

ARCANA



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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Unique villains create memorable stories. Engaging encounters, immersive worlds, and compelling NPCs are all important, but when asked what they remember about campaigns from years past, the first thing many players bring up is that goblin who got away during the first battle, then returned as a dragon-riding sorcerer, and then came back again as a lich for the final encounter. In decades of playing, I've forgotten tavern conversations, tactical battles, NPCs, entire worlds, and even the names and classes of some of my old characters, but I can still tell you almost turn-by-turn about my showdowns with unique villains.

I love playing the game with new players because many of the creatures and tropes experienced gamers take for granted are new to the humans at the table. "A bugbear? What's that?" the newbies ask as us GMs giggle with maniacal glee. Every villain that crosses a new player's path is exciting and memorable because of its novelty. Even if greenhorn players know a monster from popular media, like trolls or vampires, they don't know what the game's version of that villain is like, and they have no idea what unique spin the GM will put on the creature. Heck, with new players, us GMs even get to march out old villains and stories we've used before (or borrow them from another GM's game) and these players love to hate these baddies because it's all new to them.

Of course, most of us don't run games for new players every session, especially if we're part of a long-term campaign. And newbies go very quickly from, "Oh no! What's a kobold?" to "Let's run these pipsqueaks over to get to the treasure." This is a game about fighting monsters, after all. That means the monsters need to be compelling and there needs to be a lot of them. Villain ideas get used up rather quickly! Each time a GM spends time spinning out a unique villain, that's one more idea that they likely can't use with their group again. After a year of my best brain babies once a week, what can I give my players

to surprise them—to say nothing of the friends I started playing with nearly twenty years ago?

To keep my games fresh, I pull villains out of supplements and drop them into my campaign. If I can grab a premade villain with a unique stat block, it saves me time and energy in addition to giving me fresh stuff to put into my game. I might put my own spin on them or smash them together with a second monster to create something new. I don't think there's any published element of the game I use more than villains, and I know other GMs are similar, since monsters have their own book in the core rules! While *ARCADIA* featured some cool antagonists in previous issues, the one you're reading now presents the best selection yet.

[Michael E. Shea](#) provides four new evil characters that form a rival adventuring party to take on the player characters. Each member of the Grim Accord has a deep backstory and unique traits that make them a worthy villain as an individual. Together, this fiercely loyal band is unstoppable—or are they?

[Gabe Hicks](#) gives you an entirely different kind of villain in "Armor of Zevellon." An evil demigod of chaos magic bound himself to the pieces of his old armor and returns to life when the set is assembled. Having a villain reveal himself in a mysterious slow burn is my kind of story. The best part about this villain is that the characters might be the ones to summon him in their attempt to gather each piece of the powerful armor.

Finally, [H.H. Carlan's](#) "Spelunking" brings us one of the best types of villains: a new legendary creature with lair actions and a tragic backstory. Fawning Summerset doesn't go down easy.

I can't wait to use these villains in my game, and I'm beyond excited to learn how you all use them in yours.

Ex animo,
James Introcaso
Managing Editor

THE GRIM ACCORD

FOUR EVIL ADVENTURERS SKULKING IN THE SHADOWS OF YOUR HEROES

by Michael E. Shea

“THEY’D BE AS LIKELY TO CUT YOUR THROAT, PUT AN ARROW IN YOUR EYE, OR SET YOUR BED ON FIRE WHILE YOU SLEPT IN THE NIGHT AS LOOK AT YOU. BUT WHEN IT COMES TO FINDING TWISTED ARTIFACTS IN THE DEPTHS OF THE EARTH, THERE ARE FEW BETTER.”

—GRIM ACCORD PERFORMANCE REPORT BY
JAQUE IRONKNIFE, 12TH MERCENARY COMMANDER

INTRODUCTION

Not all adventurers are good. Not all seek the betterment of those who can’t defend themselves from the dangers lurking in the shadows of the world. Some seek power—however they can get it. None who cross paths with the Grim Accord describe them as benevolent heroes out to help those in need. The members of the Accord seek the greatest powers in the world and destroy anything in their way to grasp them.

The Grim Accord is a ready-to-use evil adventuring band you can drop into your world. They can act as rival adventurers, useful NPCs, direct villains, or even sinister quest-givers. The Grim Accord may follow their own plans, quests, and goals in parallel or perpendicular to those of the characters until the two groups finally come crashing together. The characters may hear of the Accord long before they face them directly, as NPCs and enemies whisper of the sinister group throughout many adventures.

Four members make up the core of the Grim Accord, though the group is known to hire local brigands, spies, cult fanatics, murderers, and mercenaries to bolster their rank. These four members include the charismatic halfling Irae Firetouched, an elemental sorcerer who leads the band; Kryx Bloodgnash, the feared gnoll shapeshifter; Athlonia, the Moon’s Eclipse, an elf knight of shadow; and the orc assassin Uldun of Parts Unknown.

This article includes descriptions and stat blocks for each member of the Grim Accord, tips for integrating them into your campaign, quests that bring them into the heroes’ path, and a description of the corrupt adventuring band’s mysterious headquarters.

ALSO KNOWN AS

The infamous deeds of the Grim Accord have garnered them all manner of nicknames, including the Charnel Council, Vengeance of the Wilds, Feeders of Crows, the Scorched Earth, and Fire, Shadow, Blood, and Bone. The characters may hear one of these monikers the first time they learn about the group instead of their real name. The Accord is careful to share its official name only with those who need their services.

MEMBERS OF THE GRIM ACCORD

Each member of the Grim Accord came to the adventuring group chased by a dark past. Originally hunted as outlaws and murderers, the band rose into the role of mercenaries, hunters, and bodyguards for those willing to hire such an unscrupulous group. Each member brings their specialty to the band, including Irae's charisma and negotiation skills, Kryx's connection to the merciless natural world, Athlonia's harnessing of fey magic, and Uldun's fathomless patience for the deadly hunt.

IRAE FIRETOUCHED *Halfling sorcerer of flames*

"I'VE SEEN FEW WHO NAVIGATE POLITICAL AND ROYAL LABYRINTHS AS WELL AS SHE DOES AND NONE WHO ARE AS COMFORTABLE IN THE WILDS AS SHE IS. CROSS HER, THOUGH, AND ONE BEST HOPE THE TRUE FIRE IN HER EYES ISN'T THE LAST THING THEY SEE."

—JOURNAL ENTRY OF LADY MATILDE DAWNROSE, SEVENTH OF THE LINE

NICKNAMES: Irae Ashbringer, the Scourge of Willowset, Spellstorm

Upon forming the Grim Accord, Irae rose quickly as the group's spokeswoman and leader. Her charismatic wiles have brought the Accord far, taking them out of hiding and bringing them jobs from the most unlikely sources. The other members note the value of her silvery tongue and use it regularly for their advantage. It's never clear to the members of the Accord whether Irae uses them for her gain or if they use her to get what they desire. So far, at least, the relationship profits them all.

It is said that the blazing soul of the elemental prince of fire touched the halfling when she was a child. Irae's halfling family and village, Willowset, exiled her after her powers manifested in her teenage years and she inadvertently burned down a quarter of the village in a rage-filled inferno. Outcast for six years, she finally returned and finished the job. Willowset's remains still smolder around a pit of molten rock in the center of the village that never cooled. Some say the secret of Irae's power lies within the village's charred ruin. The elf sorcerer Klaroven of the Torch taught Irae to channel her powers, only to try to steal them from the young halfling and leave her a dried husk along with his other students. Irae turned his powers against him and now wears his screaming soul in an amulet around her neck.

The other members of the Accord found Irae nearly destroyed after her battle with Klaroven. The group soon discovered her ability not only for destructive power but for verbal manipulation. It was through Irae's leadership and negotiations that the Grim Accord went from mysterious bandits to profitable adventurers.

IDEAL: "Power exists for those able to grasp it and hold on."

BOND: "My companions take me where I want to go and are easily steered by my words."

FLAW: "Sometimes I just need to see things burn."

TACTICS

Irae rarely ambushes her quarry directly. Instead, she uses her words to deceive and disarm her opponents, cornering them into a vulnerable position before she and the Accord strike. If attacked, or if her manipulations fail, Irae's persona visibly changes as she lets her fiery blood move through her veins. Her eyes glow like embers. Her hair flows back, appearing like flame. And the world around her begins to burn.



IRAE FIRETOUCHED

Small humanoid (halfling), neutral evil

ARMOR CLASS 12 (15 with *mage armor*)

HIT POINTS 49 (9d6 + 18)

SPEED 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)

SAVING THROWS Con +4, Cha +6

SKILLS Arcana +3, History +3, Intimidation +6, Persuasion +6

DAMAGE RESISTANCES fire

SENSES passive Perception 12

LANGUAGES Common, Halfling, Ignan, Undercommon

CHALLENGE 4 (1,100 XP)

PROFICIENCY BONUS +2

Firetouched. When reduced to half of her hit points or fewer, Irae becomes wreathed in flames. Whenever a creature within 5 feet of Irae hits her with a melee attack, it takes 9 (2d8) fire damage.

Quickened Fireball (3rd-Level Spell; Requires a Spell Slot). As a bonus action, Irae creates a fiery explosion centered on a point she can see within 150 feet of her. Each creature in a 20-foot-radius sphere centered on that point must make a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw, taking 28 (8d6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. The fire spreads around corners and ignites flammable objects in the area that aren't being worn or carried.

Shape Spell. When Irae casts a spell that requires a saving throw and deals fire damage, she can choose any number of creatures in the spell's area of effect. Chosen creatures automatically succeed on their saving throws against the spell, and they take no damage if they would normally take half damage on a successful save.

Spellcasting. Irae is an 8th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). She knows the following sorcerer spells:

Cantrips (at will): *control flames, dancing lights, fire bolt, friends*

1st level (4 slots): *burning hands, charm person, mage armor, shield*

2nd level (3 slots): *misty step, scorching ray*

3rd level (3 slots): *counterspell, fireball*

4th level (2 slots): *greater invisibility*

Wrathful Destruction. When Irae is reduced to 0 hit points, flames arc out of her body toward her enemies. Each enemy within 20 feet of her must make a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw, taking 28 (8d6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

ACTIONS

Scimitar of Flame. *Melee Spell Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) fire damage.

Fire Bolt (Cantrip). *Ranged Spell Attack:* +6 to hit, range 120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d10) fire damage. A flammable object hit by this spell ignites if it isn't being worn or carried.

REACTION

Shield (1st-Level Spell; Requires a Spell Slot). When Irae is hit by an attack or targeted by a *magic missile* spell, she calls forth an invisible barrier of magical force that protects her. Until the start of her next turn, Irae has a +5 bonus to AC, including against the triggering attack, and she takes no damage from *magic missile*.

KRYX BLOODGNASH *Gnoll shapeshifter druid*

“EVERY ONE HUNDRED SEASONS, THE DARK WOOD CHOOSES A VESSEL FOR ITS VENGEANCE. WARE THE ONE WHO WALKS IN THE WOOD’S NAME.”

—PHRASE FOUND IN THE TATTERED JOURNALS OF THE DRUID KYLAK IRONROOT

NICKNAMES: The Beast of the Dark Wood, Blood of the Underworld, Old Redfang

Kryx was raised by the Dark Wood. Cast out from his gnoll pack as a runt, Kryx wandered the Dark Wood, starving and scared. In a twisted grove of grasping trees dripping black liquid into a pool, an ancient presence embraced him, feeding him dead foliage and filling his veins with the oil of the land.

Able to transform into the twisted visage of a giant hyena, Kryx hunted freely in the woods that embraced him as a dark guardian. During these hunts, Kryx met Athlonia in a grove surrounding a long-dead portal to the realm of the unseelie elves. The two saw their connection to the darker side of the natural world and bonded before joining the Grim Accord.

IDEAL: “From the depths of the earth we rise and to depths of the earth we return.”

BOND: “I smile at the darkness held in the hearts of my friends.”

FLAW: “My hunger for blood and flesh sometimes outweighs the better judgment of my companions.”

TACTICS

In his years traveling with the Grim Accord, Kryx learned to hold back his initial instinct to shift into his bestial form and tear his enemies limb from limb. Kryx begins combat with his powerful spells before shifting into his fearsome giant hyena form, charging in at spellcasters and less-armored foes.



KRYX BLOODGNASH

Medium humanoid (gnoll), chaotic evil

ARMOR CLASS 14 (hide armor)

HIT POINTS 60 (8d8 + 24)

SPEED 30 ft. (40 ft. in hyena form)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	8 (-1)	16 (+3)	9 (-1)

SAVING THROWS Dex +4, Wis +5

SKILLS Nature +1, Perception +5, Survival +5

SENSES darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 15

LANGUAGES Common, Gnoll

CHALLENGE 4 (1,100 XP)

PROFICIENCY BONUS +2

Change Shape. Kryx can use his bonus action to polymorph into a giant hyena, or back into his true form, which is humanoid. His statistics, other than his movement speed, are the same in each form. Kryx does not provoke opportunity attacks when moving while in hyena form. Any equipment he is wearing or carrying is absorbed by his new form. He reverts to his true form if he dies.

Fury of the Beast (1/Day). If Kryx is reduced to 0 hit points but doesn't die outright, he is reduced to 1 hit point instead, gains temporary hit points equal to his hit point maximum, and polymorphs into his giant hyena form (see Change Shape). These temporary hit points last for 1 hour. While he has these temporary hit points, Kryx can't revert to his humanoid form, and he gains one additional melee attack as part of his Multiattack action.

Spellcasting (Humanoid Form Only). Kryx is a 6th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 13; +5 to hit with spell attacks). He has the following druid spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *guidance, poison spray, produce flame*

1st level (4 slots): *entangle, faerie fire*

2nd level (3 slots): *heat metal, pass without trace, spike growth*

3rd level (3 slots): *call lightning, dispel magic*

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Kryx makes two attacks with his claws. If Fury of the Beast is active, he makes three attacks: two with his claws and one with his bite.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) slashing damage.

Bite (Hyena Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) piercing damage.

Produce Flame (Cantrip; Humanoid Form Only). *Ranged Spell Attack:* +5 to hit, range 30 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d8) fire damage.

Heat Metal (2nd-Level Spell; Requires a Spell Slot). Kryx chooses a manufactured metal object, such as a metal weapon or a suit of heavy or medium metal armor, that he can see within 60 feet of him. For the next minute, any creature in physical contact with the object takes 9 (2d8) fire damage when Kryx casts the spell. Until the spell ends, Kryx can use a bonus action on each of his subsequent turns to cause this damage again. If a creature is holding or wearing the object and takes the damage from it, the creature must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or drop the object if it can. If it doesn't drop the object, it has disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks until the start of Kryx's next turn. Kryx must concentrate on the spell.

Call Lightning (3rd Level Spell; Requires a Spell Slot). A storm cloud appears in the shape of a cylinder that is 10 feet tall with a 60-foot radius, centered on a point Kryx can see within range directly above him. The spell fails if Kryx can't see a point in the air where the storm cloud could appear (for example, if he is in a room that can't accommodate the cloud).

When Kryx casts the spell, he chooses a point he can see under the cloud. A bolt of lightning flashes down from the cloud to that point. Each creature within 5 feet of that point must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw. A creature takes 16 (3d10) lightning damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. On each of Kryx's turns until the spell ends, he can use his action to call down lightning in this way again, targeting the same point or a different one. The spell lasts 10 minutes, and Kryx must concentrate on it.

If Kryx is outdoors in stormy conditions when he casts this spell, the spell gives him control over the existing storm instead of creating a new one. Under such conditions, the spell's damage increases by 5 (1d10).

ATHLONIA, THE MOON'S ECLIPSE *Elf knight of shadow*

"A HEART ONCE BEATING WITH ETERNAL LOVE NOW LIES BLACK IN HER CHEST. HER SPIRIT ONCE WALKED IN THE LIGHT BUT NOW WALKS IN THE SHADOWS."

—ELVEN CARVING ON THE LAST REMAINING STONE OF THE TEMPLE OF THE GRAY REACHES

NICKNAMES: The Knight of the New Moon, the Shadow's Touch, the Sorrow

Athlonia lives in the shadows of the world. When she fell in love with Kallis Redfall, the human king, she severed her connection with her elf family. As Kallis' wife and queen, she watched her soulmate and children die as age took them one by one until the entire kingdom turned to dust and bones. Athlonia soon found the world held nothing for her. As she walked in the shadowy ruins of the former elven court of the Gray Reaches, Athlonia discov-

ered a hidden gateway to the dark world of the unseelie fey. The unseelie lords on the other side bonded with Athlonia, and she found herself embracing the very shadows in which she hid. Her heart became cold.

With new power and hardened soul, Athlonia turned to bounty hunting for money and sport. Caring nothing for their lives, she cut her quarry down with her black blade. Soon she found a like-minded soul in the gnoll shapeshifter Kryx. The duo hunted at the borders between civilization and the wilds until they found a new path illuminated by the fiery charisma of Irae Firetouched. Athlonia once wore a locket around her neck with a picture of her husband and children, dead for centuries. It is said she tore it from her neck and threw it into the deep woods of the Gray Reaches, hoping to forget the life she once had. She failed to forget, however, and she secretly yearns for its return.

It is said she tore it from her neck and threw it into the deep woods of the Gray Reaches, hoping to forget the life she once had. She failed to forget, however, and she secretly yearns for its return.

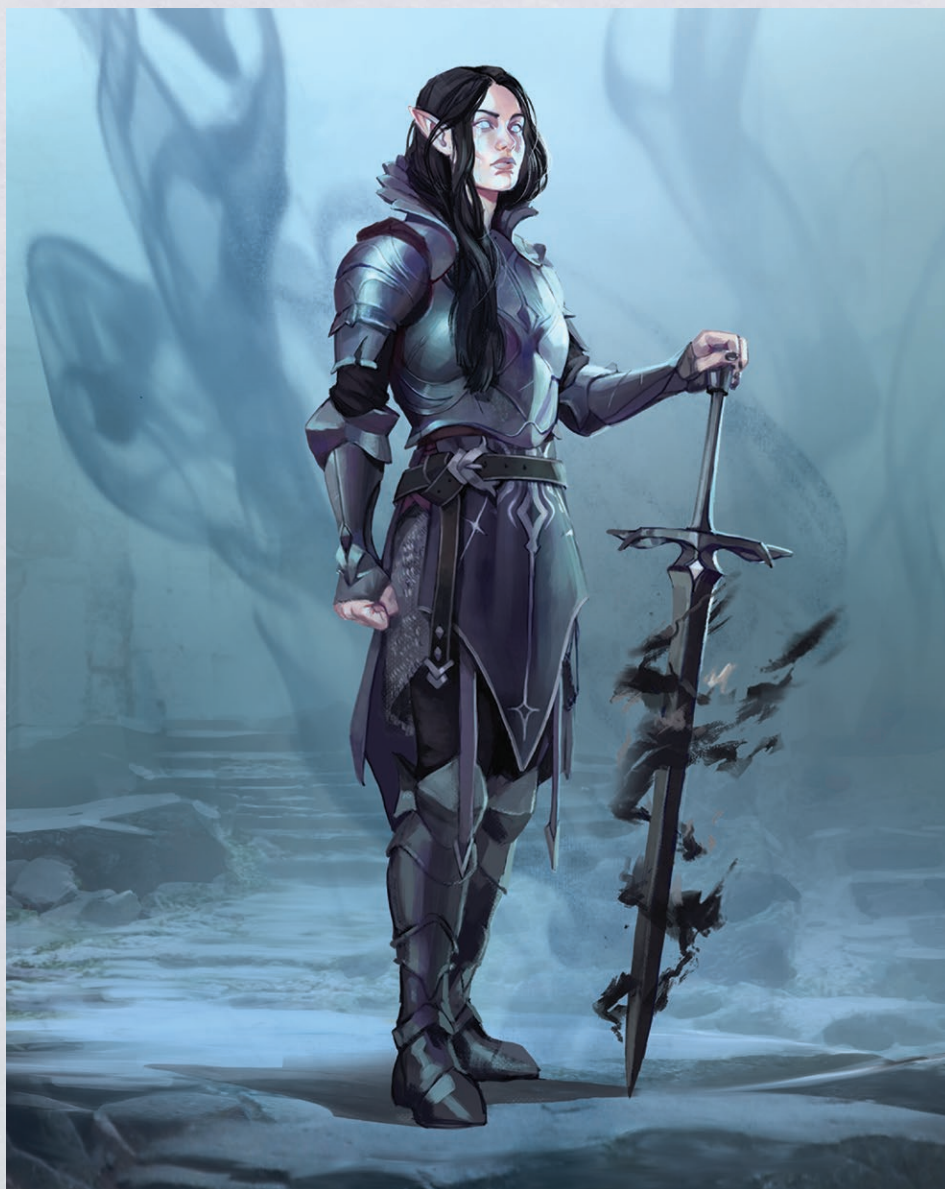
IDEAL: "A quick death from the shadow's heart is the best you can hope for in this world."

BOND: "I travel with the most unexpected companions who share my nihilistic view of the world."

FLAW: "A spark of love and loss still resides in my cold heart."

TACTICS

Athlonia is the front line of the Accord, standing silently at the Irae's side, her grim visage a contrast to Irae's blazing personality. Athlonia uses her ability to step through the shadows to block those who would threaten Irae. When pressed, the knight surrounds herself with the shadowy power of the unseelie fey.



ATHLONIA, THE MOON'S ECLIPSE

Medium humanoid (elf), neutral evil

ARMOR CLASS 18 (plate)

HIT POINTS 76 (9d8 + 36)

SPEED 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	11 (+0)	18 (+4)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)

SAVING THROWS Wis +4, Cha +4

SKILLS Athletics +6, History +2, Arcana +2, Perception +4

SENSES darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

LANGUAGES Common, Elvish, Sylvan

CHALLENGE 4 (1,100 XP)

PROFICIENCY BONUS +2

Blinding Shadows. When reduced to 0 hit points, but just before she drops unconscious or dies, tendrils of shadow erupt from Athlonia's body to her enemies. Each creature of Athlonia's choice within 60 feet of her must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or be blinded for 1 minute. A blinded creature can repeat this saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the condition on itself on a success.

Second Wind (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest). As a bonus action, Athlonia can regain 25 hit points.

Shadowblade. Athlonia's weapon attacks are magical and deal an extra 3 (1d6) necrotic damage (included in the attack).

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Athlonia makes two attacks with either her greatsword or Shadowbolt.

Greatsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) slashing damage and 3 (1d6) necrotic damage.

Shadowbolt. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +4 to hit, range 120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (3d8) necrotic damage.

REACTIONS

Defensive Shadowstep. When an allied creature within 60 feet of Athlonia is hit with a melee attack, Athlonia can teleport to an unoccupied space she can see within 5 feet of the creature that made the attack and force the attacker to reroll the attack. The attacker must use the new result, and Athlonia can make one melee weapon attack against the target as part of the reaction.

ULDUN OF PARTS UNKNOWN *Orc assassin*

“THAT ONE STANDING THERE? ONE TIME I HEARD HE SPENT A NIGHT IN THICK BRAMBLES, THORNS PIERCING HIS SKIN, HOLDING BACK HIS ARROW UNTIL JUST THE RIGHT TIME. AT THE CHANGING OF THE GUARD, HIS ARROW PIERCED THROUGH THE WALL OF A TENT AND KILLED THE COMMANDER SLEEPING INSIDE. HE AIMED BY A SNORE ALONE.”

—A STATEMENT OVERHEARD AMONG SOLDIERS AT ULDUN'S SECOND FAILED EXECUTION

NICKNAMES: The Crownhunter, the Silent Death, Vengeance of the Mountain

Uldun hunts the hunters. For three decades, Uldun watched Clormond Titanson's legions push orcs of the Pale Moon back into the mountain caves and hunt his kin as monsters. He watched orc warlords send his brothers and sisters into pointless battles and get slaughtered by the hundreds. As a young warrior, Uldun found a like mind in the fabled human mercenary Angus Threefingers. Once an orc hunter himself, Angus saw that orcs were no different than anyone else in the world—a people with their own culture and right for survival. Angus and Uldun became friends, and together they assassinated those who put orcs under the knife. They got very good at it.

Old age and a love of drink took Angus, but Uldun continued on. Uldun assassinated the officers and royalty who sent soldiers into battle against orcs. More officers and

nobles died under Uldun's arrows than all who fell under their cruelty and violence put together.

Uldun's understudy, an orc hunter named Barash Longtooth, betrayed Uldun to a local lord who sent the orc assassin for public execution. Noting his deadly skills, Athlonia and Kryx liberated him and brought him to their cause. His talents, they explained, were too valuable to end on the blade of an executioner's axe. Later, Irae showed her value to Uldun by bribing and blackmailing those who continued to hunt him. Those who do business with the Grim Accord mostly ignore Uldun's grim past, though veterans of the imperial wars remember the hundreds who fell under his arrows.

IDEAL: “I hunt those who have grown fat on the lives of others.”

BOND: “Saved from an executioner's axe, I have found a bond with the Accord.”

FLAW: “Sometimes, when the tip of my arrow aims at corrupt nobility, I cannot help but let it fly.”

TACTICS

Uldun is almost always unseen and speaks little. He possesses an unnatural ability to blend into the background. Uldun fights at range, hammering the most dangerous of his enemies with deadly arrows and repositioning himself between each shot. Though he prefers his longbow, his twin shortswords can be likewise lethal if he finds himself cornered.



ULDUN OF PARTS UNKNOWN

Medium humanoid (orc), chaotic evil

ARMOR CLASS 16 (studded leather)

HIT POINTS 52 (8d8 + 16)

SPEED 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	8 (-1)

SAVING THROWS Dex +6, Wis +3

SKILLS Acrobatics +6, Perception +5, Stealth +6

SENSES darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 15

LANGUAGES Common, Orc

CHALLENGE 4 (1,100 XP)

PROFICIENCY BONUS +2

Cunning Action. On each of his turns, Uldun can use his bonus action to take the Dash, Disengage, or Hide action.

Evasion. If Uldun is subjected to an effect that allows him to make a Dexterity saving throw to take only half damage, he instead takes no damage if he succeeds on the saving throw, and only half damage if he fails.

Roar of the Ancient Ones. When Uldun is reduced to 0 hit points, he roars out to his ancient ancestors. Each hostile creature within 120 feet of Uldun who can hear him must succeed on a DC 11 Wisdom saving throw or be plagued by the ancients until the end of its next turn. While plagued, a creature has disadvantage on attack rolls and saving throws, and attacks made against it have advantage.

Sneak Attack (1/Turn). Uldun deals an extra 14 (4d6) damage when he hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally of Uldun that isn't incapacitated and Uldun doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Uldun makes three shortsword or longbow attacks.

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage.

Longbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage.

REACTIONS

Defensive Fade (1/Day). When Uldun takes damage, he can teleport 60 feet to an unoccupied space that he can see and becomes invisible until the end of his next turn.

GROUP TACTICS OF THE GRIM ACCORD

The Grim Accord have spent years working together. Although their motives are far from altruistic, they fight together like wolves born to the same litter. It's extremely hard to catch the Grim Accord unaware. Uldun is as masterful a defensive huntsman as he is an assassin. When he detects someone hunting the Accord, he informs his allies and tracks the trackers. When enemies catch up to the Grim Accord, they often see only two of the four members of the Accord, who are not as unaware as they appear.

If given the chance, Irae casts *greater invisibility* before the battle begins and hammers slower-moving targets with quickened *fireballs* and *fire bolts*. She uses *misty step* to change positions if she gets pinned down. Kryx uses his hyena form for defensive mobility, moving to advan-

tageous positions then reverting to his humanoid form to cast spells like *heat metal* on heavily armored opponents, *blight* on lightly armored foes, or *call lightning* on groups. Athlonia uses her Defensive Shadowstep to defend allies pinned down by enemies. Using this reaction, she can often defend two allies separated across the battlefield. Uldun stays out of sight, using his Cunning Action to hide and hitting defensive spellcasters with longbow attacks.

When on the offensive, the Grim Accord doesn't play fair. Rather than attack the characters directly, the Accord attacks a location their enemies love, often setting it on fire regardless of innocents. They use the same innocents to draw their enemies into Uldun's deadly aim and Kryx's devastating spells.

INTEGRATING THE GRIM ACCORD INTO YOUR CAMPAIGN

The Grim Accord can serve as sinister NPCs the characters meet during quests, adventuring rivals who compete with the characters to complete goals or obtain items, or as direct antagonists to the characters, such as mercenaries hired by your campaign's archvillain. You can also present the members as individual NPCs rather than as a group. The members of the Grim Accord are yours to use however they best fit your game.

Characters of 7th or 8th level would likely find the Grim Accord challenging in combat. Below 7th level, the Grim Accord could be deadly. Above 8th level, consider adding other mercenaries such as **knights**, **magicians**, **priests**, or **veterans**. Individually, each member of the Grim Accord would be challenging for four 3rd-level characters.

The Accord is probably most interesting as rival adventurers. The characters may learn of the Accord through

rumors and whispers, each member identified with one of their sinister nicknames. The characters might meet Irae in a royal court, a ball, dinner party, or a gala. Met in nonhostile environments, the characters have a chance to size her up and learn about the other members.

You can tie members of the Grim Accord to the backgrounds of the characters. Perhaps Uldun assassinated one character's family members. Another could have an ancient family connection that goes back to Athlonia before she turned to the way of shadow.

For the greatest effect, introduce the Grim Accord into your campaign before any combat or confrontation. The characters should know of the Accord, their history, and their exploits before they face each other in a climactic battle.

VILLAINOUS QUESTS AND ADVENTURE HOOKS

The following three quests and adventure hooks can draw the Grim Accord into your campaign. Modify these quests to suit your needs.

THE KEYS TO DOOMSHADE

The door to the Doomshade vault was lost for thousands of years until a group of sages from the Whitetorch Academy rediscovered it. Only two maps to the door remain after the bloodshed that followed, one that falls into the hands of the characters and one that falls in the Grim Accord's. Opening the vault door requires three keys, and a total of five such keys lie hidden in ancient crypts, forgotten towers, and dead cities guarded by undead horrors. Both the characters and the Accord seek to be the first to acquire three keys and either open the vault or ensure it remains forever closed.

As the characters hunt for one key, the Grim Accord may hunt for another. Soon their paths cross until only one group can hold the final key.

PROTECTING THE HUNTED

Farnek Hobknobber, the halfling adventurer, has a price on his head. His business partner, Yoven Treetromper, stole an amulet belonging to Lord Jovendel Ironstag and his family for ten generations and left Farnek in the cross-hairs. Rumors say the amulet is the only object able to

open the doors of the lost city of Garion and reveal the ancient and powerful artifacts built by the city's founders.

Blaming Farnek for the theft, Lord Jovendel hired the Grim Accord to hunt down the halfling and find the amulet by any means necessary. Farnek hires the characters to protect him from the Accord and find Yoven and the amulet. The elusive Yoven leads them all on a chase across the land to the ruins of Garion. Throughout the adventure, the characters choose the best path to find Yoven and avoid the Grim Accord until they can hope to face them and win at the sealed doors of Garion the Sapphire City.

THE DOGS OF WAR

War has raged between the Faigon empire and the Voth city-states for five years. The half-orc general Ikonn Ironmaw hires the characters for a series of missions to destabilize the Voth. Little do the characters know that Avende the Blue Star, elven general of the Voth, hired the Grim Accord to do likewise to Faigon. As the characters engage in missions of sabotage, defense, assassination, rescue, espionage, negotiation, and diplomacy, they find signs of the Grim Accord, until the two groups finally come face-to-face on the battlefield. The confrontation may end in bloodshed, but perhaps the characters can convince the Accord to turn against the Voth and end the war.

STORMBORN TOWER, LAIR OF THE GRIM ACCORD

These villainous adventures have their own headquarters, a lair known as Stormborn Tower. This location can serve as an adventuring location should the characters approach the Grim Accord on their turf. The characters may travel here to spy on the Grim Accord, do battle with the adventuring band, steal something the Accord possesses, or visit the members of the Grim Accord as quest NPCs.

Stormborn Tower sits at the edge of civilization and the wilds—exactly where the Accord likes it. Once the lair of Zhakius Stormborn, a wizard who took power from the perpetual storms surrounding the tower, the Grim Accord seized it as a legitimate salvage for defeating the mage and the storm-infused warriors that served him. A ceaseless storm cloud surrounds the rocky hilltop where the tower

sits, and rumors persist of a powerful arcane machine in the lair's uppermost reaches that draws energy from the storm above. If the Grim Accord has made use of this strange machine, none know of it.

The Grim Accord repurposed many of the tower's chambers, each member building out their portion to suit their desires.

The tower sits atop a deep catacomb beneath its rocky hill, the origins of which predate the building's construction. Multiple layers of primeval tombs, vaults, and ossuaries lead into the earth. Even the Accord hasn't fully explored the depths. Perhaps they fear the horrors lurking in the unhallowed halls and guarding the secret paths leading into the tower's lower levels.

GRIM ACCORD NPC REALM

Though the Grim Accord mainly consists of the four NPCs described in this article, they expand their ranks and hire other mercenaries when the job calls for it. The group keeps some of these other ruffians on retainer, creating a mercenary band that fights larger battles for clients. If you are using the rules in *Kingdoms & Warfare*, you can make the Grim Accord an NPC realm with the following statistics.

GRIM ACCORD

Adventuring party (mercenary company)

Skills

Diplomacy +0
Espionage +1
Lore +2
Operations +3

Defenses

Communications 12
Resolve 14
Resources 13

Size

1 (d4 Power die, 5 domain turns during intrigue)

TITLE

As the leader of the Grim Accord, Irae Firetouched gains the following title.

Magus Protector. When a creature within 15 feet of Irae is hit with an attack or targeted by a *magic missile* spell, she can use her reaction to cast the *shield* spell using a spell slot of 1st-level or higher. The *shield* spell affects the creature instead of Irae.

Additionally, during a short or long rest, Irae can bolster herself or another creature's defenses with magic. The target gains 10 temporary hit points.

POWERS

All officers of the Grim Accord get the following organization powers.

Evil Friends Forever. When a creature within 5 feet of a Grim Accord officer is targeted with an attack, the officer can use a reaction to take a power die from their pool and become the target of the attack instead. The officer adds the number on the power die to their AC against the attack.

Fighting Dirty. Before a Grim Accord officer makes a weapon or spell attack, they can use a bonus action to target one of their opponent's vulnerable spots, making for a more challenging attack but dealing more damage. The officer takes a power die from their domain's pool and subtracts the number on the die from their attack roll. If the attack hits, it deals extra damage equal to 5 × the number on the power die.

FEATURES

Break Their Spirit (1/Intrigue). As a domain bonus action, a Grim Accord officer can make an Operations test against an opposed domain's Resolve. On a success, the target domain's Resolve level decreases by 1, and the Grim Accord's Resolve level increases by 1.

Can We Get a Raise? As a domain action, a Grim Accord officer can make a DC 14 Operations test. On a success, the officer chooses one of the following benefits:

- Until the end of the next battle, each Grim Accord officer has a +1 bonus to weapon attack and damage rolls. (The GM can rule that this bonus ends if it takes too long for the next battle to happen.)
- The next time the Grim Accord musters a cavalry or artillery unit, they can also muster an additional infantry unit.
- Each infantry unit the Grim Accord musters from now until the start of the next battle has its experience increased one level.

The Grim Accord can use this feature multiple times during an intrigue, but must pick a different benefit each time. The DC increases by 2 for each successive use.

Vengeance (Special Unit). A Grim Accord officer can make a DC 14 Operations test as a domain action. On a success, the Grim Accord musters Vengeance, a special unit of merciless warriors.

Survive Till Payday. If the Grim Accord's Resolve level is 2 or higher at the start of a battle, each unit they control has advantage on Power tests to resist battle magic during that battle.

NEW WARFARE UNIT TRAITS

The Vengeance special unit has the following traits:

By Any Means Necessary. As a reaction to this unit failing an Attack or Power test, it can suffer 1 casualty and succeed on that test instead.

An Everchanging Band of Misfits. When this unit is deployed, choose either Adaptable, Eternal, Relentless, Stalwart, or Warbred. This unit gains that trait until the end of battle.



ARMOR OF ZEVELLON

A NEW MAGIC ITEM SET AND ENCOUNTER

by Gabe Hicks

“WITH EVERY MOMENT A PERSON GROWS OLDER, THE MORE FULLY THEY UNDERSTAND HOW LITTLE THEY KNOW. THE MORE THEY SEE THAT EXISTENCE IS JUST CHAOS. AND I HAVE LIVED EONS.”

—ZEVELLON, THE CRIMSON SCORN

The *Armor of Zevellon* is a set of four magic items that make up a suit of deep red armor. The demigod Zevellon placed his essence into the pieces of armor to cheat death, similar to the way a lich conceals its soul in an object. When the pieces are worn together, Zevellon possesses the wearer, turning them into his avatar.

But Zevellon’s story began long ago, when the young elf was adopted and raised by humans. Years passed, and Zevellon’s family and friends died while he was still in his early life. A few passed suddenly in accidents or battles, most were claimed by old age as time inevitably marched on. The unstoppable force withered all mortals, even long-lived elves like Zevellon. He concluded that death rendered life meaningless. All existence was chaos...unless one could cheat death. There was the answer—immortality was all he needed to bring an end to his fears and give his existence true purpose.

Obsessed with achieving godhood to beat death, Zevellon traveled across the planes, uncovering ancient rituals to fill his body with divine magic. After displaying

the gifts of heightened strength and intelligence he could bestow upon others, warriors and mages came to worship at the feet of the self-declared Crimson Scorn, Demigod of Chaos. These warlocks pledged their fealty and received a piece of the Crimson Scorn’s power in exchange. Of course, Zevellon never shared all his gifts with his vassals—just enough to tempt them.

Zevellon’s greatest secret lies within his armor, which contains his very soul. Over the centuries Zevellon lived, he infused his essence bit by bit into the suit. The Crimson Scorn bound the pieces to each other so that, when worn together, the armor would amplify his might.

Moments before the great paladin Emilia Draeshade thrust her sword into Zevellon’s heart, he transferred his life force into the armor. Servants of the Crimson Scorn carried the armor’s pieces to different places, hiding them in deep dungeons, and waited for a host worthy of Zevellon. The demigod’s essence disguises the armor to look like holy relics until all are worn together, at which point they will return to their true, gloriously red sheen.

ARMOR OF A DEMIGOD

The *Armor of Zevellon* is composed of four pieces, each implanted with the magic and lifeforce of the demigod himself. The armor consists of gauntlets, a helmet, the body, and boots. An illusion makes the armor look like silvery holy relics, but truesight and similar abilities that can pierce illusion magic reveal the suit's fiery red appearance.

The first time you attune to a piece of the armor, you gain the following flaw, "I must seek out the other pieces of this armor at all cost." While you are attuned to and wearing at least one piece of the armor, you gain a +1 bonus to AC for each piece you wear.

All pieces of the armor count as a single item for the purposes of your magic item attunement limit. Once you attune to any piece of the armor, it can't be removed and you can't unattune from it unless you die or the *wish* spell is cast to remove it.



ZEVELLON'S GAZE

Wondrous item, legendary (requires attunement)

This helmet molds to your face and fits comfortably and slightly bolsters your voice's volume when you speak. It appears to be a winged helm of shimmering steel with a gold lining, and a soft yellow glow that emanates from the eyes. However, the helmet's true form is made of fiery red steel with black horns and eyes fuming with smoke.

Zevellon's Gaze has 3 charges. You can spend charges to create the following effects:

- **Spell Reversal.** When a creature you can see within 60 feet of you targets you with a spell or magical effect, you can spend 1 charge as a reaction and force the creature to target itself instead. If the spell or magical effect forces a saving throw, the chosen creature must make the saving throw against its own spell save DC. If the spell or magical effect is an attack, the attack roll is rerolled against the creature.
- **Kneel Before Me.** As a bonus action, you can spend 2 charges to force each creature of your choice within 30 feet of you that you can see to make a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, a target takes 4d10 psychic damage and falls prone. On a successful save, a target takes half as much damage and doesn't fall prone.
- **Gaze of Annihilation.** As an action, you can spend 3 charges to send searing pain coursing through a creature that you can see within 30 feet of you. The target must make a DC 18 Constitution saving throw. It takes 7d8 + 30 necrotic damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

The helmet regains all spent charges daily at dawn.

ZEVELLON'S SCOURGE

Armor (plate), legendary (requires attunement)

This plate mail hums with tangible power. In its illusory form, the silvery plate features a large gold cross emblazoned on the chest, and beautiful golden patterns adorning the shoulders. The armor's true form has an open hand with a dagger through it and thorn-covered vines emblazoned on the crimson steel.

As a bonus action, you can activate invisible thorny tendrils that only you can see to extend from the armor until the start of your next turn. While the tendrils are active, attacks against you are made with disadvantage.

In addition, while the tendrils are active, you can make up to three melee weapon attacks with the tendrils as an action. The tendrils have a +10 bonus to attack rolls, a reach of 10 feet and deal 2d10 psychic damage on a hit.

You can activate the tendrils five times, regaining all uses each day at dawn.

ZEVELLON'S GRASP

Wondrous item, legendary (requires attunement)

These gauntlets are warm to the touch. In their illusory form, they appear shiny, gold, and sturdy. In their true form, the fiery gauntlets are tipped with claws.

While you wear both gauntlets and have at least one free hand, you can use a bonus action to create a sword of green flame. While the sword is active, tiny screams sound in the crackling of the fire.

The sword is a one-handed melee weapon that deals 4d6 damage on a hit. Each time you create the sword, you decide if it deals fire or necrotic damage. This weapon is dismissed if you are knocked unconscious or when you use a bonus action to dispel it. You can't let go of the sword until you dismiss it. You can only have one sword at a time.

When you hit a creature with a melee weapon attack while wearing the gauntlets and you don't have a flame sword active, you can choose to deal an extra 2d6 fire damage.

ZEVELLON'S STEPS

*Wondrous item, legendary
(requires attunement)*

While you wear these boots, every step you take reverberates with power and grace, and your movement speed increases by 10 feet. The boots subtly increase your height, giving you a more powerful presence. In their illusory form, a radiant glow emanates from the bottom of these silver boots. In their true form, the boots resemble the clawed feet of an Abyssal creature.

In addition, you can use an action or a bonus action to teleport up to 60 feet to an unoccupied space you can see. If you use this property as a bonus action, you must make a DC 17 Intelligence saving throw. On a failure, you take 2d10 necrotic damage but still teleport to your chosen space.

THAT'S A LOT OF ITEMS

If you introduce the *Armor of Zevellon* into your game, there is a good chance that one character winds up wearing every item in the set. If this character finds several of the pieces quickly, their power will be unmatched by any other in the party. For some groups, this is fine, but many players may feel that their own characters are underpowered and overshadowed by their friend in the sweet new armor. If you put a few levels of adventuring between each piece of armor and ensure that plenty of other cool magic items go to the other characters, you'll avoid the issue of one character suddenly becoming the star of the show. You'll also better equip the heroes for when their friend becomes possessed by Zevellon and inevitably turns on them.

COMPLETING THE ARMOR OF ZEVELLON

“I AM FINALLY RETURNED BY A WORTHY WARRIOR. LET US ROIL CHAOS TOGETHER. I CAN GIVE YOU GREAT GIFTS. ALL I NEED FROM YOU IS A PROMISE. SWEAR TO ME THAT YOUR BODY IS MINE WHEN YOU DIE. DO SO, AND FOR THE REST OF YOUR MORTAL LIFE, I SHALL MAKE YOU A GOD. PLEDGE UNTO ME YOUR CORPSE. YOU WON’T BE USING IT ANYWAY.”

When you are attuned to and wearing all the pieces of the armor, Zevellon’s spirit revives. He asks to inhabit your body when you die and, in the meantime, to take a piece of your lifeforce in exchange for wielding his power:

- If you agree to allow Zevellon to inhabit your body after your death, your hit point maximum is reduced by 20 and you can wield Zevellon’s power (see below). If you die while attuned to the armor, your body returns to life, but Zevellon’s soul, and not yours, inhabits the form.

- If you deny Zevellon, you must make a DC 25 Wisdom saving throw. On a success, Zevellon is temporarily subdued but makes the offer again in 1 week. After three successful saving throws to resist Zevellon, Zevellon gives up asking you. On a failed save, Zevellon gains control of your body. You are incapacitated but remain aware. Zevellon uses your statistics, except he has 20 Intelligence, 20 Wisdom, and 24 Charisma, and he can access your knowledge, class features, and proficiencies. This possession lasts for as long as you remain attuned to the armor.



While you wield Zevellon’s power and you are wearing and attuned to the full suit of the *Armor of Zevellon*, you gain the following benefits:

- You have advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.
- You are immune to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from nonmagical attacks.
- When a creature hits you with a melee attack, you can use your reaction to make an attack roll with a +10 bonus against the attacker using the tendrils of *Zevellon’s Scourge*. You can perform this reaction whether the tendrils are activated or not, and doing so doesn’t activate the tendrils. On a hit, the attacker takes 4d10 necrotic damage and is restrained until the end of its next turn. You can’t use this benefit again until you complete a long rest.
- As an action, you can shout and emit a wave of negative energy from the armor. Each creature of your choice within 10 feet of you that can hear you must make a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, the creature magically begins to turn to stone and is restrained. The restrained creature must repeat the saving throw at the end of its next turn, becoming petrified on a failure or ending the effect on a success. The petrifica-

tion lasts until the creature is freed by the *greater restoration* spell or other magic. You can't use this benefit again until you complete a long rest.

If Zevellon possesses your body, he gains access to the same benefits.

In addition, if your body dies while possessed by Zevellon or if Zevellon returns to life in your body and is then killed, his soul retreats back into the pieces of armor. If the armor is permanently destroyed (see "Destroying the Armor," below), Zevellon dies and his soul can't be returned to life.

DESTROYING THE ARMOR

Individual pieces of armor can't be destroyed, but when the armor is united and Zevellon is resurrected by inhabiting the wearer's corpse, the whole suit becomes vulnerable. While Zevellon lives again, a single piece of his armor can be destroyed if it is targeted with a *disintegrate* spell.¹ If a single piece of armor is destroyed, it reforms on Zevellon's body 1d10 days later. If all the pieces of armor are destroyed before a single piece can reform, the suit never reforms.

¹ *Disintegrate* normally doesn't destroy magic items, but that's why Zevellon made this his armor's weakness. Any spellcaster who knows their craft wouldn't bother wasting a 6th-level spell slot trying to destroy a magic item.



NOW I'M THE VILLAIN

If a character winds up suddenly possessed by Zevellon, that player may feel betrayed and cheated. While those are appropriate emotions for a character in the situation to have, it's not fun for a player to feel that way. When the characters first find pieces of the armor, you may want to bring a player aside and ask them how they feel about their character becoming a villain. If the player likes the idea, you can have them play the part of Zevellon when the moment is right and turn against their friends. If the player hates the idea, the characters can find books or an NPC that can tell them more about the items. Now the quest isn't to find more pieces of the armor, but to find a way to unattune to the armor, or even attune someone else to the magic armor so it can be destroyed.

Likewise, you can hint to a character that the armor is evil before they assemble all its pieces by having it send telepathic messages to them. If you use this approach, the armor plays the part of a pious magic item most of the time, but it does occasionally try to push the character toward more nefarious action, which is a good sign that it's not what it seems.

KEEVIAL'S RAGE

This short adventure for five 6th-level characters serves as the characters' introduction to the *Armor of Zevellon*. Gavadon the Gallant, a priest of the forge god Vukaryion, owns one piece of the *Armor of Zevellon* of your choice (see "Armor Piece," below). He seeks another piece that is guarded by the devil Keevial. The devil is a servant of Zevellon bound to the Mundane World and sworn to protect a piece of the armor until someone presents him with a worthy sacrifice. The priest plans to lure the characters to Keevial as a trade for the devil's piece of armor.

INTRODUCTIONS ON THE ROAD

The characters meet Gavadon (lawful evil, human priest) as they pass through a town or out on the road. When the characters first meet Gavadon, read or paraphrase the following:

A human man wearing simple priest's robes walks with a happy skip toward you. He flashes a smile, saying, "Excuse me! You look like the sort of folks who might have time to help a priest beat the devil."

DEVIL OF A PROBLEM

Gavadon, known to locals as Gavadon the Gallant, introduces himself as a servant of Vukaryion, god of the forge and smithing. He tells the characters that an NPC they know and trust told the priest to seek them out for help with a problem—which is technically true! Gavadon asked around to find heroic adventurers worthy of a sacrifice to Keevial.

The priest claims that Keevial, a powerful devil, stole a destructive relic from the church of Vukaryion. To make matters worse, Keevial constantly sends undead to attack the priest and steal another holy relic Gavadon carries. Gavadon begs the characters to help him stop Keevial and get back the stolen item, promising to reward them with a custom magical item from his forge. "I am a cleric of the forge after all!" This is a lie. Gavadon doesn't plan on rewarding the characters. He plans on them dying.

Gavadon tracked Keevial to a cave that surges with magical energy from a bursting ley line and promises to lead the characters there. If the characters agree to help, the priest takes them to the cave, which is about ten miles away. Gavadon leads the characters with a magical sensor that looks like a compass. The *detect magic* spell reveals

that the sensor radiates divination magic. While on the same plane of existence as one or more pieces of the *Armor of Zevellon*, the sensor points in the direction of the closest piece not currently worn by the creature holding it.

ARMOR PIECE

When he meets the party initially, he wears a single piece of the *Armor of Zevellon* chosen or rolled on the Armor Pieces table below.²

If asked about the armor, Gavadon claims that the piece he wears is part of a set graced by Vukaryion. He also mentions that the piece Keevial stole belongs to the same collection. Gavadon makes casual conversation during the journey to the cave.

ARMOR PIECES

d4	Armor Piece
1	<i>Zevellon's Gaze</i>
2	<i>Zevellon's Scourge</i>
3	<i>Zevellon's Grasp</i>
4	<i>Zevellon's Steps</i>

TRAVELING WITH GAVADON

Gavadon speaks in a calm tone and has a good sense of humor, even cracking the occasional bawdy joke. If there is a cleric or paladin in the party, he asks them directly how it feels to serve their deity. His interest in their response is genuine, for Keevial prefers to devour the devout.

² Might we suggest *Zevellon's Steps*? These teleporting booties pair well with a priest who tries to avoid combat and plays the part of a coward.

A character who succeeds on a DC 17 Wisdom (Insight) check knows that Gavadon isn't being entirely honest with the characters about the dangers they face in the cave. During combat, Gavadon takes the Dodge action and tries to keep out of harm's way. If an injured character asks for his help, the priest casts the *cure wounds* spell.

VUKARYION IN YOUR WORLD

You can replace Vukaryion with any god of crafting, the forge, or smithing in your world.

Optionally, in a world with more deities than the players can track, Vukaryion could be a god that Gavadon invented. A successful DC 18 (Intelligence) Religion check reveals that Vukaryion isn't a god mentioned in any popular religious texts. If confronted about this, Gavadon admits Vukaryion isn't actually a god yet but a powerful entity whose voice the priest sometimes hears. The cleric hopes that restoring all the relics of this deity will cause Vukaryion to ascend. This is true, and Vukaryion is simply an alias for Zevellon.

Or Vukaryion could also be a god that Zevellon killed. A character who succeeds on a DC 22 Intelligence (History or Religion) check has read stories that describe the battle. If this information is revealed to Gavadon, the priest gives a sullen nod and says, "My hope is that I can bring him back." Of course, Gavadon means Zevellon here and not Vukaryion.

BLOOD SKELETONS

On the way to the cave, five blood-red horned devil skeletons (use the **minotaur skeleton** stat blocks) rise from the ground and circle the characters as four blood-red bearded devil skeletons (use the **skeleton** stat block) come out of the shadows and draw shortbows. The horned devil skeletons engage the characters in melee as the bearded devil skeletons use their bows to attack at range. The skeletons fight until destroyed.

CHAOS BRANDS

When a skeleton hits a character with an attack, the character must make a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, a red tattoo shaped like a skull with a snake through the eyes appears on the character's body. At your discretion, these brands might appear under clothing and not initially be obvious to the characters. A *detect magic* spell reveals that the tattoos radiate conjuration magic. Attempting to dispel the tattoos with *dispel magic* causes the brands to release a psychic pulse. The caster takes 11 (2d10) psychic damage and the spell fails. A *remove curse* spell, however, does remove the brand.

A character who succeeds on a DC 20 Intelligence (Religion) check knows the symbol is one used by Zevellon, an ancient and dead demigod of chaos and magic.

GAVADON'S REACTION

When the skeletons appear, Gavadon cries out, "Oh no! Not again!" During the fight he moans, "When will these accursed things stop hunting me?" as he cowers in fear. If asked, the priest says that the skeletons are servants of Keevial attempting to steal his piece of the armor. A successful DC 17 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals that Gavadon isn't being honest with the characters. He animated the skeletons himself days ago using a special ritual created by Zevellon and set this trap to sell the deception that Keevial is after him.

GAVADON GONE

If the characters refuse to trust Gavadon, the priest lashes out and attacks. He carries a yellow diamond elemental gem that he breaks to conjure an **earth elemental**. Even with this ally, Gavadon is likely no match for the characters, but given that they know his plan and his desperation to get the next piece of armor, he tries to kill them so they can't stop him or ask more questions. He fights to the death.

When Gavadon dies, the characters can take his piece of the *Armor of Zevellon* and his magic sensor that points the way to the next closest piece of armor. A character who attunes to the armor gains the flaw described above, which makes them want to seek more pieces of armor, which could lead them to Keevial's cave. If Gavadon is dead when the characters enter the cave, ignore the boxed text in "Into the Fire" and simply have Keevial awake and attack the characters, shouting they are not worthy of Zevellon's prize.

INTO THE FIRE

The cave looks normal from the outside, but a *detect magic* spell reveals that its entrance emanates an aura of conjuration magic. When the characters step into the cave, they are transported into a hellish pocket dimension. This demiplane is a cave with a 60-foot radius and a ceiling that is 20 feet high.

Smoke and ash fill the air with a toxic scent. The obsidian rocks that form the walls, ceiling, and floor of the cave are riddled with cracks that glow with crimson light. It didn't look like this from the outside.

At the center of the circular cavern, a blood-red sphere of energy hums, surrounding a sleeping chain devil that hovers in midair.

Four barbed iron chains hang from the ceiling and coil on the floor of the cave.

Gavadon whispers, "What's the plan? That's Keevial, but I don't see the relic."

The sphere around Keevial, a **chain devil**, has the same properties as one created by the *resilient sphere* spell. The ceiling in this chamber is 20 feet high.

SACRIFICE ACCEPTED

After the characters have a moment to investigate the chamber and their surroundings, Keevial opens his eyes and a wave of crimson emanates from the sphere of energy around him. Each creature in the cave that is not a fiend must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or become cursed for 10 minutes as the negative energy of the Lower Planes seeps into its body. A creature with a Chaos Brand tattoo (see "Chaos Brands," above) has disadvantage on the saving throw. While cursed, the creature makes attack rolls and saving throws with disadvantage. If a creature has the red tattoo and also fails the save, it gains a level of exhaustion as well. A *remove curse* spell or similar magic can remove the curse, but not the exhaustion (which must be restored through rest or a *greater restoration* spell or similar magic). Any creature attuned to a piece of the *Armor of Zevellon* is immune to this effect.

If Gavadon is still with the characters, read or paraphrase the following boxed text. Otherwise, the devil immediately dispels the sphere and attacks (see "Combat," below).

The devil covered in chains stares out from the sphere as Gavadon kneels before him. With glowing eyes, Keevial speaks in three discordant voices at once, saying, "Your offering. I find it acceptable." Gavadon smiles. "Zevellon will be pleased."

A new piece of the *Armor of Zevellon* (chosen or rolled on the Armor Pieces table above) appears on Gavadon's body. As he stands, both pieces of armor momentarily reveal their true form and then, with a thought, Keevial dismisses the priest from the pocket dimension.

As Gavadon disappears, Keevial sneers. "Pathetic. That priest is not truly worthy of Zevellon's prize! But I will enjoy this sacrifice all the same. None shall claim the demigod's armor while I walk this world."

Combat. Keevial dispels the sphere as two **bearded devils** appear at his side. The same piece of the *Armor of Zevellon* he appeared to have given to Gavadon appears on his form.³ This is the true piece of the armor. Gavadon has a fake.

The fiends attack the characters. The chains on the ceiling start combat already under the effects of Keevial's *Animate Chains* action. Each chain is 200 feet long. The bearded devils stay close to the chain devil and defend him from close melee attacks, while Keevial uses his chains to attack from a distance, using the features of his piece of the *Armor of Zevellon* as often as he can. The devils fight the characters until destroyed.

Keevial's Lair Actions. On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), Keevial takes a lair action to cause one of the following effects; Keevial can't use the same effect two rounds in a row.

- Each devil can teleport 30 feet to an unoccupied space it can see. After teleporting, Keevial unleashes a wave of red energy from his body that washes over all creatures in the cave. Each creature in the area that isn't a devil must make a DC 15 Strength saving throw or fall prone. Creatures with Chaos Brands have disadvantage on the saving throw.

³ Might we suggest *Zevellon's Gaze*? The helmet looks so good on Keevial and the Gaze of Annihilation feature is oh so fun!

- A 10-foot-radius column of black fire erupts from the ground at a point Keevial can see. Each creature in the area must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 11 (2d10) fire damage and becoming blinded until initiative count 20 of the following round on a failed save, or taking only half as much damage without becoming blinded on a successful one.
- Keevial's chains whip through the chamber. Four creatures of Keevial's choice must make a DC 15 Strength saving throw. On a failure, the creature takes 11 (2d6 + 4) slashing damage and is moved to an unoccupied space of Keevial's choice that the devil can see within the cave. The creature can't be moved vertically using this lair action.

Killing Keevial. When Keevial is destroyed, his form melts away, and the characters can claim his piece of the armor. Any characters with red tattoos find that the marks disappear after the devil is destroyed.

HE'S DYING TOO QUICKLY

If the characters easily dispatch Keevial within 2 rounds of combat, you can institute this change to make the combat more challenging. As the devil falls, he shrieks a prayer for help to Zevellon. A white-hot fire surrounds Keevial, burning the flesh from his bones. Keevial rises from the fire, rejuvenated as a bone devil with his hit points restored—and the battle begins anew.

CONTINUING THE ADVENTURE

It is up to the characters to decide what to do with the piece of the *Armor of Zevellon*. They might wield it themselves, research the demigod, look for more pieces, or—if Gavadon survived—try to hunt down the priest for answers and revenge. If they don't search for Gavadon, he comes looking for their piece of the armor soon enough. Only this time he's stronger, nastier, and has aid from other cultists of Zevellon.

SPELUNKING!

AN ADVENTURE FOR 4TH-LEVEL CHARACTERS

by H.H. Carlan

IN THE WOODLAND TOWN OF PIRN, THE RESIDENTS AND TRAVELERS ENJOY SPELUNKING IN THE LOCAL SUMMERSET CAVERNS. WORD SPREAD QUICKLY OF THE NEWLY DISCOVERED CRYSTAL GROVE, A CAVERN OF BEAUTIFUL CRYSTALS—SOME EVEN THE SIZE OF A DRAGON'S HEAD! BUT A GROUP OF TEENAGE SPELUNKERS HASN'T RETURNED FROM AN EXPEDITION TO THE CAVERN, AND THEIR PARENTS WORRY SOMETHING NEFARIOUS IS AFOOT.

Spelunking! is an adventure designed for four to five 4th-level characters. The characters spelunk, or explore, the local caverns looking for the Crystal Grove. However, the grove is protected by a cryad, a magical creature composed of crystal dust who harvests the crystals that grow from bodies.

ADVENTURE SUMMARY

Throughout this adventure, characters investigate the disappearance of four teenagers and deal with an ancient druidic foe deep in the Crystal Grove.

- The characters arrive in Pirn, learn of the missing teenagers, and hear rumors of a druid named Fawning Summerset.
- The characters spelunk the Summerset Caverns to find the teenagers, facing threats and twisting tunnels in their descent to the Crystal Grove.
- The characters face Fawning Summerset, a dangerous cryad, to save the teenagers and prevent Fawning from stealing their lives for her crystal haven.

WELCOME TO PIRN

Pirn is a typical woodland settlement. You can easily replace it with a similar town from your setting. Beautiful buildings constitute the town, which contains peculiar townsfolk who happily greet newcomers—if you have coin, of course. The town is the last stop for tourists eager to explore the nearby caves.

Upon entering the town, Waylon Bonesforth (veteran, he/him), the sheriff and mayor of Pirn, greets the characters:

“The good people of Pirn welcome you to our secluded woodland paradise! Need a drink? Perhaps the Brewmaster’s Table is the place for you! Or a soft pillow after a long ride? Long Knight’s Sleep has vacancies! Don’t be shy and don’t be thrifty with tips, and we will be happy to serve you!”

Waylon Bonesforth always encourages new people to take a drink at the Brewmaster’s Table and occupy a room at the Long Knight’s Sleep, as he owns both establishments. If the characters ask about the Summerset Caverns, he mentions they are temporarily closed to novice spelunkers, but thinks the characters would enjoy a visit to the caves. If pressed, the mayor says that a recent earthquake seems to have shifted things in the caves, but it’s truly nothing to worry about. A character who makes a successful DC 14 Wisdom (Insight) check realizes the mayor is worried that the incident could discourage tourism and is downplaying the danger in the caves.



NOTABLE NPCs

There are several businesses in Pirn where the characters can find all the expected goods and services, run by friendly NPCs.

The town’s notable NPCs include the following characters:

- **Calliope Daydream (She/Her).** An aged elf **scout**, Calliope is a long-term resident of Pirn. She knows more about the local area than anyone in town, as she frequently spelunks the caverns and explores the woods. Calliope usually spends her nights at the Brewmaster’s Table and her days teaching survival classes to tourists and locals. “*The mountains and caverns are just as alive as the trees. Maybe more so.*”
- **Fern Woodsmith (She/Her).** An older human **commoner**, Fern is the primary bartender at the Brewmaster’s Table. She has known Calliope for decades, and they enjoy a drink together every night. “*Every adventure should begin with a shot!*”
- **Derek Nestly (He/Him).** This elf **commoner** owns Derek’s Tackle and Supplies, a general store that sells spelunking and camping supplies. Derek is kind but always looking to sell more inventory. He happily trades gems or rare items if someone doesn’t have coin to spend. “*You never know when you need a tent and torches!*”
- **Everly Westmore (She/Her).** A human **commoner**, Everly is the manager of the Long Knight’s Sleep and chain-smokes violet cigarettes in an ivory cigarette holder. She is a no-funny-business leader, speaking quickly and without pleasantries. Her personality is rare in Pirn. “*No refunds.*”
- **Concerned Parents.** Zarah (he/him) and Drell (she/her) Reedsnip and Virna (she/her) and Knox (he/him) Twell are the human **commoner** parents of missing teenagers. They’re all quite concerned about their kids.
- **Missing Children.** Ogin (he/him) and Vold (they/them) Reedsnip and Syrah (she/her) and Poli (he/him) Twell are teens who went missing in Summerset Caverns.

NO TIME TO DAWDLE

If you’re short on time, the introduction and exploration of the town can be skipped in favor of jumping right into the adventure. Waylon Bonesforth realizes the characters are adventurers when they enter the town. He introduces them to the parents of the missing children (see “Recent Mystery”) then goes to get Calliope Daydream to meet them. Calliope gives the characters the information in “Tale of Fawning Summerset” as they travel to the caverns.

RUMORS OF FAWNING SUMMERSET

While the characters enjoy a drink at the Brewmaster's Table, check in at the Long Knight's Sleep, or buy equipment at Derek's Tackle and Supplies, different NPCs of your choice share tidbits of the town's history. They might relay the following information, including rumors about the mysterious Fawning Summerset:

- “Did you know the forest was guarded by a druid circle? They disappeared way before Pirn's founders showed up.”
- “An old story claims that the druids once had a powerful leader named Fawning Summerset. Her burial mound is supposed to be hidden in the caverns. Hence their name.”
- “My grandpa, gods rest his soul, told me that Fawning Summerset, a druid who ruled these woods long ago, was murdered by other druids jealous of her power. She might have treasure buried in the caverns.”
- “If you go down into the caverns, beware! They say Fawning Summerset's ghost still haunts the place ... We actually just tell the little ones that to keep them from going off into the caves alone.”

TALE OF FAWNING SUMMERSET

Alternatively, if you're short on time or prefer a more direct approach, you could have one NPC of your choice relay this information:

“According to legends handed down by Pirn's founders, Fawning Summerset was one of several druids who guarded the woods in this area long ago. Gifted in magic, Fawning had power the other druids jealously craved. One moonless night, they trapped her in the caverns, stabbed her in the back, and left her for dead! Sprawled out in the darkness, blood seeping from her wounds as she grew weaker with every breath, Fawning swore vengeance against her fellow druids. To escape her dark curse, they gave up being wardens of the forest and founded this simple town. But the local caverns bear her name and curse still. So if you go into Summerset Caverns, beware! You might see her ghost!”

The NPC ends the tale with a laugh, clearly thinking it's rubbish. While people sometimes report seeing a ghost in the caverns, no one has ever had any trouble inside. Well, no one until recently...

RECENT MYSTERY

As the characters explore the town, many of the NPCs they interact with mention the missing teens and explain that the concerned parents are looking for adventurers to rescue their kids. If the characters don't seek out the parents, Zarah, Drell, Virna, and Knox approach the characters with apprehension and desperation at the Brewmaster's Table, the Long Knight's Sleep, or any store they might be lingering in.

Drell dabs his eyes with a handkerchief as Zarah, his wife, explains that their twins, Ogin and Vold, are missing, along with their friends Syrah and Poli, who are Virna and Knox's children. Three days ago, the teenagers went into the caves to find the Crystal Grove, a newly discovered cavern of enormous crystals that everyone wants to see. The teens never returned. The parents went looking for them, but the once-safe tunnels of the caves were suddenly cramped and twisted! They almost got lost and turned back, resolving to pay more experienced folk to find their children.

“You see, the kids, they're just at the beginning of their lives. We encourage them to explore and have fun, but we've always taught them to be respectful of their environments and the creatures in the caves. But now those caves are a hostile place. Would you consider looking for them? They know how to survive. We're sure they're still alive in there. We could offer 100 gold apiece! It may not be much to folks like you, but it's everything we've managed to save to give our kids a better life.”

If the characters refuse the mission for such a low rate, the parents privately discuss options and approach again with deeds to their homes in exchange for finding their children.

If the characters accept the offer, the parents direct them to the bar at the Brewmaster's Table, where they can find a local spelunker and expert—Calliope Daydream, who taught the missing children how to safely explore the caverns. If anyone can guide the characters to the Crystal Grove, it's her.

TALKING TO CALLIOPE

Calliope Daydream offers to look for the teenagers with the characters. She says that she can guide them to the Crystal Grove, but mentions that she isn't a warrior, which is why she hasn't gone looking for the teens on her own. In combat, she mostly takes the Disengage, Dodge,

or Help action, keeping the characters between herself and any enemies and fighting only when cornered. If she can reach a dying character, she attempts a Wisdom (Medicine) check to stabilize them. She also might try to free characters who are restrained or otherwise immobilized.

Before leaving Pirn, Calliope encourages the characters to consider buying special supplies for spelunking, specifically a hatchet and several more rounds of rope, at Derek's Tackle and Supplies.

WHAT CHANGED THE CAVES?

If a character wants to know what changed the caves so suddenly, they can make a DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana or Nature) check. On a success, that character recalls that when someone betrays and murders a powerful druid, the dying spellcaster can ask for the spirits of nature to preserve them. If the spirits answer, a crystal cocoon encases the druid, turning them into a cryad, a crystalline construct that seeks vengeance upon all humanoids. A cryad captures people and uses their bodies as fertilizer to grow a garden of glowing, necromantic crystals. Unsealing a cryad's cocoon causes the nearby earth to shift and change into a more dangerous defense of their crystal gardens.

If no character knows this information, Calliope tells the characters about cryads after they face a couple challenges in the cave, as she knows the lore and starts to realize what may be happening. If the characters don't know about Fawning Summer-set, Calliope shares her story, as well (see "Tale of Fawning Summerset").

SPELUNKING

When the characters are ready to find the teenagers, Calliope meets them on the edge of town. The 2-mile hike up to the cavern is a pleasant walk with a slight grade. But the entrance to the cavern is a craggy 20-foot-deep shaft. When Calliope sees the hole, she explains:

"This shaft wasn't always here. Up until those kids went missing, it was just a cave mouth you could walk into. Now it's a straight drop. Something weird is happening... you ready for this?"

Characters who climb down the shaft must succeed on a DC 12 Strength (Athletics) check or fall while making the climb down, landing prone and taking 7 (2d6) bludgeoning damage. Characters who use rope or other climbing equipment have advantage on this check.

CALLIOPE AS A GUIDE

The caverns are a twisting network of tunnels that Calliope guides the characters through. There are branching paths, shafts, and pits. Most lead to dead ends, but Calliope always picks the right path to get the characters closer to the grove.

Calliope worries about the missing teens and is grateful for the characters' willingness to rescue them. She is serious and apprehensive, but she moves carefully and gracefully through the tunnels. Ever the teacher, Calliope sometimes lectures the characters about safety while traveling through the caves and offers wilderness survival tips and platitudes like "Always take a buddy" and "Sometimes you find the ooze. Sometimes the ooze finds you."

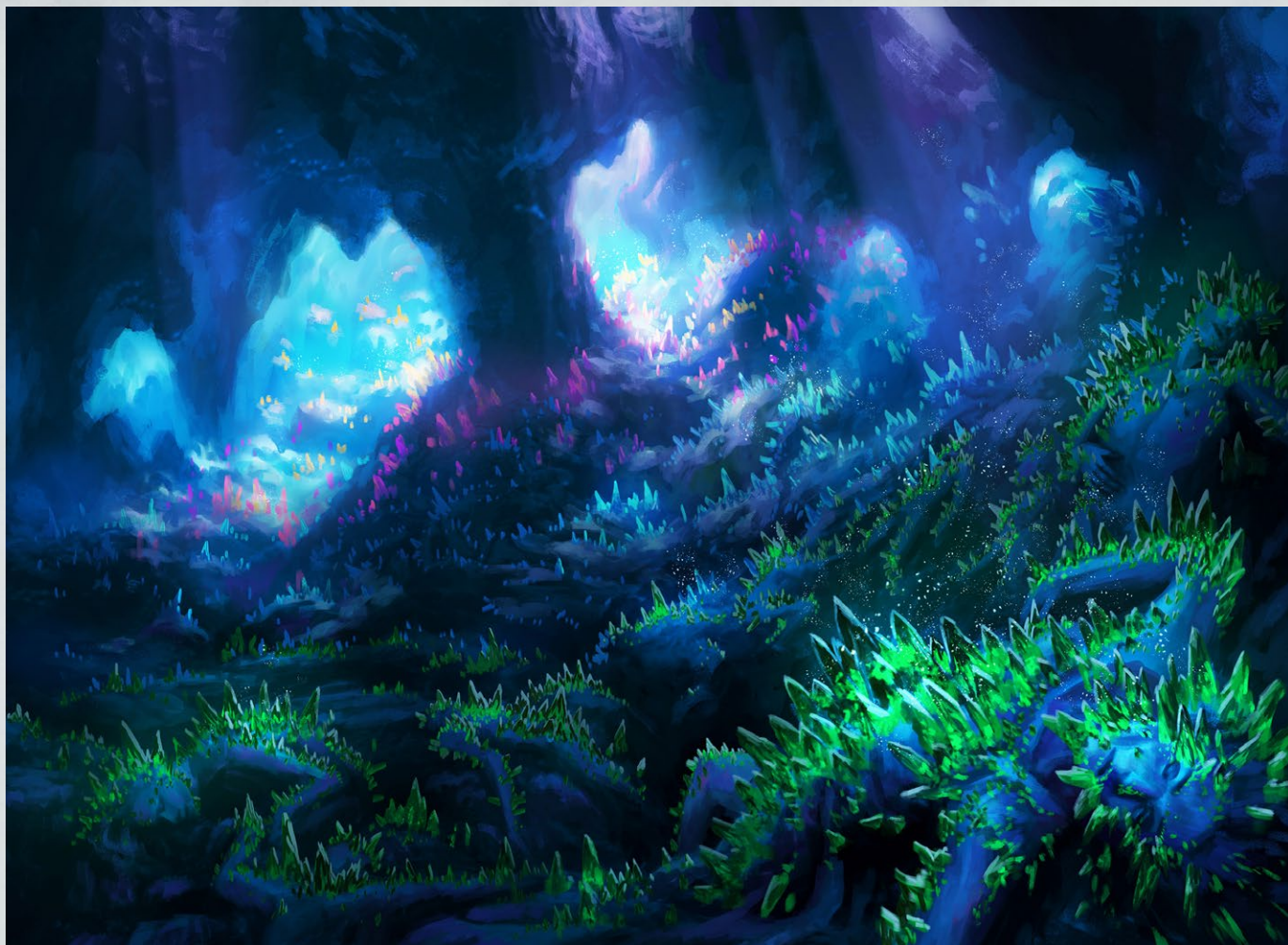
If Calliope dies, the characters can still find their way through the caves to the Crystal Grove, but they are more likely to get lost (see "Between Encounters").

RANDOM ENCOUNTERS

Each hour the characters stop to rest in the cave, roll a d20. On a result of 12 or higher, they experience a random encounter from the Random Encounters table. The cryad's cocoon unsealing shifted the caverns and cut many of these creatures off from their homes and food sources. These creatures fight to the death and attempt to devour the characters.

RANDOM ENCOUNTERS

d4	Encounter
1	1d3 + 3 giant spiders
2	1d2 + 1 gricks
3	1d2 phase spiders
4	1d2 black puddings



CAVERN FEATURES

The caverns have a range of spaces, from open rooms with high ceilings to narrow crawl spaces. Unless otherwise mentioned, there are no light sources in the caverns, save for those the characters bring with them. If the characters have no light sources, Calliope gives them three torches.

The caverns' stone is a combination of grey and green minerals, oxidizing from the air. Stalactites and stalagmites jut out across the floors and ceilings, almost as if they are protecting the caverns from wanderers. Climbing the walls of the caverns requires a successful DC 12 Strength (Athletics) check, which is made with advantage if the character uses climbing equipment.

As Calliope guides the characters through the cavern, describe the tight spaces and strange sights they encounter. You can use one of the following descriptions each time the characters travel the tunnels from one challenge to the next:

- A tunnel wall contains a faded carving of three stags goring a wolf with their antlers above a phrase in Druidic that reads “The final resting place of Fawning Summerset.”

- Dripping echoes down a yawning tunnel that divides into four halls. Rubble blocks three of the paths, and the remaining tunnel shines with eerie green stone on the walls.
- Calliope stands in the middle of a cavern, her eyes darting around at the various tunnel exits, her brow furrowed. “There used to be a shaft that led up to the surface here.” The elf shakes her head and thinks for a moment about which way to go. (If the characters wish to help with the navigation of the caves, see “Between Encounters.”)
- Calliope’s torchlight illuminates a wall ahead covered in inky black shadow. As she gets closer, the shadow, some sort of ooze, slides into a crack in the wall and disappears. (Consider running an encounter with a black pudding if you use this description.)
- Sticky white strands of rope hang from the ceiling, an abandoned web meant for creatures the size of a horse. (Consider running an encounter with a giant spider if you use this description.)

Calliope makes several comments about tunnels getting tighter and having extra bends and stalagmites than last time she was in the caves.

CAVERN ENCOUNTERS

Most of the caverns are not dangerous, but the characters encounter several terrain obstacles they must overcome. Each obstacle has a map and description.

BETWEEN ENCOUNTERS

Each time the characters approach a new encounter in the caves, have them make a group DC 12 Wisdom (Survival) check to find their way through the caves. If Calliope is with the characters, she turns up to two failures into successes whenever the group makes this check.

If the group succeeds, they move through the caverns without incident. If the group fails, they get lost in the tunnels and spend a lot of time backtracking. Each character must make a DC 10 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, a character gains a level of exhaustion.

TIME SAVER

If you're short on time, you can skip any of the following challenges in this section. If you do, the characters will have more of their hit points, spells, and resources for the final confrontation with the cryad, but that's not necessarily a bad thing!

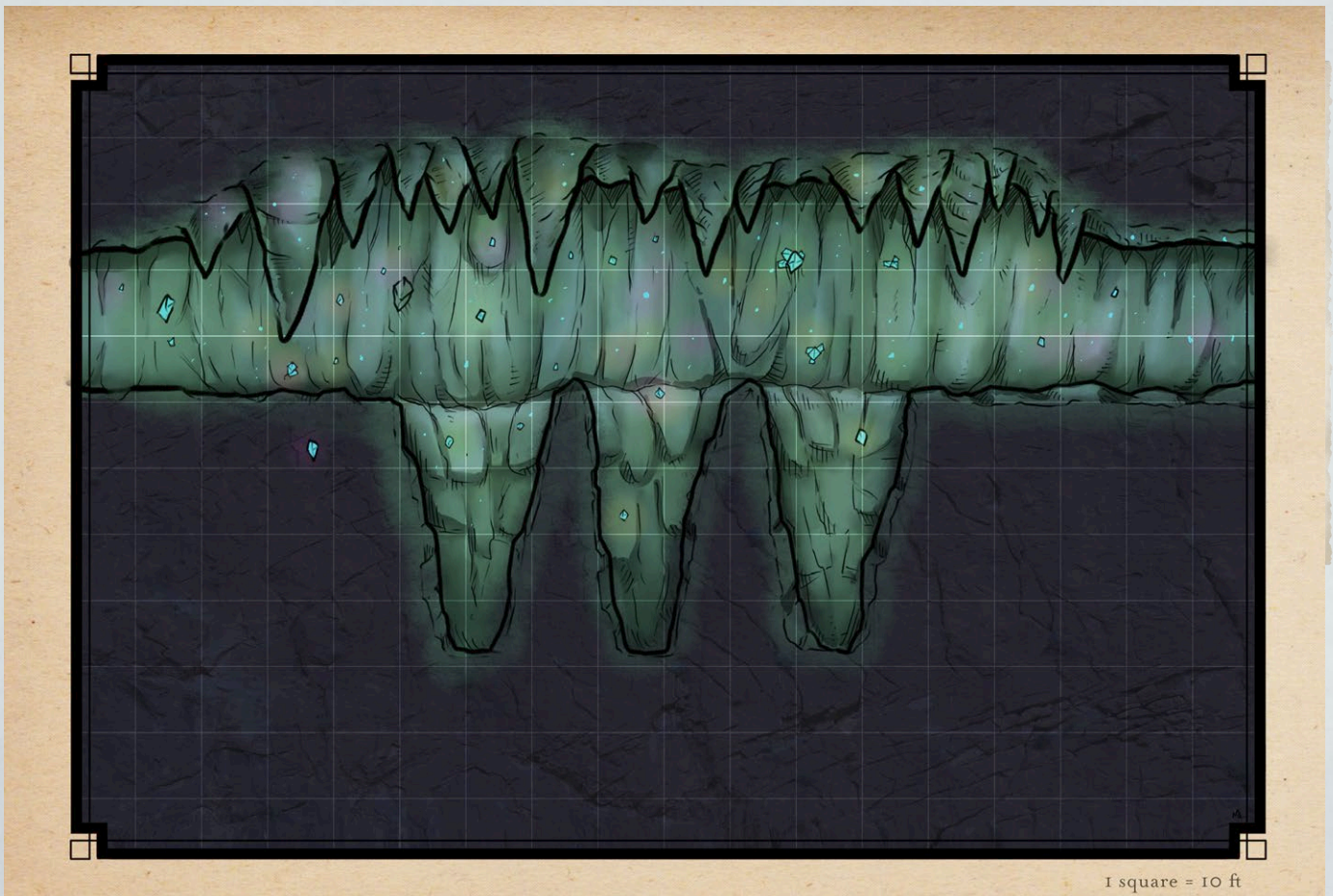
THE GORGE

You can use the Gorge map to run this encounter. After about a half an hour of following Calliope in the caverns, the characters enter this chamber from the west and come to their first obstacle.

A narrow tunnel gives way to a much wider cavern that smells of guano and glitters with a few tiny crystals embedded scattershot across the walls. Small drips echo through the chamber as water falls from the stalactites into a great gorge that slashes across your path like a deep, dark scar. Two prominent pillars of rock jut out from the middle of the gorge floor and could form a path across for daring athletes. "We need to get to the other side," Calliope says as she sets her jaw with determination.

The gorge before the characters is 80 feet across and 40 feet deep.

Crossing the Gorge. If a character attempts to hop across the pillars to the other side of the gorge, they must succeed on a DC 14 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check or lose their balance as they leap, falling to the bottom of the gorge, landing prone, and taking 14 (4d6) bludgeoning



damage from the fall. A character could also attempt to climb the cavern walls to cross to the other side, or climb down to the bottom of the gorge, walk across, then climb back up (see “Cavern Features”). A character who fails a Strength (Athletics) check made to climb the walls or down into or out of the gorge falls 40 feet to the gorge’s floor.

A young **roper** with 60 hit points hides in the ceiling among the stalactites between the pillars. The first time a character attempts to leap across the chasm using the pillars, the roper attacks, using its tendrils to reel the character up to the ceiling for a feast and grapple then drop any rescuers into the gorge. If the characters instead climb down to the bottom of the gorge to cross, the roper moves to the east side of the gorge and waits for them to climb up. A character with a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 15 or higher notices the roper moving across the ceiling. The roper fights until reduced to 30 hit points, then flees along the ceiling.

Treasure. If a character succeeds on a DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check, they notice gear at the bottom of the gorge. Roll a d6 and use the Gorge Treasure table to determine what the characters find.

GORGE TREASURE

d6	Item
1	Two backpacks with 1d6 rations each
2	<i>Morrigy’s Field Journal</i> , an incomplete journal for foraging mushrooms
3	A silvered dagger
4	A pouch containing 20d10 sp
5	Two half-full waterskins
6	Four unused 50-foot-long coils of hemp rope

In addition, the characters find *goggles of night* among the belongings. Calliope informs the characters that the gear they found belongs to the teens. If the characters rescue them, the teens allow the heroes to keep what they found as thanks.

SKIMMING ACROSS THE STONES

You can use the Crossing the Stones map to run this encounter. The characters come upon this spot about twenty minutes after they leave the gorge cavern. They enter the chamber from the south.

Calliope crawls through a low chamber on her hands and knees, motioning for you to follow. As you join her in the tight tunnel, dark standing water splashes up into your mouth, and the strong, bitter taste of mineralization overwhelms your senses. The short crawl space opens into a longer tunnel with a deep pool of this opaque water. Six smooth black stones, each topped with a cluster of crystals, dot a path across the pool to a dry opening on the other side of the narrow cavern.

The opaque standing water in this chamber is 2 feet deep, and the ceiling is 10 feet high. Entering the water attracts the attention of two **swarms of quippers** that live in the pool. The fish attack any creature that disturbs the waters, save the mimic, which they consider a predator. These quippers are cave fish—they have blindsight out to a radius of 60 feet and are blind beyond that radius.

South Stone. The southernmost stone in the water is a disguised **mimic**. Being partially submerged in the water for so long has given the mimic chills. A character with a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 15 or higher notices the mimic shiver occasionally in very short bursts. Creatures who notice the mimic can choose to avoid it while crossing the stones. The mimic waits for a character to touch it or fall in the water, then attacks, fighting to the death.

Crossing the Stones. The five northernmost stones in the pool have been smoothed over with sediment, creating an unusually slick surface. A character who attempts to hop across the stones must succeed on a DC 14 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check to do so. On a failed check, they fall into the water. A character who doesn’t choose to avoid the stone-disguised mimic lands on top of it.



1 square = 5 ft

ILLUSION OF DAYLIGHT

You can use the Illusion of Daylight map to run this encounter. The characters come upon this spot, where a crystal produces a veil of light that obscures a pit in their path, about ten minutes after they leave the standing water cavern. They enter this tunnel from the west.

Moving through a wide tunnel, you notice a beam of brilliant light coming through a crystal embedded in the ceiling ahead. You have only seen darkness and torchlight since entering the *Summerset Caverns*, but now this solid prism of blinding rainbow light obstructs any view of the path ahead.

The ceiling in this chamber is 15 feet high.

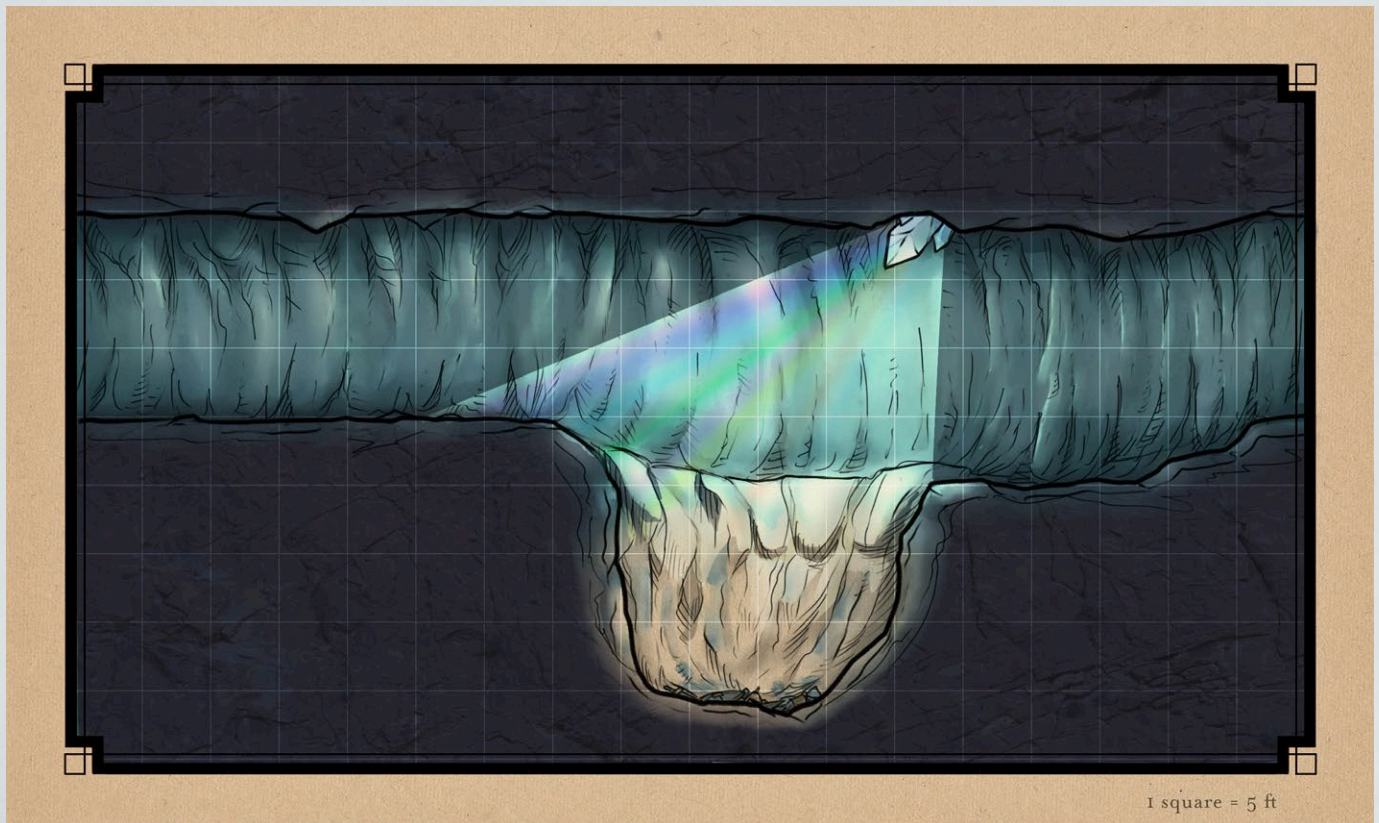
Light Crystal. The crystal embedded in the ceiling is 5 feet in diameter and extends up to the surface, where it catches the light and then magnifies it. The crystal's structure even enhances moonlight into a brilliant rainbow.

A *detect magic* spell reveals that the crystal radiates an aura of evocation magic. The crystal has AC 17, 50 hit points, and immunity to poison and psychic damage. If the crystal is destroyed, it explodes in a burst of brilliant light and each creature in the chamber must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or take 9 (2d8) radiant damage and become blinded for 1 hour. Destroying the crystal makes the light disappear.

Pit. Just beyond the veil of light is a 15-foot-deep pit with a 20-foot-square opening. A **gelatinous cube** with a climbing speed of 15 feet waits at the bottom of the pit and automatically engulfs any creature that falls into it. If two creatures pass over the pit without falling inside, the cube moves up over the opening and attempts to engulf the next creature to cross.

A character who makes a successful DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check discovers the pit on the other side of the light before crossing over. If a character doesn't notice the pit, they fall into it.

Crystal Grove Entrance. The entrance to the Crystal Grove is only about a five-minute walk from the pit.



THE CRYSTAL GROVE

The small tunnel leading into the Crystal Grove is 3 feet wide, 3 feet tall, 5 feet long, and 4 feet off the ground. When the characters enter the tunnel, read or paraphrase the following boxed text:

Vibrating energy in this darkened cavern flows through the air, creating a gentle hum of growth that echoes across the walls. The hum builds to a loud groan, then almost a scream, a harrowing greeting. As the volume increases, clusters of white, pink, green, yellow, and blue crystals glow with bright light, forming a cohesive fabric of sparkling destiny that covers the ground's rolling mounds. Some crystals are just a bit more than a speck of dust, while others are as thick as trees with heights over eight feet tall.

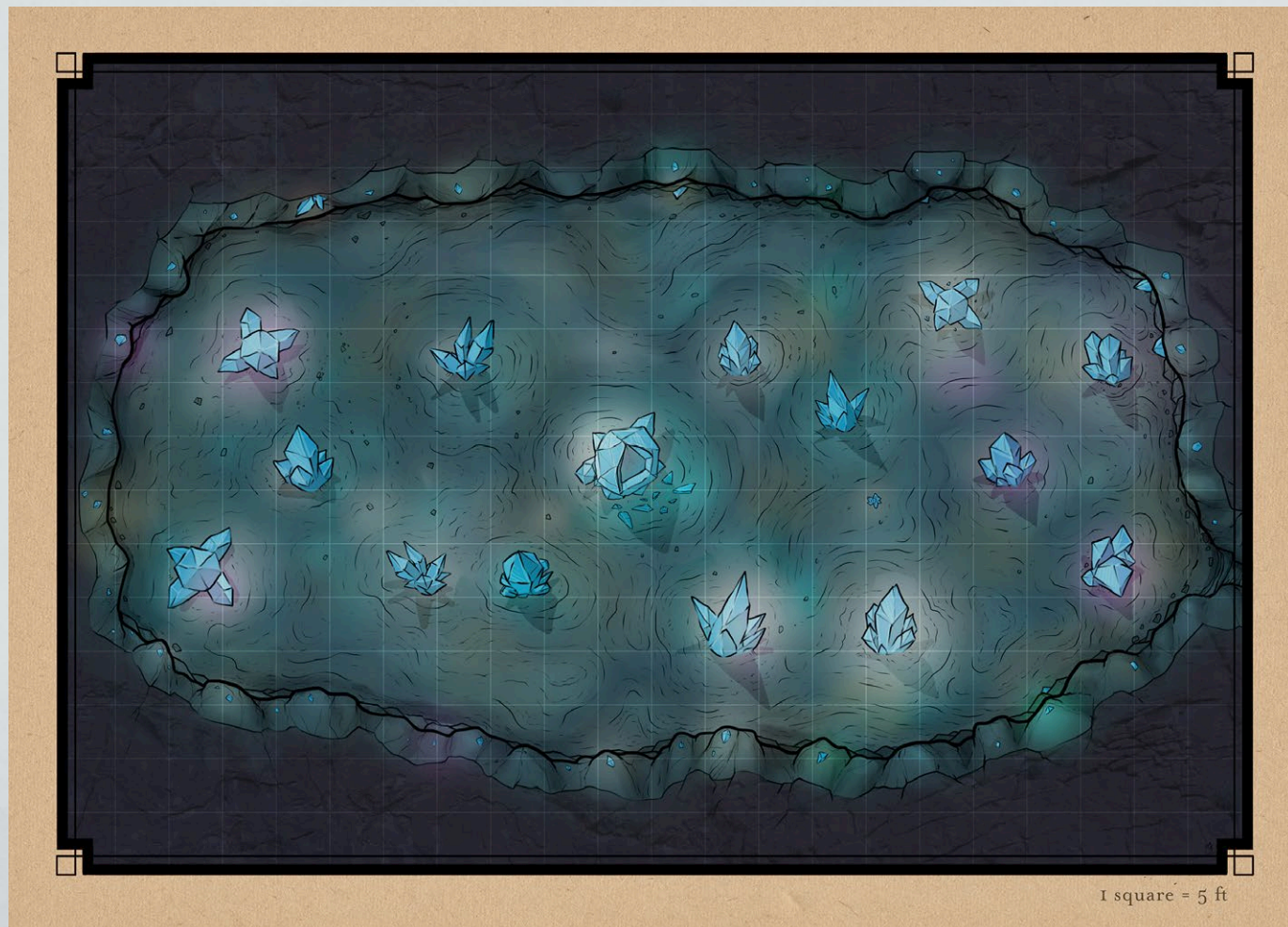
You can use the Crystal Grove map to run this encounter. The entrance to the cavern is on the east wall. The ceiling in this room is 15 feet high and the crystals provide bright light throughout the entire area.

THE ENVIRONMENT

The largest crystal at the center of the chamber is a cloudy white color, and one side of it has been smashed open. The inside is hollow. A character who knows about cryads (see the “What Changed the Caves?” sidebar) knows that this enormous hollow crystal likely held one. The teens broke the crystal open, causing the changes to Summerset Caverns.

A *detect magic* spell reveals that the crystals in this chamber radiate auras of necromancy magic. The four southern-most Medium crystals (see below) have mounds covered in tiny crystals beneath them.

A character who makes a successful DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation or Nature) check can tell that the mounds underneath the largest crystals are the sleeping bodies of the four missing teens (who are noncombatants). The crystals slowly drain the life of Ogin and Vold Reedsnip and Syrah and Poli Twell. A character who examines a crystal mound and wipes away the dust notices the teens beneath. When this happens, all the teens wake and speak in unison, urging the characters to flee.



“The children you know are gone—trapped, one with the crystal. We pay penance to Fawning’s grove, make something beautiful out of our dying sacks. Go! Leave! Leave us to the crystal, or join its growth forever!”

The teens can’t move on their own while covered in crystals. After the teens speak and while the cryad is alive, a character that touches a crystal-covered teen must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or take 5 (1d10) necrotic damage as the crystals siphon some of their life energy.

A character who knows about cryads knows that destroying the cryad, a successful DC 14 Wisdom check with jeweler’s or mason’s tools made as an action, or a *lesser restoration* spell or similar magic causes the cry-

ads surrounding the teens to break, releasing the children from their magic and severing their connection to Fawning. Each teen weighs 500 pounds while covered in crystals, but is not attached to the floor and can be dragged out of the room by a creature with a Strength score of 17 or higher.

THE CRYAD

At the west end of the chamber, **Fawning Summerset**, a cryad, watches the area and feeds off the energy from her growing crystals. Her False Appearance trait allows her to remain undetected while motionless. When the characters interact with the mounds, she comes to life and attacks, fighting until destroyed.

Fawning stands just over eight feet tall and is composed of a fine crystal powder. When she springs to action, her face appears and limbs grow from her body. Her eyes shine in the light and appear clear like water.

ENGAGING THE ENEMY

Once the characters interact with the cryad’s crystals, she attacks and can’t be convinced to stop her advance until their bodies grow replacement crystals for those they disturbed. There is no way to peacefully resolve conflict with the cryad.

Fawning uses **Blinding Light** at the start of combat then charges into melee with two characters near one another, using **Multiattack** to target both, attempting to knock them prone. She then uses her **Fertilize** lair action. Once she has some control of the battlefield, she deals as much damage as possible to the characters with more slam attacks and her **Shake** lair action. If the characters try to pin her down, she can use **Crystal Stride** to escape or cast spells to attack them at a distance.

MEDIUM CRYSTALS

Fawning’s **Crystal Stride** trait and **Faerie Lights** lair action refer to Medium or larger crystals in the grove. Any crystal on the Crystal Grove map that is large enough to take up at least 1 square counts as a Medium or larger crystal.



Each crystal has AC 17, 18 hit points, and immunity to poison and psychic damage. Destroying a crystal also deals 10 damage to Fawning. A character proficient in Arcana or Nature knows that destroying a cryad's larger crystals harms the cryad.

SHE WON'T HARM TEENS

Fawning doesn't harm the teens with any of her actions. She sees their bodies are precious resources and chooses to keep them alive if she can.

ESCAPING

If the characters flee the encounter with Fawning, they can escape through the hole in the wall that they used to enter. There are no other exits in the cavern. Medium creatures can squeeze through it. Small and Tiny creatures can move through with no problem.

If the characters free the teenagers, they willingly follow any of the character's instructions. Fawning can peer and reach through the hole, but she is too large and is unable to pass through.

TREASURE

The large crystal that held Fawning's form for so long has a *staff of swarming insects*, the druid's old staff, embedded in its still-standing walls. If the cryad dies, the crystals in the chamber immediately crumble to dust and reveal the staff.

CONCLUSION

If the characters free the teens and leave Fawning's chamber, Ogin and Vold shout in unison once the group is safely out of the Crystal Grove.

"Quick! There's another way out!"

Thanks to their connection to the cryad, the twins know of a nearby secret exit that is blocked by a rock, easily slid out of the way, revealing a path down to Pirn.

If the characters are unable to heal the teenagers and carry them from the cavern back to Prin, a healer in town restores the children. Once restored and safe, the children explain to the characters that they found the grove and broke open the crystal because they thought they saw a staff inside it!

If the teenagers are returned, their parents and the grateful townsfolk offer their thanks and promised rewards to the characters. If the characters refuse the reward from the parents, Waylon Bonesforth pays it instead.

The mayor holds a party in the characters' honor at the Brewmaster's Table and declares:

"Good night! The sight of these returned children brings joy to our hearts! What can we do to repay you? Will anything ever be sufficient for returning our kids to us?"

Everly Westmore offers the characters free rooms for life! Fern Woodsmith promises free drinks for life! The children also allow the characters to keep any of the equipment they found in the gorge (see "Crossing the Gorge"). If the characters also killed Fawning, Waylon gives them an extra reward of 250 gp each for "saving the town's tourist industry."

If the characters leave Pirn, the mayor and the parents stand in the road and wave goodbye, the sun setting on the recent spelunkers, crystal dust billowing off their clothes.

If the characters return without the teenagers, the parents go into mourning for their lost children. They still pay the characters as promised, but there are no offers for free drinks and nights at the inn.

If the characters die facing Fawning, their bodies serve as fertilizer for more crystals.

ADVANCEMENT

If the characters successfully complete this adventure, they earn 1,900 experience points each, which is half of what they need to advance to level 5.

FAWNING SUMMERSET

Large construct, unaligned

ARMOR CLASS 15 (natural armor)

HIT POINTS 149 (13d10 + 78)

SPEED 40 ft., climb 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	15 (+2)	22 (+6)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)

SAVING THROWS Int +4, Wis +6

SKILLS Intimidation +3, Nature +4, Perception +6

DAMAGE RESISTANCES cold, fire, thunder

DAMAGE IMMUNITIES necrotic, poison

CONDITION IMMUNITIES charmed, deafened, petrified, poisoned

SENSES darkvision 120 ft., tremorsense 60 ft., passive Perception 16

LANGUAGES understands Common and Druidic but can't speak

CHALLENGE 7 (2,900 XP)

PROFICIENCY BONUS +3

Blinding Light (1/Day). As a bonus action, Fawning fills the Crystal Grove with dazzling light created by her crystals. Each creature of her choice in the grove must succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or be blinded until the start of her next turn. In addition, Fawning casts the *mirror image* spell, requiring no components.

Crystal Stride (1/Turn). Fawning can use 10 feet of her movement to enter a crystal within her reach and appear in an unoccupied space of her choice within 5 feet of another crystal in the grove. Both crystals must be Medium or larger.

False Appearance. While Fawning remains motionless, she is indistinguishable from a normal crystal.

Immutable Form. Fawning is immune to any spell or effect that would alter her form.

Innate Spellcasting. Fawning's innate spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 14). She can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:
1/day each: *dispel magic*, *moonbeam*, *spike growth*

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If Fawning fails a saving throw, she can choose to succeed instead.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Fawning makes two slam attacks.

Slam. Melee Weapon Attack: +6 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. **Hit:** 10 (2d6 + 3) bludgeoning damage and the target must succeed on a DC 14 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

Fawning can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Fawning regains spent legendary actions at the start of her turn.

Move. Fawning moves up to half her speed.

Slam. Fawning makes one slam attack.

Spell (Costs 2 Actions). Fawning casts a spell.

LAIR ACTIONS

On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), Fawning can take one lair action to cause one of the following effects; she can't use the same lair action two rounds in a row:

Faerie Lights. The crystals in the grove produce a burst of brilliant purple light. Each creature within 5 feet of a Medium or larger crystal must make a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw. Fawning automatically succeeds on this save. On a failed save, the creature sheds dim purple light in a 10-foot radius until initiative count 20 of the next round. Any attack roll against an affected creature or object has advantage if the attacker can see it, and the affected creature or object can't benefit from being invisible.

Fertilize. Fawning uses prone bodies to grow new crystals. All prone creatures in the Crystal Grove of Fawning's choice must make a DC 14 Constitution saving throw as necrotic crystal powder grows on their exposed skin. On a failed save, a creature takes 11 (2d10) necrotic damage.

Shake. Fawning's lair shakes and crystals on the ceiling of the cavern come crashing down. Each creature Fawning chooses in the Crystal Grove must succeed on a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw or take 5 (1d10) bludgeoning damage and be pushed 5 feet in a direction of Fawning's choice.

RESOURCES

SPELUNKING:

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