the hamlet.

► **Scouts.** Two orcs stand on the gate structure keeping watch of the deforested terrain nearby. If the characters are spotted (DC 14 Stealth to avoid detection), one orc commands them to drop their belongings; the other blows his horn. 2d4 orcs come after they hear it.

► **Distraction.** Through digging, cutting support ropes, or using an explosive device, the party causes a 20-foot section of the palisade to collapse. Then, half the orcs in other areas to come investigate for 10 minutes.

► **The Horn.** These orcs stole the horn a few days ago from the nearest settlement, Torren's Square. It is a non-magical relic of great religious value to the locals. Returning it to the church would be a great deed.

3. THE PRISONER DRYAD

A slim, bark-surfaced being languishes inside a makeshift cell. She slowly raises her pain-stricken visage.

Aarenal, the **dryad**, is the only fey in Hyacinth Bed as she is bound to her guardian tree on the north side of town. Normally, she would not be able to come this far south but the orcs forcefully moved her here. The distance from her tree has caused her to weaken and become frail. One more day here shall be her demise. Aarenal can tell the characters about the attack and how the orcs overpowered all the fey in Hyacinth Bed. She is grateful if the cell is opened (DC 13 Thieves' Tools). Aarenal is too weak to fight. However, if she is escorted to her tree, the north of area 7, she requires 2 hours to heal. After this, Aarenal can fight alongside the characters. She may also summon two **sprites** to help.

► **Treasure.** At home, the dryad gifts the characters two *potions of healing* and an elvish *+1 longsword*.

4. SMELTING WORKSHOP

Three **orcs** and a kidnapped blacksmith named Orlo (**commoner**) use salvaged material to build a kiln and a forge. Orlo has stopped insisting that they do not have what is needed for a proper forge after being beaten twice for speaking his mind. Gorlav needs a forge to craft better armor and weapons for his group and even to arm their prisoners in case of an attack. Alas, they are far from achieving this goal as they need stone and iron.

5. WEST CELL

Four **commoners** are imprisoned here when not doing forced labor. Two are a merchant and his bodyguard, and the other two are traveling herb purveyors. During their last shift, one of them found a piece of wire that they want to use to break themselves free. It may occur before the characters come here (see **Random Event 6**).

6. EAST CELL

Seven people are imprisoned here when not doing forced labor. They were part of the same traveling caravan. Two of them (**thugs**) were its bodyguards. The rest are no fighters (**commoners**). They failed to stop the orc raiders and were brought here. If the characters open the cell (DC 13 Thieves' Tools) the thugs immediately offer their help fighting the orcs; they only need a weapon.

► **Guards.** Two **orcs** come to bring food to the prisoners 1 minute after the characters come here.

► **Treasure.** If freed, one of the traveling merchants gives the party a leather pouch with 30 gp as a reward.

7. ORC BARRACKS

Orcs sleep in this dilapidated building. They shamelessly sleep on the floor over one another with no sense of distance, nor respect. At night, the characters find 2d4 **orcs** playing dice games. During the day 2d4 orcs sleep on the floor, surrounded by rotting food scraps.

8. THE LARDER

The orcs use this hollowed-out tree building to store food items. Fruit, meat, animal carcasses, and other stuff stolen from the merchant caravans are just dropped here in an uncivilized manner. Half the contents of this room are rotting. The orcs do not appear to care about it.

9. GORLAV'S HALL

Hyacinth Bed's great hall has been repurposed by Gorlav, who now sits in Aarenal's throne-like seat. Gorlav (LV-4 fighter **orc**) is in the company of nine **orcs** at any given time. Such confrontation may prove deadly if the characters are not strong enough. Fortunately, there are plenty of opportunities in this quest for the characters to join forces with other beings with the same interests.

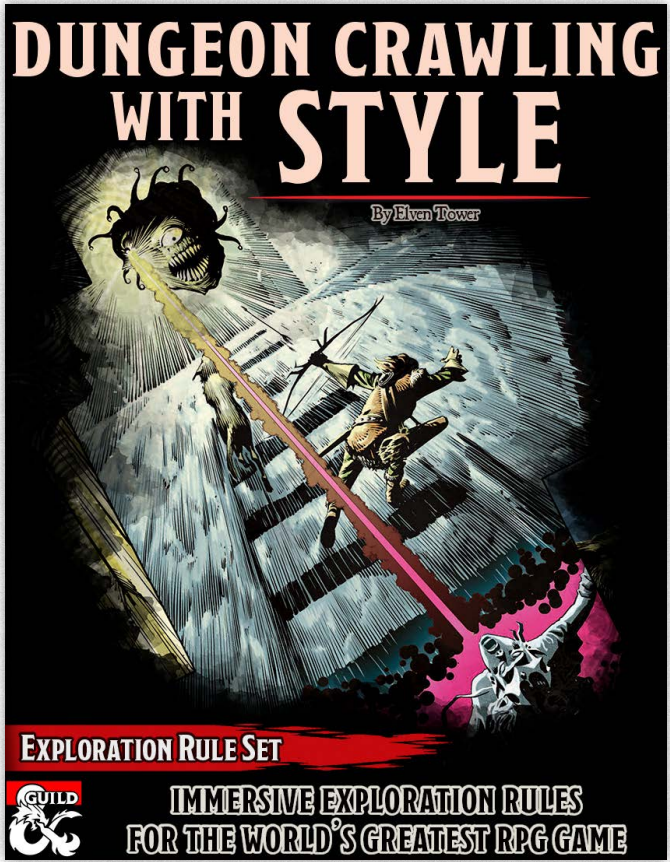
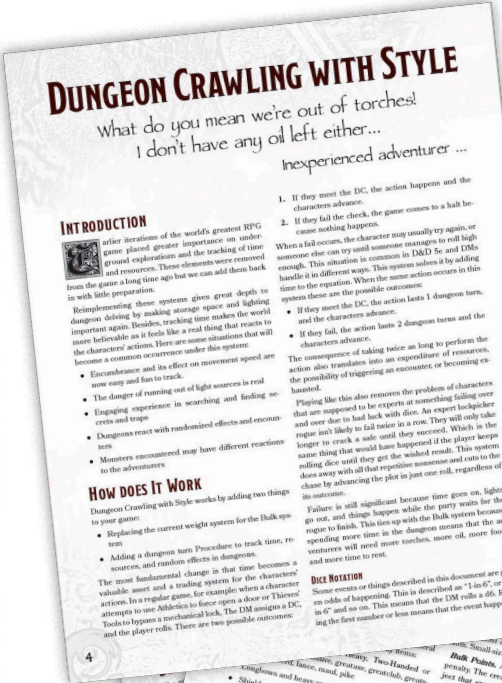
Gorlav and his followers fight bravely and without mercy. However, if Gorlav is slain in combat, surviving orcs flee toward Crooked Teeth to rejoin Sharp-Teeth Bagark.

► **Victory.** Saving Hyacinth Bed earns the characters the friendship of Aarenal and all the fey creatures in Oakhelm Forest. Their allegiance may prove instrumental when confronting Sharp-Teeth Bagark in his fortified lair in the southwest reaches of Red Lead Vale.



Dungeon Crawling with Style

Take control of your dungeoncrawls
Play a game of exploration and darkness



Example Dungeon!

Earlier iterations of the world's greatest RPG game placed greater importance on underground exploration and the tracking of time and resources. These elements were removed from the game a long time ago but we can add them back in with little preparation.

Reimplementing these systems provides depth to dungeon-delving by making storage space and lighting important again. Tracking time makes the world more believable as it feels like a real thing that reacts to the characters.

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idden from view, in the highest reaches of the craggy hills of Red Leaf Vale, lies a strange dungeon carved into the very stones of the old world. Therein lies a secret power, an ancient relic of such might, that it can tip the balance of control in the region. The Temple of the Iron Masks is named after an old legend that dates back to the olden times when people were free from the yoke of the empire. There are rhymes and poems about it that claim that by overcoming a hero's challenge before six iron-masked idols, a seventh mask of great power is revealed.

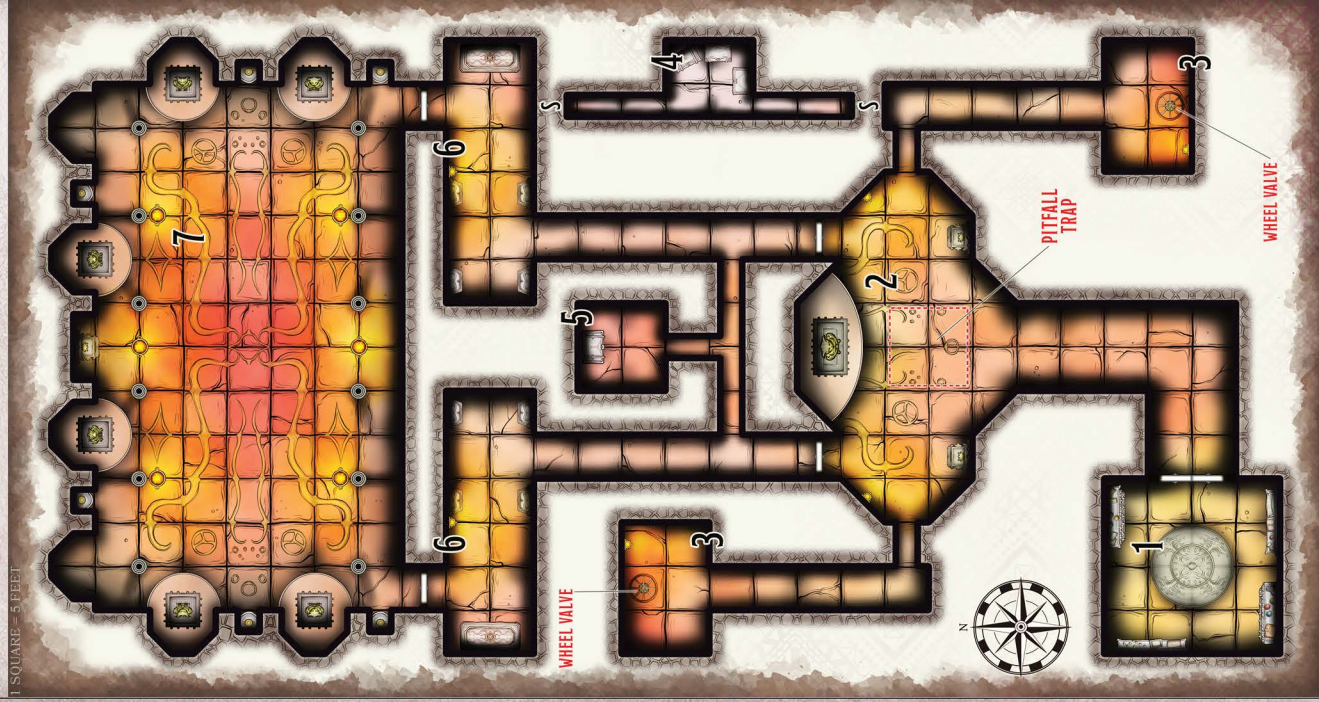
The Quartz Mask

THE STRANGE RELIC is crafted from pink quartz, it is a marvel of craftsmanship that cannot be imitated today. In its time, the legend says, it was worn by an order of warrior priests. There are decrepit murals and faded frescoes depicting the holy warriors; their visages covered by a shining, pink mask carved with a demonic face. Little is known of the Quartz Mask's magical properties. Scholars still debate this subject. Most concede is that the Quartz Mask enhanced the inherent power of whoever wielded the artifact. For that reason, it was reserved for the most powerful arcane magic-users and priestly figures.

Adventure Hook

THE AUTHORITIES FROM the nearest town, offer a bounty for retrieving the object of power that lies in the dungeon. Would-be adventurers looking for glory and treasure inevitably hear about the Temple of the Iron Masks. The locals know the way to its entrance, but no one dares to approach it due to deep-rooted superstitions. The heroes learn that a gate in the eastern plateau leads to a chamber with a magic circle. Standing on it during the new moon leads to the Temple of the Iron Masks.

Temple of the Iron Masks



Reaching the Temple

THE NORTHERN ROAD from the nearest settlement leads to an arid region of rocky crags and the rising mass of the eastern plateau. A half-day journey of climbing leads to an ante-diluvian monument near the summit. A stone arch, once decorated with intricate carvings, now stands bare to the elements. It leads into the veins of the earth under the plateau. Deep into the narrow cavern, a warm effulgence lies ahead; its source a carved magic circle.

The magic circle is time-sensitive and synced with the moon phases. During the night of the new moon, the portal is open. Creatures that step on the circle are instantly transported to area 1. A mage can channel its full power to activate the circle during a different day, to force the eldritch magic through.

Challenge of the Iron Masks

REACHING THE HALL of Masks (area 7) triggers this heroic ordeal. Within the cyclopean chamber, six golden idols wearing iron masks stand by the walls. Animated with tenebrous spells, the idols raise their hands as fiery eyes glow through the mask openings. Deadly guardians are summoned from the very ether to gauge the characters' combat prowess.

After the guardians are destroyed, the idols telepathically inform the adventurers that for anyone to claim their sepulchral treasure, they must abandon that which is their deepest, most coveted desire. The characters are not forced to comply. But if they do, their deep desire, which defines their motivations, is magically stripped from their soul. The character is forever changed after this interaction as it reaches their core and shifts it fundamentally. Overcoming this contest of will earns the idols' respect. They freely surrender the Quartz Mask to whoever sacrificed the most.

Sellswords Wanted!

Help the region and
prove your worth by
retrieving the fabled
Quartz Mask!

REWARD

450 gold pieces and a
knightly title.

Torren's Square Bounty Notice

Random Events

Roll 1d6 for a random event inside the dungeon every 30 minutes and after loud noises.

1. Three hungry rust monsters approach.
2. A sepulchral wind consumes all fires.
3. Four skeleton guardians with fiery eyes stumble in from the darkness ahead.
4. A brave mercenary enters the dungeon looking for glory. He may join the party.
5. A deathly voice calls the characters forth.
6. An earthquake shakes the compound.

1. Entrance Hall / Library

The teleportation circle leads to this chamber. Stepping back on the circle transports creatures back to the entrance in the plateau, regardless of the current moon phase.

► **Documents.** Inspecting the magically-preserved library for 1 hour reveals that the Quartz Mask is hidden by the idols in area 7; each contains the soul of a past wielder of the magic artifact. It is also revealed that the two entrances are currently locked.

2. Mischievous Idol

A magical voice issues forth from the gold idol on the pedestal. It calls the characters to approach for instruction, leading careless and naive creatures into a perilous trap.

► **Pitfall Trap.** A 10-foot-square trapdoor opens to a 40-foot-deep shaft. The shaft's bottom is lined with sharp steel spikes.

3. Valve Control Rooms

Both chambers contain a single, unmarked wheel valve in its closed position. Opening the valve appears to have no immediate or noticeable effect but they control the two doors that connect areas 6 and 7. Turning either valve is the only way to reach the Hall of Masks.

► **Guardian.** A spirit comes forth at the activation of either valve. The **undead specter** attacks living creatures with unearthly rage.

4. Secret Vault

Pulling a loose, hidden brick in areas 3 or 6 causes a section of the wall to swing inward, revealing a narrow passage to this vault. It holds the valuables of those interred in the dungeon.

► **Treasure.** The three stone coffers contain 200 gp, 1,940 sp, and a +1 ceremonial dagger.



5. Deceit for the Greedy

Touching the stone coffer in this chamber causes a flame rune on the lid to glow. A smoldering explosion occurs a moment later. Everything turns to cinders within 20 feet. Only the fastest of tomb-robbers can aspire to jump away fast enough to survive this.

6. Tomb of Lesser Guardians

Some of those who failed the Challenge of the Iron Masks are buried here. Their souls forever in angst and despair for their defeat.

► **Doors.** The locked gates to area 7 can only be released by opening both valves in area 3.

► **Guardians.** A gaunt, rage-stricken skeleton emerges from each enclosure to attack.

7. Hall of Masks

In this chamber, the characters shall face the Challenge of the Iron Masks (see above), their performance may be instrumental in the completion of future quests and their advancement as adventurers. Acquiring the fabled Quartz Mask (see below) also antagonizes those who have coveted this relic for untold time.

► **Treasure.** Each of the solid gold idols is worth 100 gp. However, removing any of the idols causes the Quartz Mask owner to die. The mask is inert until the idol is returned.

► **The Banner.** An intricately sewn tapestry that brandishes the old kingdom's colors hangs on the wall. It is a valuable heirloom that antique collectors shall gladly buy.

The Quartz Mask

WHEN DONNED, THE character acquires the experiences and memories of all those who possessed the pink quartz mask before. This information is a pool of grandiose knowledge. In addition, the character's base power can be doubled once per week for 10 minutes.

Brave Warrior of mighty light



**Yours is the power to
bring balance to the land.**

**Through your valiant
deeds, you can vanquish
evil and bring hope to the
weak and dispossessed.**

**But a ruinous price
must be paid for such
renown and glory.
Abandon all aspirations
of close ties as all
around you shall be
endangered. And accept
the fact that you too may
lose yourself in the quest
for eternal glory!**

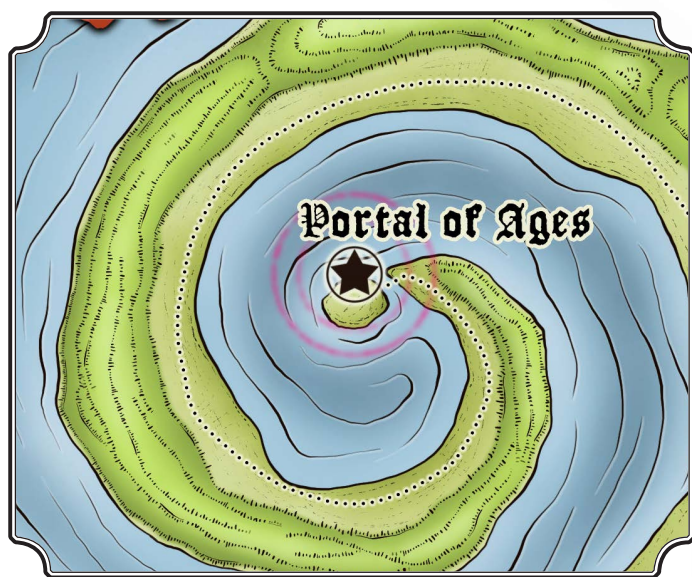
THE PORTAL OF AGES

In the dance of time and magic, we found strength in the shadows of what might be, standing united to forge our destiny, and embracing the unknown.

Dungeon's Inscription

This grandiose artifact was crafted in the forgotten epochs, a very long time ago. This portal is a masterpiece of the Ancients, beings whose knowledge of magic and the cosmos far surpassed that of any civilization known to history. It was designed as a convergence point for the ley lines that web across the Material Plane, meant to harness and channel the raw energies of the universe. Intended as a gateway for exploration and safeguarding realms against cosmic threats or invaders, its creators vanished, leaving behind their enigmatic, mind-bending artifacts.

Over millennia, the portal's true purpose and operation faded into legend. Thus, the Portal of Ages remains shrouded within a dungeon away from prying eyes. Hidden down a dark, stone staircase it stands, wrapped by the mists that bathe the Spiral Peninsula.



WHAT THE LOCALS KNOW

TO THE SCHOLARS and sages of Red Leaf Vale, the portal represents the pinnacle of an arcane enigma, offering both the promise of untold knowledge and the peril of unfettered power. Those who have gone there have never returned. Bequeathing a grim reputation to this place.

Unbeknown to the marauding orc leader, Sharp-Teeth Bagark, who dismisses the area as worthless, the Portal of Ages holds the potential to alter the fate of Red Leaf Vale. But for those brave enough to unlock its secrets, the portal could unveil pathways to leverage against any adversity, securing the future of the vale against the shadows of orcish conquest. However, the heroes must give their all if they aspire to come out victorious.

The Portal of Ages may cause unforeseen consequences that could change the heroes' lives forever.

THE PORTAL'S POWER

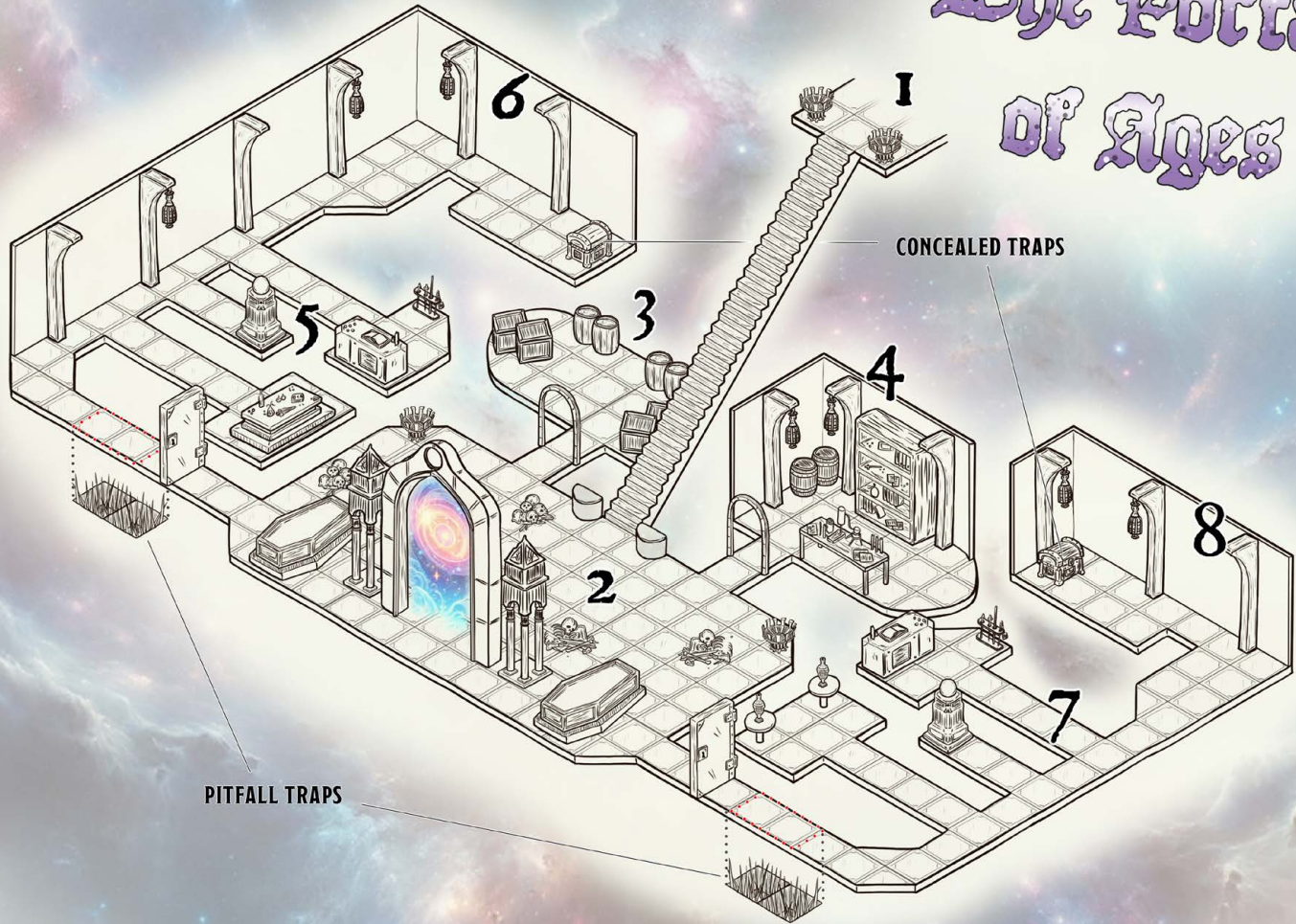
THE PORTAL OF Ages is not only a nexus of ancient power and arcane knowledge. This marvelous artifact offers several ways to help the heroes in their quest to protect Red Leaf Vale. However, even if the heroes succeed at reaching the portal and activating it, they lack the arcane prowess to control the outcome of its use. They must walk into the unknown and embrace unpredictability.

In addition, there is a high risk; they may not obtain what they seek, or perhaps they are presented with something that, in their opinion, does not benefit them much in their quest. Nevertheless, the opportunity to change their stars may be sufficient motivation.

RANDOM ENCOUNTERS

d6	Details
1	A swarm of spiders attacks the target with the least armor on. The insects flee when reduced to half their Hit Points.
2	As the PCs navigate the corridors, ethereal shadows detach from the walls, fragments of people and minds from other dimensions. They whisper forbidden secrets that chill the bones (DC 12 Charisma). On a fail, the next save is made with disadvantage.
3	A leech that feeds on magical energy drops on a spellcaster (DC 12 Constitution). On a fail, they lose the use of 1 spell (1 day).
4	The characters stumble upon four skeletons . The undead warriors fight the intruders until slain.
5	Filled with runes and shimmering faintly, two animated armors awaken with a grinding roar. Their eyes glow with arcane energy, programmed to attack anyone who dares step into the chambers of this dungeon, and the sacred Portal of Ages.
6	A barbed devil somehow manages to traverse the Portal of Ages in area 2. The evil creature seeks only violence and death.

The Portal of Ages



ADVENTURE HOOKS

Heroes. The characters want to help Red Leaf Vale and believe this forsaken dungeon may hold an answer to the imminent orcish invasion. The heroes can only trust the legends about this place and hope for two things: a weapon or an artifact to help them defeat the orcs, and the means to retrieve it and make it back home.

REACHING THE DUNGEON

The heroes must make a spiral trip through the peninsula to reach this place (DC 12 Survival). Failing by 5 or more means the heroes fail to notice the tiger dung on their way and stumble upon a hungry **tiger**.

Then, they must make a great effort to swim toward the island (DC 12 Athletics). Failing by 5 or more means the heroes arrive at area 1 too tired and out of breath. They acquire 1 level of Exhaustion if this is the case.

Level 3-4 Adventure

► **Danger.** Risky. Check for a **Random Encounter** every 20 minutes and after loud noises (4-in-6 chance).

► **Light.** Some areas feature magical braziers that stay ever-burning. The monsters within are have **Darkvision**.

► **Arcane Pulse.** A *detect magic* spell can perceive the portal's powerful energy from a distance of 300 feet.

► **Time and Space.** It is not uncommon for visitors to see spirits and shadows of people from other dimensions. The heroes hear conversations in ancient tongues, battles fought long ago, and other events. However, they cannot interact with these visions whatsoever.

1. THE LONG DESCENDING STAIRS

The stairs are a magical oddity: as a creature descends, they leave the Material Plane behind and are transported to a small artificial demi-plane, the dungeon. It exists outside the confines of time and space.

THE PORTAL OF AGES

After the activation of both crystal balls, two **wights** come out of the sarcophagi in area 2, the last obstacle before the heroes can make use of the portal's magic.

It takes 10 minutes and the presence of a magic user. However, controlling what may occur or knowing the outcome beforehand are two impossible things. Each of the four outcomes described in this module (see **Development**) has a 25% chance of occurring. Roll 1d4.

2. THE PORTAL OF AGES

The portal is an architectural marvel. Framed by two clock towers, the great arch shimmers with a kaleidoscope of colors that swirl in constant motion.

The heroes can admire the portal all they wish. But they cannot cross it or make it work until they activate the crystal balls in areas 5 and 7 (see **The Portal of Ages**).

3. ARCANE COMPONENTS

In a dim, dust-laden room lie barrels and crates filled with cheap arcane substances and alchemical reagents.

► **Treasure.** A perceptive character finds loot among the trash (DC 13 Perception). A bag of rare spices (15 gp), a chunk of meteorite (75 gp), a lantern made of intricate stained glass (80 gp), and a leather bag with 41 gp.

4. LABORATORY

A lab-like room brims with the legacy of the portal's creators, its tables littered with arcane tools and ancient tomes. Shelves of varied specimens and intricate formulae bear witness to their vast magical research.

The **shadow** of a past scientist appears. It cannot be reasoned with, the mind of this person is long gone.

► **Treasure.** 10 minutes searching the area yields a pearl (40 gp), a green statuette of an ancient deity (50 gp), and 187 gp worth of arcane components.

5. WEST CORRIDORS

The heroes are free to explore these corridors. It takes them 10 minutes to activate the crystal ball and retrieve the following from the altars: a *potion of healing*, and six bars of flowery-scented deluxe incense (15 gp).

► **Spikes.** DC 12 Perception. Failing to see the pitfall trap results in 2d10 damage and 10 minutes spent pulling the victim out of the pit without causing more harm.

6. FAKE CHEST

Failing to notice the suspicious bolts and springs by the chest's lid causes one of the heroes to trigger the trap (DC 13 Perception). Darts fly and poison all creatures standing before the chest: they take 2d8 poison damage and are poisoned for 1 hour (DC 15 Constitution).

7. EAST CORRIDORS

► **Treasure.** This is identical to area 5 but contains different treasure. After searching the corridors for 10 minutes, the characters find two gold urns (35 gp each), rare history books and scrolls (50 gp), and a *+1 dagger*.

8. CLEVER ILLUSION

This is an illusory chest. A *detect magic* spell reveals the deceit. Creatures who know the chest is fake can see through it and notice a burnt orifice in the wall. Approaching triggers the fire jet, dealing 2d8 damage to all creatures before the chest (DC 14 Dexterity for half).

DEVELOPMENT

THE CHARACTERS ACTIVATE the portal and get rid of the guardians (see **Portal of Ages**). They then 'cross' the threshold and experience a vivid journey where the unforeseen occurs. Consider the following:

► **Time Manipulation.** The heroes glimpse into the past and future, granting them insights into the strategies and weaknesses of the orcish invaders, enabling them to make more informed decisions and prepare better. The heroes acquire new memories and come back armed with foreknowledge of the orcish invaders' plans and tactics. Their victory is written in the stars.

► **Summoning Allies.** Powerful allies from different eras or planes of existence come forth, offering assistance in the form of legendary warriors, wise sages, or mythical creatures to stand against the orcish onslaught. The heroes come back bolstered by the strength of newfound allies, or perhaps weapons from another timeline or universe. This turns the tides of war in their favor.

► **Arcane Empowerment.** Heroes receive temporary boosts in strength, endurance, or magical artifacts, enabling them to fight with enhanced prowess or perform heroic feats beyond their normal capabilities. The heroes come back stronger and wiser than their past selves. They may gain a level, increase their abilities, or obtain wondrous artifacts (GM's discretion).

► **Chaos in Time.** The worst possible outcome. The heroes are sucked into the portal and travel to a universe where Red Leaf Vale is ruled entirely by orcs. Here, *they* are the invaders in an improvised fort, planning to take over the vale. Their mission to fend off the orc invaders turns into a mammoth quest: retake the entire vale.

In other words, after crossing the portal, the heroes may either return stronger and wiser to save their world or not return at all after being sent to another dimension. As always, a great reward comes with a high risk. In the case of the worst possible scenario, the risk could be a little too high for the kind-hearted heroes' taste.

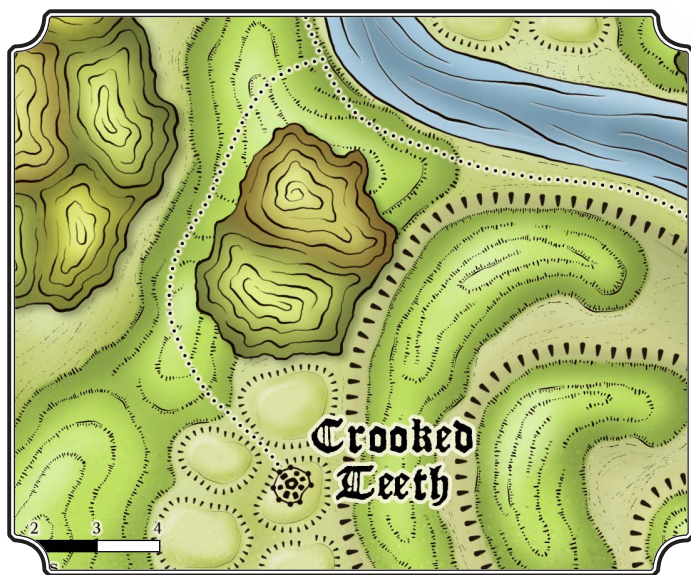
CROOKED TEETH FORT

“You petty mercenaries can do NOTHING to stop me. The vale is mine! It is a matter of time before the settlers bow their knees and swear their allegiance.”

Sharp-Teeth Bagark

In the southwest reaches of Red Leaf Vale, the orc chieftain Sharp-Teeth Bagark, has built a fortified position in an abandoned mining site. Orcs, goblins, and an ogre quickly built a palisade around the mine’s spiraling descent. Bagark has also repurposed a section of the mine as his lair.

The time of reckoning for the orc invaders has come. The characters have come to exact a ruinous cost for the chieftain’s aspirations. In their quests, the characters may have conscripted powerful allies, acquired game-changing magical items, and maybe even learned of the fort’s secret entrance underneath. See **Factions** for the available allies that may come aid the characters. Sharp-Teeth Bagark’s forces are too numerous for the adventurers to take by themselves. Their only chance as a solo operation is to attempt to assassinate Bagark by infiltrating the mine through the secret tunnel (area 11).



Level 4 Adventure

► **Danger.** Risky. Check for a **Random Event** every 20 minutes and after loud noises (3-in-6 chance).

► **Fog.** If the characters approach between midnight and dawn, the area is foggy. Vision is reduced to 20 feet and checks to move silently are rolled with advantage.

► **Smells and Sounds.** The sounds of cutting trees and constructions can be heard during the day. After sunset, the orcs chatter, drink, and play dice games.

FACTIONS

Settlers. If whoever rules over Red Leaf is grateful to the party, they send ten **guards** to aid the characters. Earning Constable Ciranna’s favor causes her to appoint four **thugs** to follow the characters’ commands here.

The Knight. Sir Dante of Torren’s Square may be with the party if he is convinced to return from retirement.

Varena. Sharp-Teeth Bagark’s sibling (**mage**) is on a path for revenge. She may join the party in the sewers of Red Leaf. She knows the secret mine tunnel (area 11).

The Fey. If the characters help Aarenal in Hyacinth Bed (Oakhelm Forest), the dryad sends four **elves** to aid the characters on the attack. Aarenal cannot come herself because of the nature of her tie with her bonded tree.

Arcane Aid. Powerful relics and boons can be secured by the party in the Red Leaf Vale: a *sword of sharpness* can be unearthed in the Crypt of Ashen Bones. The *Quartz Mask* can be obtained in the Hall of the Iron Masks for a steep price, and an unpredictable advantage to the characters’ abilities may be earned in the Portal of Ages. This last one may come in the shape of allies, weapons, artifacts, or even an enhancement of abilities.

RANDOM EVENTS

d6	Details
1	A patrol of four orcs returns from the north. They join any ongoing conflict. Otherwise, they go to rest in a tent.
2	A thunderstorm breaks. Visibility is reduced for the day. The battle for Red Leaf Vale shall occur during the storm.
3	Two centaurs scouts from Hyacinth Bed hide in the area. They join the battle against the orc invaders after the characters start.
4	The orc scouts on the palisade change shifts in a disorderly manner. For 10 minutes, the fort is not under vigilance. The characters have advantage on infiltration checks and attempts to quietly assassinate orcs around the base.
5	If Gorlav (LV-4 fighter orc) in Oakhelm Forest has not been defeated or he escaped, he and six orcs arrive during the battle to murder Sharp-Teeth Bagark. The resulting havoc of orcs-against-orcs conflict wreaks confusion.
6	Five valiant men from Torren’s Square (guards) infiltrate the fort from the east and start fighting the orcs in the nearest tent.

THE ORC CHIEFTAIN

“Our cunning chieftain united the orc clans with a vision of conquest, his ambition shadowed only by his disregard for other races and the arcane”

Sharp-Teeth Bagark's follower

Bagark emerged from the harsh and unforgiving lands beyond the southern mountains. Born into the tumult of orcish clan warfare, Bagark quickly distinguished himself. Having his strength and cunning mind is rarely seen in his kind.

Bagark united the fractious orc clans under a single banner for the first time in generations. The orc chieftain possesses an ancient artifact that nullifies magic. It is an amulet of great power that he wields at all times.

Under his command, the orcish hordes have become a disciplined, if fearsome, military force. Yet, within Bagark's iron grip lies a vulnerability—an overconfidence in his strength and a dismissal of the arcane forces, which heroes could exploit to their advantage. He has other detractors; Gorlav and his gone-rogue goons in Oakhelm Forest, and Varena, his sister, among them. The first wishes to be the leader of the orcs, the latter won't rest until she takes revenge for Bagark's parricide.

SHARP-TEETH BAGARK, ORC CHIEFTAIN

Medium humanoid (orc), chaotic evil

Armor Class 17 (breastplate armor, shield)

HP 105 (15d8 + 30)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	13 (+1)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Str +6, Dex +4, Con +5, Cha +6

Skills Athletics +6, Intimidation +6

Senses passive Perception 11

Languages Orc, common

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Brave. Advantage on saving throws against being frightened.

Brute. A melee weapon deals an extra 1d6 damage when the orc chieftain hits with it (not included in the attack).

Amulet. The orc chieftain has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects. 1/day, he can activate the amulet and obtain total immunity to harmful magic for 1 hour.

Actions

Multiattack. The orc chieftain makes three greataxe attacks, or two spear attacks.

Greataxe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (1d12 + 3) slashing damage.

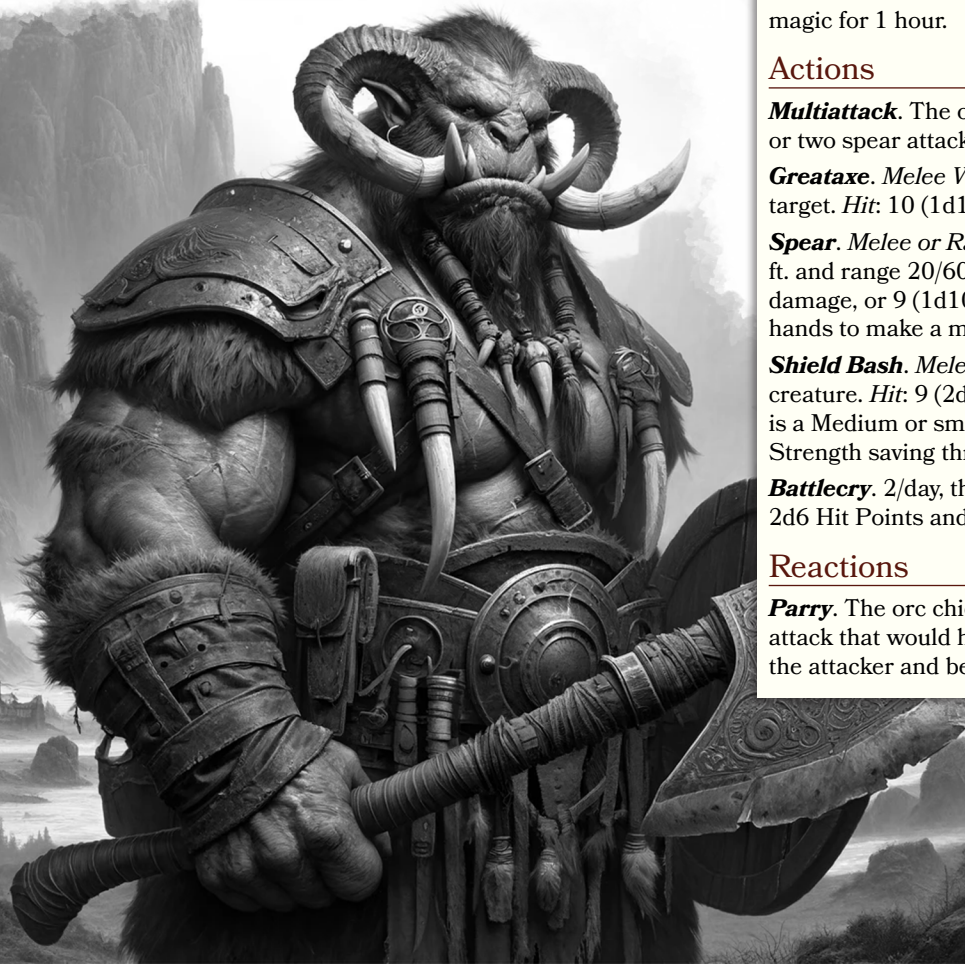
Spear. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft. and range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage, or 9 (1d10 + 3) piercing damage if used with two hands to make a melee attack.

Shield Bash. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 9 (2d4 + 3) bludgeoning damage. If the target is a Medium or smaller creature, it must succeed on a DC 14 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Battlecry. 2/day, the orc chieftain inspires allies. They regain 2d6 Hit Points and gain advantage on their next attack.

Reactions

Parry. The orc chieftain adds 3 to its AC against one melee attack that would hit it. To do so, the orc chieftain must see the attacker and be wielding a melee weapon.





1. NORTH ROAD

Once a well-trodden road, the way to the mine was abandoned 6 years ago. Characters and their allies approaching from this road have a 3-in-6 chance of being spotted by six **orc** scouts. The orcs attack on sight.

2. THE PALISADE

A 20-foot-tall palisade surrounds what once was a popular, local mining site. Scouts stand on makeshift watchtowers while smoke rises from within.

► **Scouts.** There are twelve watchtowers, each with an orc or goblin scout at any given time. They are not consistent at this task, though; once per hour, there is a 4-in-6 chance that the guard is missing. If the characters are spotted (DC 13 Stealth), the scouts raise the alarm.

► **Infiltration.** The characters can jump over the palisade if no scout is in sight (DC 13 Athletics). On a success, they move to the inner side without being seen.

3. TENTS AND INNER YARD

There are six hide tents inside the walls. Two makeshift racks with hanging meats, two raging campfires, the spiral descent into the mine, and a larger tent by the south wall from which a loud snoring sound comes.

► **Small Tents.** Bagark's forces, a motley crew of orcs, goblins, and a few humans, live in these tents. Each is littered with pelts, straw, and a horrid stench of droppings and sweat. At any given time, there are 1d8 **orcs**, 3d4 **goblins**, and 1 **thug** per tent. They may be inside sleeping or by the yard campfires. Numbers vary because some may be on patrol, hunting game, or attacking travelers on the road. If the alarm is raised, a veritable army emerges to attack; the characters shall not be able to confront this unless they have secured allies in the vale.

► **Treasure.** It takes 20 minutes to inspect all the small tents. The search yields 110 gp, 480 sp, a *potion of healing*, and a jade statuette (120 gp).

4. LARGE CAMP TENT

An **ogre** named Muk sleeps in the larger tent. Its body is strewn with burnt marks; grim evidence of the vicious training that Bagark subjected the ogre to in its youth. It is a formidable opponent that may decimate whatever force attacks Crooked Teeth Fort. It is loyal to Sharp-Teeth Bagark and shall die defending its orcish master.

► **Weakness.** Muk, the ogre, has a debilitating fear of fire due to how it was tamed years ago. The ogre rolls a Morale check with disadvantage each time it is harmed with fire during combat. On a fail, it flees in the opposite direction, trampling down a section of the wall.

5. MINE ENTRANCE

A spiral ramp with shallow steps descends 40 feet into the mine. It has not been maintained for years, which caused a few accidents when the orcs took over the site. With their improvised fixes and a few added wooden supports, the descending ramp is safe. It takes a creature two turns to move from area 5 to 6 or vice-versa. Creatures that fall from the surface to the landing (area 6) take 4d6 damage (DC 14 Dexterity for half).

6. MINE LANDING

An oil lamp burns by the wall of this otherwise empty cavern chamber. Rotting wooden beams support the walls, evidence of the mining activity years ago.

► **Guards.** Six **orcs** stand watch here. Moving past them toward the mine tunnels is impossible unless these orcs are dealt with magically or lured away.

► **Scattered Ore.** Careful inspection of the minute ores and crystal fragments littering the floor reveals that this was primarily a copper and quartz mine (DC 13 Arcana).

7. BAGARK'S OFFICE

Sharp-Teeth Bagark (see statblock page) is here when the characters arrive at the fort. He moves to other areas as needed or if the alarm is raised on the surface.

► **Bodyguards.** Four loyal **orcs** accompany Bagark everywhere. If a battle breaks in the mine, the bodyguards usher Bagark to area 6 to climb to the surface.

► **Documents.** Inspecting the tomes and parchments for 10 minutes reveals that the original purpose of the mine was to secure quartz stones to build the magical filtration system in Red Leaf 6 years ago. The mine was abandoned after they obtained enough ore.

8. SECRET VAULT

Pulling a book switch in the bookcase in area 7 causes it to swing inward and reveal a passage to this vault.

► **Treasure.** The three coffer contain 1,500 gp, 24,380 sp, two *potions of healing*, a *potion of heroism*, a *+1 dagger*, a golden amulet (40 gp), and a *crystal ball*.

9. MINING IMPLEMENTS

The chamber contains an assortment of mining tools, sacks with coal, and several mining carts in working order. Some of them are still packed with whatever the miners left in them years ago. There are eight **goblins** here. Sharp-Teeth Bagark ordered them to clean and organize the room so that they can restart the mine soon. The orc chieftain plans to forcibly employ the townsfolk of Red Leaf Vale to work as miners. He believes the glowing quartz stones must be valuable as an export.

10. ABANDONED MINE

A cart rail pierces into the gem-lit tunnel to the south. The mine proper is a network of expanding tunnels. The glowing stones on the walls are forms of quartz that can be sold wholesale to traveling merchants for a low price. The real use for these gemstones, if properly treated by an alchemist and a mage, is as parts of complex clockwork devices, like the filtering machine under Red Leaf.

11. COLLAPSED TUNNEL

Mounds of stone and debris impede passage. The orc invaders have not bothered cleaning this as they believe it is nothing but another mine tunnel. Alas, the tunnel leads to an alternate mine entrance 2 miles to the east. The characters may find this well-hidden entrance by exploring the area before attacking (DC 18 Survival). Otherwise, they may learn about it from Varena, Bagark's sibling, in the sewers of Red Leaf; she has a map.

► **Cleaning Up.** The characters can remove the obstacle in 10 minutes (no check) but it is a loud affair that attracts the attention of the **goblins** in area 9. Alternatively, the characters can remove the boulders slowly and quietly (DC 13 Dexterity) to gain access to the mine tunnels without attracting unwanted attention.

► **Arcane Ally.** If the characters made an alliance with Varena (**mage**), she waits for the party at the alternate mine entrance. Her eyes shine with anticipation as her chance to take revenge on her brother approaches.

THE BATTLE

This is a complex scenario with many moving parts as the characters may have conscripted a numerous force to storm the fort. They may also attempt a quiet approach and try to deal with Bagark in area 7 before his forces are truly alerted. A pincer movement is also available as an option, with the characters and Varena attacking from the mines, and other allies distracting the surface forces. One thing is certain, once Sharp-Teeth Bagark is defeated in battle, all his forces disband, flee, or surrender. With the sole exception of Gorlav, if he is present (see **Random Event 5**), he rallies Bagark's remaining goons to his side and fights the characters.

THE FUTURE OF RED LEAF VALE

EXHAUSTING EVERY RESOURCE, the characters are victorious and rid the vale of the orc invasion. Sharp-Teeth Bagark's surviving forces quickly scatter to the southern realms and return from whence they came.

THE SETTLEMENTS

The defeat of Bagark is celebrated equally in Red Leaf, Torren's Square, and Hyacinth Bed. The characters embark on a victory tour around the region. The locals shower them with gifts, food, drinks, and flower garlands. The characters are invited to settle down in either human town and given the option to purchase a land lot.

A POWER STRUGGLE

Constable Ciranna takes advantage of the orcs' defeat to grasp for power. Whether Arthur Reati, the incompetent lord, or the ouster Baranter, is chief in town she does not care. She believes that the fate of Red Leaf Vale lies in her hands and that the current ruler of the capital must step down and allow her to lead. She sends letters stating this matter but she is later rebuked. Constable Ciranna then starts conscripting forces to invade Red Leaf and take over the Red Fort. The warring constable summons the characters as she expects them to side with her. If the characters refuse, she orders her allies to arrest the party and tries to imprison them in the dungeon.

In Red Leaf, Constable Danley appeals to the characters to defend the town and uphold the Vassal Lord's legitimacy; if he still rules. He claims that if Arthur Reati is removed, the empire shall seek the ones responsible.

WILL OF THE EMPIRE

Envoys from the faraway empire come too late to learn about the orcish invasion. When they come, if a person other than Arthur Reati is in charge of Red Leaf, they warn that the emperor did not sanction such bequeathing of power. The imperial forces shall soon make an appearance and they shall uproot the usurper and place a new person as the Vassal Lord of Red Leaf Vale. If the usurper is Constable Ciranna, she conscripts the characters and orders them to raise an army for her, to withstand the onslaught of the empire. She believes the vale is ready to once again become a free province.

THE SORCERESS

If Varena survives, she is thankful to the characters. Due to her ancestry and recent events, she knows she is not welcome anywhere in Red Leaf Vale. However, she vows to remember the characters' help and offers her aid in future quests outside the vale. The crystal ball from area 8 can be used to communicate with her. Future ventures with the sorceress are up to the characters.



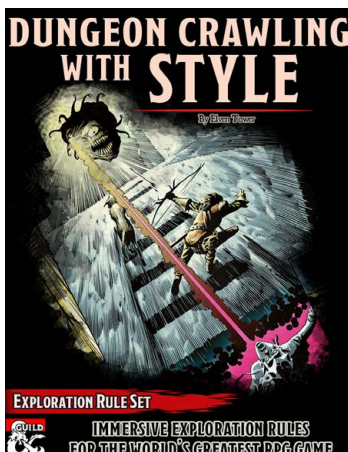
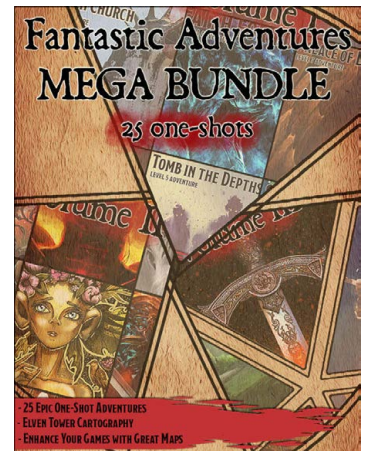
CONCLUSION

THE CHARACTERS' VALIANT deeds in Red Leaf Vale shall be remembered forever; it shall be a mark of pride in their adventuring lives wherever they go. Perhaps the characters will settle for a life of adventure in the vale. Or maybe they will leave to seek gold and glory elsewhere. Alas, those are adventures for another day...

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