CORE1-7

Sovereign of the Mines

A Dungeons & Dragons® *Living Forgotten Realms* Adventure

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Someone is interfering with valuable shipments from the mining community of Ioma Town. Production is way down, and the rulers of Amn aren't pleased. The evidence indicates that it's an inside job... deep inside. Adventurers are needed to go into the mines and find out who (or what) is trying to sabotage the Iomic Crystals. A *Living Forgotten Realms* adventure set in the Nelanther Isles for characters levels 7-10. It is recommended, but not required, that characters have participated in CORE1-4 *Crystal Clear* before playing this adventure.

Based on the original Dungeons & Dragons® rules created by E. Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson and the new Dungeons & Dragons game designed by Andy Collins, Rob Heinsoo, and James Wyatt.

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Preparing for Play

In order to play this adventure, you'll need copies of the following D&D 4th Edition rulebooks: *Player's Handbook*, *Dungeon Master's Guide*, and the *Monster Manual*. Any other rules referenced in this adventure will be noted in the **New Rules Items** section at the end of the adventure.

Throughout this adventure, text in bold italics provides player information for you to paraphrase or read aloud when appropriate. Information on nonplayer characters (NPCs) and monsters appear in abbreviated form in the adventure text.

Along with this adventure, you'll find a RPGA Session Tracking sheet. If you're playing this adventure as part of an RPGA-sanctioned event, complete and turn in this sheet to your Senior GM directly after play.

Reading Monster Stat Blocks

Most of the information should be easy to understand, as it mirrors the information presented in the *Monster Manual*. Attacks have a letter next to them designating the type: M for melee, R for ranged, C for close, and A for area. A lower-case letter (used only in some melee and ranged attacks) denotes that the attack can be used as a basic attack.

Important DM Information

As the DM of the session, you have the most important role in facilitating the enjoyment of the game for the players. You take the words on these pages and make them come alive. The outcome of a fun game session often creates stories that live well beyond the play at the table. Always follow this golden rule when you DM for a group:

Make decisions and adjudications that enhance the fun of the adventure when possible.

To reinforce this golden rule, keep in mind the following:

- **You are empowered to make adjustments to the adventure and make decisions about how the group interacts with the world of this adventure.** This is especially important and applicable outside of combat encounters, but feel free to use the "scaling the encounter" advice (usually for adjusting to different-sized groups) to adjust combat encounters for groups that are having too easy or too hard of a time in an adventure.
- **Don't make the adventure too easy or too difficult for a group.** Never being challenged makes for a boring game, and being overwhelmed makes for a frustrating game. Gauge the experience of the players (not the characters) with the game, try to feel out (or ask) what they like in a game, and attempt to give each of them the experience they're after when they play D&D. Give everyone a "chance to shine."
- **Be mindful of pacing, and keep the game session moving along appropriately.** Watch for stalling, as play loses momentum when this happens. At the same time, make sure that the players don't finish the adventure too early; provide them with a full play experience. *Living Forgotten Realms* adventures are designed to be played within 3.5 - 4 hours; try to be very aware of running long or short. Adjust the pacing accordingly.
- **Give the players appropriate hints so they can make informed choices about how to interact**

with their environment. Players should always know when enemies are affected by conditions and are bloodied. They should be given clues about how to interact with their surroundings so they can tackle skill challenges, combats, and puzzles without getting too frustrated over lack of information. This helps to encourage immersion in the adventure and gives players "little victories" for figuring out a good choice from a clue.

In short, being the DM for a *Living Forgotten Realms* adventure isn't about following every word on the page; it's about creating a fun, challenging game environment for the players. A great deal of good information on being a DM for a D&D game can be found in Chapters 1-2 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide.*

Appropriate Character Levels

This adventure is designed for player characters (PCs) levels 7-10. Characters that fall outside of the level range may not participate in the adventure. Make certain to check the levels of the PCs before beginning play to ensure that they are the proper level.

Each adventure has a low-level version and a high-level version. The low level is meant for a group whose levels, on average, fall in the first two levels of the adventure's level spread. The high level is meant for a group whose levels, on average, fall in the last two levels of the adventure's level spread.

A group may decide to play riskier and play the high level when their levels are more suited to the low level if everyone in the group is in agreement to do so; however, some of the rewards may not be available to them. Conversely, a group may decide to play the low level when their levels are more suited to the high level if everyone in the group is in agreement to do so; however, some of the rewards may be less than what they'd ideally want from the adventure.

Reading the Numbers: Each encounter will have a level and other values (such as XP or sometimes skill checks) listed with two numbers divided by a slash. The number before the slash is always the value for the low-level version of the adventure; the number after the slash is the value for the high-level version of the adventure.

Failing to Defeat an Encounter

If a group fails to defeat an encounter - that is, if they have to flee from a combat because it's too tough or they reach the predetermined number of failures in a skill challenge before reaching success - they are only awarded half experience points (round down) for the encounter. If they manage to tackle the encounter later on and defeat it, award them the other half of the experience points for the encounter.

Character Death

If a PC dies during the course of the adventure, the player of that character and the rest of the group have two options, provided that they have access to the Raise Dead ritual (either a PC has it and can use it or the characters return back to civilization), they have access to the body, and it is possible to return the dead PC to life.

- **Pay the component cost for the ritual.** If the group chooses this option, the cost should be divided evenly amongst the group (500 gp for heroic tier, 5,000 gp for paragon tier, and 50,000 gp for epic tier). Using a source outside the group to cast the ritual costs 20% more than the component cost. Total cost when using an outside source is 600 gp for heroic tier, 6,000 gp for paragon tier, and 60,000 gp for epic tier. A PC that dies and chooses this method of return gains full (or half, if the party was defeated) experience points from the encounter in which the character died, but no experience points for any encounters that were missed while the character was dead. If there's still more of the adventure remaining, the PC continues to earn experience as normal, and receives a normal cut of the rewards at the end of the adventure.
- **Invoke the Death Charity clause.** If the group cannot afford to pay for the ritual (or doesn't desire to do so), the PC can choose to return back to life at the end of the adventure. Doing so forfeits all rewards (including treasure and story rewards) earned for the adventure except experience points gained prior to the character's death (the character receives the experience point award for the encounter in which they died). The PC cannot participate in the same adventure a second time.

Milestones

No matter if the characters succeed or fail in an encounter, they reach a milestone if it is the second encounter they've had since the start of the adventure or their last extended rest. Encounters that do not give out experience points do not count for purposes of reaching a milestone. Make certain to mention this information to the players when applicable, as it gives each PC another

action point and affects how some magic item powers are used.

Adventure Background

The merchant-dominated nation of Amn (see FRCG page 92) is one of the wealthiest in all Faerûn and a fierce rival to city-states like Baldur's Gate and Waterdeep. One of Amn's prized holdings is the mining colony of Ioma Town in the Nelanther Isles. Ioma Town (see FRCG page 162) was founded about sixty years ago. The mine is famous for its production of so-called Iomic crystals, which are purplish in color (resembling amethyst), come in various shapes and sizes, and are well-suited to use in all types of jewelry. During the period after the Spellplague, when magic was unstable and dangerous, Iomic crystal gained a reputation for providing protection against the various curses and afflictions that were attributed to the Spellplague. Although this claim was eventually shown by reputable scholars and wizards to be nothing more than snake oil, the crystals nevertheless retain some degree of popularity among the poor and less-educated folk of the world, who eagerly buy bracelets and charms with Iomic crystals to protect themselves from evil magic. Because of this, and because the crystals do have some intrinsic value (along the same lines as quartz), the mining colony continues to prosper.

What the merchants of Amn do not realize is that even though it is not proof against magic, Iomic crystal actually does have one very valuable property. The peculiar structure of the crystals makes them very well-suited to holding and releasing psionic energy. This fact has become known to the Abolethic Sovereignty. In order to secure a supply of the crystals for experimentation, the Sovereignty's agents infiltrated the mining colony and began diverting some of the crystals. To cover up their thefts, the Sovereignty's agents change the paperwork to make it look like all the expected crystals were shipped. That way, when the shipments come up short upon being unloaded at their destination, suspicion falls on the sailors and captains of the trading vessels, rather than on the mine itself.

Before now the Cowled Wizards had no reason to suspect a problem at Ioma Town itself. The colony is on a remote island, and only vessels controlled by Amn are allowed to dock. However, recent events (see CORE1-4 *Crystal Clear* for details) have revealed the fact that the Sovereignty is somehow getting access to Iomic crystals and using them for evil purposes. The merchant consortium that owns the mine doesn't want to risk a huge disruption, so they have ordered the Cowled Wizards to send a small group of adventurers into the mines to investigate who is stealing the crystals.

The actual situation is far more dangerous than either the merchants or the Cowled Wizards realize. The Abolethic Sovereignty has managed to corrupt a number of the miners and other officials who live and work in Ioma Town. Furthermore, they have secretly transported a colony of grells into the very heart of the mine. These aberrant philosophers have begun a slow but steady process of corrupting the entire supply of crystals within the island, even those that have not yet been extracted. When completed, this ritual will transform Ioma Mountain into a massive beacon for psionic energy, allowing the aboleths to project their power anywhere within the Nelanther Isles.

Player's Introduction

In this adventure, the player characters are given an assignment to infiltrate the mining colony at Ioma Town and find out who has been stealing Iomic crystals, and why. The Cowled Wizards have been ordered not to take direct action or get involved in any way, unless absolutely necessary, because the merchant consortium doesn't want to alarm the workers and cause a drop in crystal production. (They are always looking out for the bottom line, after all.)

When the adventure begins, the PCs are aboard a ship heading from the city of Athkatla to the mining colony of Ioma Town. Read or paraphrase the following:

To those who love the sea, there's nothing quite like the feeling of standing on the deck of a fast ship as she cuts the waves. The sails crack and pop as they are filled with a strong wind, sunlight sparkles off the ever-flowing water, and the briny smell of the ocean speaks of endless invigorating possibilities. For these hearty souls, there is no freedom like the freedom of the open sea.

For others, a ship voyage is pure torture. The endless lurching and swaying of the vessel induces nausea, the cramped quarters and stifling heat below deck are more miserable than any city slum, and between the stink of sweaty sailors and the rancid contents of the cargo hold, the smell… well, some things are best left to the imagination.

No matter which category you fall into, all of these sensations are magnified when the vessel upon which you ride is piloted by a Cowled Wizard of Amn. This brown-cloaked figure crouches at the prow, his wooden staff held tightly in both hands. Arcane energies imbue the entire ship with a visible glow. At the Wizard's urging, the wind blows harder, the impact of every wave is magnified, and the Sea of Swords flashes by as little

more than a blue-green blur. The hull creaks and groans ominously, as if the strain of such an unnatural voyage must surely tear the vessel apart. Whatever may be going on at the mining colony of Ioma Town, the merchants who hired you certainly want you to get there in a hurry.

Normally the voyage from Athkatla to Ioma Town would take several days, but with the magical assistance of the Cowled Wizard, the vessel is able to cover the distance much more quickly. This is an excellent time to do character introductions. The PCs have about an hour before they arrive at the mining colony of Ioma Town in the Nelanther Isles. The characters boarded this ship in Athkatla a day ago and have been told that the details of their assignment will be explained once they reach Ioma Town. All the characters know at this point is that the merchants of Amn and the Cowled Wizards want them to conduct an investigation into some kind of problem at the mining colony. As for why the characters have chosen to be here, ultimately that's up to each player to decide individually, but here are some possible hooks:

- Characters might have played CORE1-3 *Sense of Wonder* and received the *Contact with the Cowled Wizards* story award. These characters were targeted with a Sending ritual and asked to come to Athkatla. (Perhaps the Cowled Wizard piloting this ship is the same the PCs met earlier.)
- Characters might have played CORE1-4 *Crystal Clear* and received the *Aboleth Taint* story award. These characters have been asked by the Amnian merchants who control Ioma Town to conduct a further investigation of the events that recently unfolded in Athkatla. These PCs have a vested interest in the situation and probably know a little bit more about what's going on than those who haven't played CORE1-4. Remind the players to try and avoid spoiling the adventure for those who haven't played it yet.
- For other characters, improvise a hook based on the character's background, class, race, home region, or affiliation. For example, arcane spellcasters might be interested in getting a license to practice arcane magic in Amn without running afoul of the Cowled Wizards. Those with expertise in mining operations might have been invited because they can use their skills as a cover. A character from humble origins might have a friend or family member who works as a miner. Someone from Waterdeep or Baldur's Gate, or affiliated with a rival merchant company, might accept the assignment because it provides an opportunity to gather information about how the Amnian merchant consortium operates.

DM's Introduction

This adventure is organized a little bit differently than most. The heart of the adventure is a single extended skill challenge. This represents the PCs' investigation of the mining colony (both above and below ground). As the PCs uncover key pieces of information during their search, they are directed to specific locations within the mines. At several of these locations, a tactical combat encounter occurs. After resolving that encounter, the PCs return to their investigation (continuing the skill challenge). So, they will not necessarily go through the encounters in numerical order.

Encounter 1 provides an overview of Ioma Town and sets the stage for the adventure, while **Encounter 2** contains a number of smaller scenes that represent various aspects of the PCs' investigation. In each scene, the PCs can make skill checks and roleplay with the denizens of Ioma Town to gain clues.

Encounter 3 and Encounter 4 are tactical combats that occur inside the mine, which you can run whenever you deem appropriate. After each of these encounters, return to **Encounter 2**.

Once the PCs have discovered enough clues, they can complete the skill challenge by using the locations of the tainted crystal formations they have discovered to determine where the center of the corruption should be located. This leads the PCs to **Encounter 5**, where they must confront the grells and put a stop to the Abolethic Sovereignty's ritual of corruption.

Aboleth Taint

Before beginning play, you should check to see which characters have the story award **CORE09 *Aboleth Taint*** from the adventure CORE1-4 *Crystal Clear*. Characters who have the Aboleth Taint are referred to as "Tainted" in the rest of the encounters. Tainted characters are preferentially targeted by the aberrant monsters, although this shouldn't override other tactical concerns. Also, Tainted characters may have visions at certain key points as described in the adventure.

It doesn't change the story at all if nobody in the party is Tainted; the encounters still play out exactly the same way. But, if you do have Tainted characters present, these added effects should help to heighten the tension and make the players feel like they are "on the clock" to put a stop to the spread of the blasphemous energies of the Far Realm before it's too late - not just for the innocent miners, but also for themselves.

Encounter 1: Ioma Town

Setup

Important NPC: Zylem, Cowled Wizard (human male)

The journey across the Sea of Swords to the mining colony of Ioma Town is uneventful. Read or paraphrase the following:

The island of Ioma is little more than a large mountain that juts upward from the ocean. The mining colony of Ioma Town is built at the base of the mountain near the shore. The town consists of a small number of above-ground buildings: living quarters for the miners and other staff, several taverns to keep the workers entertained when they are not on duty, a number of small warehouses near the docks, offices for running the business side of the operation, a jeweler's workroom for sorting and cutting the crystals, and a thin basalt tower from which the Cowled Wizards can survey the entire island and the surrounding sea. Of course, there are a number of mine entrances that lead beneath the mountain's surface. Iron tracks have been laid in a crisscross pattern, linking many of the buildings to the mining operation. Small hand carts filled with tailings and a scattering of picks and shovels provide further evidence of below-ground activity.

After disembarking, your arcane navigator leads you to the tower. With a curt gesture and a few muttered words of power, he dismisses the entrance wards and bids you enter. The tower is larger on the inside than it appears from the outside, with spacious living quarters for the three Cowled Wizards who dwell here, and a large central area with a table and chairs. Maps of the Nelanther Isles and a detailed survey of the mountain itself cover the table.

After you have refreshed yourselves, the Cowled Wizard motions for you to be seated. "Thank you for coming," he says. "My name is Zylem, and I will be your point of contact for this operation. Let me tell you what we know…"

Zylem can relate the following information. Give the PCs plenty of opportunities to steer the direction of the conversation by asking questions, rather than you just reading them a long list of items.

- The colony of Ioma Town is entirely dedicated to the mining operation. The Iomic crystals are extracted from the mine, cut into a variety of patterns, and shipped back to Amn, where they are sold (some raw, others turned into jewelry and other trinkets). This business is quite profitable.
- Many commoners believe that the crystals have special properties, such as providing protection from evil magic, but Zylem assures the PCs that this is just a folk tale.
- For some time, certain shipments of crystals have been coming up short. The crystals are all accounted for at Ioma Town, but when the ships arrive in Athkatla, some of the crystals are missing. The Cowled Wizards initially suspected theft or piracy at first, but were unable to discover any evidence of such activity, other than one questionable individual (Inder "Leadbottom" Kloom) who was interrogated but released after his adventurer friends vouched for him.
- Recently, there was a very troubling incident in Athkatla involving Iomic crystals. (This was the subject of CORE1-4, so spoilers aren't included here.) Evidence that was uncovered by the adventurers who dealt with that situation pointed to the mining colony itself as being the source of the problem. Someone or something appears to be stealing or tampering with the crystals at their source. There were also indications that the Abolethic Sovereignty might be involved, so the PCs should be careful.
- The merchant consortium that owns and operates Ioma Town doesn't want to risk a disruption by getting the Cowled Wizards involved. The miners, laborers, and other help are already apprehensive about the Wizards being on the island in the first place, because the people of Amn tend to fear and distrust magic. Production levels need to be maintained in order for the mine to stay profitable.
- Thus, the decision was made to hire adventurers and have them conduct a surreptitious investigation. The PCs can adopt whatever disguise or premise they think is effective - they could pose as mine workers, experts brought in to analyze the tunnels, extra guards hired to protect against the threat of piracy from the nearby town of Skaug, or anything else that seems plausible.
- The authorities are not sure who is stealing the crystals - anyone could be involved. It might be a group of miners who are pocketing crystals and selling them on the side, it might be people in the business office who are forging paperwork, it might be agents of a rival merchant consortium who are paying off the ship captains or dockworkers, and so forth. The PCs' job is to find

out who is interfering with the crystals and put a stop to it.

- There are three Cowled Wizards who share the responsibility for protecting Ioma Town. Two of them are currently at sea, since every shipment of crystals is being personally escorted by a wizard to prevent further losses.
- Divination rituals (such as Hand of Fate) and teleportation rituals are ineffective on the island, in the mines, and out to a distance of five miles. (Point-to-point teleportation over short distances, such as *fey step*, works fine.) To prevent rivals from spying on the operation, Ioma was thoroughly warded long ago. It's inconvenient now, but dropping the wards could make things worse.
- Zylem provides the PCs with a detailed map of the mines. This shows all the known tunnels, their interconnections, and where the work groups are currently assigned. The mining operation is very extensive, as it has been going on for over a hundred years. There are literally miles and miles of tunnels that snake their way up and down the inside of the mountain. Even so, the vast majority of the mountain's interior volume is still unexplored.
- A standard work group consists of about a dozen workers, six laborers, and a foreman. The day shift works from early in the morning until early in the afternoon, and then the night shift works from mid-afternoon until about midnight. Laborers shore up the tunnels and drag debris to the surface. The crystals are taken for cutting and processing, while the tailings are dumped in the ocean. It takes a month of work to harvest enough crystals to complete a shipload.
- There are a total of 800 people living on the island. Most of them are miners, laborers, and their families, with about 100 people total who work in the business office, the warehouses, cutting and packing the crystals, and so forth. There are also several taverns to cater to the workers. There is a fancy guest house for visiting dignitaries, but it's rarely used.
- The vast majority of the miners and other people who live here are human, but there is a smattering of other races, so the PCs should be able to blend in as long as they choose a reasonable cover story for each member of the party. There are a few monstrous workers, who serve as grunt laborers. Sometimes when there is trouble between Amn and the monster kingdom of Muranndin, monstrous humanoids are captured and sent to work in the mines as slaves.
- Excavating crystals is hard, back-breaking work, and living on Ioma is deadly dull compared to the urban delights of Athkatla, but the pay is good and there's no shortage of volunteers. It wouldn't be hard to infiltrate the ranks of the workers, since laborers come and go regularly. Zylem can give the PCs access to appropriate equipment and suitable clothes if they want to temporarily join the work force.
- If the PCs ask how the Cowled Wizards know that one of their number isn't the source of the problem, Zylem gets slightly irritated. He assures the PCs that the ranks of the Cowled Wizards are thoroughly scoured on a regular basis for "inappropriate influences."

Ending the Encounter

If it seems a bit strange that the Cowled Wizards aren't able to deal with this problem on their own, Zylem explains that their specialty is more in the way of overwhelming force rather than subtlety. With the lack of divination rituals and the fact that the workers don't want to talk to the Cowled Wizards in the first place, it's difficult for the authorities to conduct this investigation themselves. The PCs should be able to move more freely and interact more easily with the community.

If the PCs ask what they should do if they find themselves confronted with a threat that is beyond their ability to handle, Zylem instructs them to return to him and he will summon help from Athkatla. He hopes that this won't be necessary, however. If the PCs can apprehend the culprits directly, that would be the ideal outcome.

Time is of the essence, and Zylem encourages the PCs to conduct their investigation as quickly as possible, but he isn't aware of any specific time limit. When they need to rest, the PCs can lodge with the workers or in the guest house, as they prefer.

Treasure

Zylem pays the PCs 50/75 gp each up front. He promises an equal sum and "other appropriate rewards" to be paid upon a successful outcome.

Zylem also loans the PCs a pair of *sending stones* (see PH, page 255) that they can use during their investigation. If they need to split up, the *stones* can help them stay in communication with one another.

Experience Points

The PCs earn no XP in this encounter, and this encounter does not count towards a milestone.

Encounter 2: Triangulation

Skill Challenge Level 7/9, Complexity 3 (800/1,200 XP)

Setup

This encounter represents the overall investigation that the PCs conduct during their stay in Ioma Town. This encounter probably spans several days, since most of the scenes require several hours of game time to complete. It's possible that the PCs might be very efficient (splitting up to talk to multiple groups, for example) and complete the entire investigation in a single day. However, it's more likely that the investigation spans at least two days, with the PCs taking an extended rest at some point.

The players aren't initially given a time limit to complete their investigation, but in reality they are in a race against the clock. The agents of the Abolethic Sovereignty are in the middle of a complex ritual. If the ritual succeeds, it's entirely possible that the entire Nelanther Isles could fall under the aboleths' sway, and everyone within a hundred miles of Ioma could be transformed into an aboleth servitor.

The PCs have two full days and two full nights (48 hours) to conduct their investigation. Every scene has an estimated duration, but you should feel free to modify these as needed. Typically, the PCs can get from any point in Ioma Town to any other point in Ioma Town within 30 minutes. Getting to any point in the mine from Ioma Town should be assumed to take 1 hour in each direction. An extended rest consumes 6 hours. If the PCs haven't reached Encounter 5 within 48 hours of their arrival, the grell philosophers complete their ritual and the transformation of Ioma begins.

Skill Challenge

Although it uses the same basic mechanics, this skill challenge is a bit unusual because it represents an extended investigation. You should feel free to modify the provided scenes and improvise new scenes on the spot as necessary, depending on how the PCs decide to go about their task. Each scene offers the characters the opportunity to gain a clue, which might be useful information or might lead them to a specific location in the mines. Several of those locations feature tactical combat encounters against the aberrant minions of the Abolethic Sovereignty; so, you must temporarily leave this encounter to run **Encounter 3** at some point and then again to run **Encounter 4**.

Although the scenes in this encounter are numbered, this is purely for convenience. You do not need to run these scenes in the order presented. Let the players talk about how they want to conduct their investigation, make plans, and then go from there. The exact pacing and sequence of events is up to you. If the players are having fun with the roleplaying and investigation scenes, stretch those out. If they prefer the combat scenes, keep the information-gathering to a minimum. Most groups like a balance between the two. Keep an eye on your overall time limit if you are playing in a time-sensitive setting, to make sure that you leave enough time to complete **Encounter 5**.

Ultimately, what the PCs need to do is discover the locations of at least four clusters of corrupted Iomic crystals. (The PCs need to complete both **Encounter 3** and **Encounter 4**, so one way to do this is to have two combat scenes and two non-combat scenes.) Each time they discover another cluster, they gain information about the strength and spread of the evil ritual that is slowly tainting the entire island. Once they have discovered four clusters, they have enough information to determine the location where the center of the corruption must lie, which ends this encounter and leads the party to **Encounter 5**.

Throughout the investigation, the players may use a variety of skills other than the example skills that are provided in each scene. You should feel free to improvise as much as needed. If something seems plausible, use the moderate DCs (14/15). If something seems unlikely or difficult, use the hard DCs (19/20). If the characters come up with a particularly brilliant plan, you can use the easy DCs (9/10) or just provide the information.

Rather than counting successes and failures with each skill check that the characters make, you should think of each individual scene as being part of the extended framework of the skill challenge. Every time the PCs exit a scene successfully, having gained a clue, they have made progress. If they are unsuccessful in a particular scene, then they make no progress. In the worst-case scenario, it is possible for the PCs to fail this challenge (by running out of time before accumulating the necessary number of clues). There is a special "bad ending" provided under the "Failure" heading for this purpose. If you run out of scenes before the PCs have collected the necessary number of clues, but they still have time remaining, you can allow them to revisit a scene that they failed previously, but they should take a different approach than they took the first time.

Each of the roleplaying scenes is intended to be fairly short. You can play it by ear and simply decide when the PCs have done enough to earn the

information they seek (or when they have failed), or you can follow a more formal mechanic, in which case each scene should be treated as a Complexity 1 skill challenge (any combination of four successful skill checks before three failed skill checks is sufficient to successfully complete the scene).

Troubleshooting: The "Get a Clue" Check

Some groups of players are very tentative when presented with an open-ended challenge. You can and should nudge them in the right direction when appropriate, but if worse comes to worst, you can always have inspiration strike someone in order to keep the game from coming to a complete halt.

At any time during the challenge, if the players seem a bit lost about how to proceed, you can let any character make an Insight check to get some suggestions. Try to keep your suggestions gentle. Lead the players in the right direction, rather than directly saying "okay, the next thing you should do is..."

Insight (DC 14/15, not a success or failure): The PC realizes some piece of information that helps the party narrow down the search. This is a way for you to suggest a course of action that the PCs haven't tried yet. Guide the PCs to a scene they haven't yet visited, or during a scene, this skill can provide a "flash of insight," granting a +2 bonus on another character's skill check.

Troubleshooting: Nobody Here Knows Anything About Arcana?

Much of the information-gathering in this adventure is designed to lead up to the PCs making skill checks, particularly Arcana checks, to analyze the strength of the corruption on the clusters of Iomic crystals that they discover. The idea is that each cluster gives the PCs more information about the strength and direction to the center of the ritual (the source of the taint).

Although it's probably unlikely, if there are no characters in the party who are trained in Arcana, then you may need to substitute another skill that someone is trained in. Religion is an obvious choice, allowing the character to perceive the "wrongness" of the aboleths' Far Realm influence where it intrudes upon the world, but other skills such as Insight (sensing the aberrant emanations), History (referencing ancient ritual books to look for correlations) or even Dungeoneering (analyzing the structure of the crystals to assess the degree of corruption) could suffice in a pinch.

Alternatively, the PCs could use their *sending stones* to communicate their findings to Zylem, who can analyze the crystals they discover and steer them in the right direction. The point is simply that you should not let the lack of having a character trained in Arcana to cause the party to fail the adventure.

Scene 1: Hoisting a Pint or Three

Use this scene if the PCs decide to talk with the local miners and laborers. The obvious way to do this is to pay a visit to a local tavern (the Brass Lantern or the Vorpal Pickaxe) and chat up the workers. When they are not on duty, most miners and laborers toss back a few pints. Because the mine operates both day and night, the day workers drink at night, and the night workers drink during the day, so the taverns are always busy.

Bluff (DC 14/15): The PC attempts to use guile to get close to one of the laborers, perhaps by claiming a common background ("You're from Athkatla? I'm from Athkatla too!") or telling other lies to gain the trust of the assembled workers.

Diplomacy (DC 14/15): The PC takes the friendly approach, buying drinks and slapping backs, to earn the miners' trust and find out if they know anything.

Endurance (DC 19/20): The PC challenges all comers to a drinking contest, or demonstrates some amazing feat of bar prowess (such as chugging a certain number of drinks) to win friends and influence people.

Intimidate (DC 14/15): The PC picks out the meanest, roughest, toughest, nastiest guy or gal in the bar and stares 'em down. This automatically makes the PC the new meanest, roughest, toughest, nastiest guy or gal in the bar, which results in the character receiving grudging respect and probably some toadying. Actually starting a bar fight is frowned upon, though it's not uncommon under these circumstances.

Religion (DC 19/20): It's a tough crowd, but the workers don't get much access to religious services, so a character might be able to preach a sermon or conduct a religious ceremony to impress the people here. Many of the miners have their families on the island too, and there are often new babies that need blessing and other simple rituals that could go a long way to earn the people's trust.

Streetwise (DC 19/20): Ioma Town isn't huge, but it's big enough to have a small black market for "important supplies" and other goods that the authorities don't want the workers to have. Using this skill, the PC can home in on "people who know people" and make some connections.

Thievery (DC 19/20): The character attempts to blend in by getting into a card or dice game, throwing darts, demonstrating simple magic tricks (sleight of hand), helping a drunk "find" his "missing" coin pouch, and so forth.

Once the PCs have gained their trust, the miners can reveal the following information:

- The workers are pretty satisfied with the way they are treated. They know the merchants are making all the money while they struggle for a few silver pieces a day, but that's the way the world is. The work is hard, but the pay is fair, and the company provides free housing and medical care for the workers and their families, which is more than you get in a lot of places.
- None of the miners know anything about stolen crystals. Oh, sure, every now and then a guy will try to pocket a raw crystal, but such people usually get caught pretty quickly, and they get fired for doing it. Plus, who are you going to sell it to? Everybody around here is sitting on top of a gigantic pile of the darn things. Most of the people who live and work here know that the crystals don't really have special powers.
- One thing that does have some people concerned is that there have been a small number of workers who have just up and vanished lately. It's a big workforce, and nobody knows everybody, and people quit all the time, but you usually know about it pretty far in advance because they complain even more than usual. Plus you generally get to say goodbye to your friends, since the ships bound for Athkatla only leave a few times a month. But several of the miners mention people on their crews who have simply vanished. The bosses don't seem to think it's a problem - when someone doesn't show up for work, they assume he quit and just snuck off to the ships without telling anybody. Every now and then, a freebooter from Skaug weighs anchor a few miles offshore, and a couple of guys are always tempted to swim out there and join the pirate life. It's got to be better than the workman's life, right?

Success: The PCs get directions to a specific location in the mines where one despondent miner named Crador says his best friend recently disappeared. He walked away for a few minutes to relieve himself, and never came back. Heading to this location, which takes about an hour, the PCs can search and eventually discover a cluster of corrupted Iomic crystals. (What actually happened is the miner succumbed to the whispers of the corrupted crystals, lost his free will, and wandered deeper into the mine to become a thrall. He is now found among the aboleth servitors in **Encounter 5**.)

Failure: If the PCs fail in this scene, then they are unable to befriend the miners, and don't get any information.

Scene 2: The Business Office

Use this scene if the PCs decide to investigate the reports of missing Iomic crystals by auditing the shipping manifests, checking the books, or otherwise looking into the business side of things (as opposed to the labor side). The business office is only open during the day, but the PCs might choose to take a stealthy approach and break in at night to examine the documents instead. During the day, the office is occupied by a number of clerks and accountants. It is a very unexciting building filled with small offices and cabinets full of purchase orders, work schedules, and inventory cost analyses (the expected statistical rate of pick-handle breakage times the number of workers yields…)

Bluff (DC 19/20): The PC attempts to pass himself off as an auditor, member of one of the ruling merchant houses, or some other person who has the authority to browse the files without being questioned. This might involve forged credentials or other phony paperwork. A particularly brazen con artist may actually be able to convince the office staff to do his work for him.

Diplomacy (DC 19/20): The PC tries to sweet-talk the office workers into letting him examine the files that he wants to see. This is a tricky proposition, since the PCs aren't supposed to reveal that they are actually investigating stolen crystals. So the PCs need to come up with a different, but still believable, story for why they want to review the shipping manifests.

Intimidate (DC 14/15): The PC attempts to browbeat some hapless functionary into telling him what he wants to know. The office workers tend to be pretty easily intimidated, but at the same time, the workers get suspicious quickly if the PCs' cover story is not very convincing.

Perception (DC 19/20): Once the PCs have some documents to look at (particularly shipping manifests), this skill allows them to notice where someone has been changing the numbers.

Stealth (DC 14/15): The PC attempts to sneak off to a place where he's not supposed to be (and do so unobserved) or sneak into the office after hours when everybody has gone home for the night.

Thievery (DC 19/20): This skill requires the character to be alone with one of the locked filing cabinets, somebody's desk, etc. The character picks the lock and rifles through the information without leaving any evidence behind.

The PCs can learn the following information by perusing the shipping manifests for the crystal shipments that came up short:

- There are a number of manifests that have been altered (see Perception, above). It appears that for the shipments that arrived in Athkatla with less than the expected number of Iomic crystals, those crystals never were on the ship in the first place, and someone has been changing the records to make it look otherwise.
- All of the affected manifests were prepared by the same clerk, a man named Quesul. If the PCs ask around in the office, they can easily get a description of Quesul and find out where his office is (if they want to confront him on site), or where he lives (if they want to confront him at home, which is probably better, since it attracts less attention).
- Other than the altered shipping manifests, it doesn't look as though there is any embezzlement or other criminal activity going on in the business office. Apparently the fear of the merchant houses and the Cowled Wizards is enough to keep most would-be white-collar criminals in line.

Success: The PCs track down Quesul, who is a short, bald human of middle age. When confronted, he quickly breaks down (Intimidate DC 9/10) and admits that he is responsible for the forged shipping manifests. He doesn't know who stole the actual crystals; he was just paid to cover up the thefts. However, to collect his payments, he has to go into the mines, to a specific location, where the gold is always waiting for him. Strangely enough, although he insists that he met with his "benefactor" on multiple occasions, he can't remember anything about what the person looks like. Shrewd questioning might enable the PCs to conclude that Quesul has actually been receiving instructions in his dreams and through telepathy rather than actually making contact with a real person.

Following Quesul's directions to the meeting spot, the PCs are able to discover a cluster of corrupted Iomic crystals (whose effects no doubt further befuddled poor Quesul's overtaxed brain). Whether the PCs turn Quesul in to the Cowled Wizards is up to them; he has no further part to play in the adventure, unless you want to have him show up as one of the aboleth servitors in **Encounter 5**.

Failure: If the PCs fail this scene, they do not learn about Quesul's efforts to cover up the stolen Iomic crystals by altering the shipping manifests.

Scene 3: The Lost Miner

The first time the PCs enter the mines of their own accord, you should run this scene. One of the miners has succumbed to the whispers of the corrupted crystals and wandered deeper into the mine, trying to find the source of his new obsession. However, mindless thralls don't do a good job of paying attention to their surroundings, and he's fallen into a pit. The situation is further complicated by the fact that the walls of the pit are unstable and could collapse at any moment, burying the man alive.

This scene begins with a Perception check for the characters to hear the trapped miner's cries for help. After that, the following skills may be helpful:

Acrobatics (DC 14/15): The PC helps rescue the trapped miner by balancing on a narrow ledge, circumventing the pit to help set up a rope harness, or some other type of dexterous activity.

Athletics (DC 17/18): The PC helps rescue the trapped miner by climbing into the pit, hauling him up on a rope, or some other type of physical activity.

Dungeoneering (DC 14/15): The PC studies the area to determine the best way to climb down into the pit or the best place to set up the rescue operation without causing a landslide.

Heal (DC 14/15): The PC checks the miner for injuries or helps him "snap out of it" and break free from his trance once he has been rescued.

Nature (DC 14/15): The PC studies the pit to figure out the best way to reach the trapped miner (a pit in a cave isn't that different from a ravine or other outdoor hazard), or creates a clever rope harness using his knowledge of snares.

Perception (DC 14/15): Someone needs to make a Perception check initially to hear the trapped miner's cries for help; subsequent checks can be used to look for suitable approaches, watch out for unstable rocks, and so forth.

Success: The PCs rescue the miner, a young human named Morem. He seems very befuddled and confused, as if unaware of his surroundings and not in control of his own actions. The PCs can slap him around, put smelling salts under his nose, make a Heal check, or take any other appropriate action to shake him loose from the trance. He seems surprised to be in the mines. The last thing he remembered, he was just outside the mine, getting things ready for the next shift (checking tools to make sure the handles aren't split, emptying mining carts of tailings, and so forth). He vaguely remembers hearing singing or chanting or a voice in his head, but he can't describe it very well. He just knows that he wanted to find out where it was coming from.

Morem is very frightened at the prospect of some monster in the mines that is luring people to their deaths, so the PCs must calm him down if they don't want him to spread the story all over Ioma Town. At any rate, he remembers the direction he was trying to go, and can impart this information to the PCs. This leads them deeper into the mine, off the main tunnels, and should trigger either **Encounter 3** or **Encounter 4**. Morem doesn't accompany the PCs, preferring to get out of the mine as fast as possible.

Failure: If the PCs fail this scene, they don't get the lead from Morem and have to discover the location he would have led them to in some other way.

Scene 4: Exploring the Mines

Presumably the PCs will want to go off on a general exploration of the mines at some point. There are miles and miles of mine tunnels that have been carved out over the past hundred years of work, so the area to be covered is truly vast. The PCs might wish to search for secret tunnels or hidden caches of stolen crystals, or they might simply want to attract the attention of whoever has been stealing the crystals and make themselves a target, hoping to provoke a response.

This scene is intended to cover the PCs exploring the mines unaccompanied (i.e. not part of a group of workers). It would be difficult for them to do what they need to do in the company of two dozen curious laborers.

One thing to note as the PCs move through the mine is that the veins of crystal near the entrance have been played out. It's clear that the mining company is sending its workers deeper and deeper into the mountain in order to find new sources. However, once they get past the largest, played-out tunnels, the PCs find plenty of work sites and rich veins. It's clear that Ioma Mountain contains a staggering amount of Iomic crystals – surely enough to keep the mine in operation for at least another hundred years.

Endurance (DC 14/15, not a success or failure): It's a long march through the mines. When the PCs leave the worked stone tunnels behind and start clambering through the natural fissures within the mountain, the going gets pretty rough. Each character should make an Endurance check at some point during the journey. A failed check indicates that the character has suffered some accident or mishap and loses 1 healing surge.

Arcana (DC 14/15): The PC opens himself up to the flow of magic, trying to sense any auras that seem out of place. This can help lead the party towards a cache of corrupted crystals.

Athletics (DC 14/15): Once the PCs get beyond the "beaten path" of the man-made tunnels, they need to navigate various hazards (crossing chasms, climbing over fallen rocks, and so forth). This skill can be used to bypass such obstacles.

Dungeoneering (DC 14/15): A PC with this skill should probably be in the lead, reading and interpreting the map, choosing which tunnels to go down, and generally making sure the party doesn't get lost. Characters trained in Dungeoneering feel right at home in the mines, as they are in their element.

History (DC 19/20): The character draws on book knowledge about mining operations, spelunking, the likely place for natural Iomic crystal formations to occur, or some other suitable subject to help the party choose which way to go or overcome some dungeon hazard.

Nature (DC 19/20): Knowledge of the natural world isn't as useful underground as it is on the surface, but a character can use this skill to help guide the party if there isn't anyone trained in Dungeoneering.

Perception (DC 14/15): The PCs can use this skill to look for signs of passage down particular tunnels, spot veins of crystal that haven't been tapped yet, listen for the sounds of activity elsewhere in the mine, and so forth.

Religion (DC 14/15): This skill can be used similarly to Arcana. The character focuses on the power of his faith to seek out unnatural creatures and auras. Because the Abolethic Sovereignty represents a fundamental perversion of the natural order, nearly all of the deities of Faerun are opposed to the incursion of the Far Realm upon the world.

Success: The first time the PCs succeed in this scene, they discover a site of interest deep within the mine. This should lead to either **Encounter 3** or **Encounter 4**. You can run this scene again to lead them to the other combat encounter if necessary, but try to come up with a different set of challenges for them to overcome so that it doesn't just feel like an endless series of identical skill checks.

Failure: If the PCs fail this scene, which seems amazingly unlikely, then they don't gain any useful information on this trip into the mines. They lose 4 hours of time, but they can always try again later.

Triangulation: Analyzing the Corrupted Crystals

As the PCs complete the various scenes (including Encounters 3 and 4), they discover corrupted Iomic crystals. Each time they find a new cluster of crystals, they can analyze the aura of corruption using the Arcana skill (DC 14/15). (See the "Troubleshooting" sidebar if there isn't anyone in the party who's trained in Arcana.)

Each set of crystals has the same basic aura: characters who have played CORE1-4 will recognize it immediately, since it matches the Aboleth Taint that some or all of them also carry. Characters who haven't played that adventure can make Arcana, History, and Religion checks (DC 14/15) to recognize the aura as being similar to the aberrant energies used by aboleths to create their servitors.

However, each set of crystals has a slightly different strength to its aura. The PCs can surmise from this that the locations of the corrupted crystal formations roughly indicate the age and rate of growth of the taint. If all the crystals in the mountain are slowly becoming corrupted, then there might be a central point from which the aberrant energy is emanating.

- After the PCs have analyzed their first set of crystals, they are readily able tell the difference between corrupted and non-corrupted crystals. The vast majority of crystals that they find in the mountain are not yet corrupted, but the deeper they go, the more they can sense a faint aura that seems to be permeating all of the crystals.
- After the PCs have analyzed their second set, they realize that different clusters appear to have varying aura strengths, meaning that crystals in different locations are probably being affected at different points in time, or the strength of the corruption attenuates with the crystal's distance from some central point.
- After the PCs have analyzed their third set, they can plot the locations of the corrupted crystals they have discovered on their map, and begin to narrow down the possibilities for where the central location must be. They can quickly rule out all of the existing mine tunnels, but because of the distances involved and differing tunnel heights inside the mountain, they don't have quite enough data to pinpoint the source.
- After the PCs have analyzed their fourth and final set, plotting all of the locations they've discovered on the map and triangulating in three dimensions, they are able to conclusively determine the most logical location for the source of the corruption. They have successfully completed the skill challenge.

Ending the Encounter

This encounter ends when the PCs have successfully analyzed four sets of corrupted Iomic crystals and plotted their locations on the map given to them by the Cowled Wizards. Alternatively, the encounter ends if 48 hours of game time pass without the PCs discovering the central location. (When the PCs take their first extended rest, you can give them a clue that they are up against a time limit by having them experience nightmares of tentacled horrors swarming out of the mountain to ravage Ioma Town. That ought to get their attention.)

Success

The PCs should proceed to the location they have identified as soon as they are ready. Continue with **Encounter 5**.

Failure

The PCs fail to locate the source of the corruption before the servants of the Abolethic Sovereignty are able to complete their ritual. As the ritual reaches its culmination, every Iomic crystal on the island (basically, the entire mountain) is converted to a psionic battery for the use of the aboleths. They are quickly able to begin projecting their power into the Sea of Swords through this new conduit. Aberrations beyond numbering come pouring out of the mines, killing many and dragging others back into the mountain where they are transformed into horrifying aboleth servitors. The PCs manage to escape with the aid of Zylem, but they have failed at their mission and the entire Nelanther Isles are now at risk of falling under the sway of the Sovereignty. To be clear, this ending should be extremely unlikely. Nevertheless, if it occurs, make sure to fill out the Adventure Questions at the end of the scenario accordingly.

Experience Points

The characters receive 160/240 experience points each for successfully completing the skill challenge by determining the location of **Encounter 5**.

Treasure

There is no treasure in this scene, but it leads to Encounters 3 and 4, which do have treasure.

Encounter 3: Squamous Guardians

Encounter Level 8/10 (1600/2500 XP)

Setup

This encounter includes the following creatures at the low tier:
2 squamous maws (Level 8) (M)
1 aberrant crystal (C)

This encounter includes the following creatures at the high tier:
2 squamous maws (M)
1 aberrant crystal (Level 10) (C)

The PCs reach this encounter after they have discovered a clue directing them to this specific location within the mines. This part of the tunnels is extremely remote. It takes about two hours to reach this location starting at the mine entrance. To get here, the PCs start off down one of the major mine tunnels, but quickly turn down side shafts until they reach a place where the mining operation has apparently stopped, but natural tunnels continue. After another fifteen minutes or so, they reach this location.

Read or paraphrase the following when the adventurers enter the area:

This large cave is irregularly-shaped, with deep niches in several places. The ceiling ranges from 15 to 20 feet in height. A very large skull rests near the center of the cave. Perhaps this area was once a dragon's lair, but there is no sign of habitation now. Indeed, it does not look like this area has ever been disturbed by human activity.

Although this area should be pitch black, it is dimly illuminated by a purplish light. The far side of the cave is covered with Iomic crystals that seem to be growing out of the walls. These crystals flicker with a faint inner glow that rises and falls, almost as if they are breathing.

When the PCs enter the cave, the monsters are NOT on the battle map. They do not appear until the PCs begin disturbing the crystals. When the characters move into the cave, check their passive Perception scores. Anyone who beats a DC 17/21 notices that there is one particular cluster at the very back of the cave (in the location indicated on the tactical map) that seems to glow a bit more insistently than the other crystals. Arcana checks reveal a strong magical aura in the entire area, emanating from the crystals. When the first PC passes beyond the dragon skull shown on the map, the tainted crystal senses their presence and acts to defend itself by summoning abominations from the Far Realm. Read or paraphrase the following:

As you approach the glowing cluster of crystals at the back of the cave, you feel a sudden prickling sensation all over your body, as if energy was rushing towards the crystal. A beam of purple light streaks from the cluster and strikes the dragon skull. Twin balls of energy glow within the skull's eye sockets before bursting out to either side. There is a ripping sound, as if the very boundaries of the natural world are being torn, and … something … steps through.

Two large beasts appear on either side of the skull, almost as if they simply stepped sideways to transit between the planes of existence. They are clearly dragon-shaped, but their forms are an amorphous mass of scales, mouths, fangs, and reptilian eyes. Their bodies roil with different colors, seeming to change shape and size from moment to moment. A mixture of brimstone and decay assails your nostrils, while a dreadful cacophony of screams, howls, and laughter echoes throughout the cave, seeking to invade your mind.

With a DC 15 Arcana check, a character knows that these creatures are squamous maws, horrid blots upon reality that are created when the madness of the Far Realm touches the world. They probably took the shape of dragons because of the presence of the dragon skull. For more information, including a picture that you can show to the players, see page 230 of *Draconomicon*.

Features of the Area

The cave has the following features:

Ceiling: The cave walls and ceiling are irregular. The height varies from 15 to 20 feet. With their reach 2, there is no place in the cave that the characters could fly to where the maws wouldn't be able to reach them. If the characters retreat back into the tunnels, those are smaller and narrower, with a height ranging from 8-10 feet. This might force the maws to squeeze, which could give the PCs an advantage.

Illumination: The pulsating crystals provide dim illumination throughout the cavern. (Note that the squamous maws have both darkvision and all-around vision.)

Skull: The dragon skull is not connected to the existence of the squamous maws in any way. Once they

have been summoned, they must be destroyed in order to return their essence to the Far Realm. However, the skull counts as blocking terrain; it can provide cover, and can be used in an acrobatic stunt. A DC 15 Athletics check allows a character to climb on top of the skull.

Rubble: Squares with rubble are considered difficult terrain, costing 2 squares of movement.

Crystals: Most of the crystal formations in this area are embedded in the walls and do not count as tactical features. The corrupted crystal cluster shown on the tactical map occupies a square and is considered to fill that square, so it cannot be entered or moved through.

Tactics

The squamous maws were summoned to protect the crystal, so they focus their efforts on any character who seems to be damaging the crystal. This is an opportunity for the party defenders to shine. A maw typically begins combat with its *breath weapon*, the moves closer and spends its action point to make a *double attack*. The more creatures it can deal ongoing psychic damage to, the more it can affect with its *mad hunger* and *dreadful cacophony*. Once summoned, the maws fight to the death. Destroying the crystal doesn't banish them back to the Far Realm, but if the PCs are having a tough time, you could help them out by causing the maws to take damage when the crystal takes damage.

The crystal is semi-sentient (it cannot communicate, but it knows when it is being damaged and seeks to retaliate). If the crystal does not take damage during a round, then it targets random characters with its attacks. However, it can sense the presence of Tainted creatures and will focus its attacks on those characters in preference to non-Tainted creatures.

Scaling the Encounter

Make the following adjustments to the combat based on the number of PCs present.

Four PCs: Reduce the squamous maws' hit points by 32 each.

Six PCs: Increase the squamous maws' hit points by 32 each.

If the party consists mostly of 7th-level characters, they might have a hard time beating some of the maws' defenses. If this appears to the case, consider lowering the maws' AC and Fortitude by 2 each.

Ending the Encounter

Destroying the corrupted crystal does not prevent the PCs from studying it for information. Once the maws and crystal have been dealt with, the PCs can examine the crystal fragments. See the "Triangulation" scene in **Encounter 2** for details on what they can learn from these fragments.

If the PCs win this battle and are able to analyze the corrupted crystal cluster, it counts as a "successful scene" for resolving the overall skill challenge in **Encounter 2**.

Experience Points

The characters receive 320/500 experience points each for defeating the squamous maws and destroying the corrupted crystal formation.

Treasure

The squamous maws do not have any treasure, but if the PCs search the cave after the battle, they find the half-buried skeletal remains of a previous explorer, who was scouting this area many decades ago in search of new veins of ore. He met with a mishap (perhaps falling afoul of the dragon?) and his body was never discovered. Although there is nothing left of his possessions save scraps of cloth and bits of rusted metal, in the decaying remains of his backpack, the PCs discover 25/35 gp and a *rope of climbing*.

Encounter 3: "Squamous Guardians" Statistics (Low Level)

Squamous Maw (Level 8) **Level 8 Elite Soldier**
Large aberrant magical beast (dragon) XP 700

Initiative +7 **Senses** Perception +7; all-around vision, darkvision
Dreadful Cacophony aura 3; any enemy within the area that is taking ongoing psychic damage takes a -1 penalty to attack rolls.
HP 184; **Bloodied** 92; see also *bloodied breath*
AC 25; **Fortitude** 23, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 21
Resist 5 variable (1/encounter; see MM 282)
Saving Throws +2
Speed 6, burrow 3
Action Points 1

m **Bite** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic**
Reach 2; +15 vs. AC; 2d8 + 4 psychic damage, and ongoing 5 psychic damage (save ends).

M **Double Attack** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic**
The maw makes two bite attacks.

C **Breath Weapon** (standard; recharge 5 6) ✦ **Psychic**
Close blast 5; +13 vs. Reflex; 1d12 + 6 psychic damage, and ongoing 5 psychic damage (save ends). *Miss:* Half damage, and no ongoing damage.

C **Bloodied Breath** (free, when first bloodied; encounter) ✦ **Psychic**
The maw's *breath weapon* recharges, and the maw uses it immediately.

Mad Hunger
The maw gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls and a +5 bonus to damage rolls against enemies that are taking ongoing psychic damage.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Draconic, Far Speech
Skills Intimidate +10
Str 23 (+10) **Dex** 17 (+7) **Wis** 15 (+6)
Con 20 (+9) **Int** 11 (+4) **Cha** 13 (+5)
Source *Draconomicon* 231

Corrupted Crystal **Level 5 Blaster**
Trap XP 200

Trap: The cluster of purple crystals attacks each round on its initiative after it has been triggered, unleashing beams of corrupting energy that induces horrible transformations in its victims.

Perception
DC 17: The character notices the glowing crystal formation and recognizes it as a potential threat..
Secondary Skill: Arcana
DC 17: The character recognizes the crystal's magical aura as being connected to the Far Realm, and realizes that it might be possible to sever the crystal's planar connection (see Countermeasures).

Trigger
The trap activates and rolls initiative when a character comes within 2 squares of it, or when it is attacked or damaged.

Attack
Standard Action **Ranged** 10
Targets: One or two creatures within range
Attack: +8 vs. Reflex
Hit: 1d10 + 4 damage.

Countermeasures
✦ A character can attack the crystal formation (AC 4, Fortitude 12, Reflex 4, Will immune, HP 80, resist all 5). Destroying the formation disables the trap.
✦ A character within 5 squares can attempt to redirect the crystal's energies back upon itself. The character uses a standard action and makes an Arcana check, dealing damage to the crystal equal to the check result minus 5 (to reflect the crystal's damage resistance). A character who damages the crystal in this fashion gains ongoing 5 psychic damage (save ends, characters suffer a -2 penalty on saves to end this effect)..
✦ An adjacent character can delay the trap as a standard action with a DC 17 Thievery check. This causes the trap to stop attacking for 1 round. For each 10 points above 17, the trap is delayed for an additional round (DC 27 = 2 rounds, etc.)

Encounter 3: "Squamous Guardians" Statistics (High Level)

Squamous Maw **Level 10 Elite Soldier**
Large aberrant magical beast (dragon) XP 1,000

Initiative +8 **Senses** Perception +8; all-around vision, darkvision
Dreadful Cacophony aura 3; any enemy within the area that is taking ongoing psychic damage takes a -1 penalty to attack rolls.
HP 216; **Bloodied** 108; see also *bloodied breath*
AC 27; **Fortitude** 25, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 23
Resist 5 variable (1/encounter; see MM 282)
Saving Throws +2
Speed 6, burrow 3
Action Points 1

m **Bite** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic**
Reach 2; +17 vs. AC; 2d8 + 5 psychic damage, and ongoing 5 psychic damage (save ends).

M **Double Attack** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic**
The maw makes two bite attacks.

C **Breath Weapon** (standard; recharge 5 6) ✦ **Psychic**
Close blast 5; +15 vs. Reflex; 1d12 + 7 psychic damage, and ongoing 5 psychic damage (save ends). *Miss:* Half damage, and no ongoing damage.

C **Bloodied Breath** (free, when first bloodied; encounter) ✦ **Psychic**
The maw's *breath weapon* recharges, and the maw uses it immediately.

Mad Hunger
The maw gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls and a +5 bonus to damage rolls against enemies that are taking ongoing psychic damage.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Draconic, Far Speech
Skills Intimidate +11
Str 23 (+11) **Dex** 17 (+8) **Wis** 15 (+7)
Con 20 (+10) **Int** 11 (+5) **Cha** 13 (+6)
Source *Draconomicon* 231

Corrupted Crystal **Level 10 Blaster**
Trap XP 500

Trap: The cluster of purple crystals attacks each round on its initiative after it has been triggered, unleashing beams of corrupting energy that induces horrible transformations in its victims.

Perception
DC 21: The character notices the glowing crystal formation and recognizes it as a potential threat..
Secondary Skill: Arcana
DC 21: The character recognizes the crystal's magical aura as being connected to the Far Realm, and realizes that it might be possible to sever the crystal's planar connection (see Countermeasures).

Trigger
The trap activates and rolls initiative when a character comes within 2 squares of it, or when it is attacked or damaged.

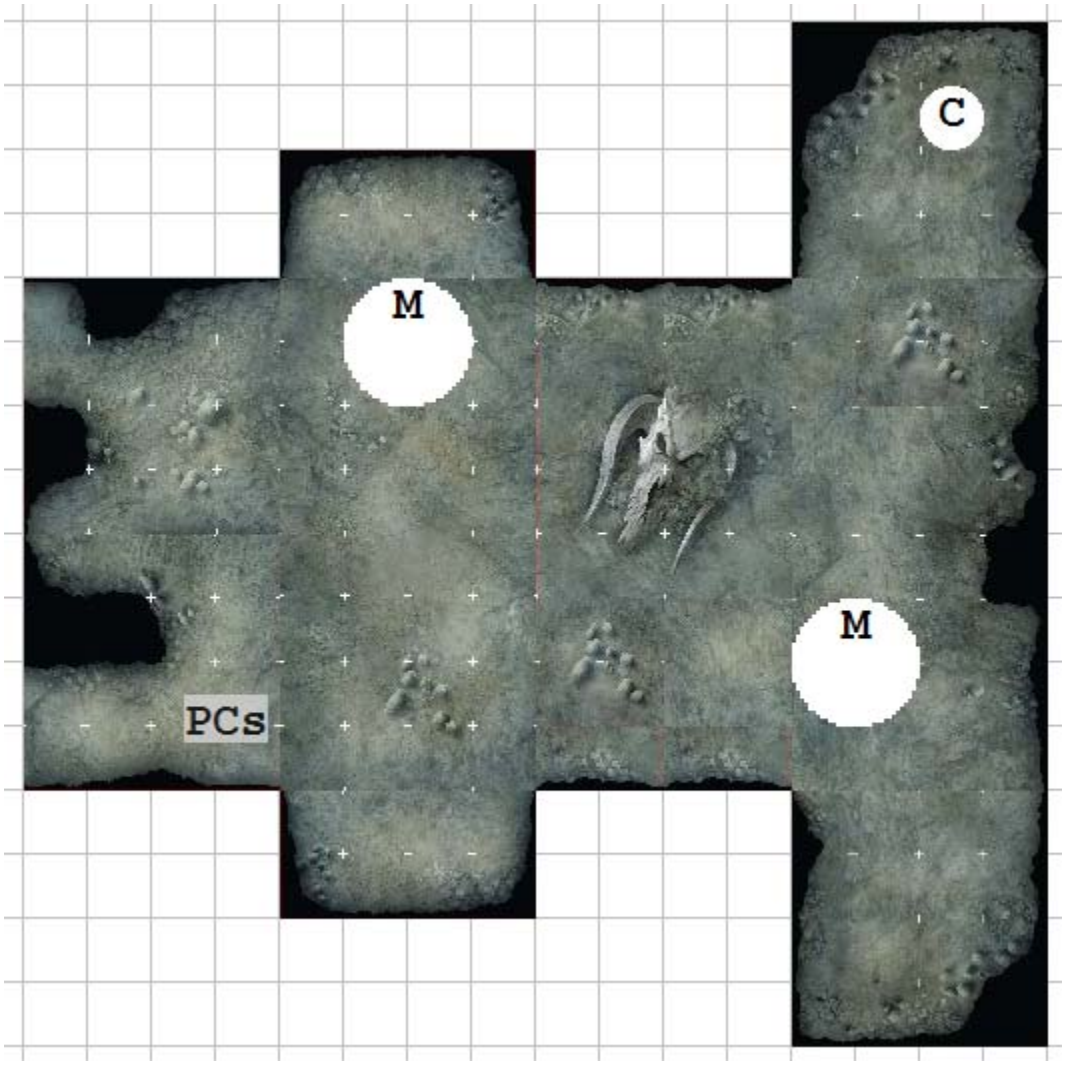
Attack
Standard Action **Ranged** 10
Targets: One or two creatures within range
Attack: +13 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d6 + 5 damage.

Countermeasures
✦ A character can attack the crystal formation (AC 4, Fortitude 12, Reflex 4, Will immune, HP 80, resist all 10). Destroying the formation disables the trap.
✦ A character within 5 squares can attempt to redirect the crystal's energies back upon itself. The character uses a standard action and makes an Arcana check, dealing damage to the crystal equal to the check result minus 10 (to reflect the crystal's damage resistance). A character who damages the crystal in this fashion gains ongoing 10 psychic damage (save ends, characters suffer a -2 penalty on saves to end this effect).
✦ An adjacent character can delay the trap as a standard action with a DC 21 Thievery check. This causes the trap to stop attacking for 1 round. For each 10 points above 21, the trap is delayed for an additional round (DC 31 = 2 rounds, etc.)

Encounter 3: "Squamous Guardians" Map

Lost Caverns of the Underdark

Floor / Tunnel	4x8	x1
Cave Offshoot / Tunnel End	4x4	x1
Cave Offshoot / Tunnel End	4x4	x1
Tunnel End / L-Tunnel	4x2	x2
Cave Wall / Statlagmites	2x1	x2
Cave Wall / Tunnel End	1x2	x2
Floor w/Debris / Cave Pillar	2x2	x2
Dragon Skull / Tunnel Bend	4x4	x1
Cave Wall / Tunnel Bend	4x8	x1
Tunnel End / Tunnel	4x4	x2
Floor / Tunnel	2x2	x1



Note: The Squamous Maws are not on the battle map when the PCs arrive. The indicated locations are where they appear after they have been summoned by the crystal.

Encounter 4: Gibbering Nest

Encounter Level 8/10 (1,875/2,600 XP)

Setup

This encounter includes the following creatures at the low tier:
3 gricks (G)
1 grick alpha (A)
1 gibbering mouther (M)
1 collapsing wall (trap)

This encounter includes the following creatures at the high tier:
3 gricks (Level 9) (G)
1 grick alpha (Level 11) (A)
1 gibbering mouther (Level 12) (M)
1 collapsing wall (Level 9) (trap)

The PCs reach this encounter after they have discovered a clue directing them to this specific location within the mines. This part of the tunnels is somewhat remote. It takes about 90 minutes to reach this location starting at the mine entrance. To get here, the PCs start off down one of the major mine tunnels and eventually turn down a side tunnel that descends towards sea level. This is an area that was actively worked for a while until the vein of ore that the miners were following led to an underground aquifer, which broke through the tunnel walls, flooding a section of the mine. The area was abandoned after that. The waters have mostly receded, but a small stream still cuts through part of the caves.

Read or paraphrase the following when the adventurers enter the area:

The tunnel you have been following does not appear to have been used in many years. Up ahead, you see an intersection. The main tunnel continues straight, but appears to get progressively narrower after about 50 feet. Other tunnels branch off to the right and left from the intersection. The ground is littered with debris, as if the mining operations in the area were abandoned very abruptly.

There is no illumination of any sort in these tunnels, so this would be a good time to confirm what the PCs are using for a light source. The party might choose to send one of their number to scout ahead, or they might prefer to advance as a group. Whichever way they proceed, you can begin the tactical encounter accordingly. If the PCs go down the left-hand tunnel, they come to what looks like a dead end. However, the wall has been severely weakened by the running water that trickles through the cavern, and is ready to collapse. If the gricks on the other side of the wall become aware of the PCs (which happens automatically if a Tainted character comes within 20 feet) then they will surge forward, toppling the wall onto the party and initiating combat. Alternatively, if the PCs enter combat with one of the individual gricks down the right-hand or center tunnels, you can have the other gricks and the gibbering mouther break through the wall and flank the PCs from the other side.

When the PCs first catch a glimpse of one of the gricks, read the following:

A worm-like creature with thick, rubbery skin slithers along the tunnel. Its mouth resembles a huge beak surrounded by four long tentacles, each of which is tipped with a vicious-looking spike.

When the PCs first catch a glimpse of the gibbering mouther, read the following:

An ooze-like creature covered with eyes and mouths floats on the surface of the water. The ground around it seems to warp and buckle, as the monstrosity's endless gibbering of nonsensical noises and phrases seems to undermine the very fabric of reality around it.

The aberrations are nesting in this area (drawn by the presence of the corrupted crystals) and will fight to the death. The crystal formation that the PCs are searching for is actually at the bottom of the small lake shown on the map.

Features of the Area

This area has a few important features.

Illumination: None. The PCs must provide their own light sources. The monsters all have darkvision.

Ceiling: The ceiling in the tunnels averages about eight feet. Although the grick alpha is Large, it is low to the ground and does not have to squeeze in the tunnels, unless it is forced to enter a space smaller than 2x2. The ceiling in the cave is natural, rising to about 15 feet.

Column: The column shown in the central tunnel is part of the cave wall. The tunnel narrows to one square wide at the indicated point.

Water: The water shown on the tactical map is 10 feet deep, requiring characters to swim if they enter those squares. The water is extremely cold, but it is not difficult to swim (DC 10 Athletics). See PH 183 for

details on swimming, and DMG 45 for the effects of aquatic combat. The gibbering mouther has a swim speed and is able to move through the water without needing to make skill checks. The gricks have a climb speed and prefer to skirt the edges of the water by going along the walls.

Collapsing Wall: The two squares shown on the map look like an ordinary cave wall (but see the trap's statistics block for Perception and other skill checks that can enable the PCs to detect this hazard). If the PCs enter the area and the grick senses their presence, it will crash through the wall, triggering the trap. This can be a very dynamic way to start the combat encounter, but if the PCs are making an effort to explore carefully, then you can reward them for their caution by enabling them to bypass this hazard. The gricks can still collapse the wall, even if it doesn't hit anyone, to open up the tunnel for additional tactical opportunities.

Tactics

The gricks are pack hunters, attacking viciously. They have been enjoying a diet of the occasional miner who succumbs to the siren song of the corrupted crystals and wanders down this tunnel, but such snacks do little to sate their voracious appetites. The gricks attempt to gang up on a single character, taking advantage of their *expert flanker* ability to tear that victim to pieces before moving on to the next. The grick alpha makes a *tentacle rake* attack and grabs on, biting the creature on subsequent rounds while using *pinning grip* to allow the other gricks to rip the grabbed creature to shreds.

The gibbering mouther and the gricks are considered allies for the purpose of the mouther's *warped ground* ability. The gricks have been in the area long enough to have developed immunity to the mouther's *gibbering* as well, so they cannot be dazed by it. The mouther attempts to position itself so that its aura hampers the PCs' movement, and then attempts to daze as many characters as it can, using its *gibbering* power, and then use *gibbering feast* to damage all the creatures it has dazed. It then begins biting the nearest target until its *gibbering feast* power recharges.

All of the aberrations have the ability to sense the presence of Tainted characters. This grants them the equivalent of the tremorsense ability with a range of 4 squares (20 feet), but only for Tainted characters.

Scaling the Encounter

Make the following adjustments to the combat based on the number of PCs present.

Four PCs: Remove one of the gricks (the one shown in the right-hand tunnel).

Six PCs: Add another grick.

Ending the Encounter

Once the PCs defeat the gibbering mouther and the gricks, they are free to search the area. The crystal formation that they seek isn't immediately obvious, but if anyone thinks to dive down to the bottom of the pool, that character discovers a narrow water-filled crack that seems to have been burrowed into the stone. That crack is filled with corrupted crystals. The crystals flicker dimly but their light isn't bright enough to cut through the murky water. (If the PCs don't think to search the pool, you can allow them to make Perception checks to notice a faint glimmer of light coming from somewhere beneath the water.)

Once they discover the crystals, the PCs can analyze them to learn more about the spread of the corruption. See the "Triangulation" scene in **Encounter 2** for details on what they can learn from the tainted aura.

If the PCs win this battle and are able to analyze the corrupted crystal cluster, it counts as a "successful scene" for resolving the overall skill challenge in **Encounter 2**.

Experience Points

The characters receive 375/520 experience points each for defeating the aberrations.

Treasure

At the back of the cave, the PCs find the half-dissolved remains of the gricks' most recent victims. The gricks eat all the meat and the mouther dissolves the bones with its acid. This leaves little more than a putrid puddle of watery flesh for the PCs to find. Nevertheless, there is still a little bit of undigested material remaining. If the PCs can stomach slopping through the pureed bodies, they discover a diamond worth 25/40 gp and a pair of *strikebacks* (magical gloves; see the New Rules section for details).

Encounter 4: "Gibbering Nest" Statistics (Low Level)

Grick — **Level 7 Brute**
Medium aberrant beast — XP 300

Initiative +4 **Senses** Perception +10; darkvision
HP 96; **Bloodied** 48
AC 19; **Fortitude** 19, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 15
Resist 5 against effects that target AC
Speed 6, climb 4

m **Tentacle Rake** (standard; at-will)
+10 vs. AC; 2d6 + 4 damage, and ongoing 5 damage (save ends).

Expert Flanker
The grick gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls against an enemy it is flanking.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** --
Skills Endurance +11, Stealth +9
Str 18 (+7) **Dex** 13 (+4) **Wis** 14 (+5)
Con 16 (+6) **Int** 2 (-1) **Cha** 7 (+1)

Grick Alpha — **Level 9 Brute (Leader)**
Large aberrant beast — XP 400

Initiative +5 **Senses** Perception +11; darkvision
HP 116; **Bloodied** 58
AC 21; **Fortitude** 22, **Reflex** 17, **Will** 18
Resist 5 against effects that target AC
Speed 7, climb 4

m **Tentacle Rake** (standard; at-will)
Reach 2; +13 vs. AC; 2d8 + 5 damage, and the target is grabbed (until escape) and takes ongoing 5 damage (save ends).

M **Vicious Bite** (standard; at-will)
Grabbed target only; automatic hit; 1d8 + 5 damage.

Expert Flanker
The grick alpha gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls against an enemy it is flanking.

Pinning Grip
The grick alpha's allies gain a +2 bonus to attack rolls against an enemy grabbed by this creature.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** --
Skills Endurance +12, Stealth +10
Str 20 (+9) **Dex** 13 (+5) **Wis** 15 (+6)
Con 16 (+7) **Int** 2 (+0) **Cha** 7 (+2)

Gibbering Mouther — **Level 10 Controller**
Medium aberrant natural beast — XP 500

Initiative +7 **Senses** Perception +4; all-around vision, darkvision
Warped Ground aura 3; enemies treat the area within the aura as difficult terrain.
HP 110; **Bloodied** 55
AC 22; **Fortitude** 23, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 19
Speed 5, swim 5

m **Bite** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Acid**
+15 vs. AC; 1d6 + 6 damage, and ongoing 5 acid damage (save ends).

C **Gibbering** (free; once on the gibbering mouther's turn before it takes other actions; at-will) ✦ **Psychic**
Close burst 5; deafened creatures are immune; +12 vs. Will; the target is dazed until the end of the gibbering mouther's next turn.

M **Gibbering Feast** (standard; recharge 6) ✦ **Acid**
Close burst 5; unnatural mouths appear on dazed creatures in the burst and bite them; +15 vs. AC; 1d6 + 6 damage, and ongoing 5 acid damage (save ends).

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** --
Str 19 (+9) **Dex** 14 (+7) **Wis** 8 (+4)
Con 22 (+11) **Int** 4 (+2) **Cha** 18 (+9)

Collapsing Wall — **Level 7 Lurker**
Trap — XP 75

Trap: A cave wall is rigged to collapse, damaging and trapping any characters caught in the area.

Nature, Dungeoneering, or Perception
DC 14: One section of the wall is packed with dirt and small stones. It's clearly meant to camouflage something.
DC 19: A portion of the cave wall looks very unstable. It could easily collapse, showering the nearby area with rocks and debris.

Trigger
The wall collapses when a creature on the far side of the wall pushes on it.

Attack
Immediate Reaction **Close** blast 2
Targets: Creatures in blast
Attack: +10 vs. Reflex
Hit: 3d10 + 5 damage, and the target is immobilized and knocked prone (until escape).
Miss: Half damage and push 1.
Effect: The trap squares and the blast area become difficult terrain.

Countermeasures
✦ An adjacent character can delay the wall's collapse with a DC 19 Thievery check. (This can only be done before the trap is triggered.)
✦ Immobilized characters can use the escape action against DC 14 to free themselves, moving 1 square but still prone.
✦ A character not immobilized by the rubble can free an adjacent trapped character with a DC 19 Strength check.

Encounter 4: "Gibbering Nest" Statistics (High Level)

Grick (Level 9) **Level 9 Brute**
Medium aberrant beast XP 400

Initiative +5 **Senses** Perception +11; darkvision
HP 116; **Bloodied** 58
AC 21; **Fortitude** 21, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 17
Resist 5 against effects that target AC
Speed 6, climb 4

m **Tentacle Rake** (standard; at-will)
+12 vs. AC; 2d6 + 5 damage, and ongoing 5 damage (save ends).

Expert Flanker
The grick gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls against an enemy it is flanking.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** --
Skills Endurance +12, Stealth +10
Str 18 (+8) **Dex** 13 (+5) **Wis** 14 (+6)
Con 16 (+7) **Int** 2 (+0) **Cha** 7 (+2)

Grick Alpha (Level 11) **Level 11 Brute (Leader)**
Large aberrant beast XP 600

Initiative +6 **Senses** Perception +12; darkvision
HP 136; **Bloodied** 68
AC 23; **Fortitude** 24, **Reflex** 19, **Will** 20
Resist 5 against effects that target AC
Speed 7, climb 4

m **Tentacle Rake** (standard; at-will)
Reach 2; +15 vs. AC; 2d8 + 6 damage, and the target is grabbed (until escape) and takes ongoing 5 damage (save ends).

M **Vicious Bite** (standard; at-will)
Grabbed target only; automatic hit; 1d8 + 6 damage.

Expert Flanker
The grick alpha gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls against an enemy it is flanking.

Pinning Grip
The grick alpha's allies gain a +2 bonus to attack rolls against an enemy grabbed by this creature.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** --
Skills Endurance +13, Stealth +11
Str 20 (+10) **Dex** 13 (+6) **Wis** 15 (+7)
Con 16 (+8) **Int** 2 (+1) **Cha** 7 (+3)

Gibbering Mouther (Level 12) **Level 12 Controller**
Medium aberrant natural beast XP 700

Initiative +8 **Senses** Perception +5; all-around vision, darkvision
Warped Ground aura 3; enemies treat the area within the aura as difficult terrain.
HP 126; **Bloodied** 63
AC 24; **Fortitude** 25, **Reflex** 18, **Will** 21
Speed 5, swim 5

m **Bite** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Acid**
+17 vs. AC; 1d6 + 7 damage, and ongoing 5 acid damage (save ends).

C **Gibbering** (free; once on the gibbering mouther's turn before it takes other actions; at-will) ✦ **Psychic**
Close burst 5; deafened creatures are immune; +14 vs. Will; the target is dazed until the end of the gibbering mouther's next turn.

M **Gibbering Feast** (standard; recharge 6) ✦ **Acid**
Close burst 5; unnatural mouths appear on dazed creatures in the burst and bite them; +17 vs. AC; 1d6 + 7 damage, and ongoing 5 acid damage (save ends).

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** --
Str 19 (+10) **Dex** 14 (+8) **Wis** 8 (+5)
Con 22 (+12) **Int** 4 (+3) **Cha** 18 (+10)

Collapsing Wall (Level 9) **Level 9 Lurker**
Trap XP 100

Trap: A cave wall is rigged to collapse, damaging and trapping any characters caught in the area.

Nature, Dungeoneering, or Perception
DC 15: One section of the wall is packed with dirt and small stones. It's clearly meant to camouflage something.
DC 20: A portion of the cave wall looks very unstable. It could easily collapse, showering the nearby area with rocks and debris.

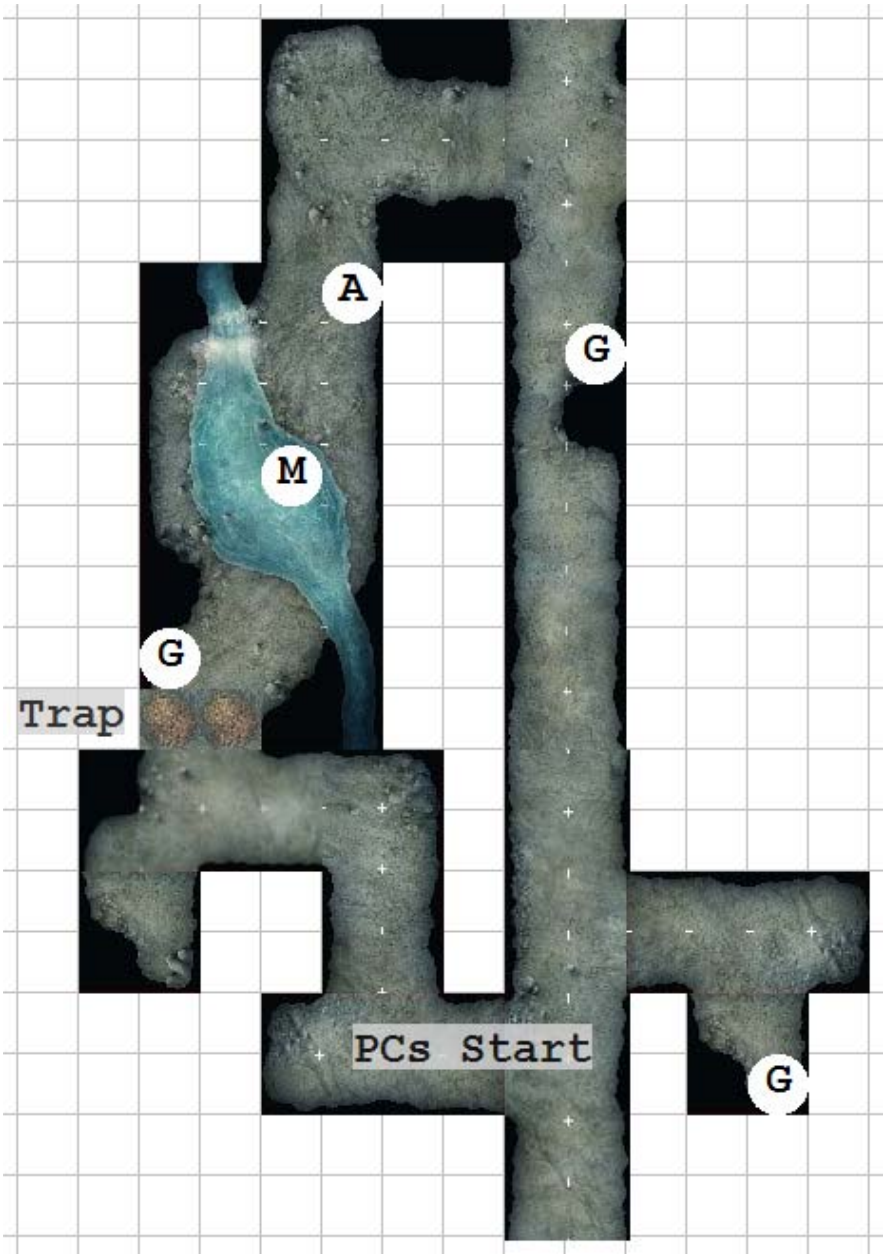
Trigger
The wall collapses when a creature on the far side of the wall pushes on it.

Attack
Immediate Reaction **Close** blast 2
Targets: Creatures in blast
Attack: +12 vs. Reflex
Hit: 3d10 + 6 damage, and the target is immobilized and knocked prone (until escape).
Miss: Half damage and push 1.
Effect: The trap squares and the blast area become difficult terrain.

Countermeasures
✦ An adjacent character can delay the wall's collapse with a DC 20 Thievery check. (This can only be done before the trap is triggered.)
✦ Immobilized characters can use the escape action against DC 15 to free themselves, moving 1 square but still prone.
✦ A character not immobilized by the rubble can free an adjacent trapped character with a DC 20 Strength check.

Encounter 4: "Gibbering Nest" Map

Lost Caverns of the Underdark		
Tunnel / Tunnel	4x2	x2
Tunnel End / L-Tunnel	4x2	x1
Tunnel End / Pit	2x2	x2
Cave Wall / Tunnel	4x2	x1
Floor / Tunnel	8x2	x1
Floor / Tunnel w/Stream	4x8	x1
Cave Corner / Tunnel Corner	4x4	x1
Cave Pillar / Sand	1x1	x2
Cave Corner / Tunnel Intersection	4x2	x1
Wide Tunnel / Tunnel Intersections	8x2	x1



Encounter 5: Dining Philosophers

Encounter Level 9/11 (2,104/2,904 XP)

Setup

This encounter includes the following creatures at the low tier:
2 grells (Level 6) (G)
1 grell philosopher (Level 7) (P)
8 aboleth servitors (Level 6) (S)
8 human rabble (H)

This encounter includes the following creatures at the high tier:
2 grells (Level 8) (G)
1 grell philosopher (Level 9) (P)
8 aboleth servitors (Level 8) (S)
8 human rabble (H)

The PCs cannot reach this scene until they have successfully completed the investigation skill challenge (**Encounter 2**). By locating and studying four of the corrupted clusters of Iomic crystals, the PCs gain enough information about the strength and direction of the tainted aura to be able to triangulate the position where the center of the corrupting effect must be located. That leads them to a spot that isn't marked on their map. It takes about two hours to get to this location, as the PCs must go very far off the main tunnels in order to work their way toward the mountain's heart.

Characters who are trained in Dungeoneering and who look at the map of the known veins of Iomic crystal realize that the target location is perfectly placed – it is at the center of all the known veins, and no doubt many others that haven't yet been tapped, meaning that the corruption can radiate outward from this point to affect every single crystal in the entire mountain, turning Ioma into a massive focus for the Sovereignty's evil ritual.

The Doorway

Before the PCs can interrupt the ritual, they have to find the entrance. Read or paraphrase the following:

The location you seek is not part of the mine shafts and tunnels that have been marked on your map. You are forced to make your own way through the natural caverns and tunnels that snake through the heart of the great mountain of Ioma. After several hours of arduous travel, you finally reach the destination that you have calculated must be the source of the corruption that is spreading through the crystal veins. And yet… you see nothing but a featureless stone wall. This location seems no different than any of the other endless miles of tunnels that you have traversed recently.

Even though this area is not part of any known mine tunnel, the grells are aware that one of their thralls might be followed at some point, so they have placed a powerful illusion over this entire tunnel. However, they did not count on the possibility that someone bearing the aboleth taint who was not a thrall could come along. If there is at least one Tainted character in the party, read the following:

You hear a whisper as if someone was standing right behind you. The sound is faint, but you can hear it clearly. It is a single phrase, in a language that you know you have never heard spoken but nevertheless can understand perfectly. Every syllable resonates with the wrongness that has spread throughout your body and soul, urging you onward, urging you to submit your will to the ancient power of the aboleths. You are a thrall… you are a thrall… you are a thrall… you must serve.

For the briefest instant, you catch a glimpse of a portal, a doorway in the stone. Yet it is gone before you can fully register what you have seen, as your mind recoils against the alien voices. When you look in the place where you saw the doorway, you are unable to find anything. When your thoughts subside and the whispering rises in your mind once more, you can almost, but not quite, see it once more, out of the corner of your eye.

The idea here is that only a character who is under the domination of the Abolethic Sovereignty can perceive the door that leads to the ritual chamber. So, in order for the PCs to get past this obstacle, one of the Tainted characters must willingly submit to the insistent song in his or her mind and temporarily surrender free will. Don't roll attacks against the Tainted characters' Will defenses; this must be a voluntary act, done without any knowledge of whether the character will be able to break free from the spell or not. If a character decides to submit, that character's eyes roll back and his or her movements become jerky, like a marionette. The character begins whispering "thrall… thrall… thrall…" and staggers over to a section of wall, scratching at the stone. Moments later, the outline of a door is revealed. That character will begin combat with the **dominated condition (save ends)** but do not tell this to the players

yet. The thrall pries the door open and shambles through, and the rest of the party may follow.

If there are no Tainted characters in the party, then the above scene makes a little bit less sense. You can either run with it anyway, choosing one of the PCs to hear the faint whispers, or you can simply resolve this with Perception and Insight skill checks to pierce the illusion and find the secret door (DC 19/20 for each). However, if the door is not opened by a Tainted creature, then the person who does open the door is assaulted by the power of the Far Realm, which warps and twists the character's form, causing tentacles to sprout from his nose, mouth, eyes, and ears. The character loses two healing surges. After a few seconds, the effect fades.

The Ritual Chamber

The site of the ritual is carved from the very heart of the mountain. The grells have magically excavated this chamber to the precise dimensions needed to maximize the resonance of their aboleth-empowered magic. Read or paraphrase the following:

As you pass through the doorway, you are momentarily blinded by the brilliant light of the chamber beyond. It is like staring directly into the sun, at least if the sun were purple. This place appears to have been carved directly out of the heart of what must be a massive vein of Iomic crystal. The walls, floor, ceiling, and every surface are made of pure crystal, the amethyst surfaces gleaming and reflecting light in all directions. The chamber is shaped to precise dimensions, with three tiers rising at various heights, linked by ramps and staircases, all cut from the crystal, none showing any mark of tool or craft.

It appears that you are not the first thralls to be drawn to this location. A number of humans, miners and laborers, are gathered at the bottom of two staircases. They prostrate themselves before four glowing columns of energy that stretch from floor to ceiling, some fifty feet high. Their murmured voices all seem to be echoing the same chant, incomprehensible yet terribly disturbing. They appear oblivious to your presence.

Not so oblivious, however, are the three creatures floating at various points around the room. They look like flying brains, with sharp beaks and a mass of spiked tentacles dangling to the ground. Two of these aberrations immediately begin drifting toward you, while the third, at the very apex of the chamber, seems to be focused on weaving the energy of the glowing columns together to form a single point. The feeling of taint and corruption radiating from that point is palpable. It seems to be infusing the crystals with dark energy, more and more twisted power pouring into the heart of the mountain with each passing second.

Features of the Area

Illumination: The pulsing energy from the glowing pillars fills the entire room with bright illumination.

Elevation: The height of each level is marked on the tactical map. The PCs enter at ground level (0 feet). The first pair of corners is 10 feet up the stairs. From there, ramps rise to either side, curving up another 10 feet to the second set of corners. Finally, another set of staircases connect to the topmost level, which is 30 feet above the ground. The ceiling rises another 20 feet above that, giving the room a total height of 50 feet.

Stairs and Ramps: The staircases are steep, and are treated as difficult terrain. The ramps are considered normal terrain, but they do not have any banisters or other restraints, meaning it is possible for characters to be pushed off the ramps and fall to the ground below, suffering 1d10 points of damage per 10 feet fallen. The minions may try to bull rush PCs off the ramps rather than attacking them for damage.

Braziers / Columns: The four flaming braziers shown on the tactical map are actually columns of corrupted energy. They stretch from floor to ceiling and are the source of power for the ritual. The PCs cannot affect them until after the grells have been dealt with, however. Any non-aberrant creature that enters a column takes 10 points of psychic damage and is pushed back 1 square. Aberrant creatures take no damage, but are still pushed back.

Altar: The altar on the very top level is the focus for the grells' ritual. It cannot be disrupted while the grell philosopher is alive. When the PCs enter, the ritual has progressed to the point where it is entering its final stages, meaning that the philosopher does not need to spend actions in order for the ritual to continue.

Tactics

The grell philosopher hangs back from battle, allowing its kin to enter melee. It uses *lightning lance* to blind enemies and *psychic storm* against multiple foes. It saves *venomous mind* until enemies get close.

The other grells attempt to use *tentacle grab* followed by *venomous bite*. Once a creature has been stunned, it is usually pretty easy for the grell to finish it off. However, if a grell is faced with multiple foes, it will use its *tentacle rake* instead, since that deals more damage and can also slow foes down, allowing the grell to move to a more advantageous location.

Although all of the grells can fly, and the ceiling is 50 feet high, their purpose in being here is to make sure the ritual is completed successfully. So, they will not flee, although they will use their flight to best tactical advantage. With their superior reach, they might be able to strike at PCs on the ramps or platforms from a position where the PC is unable to attack back.

The aboleth servitors are simple and mindless. They surge forward, attempt to bludgeon the PCs into submission, and create flanking opportunities for the grells. Once the PCs get onto the ramps, the servitors throw themselves at the characters with abandon, trying to bull rush the PCs off the ramps and cause them to plunge to the ground below. Anything to keep the intruders away from their beloved masters!

As long as the grell philosopher is alive, all of the aboleth servitors are considered to be within 10 squares of their aboleth master, and the entire room is considered to be under the effects of an aboleth's *mucus haze*. So, the servitors gain the benefits of their *aboleth devotion*, and do not suffer the drawbacks. (The PCs do not actually suffer the *mucus haze* effect; it just applies to the servitors.) When the grell philosopher dies, any remaining servitors are essentially out of the fight.

Note that all of the servitors were once innocent men and women, so ask the PCs as they drop each servitor whether they want to kill it or knock it unconscious. This will affect the rewards the PCs get at the end of the adventure.

During the battle, the human rabble (those who aren't turned into servitors) simply ignore everything that is going on. They continue bowing and scraping before the energy pillars, droning their endless chant. The PCs might want to be careful not to accidentally kill them with area effects.

Tainted Characters

There are several effects that the Aboleth Taint story object has on PCs in this combat.

First, whichever Tainted character opened the doorway begins the combat with the dominated condition (save ends). This means that for at least one round, that PC will turn on his allies. See PH 277 for details. The PC is considered to be dominated by the grell philosopher.

Second, every round, the PCs who have the Aboleth Taint are subject to an attack by the power of the Far Realm. This represents the corruption that they carry within themselves responding to the power of the ritual. Each round, at the beginning of his or her turn, a Tainted character suffers a Far Realm Taint attack. (The dominated character is not subjected to this attack until he saves against the dominated condition.)

Far Realm Taint: +10 / +12 vs. Will
Hit: The target is dazed until the start of its next turn. After a particular creature has been dazed once by this ability, any subsequent successful attacks against that creature instead apply a -2 penalty to the creature's defenses until the start of its next turn.

Naturally, you should play this up for maximum effect. The Tainted characters see tentacles reaching out from the columns of energy to attack them, they feel spikes of pain driving into their minds, they feel the weight of crushing despair urging them to submit to the domination of the aboleths, parts of their bodies become twisted and corrupted (without changing their game statistics other than as described in the ability), and so forth. Let your imagination run wild. The PCs will be freed of the taint as soon as they win this battle, so this is your last chance to have some fun with them.

Scaling the Encounter

Make the following adjustments to the combat based on the number of PCs present.

Four PCs: Change one of the grells to a lesser grell.
Six PCs: Add a lesser grell.

Lesser Grell: A lesser grell has the same game statistics as a regular grell, except that it is a standard monster instead of an elite monster. This means it has half the hit points of the elite version, does not get a bonus on saving throws, and does not have an action point. You can also reduce its AC and Reflex defenses by 2 points each if you want to give the PCs a slightly easier encounter.

For extra cruelty, or if you think the PCs are having too easy a time with this encounter, after a few rounds of combat, have the grell philosopher activate a special ability (not found in its stat block) that transforms the other 8 human rabble into 8 more aboleth servitors. You can transform them all at once, or you can transform them in two groups of 4, a round or two apart. Only do this if you are certain that the PCs can handle it.

Ending the Encounter

Once the PCs defeat the grell, they can turn their attention to stopping the ritual (**Encounter 6**).

Experience Points

The characters earn 420/580 experience points each for defeating the grells and their servitors.

Treasure

The grells carry no treasure.

Encounter 5: "Dining Philosophers" Statistics (Low Level)

Grell (Level 6) **Level 6 Elite Soldier**
Medium aberrant magical beast (blind) XP 500

Initiative +9 **Senses** Perception +9; blindsight 12
HP 140; **Bloodied** 70
AC 21 (23 while the grell has an enemy grabbed); **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 19, **Will** 16
Immune gaze
Saving Throws +2
Speed 1 (clumsy), fly 6 (hover)
Action Points 1

m **Tentacle Rake** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Poison**
Reach 2; +11 vs. AC; 3d8 + 4 damage, and the target is slowed and takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends both).

M **Tentacle Grab** (standard; at-will)
Reach 2; +11 vs. Fortitude; 2d8 + 4 damage, and the target is grabbed. The grell can grab only one creature at a time.

M **Venomous Bite** (minor 1/round; at-will) ✦ **Poison**
Grabbed target only; +11 vs. AC; 1d8 + 4 damage, and the target is stunned (save ends).

Alignment Evil **Languages** Deep Speech
Skills Stealth +17
Str 12 (+4) **Dex** 19 (+7) **Wis** 12 (+4)
Con 14 (+5) **Int** 10 (+3) **Cha** 9 (+2)

Aboleth Servitor (Level 6) **Level 6 Minion**
Medium aberrant humanoid (aquatic) XP 63

Initiative +5 **Senses** Perception +3; darkvision
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.
AC 20; **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 13, **Will** 11
Speed 6, swim 6

m **Slam** (standard; at-will)
+9 vs. AC; 5 damage.

Aboleth Devotion
An aboleth servitor gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls against enemies in an aboleth's mucus haze aura. If an aboleth servitor is ever more than 10 squares from its aboleth master, the servitor becomes dazed, weakened, and immobilized until its master moves within 10 squares of it.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common
Str 20 (+8) **Dex** 15 (+5) **Wis** 10 (+3)
Con 16 (+6) **Int** 10 (+3) **Cha** 10 (+3)

Grell Philosopher (Level 7) **Level 7 Elite Controller**
Medium aberrant magical beast (blind) XP 600

Initiative +8 **Senses** Perception +10; blindsight 12
HP 160; **Bloodied** 80
AC 23; **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 19
Immune gaze; **Resist** 20 lightning
Saving Throws +2
Speed 1 (clumsy), fly 6 (hover)
Action Points 1

m **Tentacle Rake** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Poison**
Reach 2; +13 vs. AC; 3d8 + 3 damage, and the target is slowed and takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends both).

R **Lightning Lance** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Lightning**
Ranged 10; +10 vs. Reflex; 3d6 + 4 lightning damage, and the target is blinded (save ends).

A **Psychic Storm** (standard; recharge 6) ✦ **Psychic, Zone**
Area burst 2 within 10; +10 vs. Will; 3d8 + 1 psychic damage, and the target is dazed (save ends). The psychic storm is a zone that lasts until the end of the encounter. Any creature entering the zone is dazed (save ends).

C **Venomous Mind** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic**
Close burst 3; targets enemies; +11 vs. Will; 2d8 + 3 psychic damage, and the target must choose a random target for any melee attacks it makes (save ends).

Alignment Evil **Languages** Deep Speech
Skills Arcana +11, Stealth +18
Str 14 (+5) **Dex** 21 (+8) **Wis** 14 (+5)
Con 16 (+6) **Int** 16 (+6) **Cha** 13 (+4)

Human Rabble **Level 2 Minion**
Medium natural humanoid XP --

Initiative +1 **Senses** Perception +1
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.
AC 15; **Fortitude** 13, **Reflex** 11, **Will** 11; see also *mob rule*
Speed 6

m **Club** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+6 vs. AC; 4 damage.

Mob Rule
The human rabble gains a +2 power bonus to all defenses while at least two other human rabble are within 5 squares of it.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common
Str 14 (+3) **Dex** 10 (+1) **Wis** 10 (+1)
Con 12 (+2) **Int** 9 (+0) **Cha** 11 (+1)
Equipment club

Encounter 5: "Dining Philosophers" Statistics (High Level)

Grell (Level 8) **Level 8 Elite Soldier**
Medium aberrant magical beast (blind) XP 700

Initiative +10 **Senses** Perception +10; blindsight 12
HP 172; **Bloodied** 86
AC 23 (25 while the grell has an enemy grabbed); **Fortitude** 20, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 18
Immune gaze
Saving Throws +2
Speed 1 (clumsy), fly 6 (hover)
Action Points 1

m **Tentacle Rake** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Poison**
Reach 2; +13 vs. AC; 3d8 + 5 damage, and the target is slowed and takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends both).

M **Tentacle Grab** (standard; at-will)
Reach 2; +13 vs. Fortitude; 2d8 + 5 damage, and the target is grabbed. The grell can grab only one creature at a time.

M **Venomous Bite** (minor 1/round; at-will) ✦ **Poison**
Grabbed target only; +13 vs. AC; 1d8 + 5 damage, and the target is stunned (save ends).

Alignment Evil **Languages** Deep Speech
Skills Stealth +18
Str 12 (+5) **Dex** 19 (+8) **Wis** 12 (+5)
Con 14 (+6) **Int** 10 (+4) **Cha** 9 (+3)

Aboleth Servitor (Level 8) **Level 8 Minion**
Medium aberrant humanoid (aquatic) XP 88

Initiative +6 **Senses** Perception +4; darkvision
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.
AC 22; **Fortitude** 20, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 13
Speed 6, swim 6

m **Slam** (standard; at-will)
+11 vs. AC; 5 damage.

Aboleth Devotion
An aboleth servitor gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls against enemies in an aboleth's mucus haze aura. If an aboleth servitor is ever more than 10 squares from its aboleth master, the servitor becomes dazed, weakened, and immobilized until its master moves within 10 squares of it.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common
Str 20 (+9) **Dex** 15 (+6) **Wis** 10 (+4)
Con 16 (+7) **Int** 10 (+4) **Cha** 10 (+4)

Grell Philosopher (Level 9) **Level 9 Elite Controller**
Medium aberrant magical beast (blind) XP 800

Initiative +9 **Senses** Perception +11; blindsight 12
HP 192; **Bloodied** 96
AC 25; **Fortitude** 19, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 21
Immune gaze; **Resist** 20 lightning
Saving Throws +2
Speed 1 (clumsy), fly 6 (hover)
Action Points 1

m **Tentacle Rake** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Poison**
Reach 2; +15 vs. AC; 3d8 + 4 damage, and the target is slowed and takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends both).

R **Lightning Lance** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Lightning**
Ranged 10; +12 vs. Reflex; 3d6 + 5 lightning damage, and the target is blinded (save ends).

A **Psychic Storm** (standard; recharge 6) ✦ **Psychic, Zone**
Area burst 2 within 10; +12 vs. Will; 3d8 + 2 psychic damage, and the target is dazed (save ends). The psychic storm is a zone that lasts until the end of the encounter. Any creature entering the zone is dazed (save ends).

C **Venomous Mind** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic**
Close burst 3; targets enemies; +13 vs. Will; 2d8 + 4 psychic damage, and the target must choose a random target for any melee attacks it makes (save ends).

Alignment Evil **Languages** Deep Speech
Skills Arcana +12, Stealth +19
Str 14 (+6) **Dex** 21 (+9) **Wis** 14 (+6)
Con 16 (+7) **Int** 16 (+7) **Cha** 13 (+5)

Human Rabble **Level 2 Minion**
Medium natural humanoid XP --

Initiative +1 **Senses** Perception +1
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.
AC 15; **Fortitude** 13, **Reflex** 11, **Will** 11; see also *mob rule*
Speed 6

m **Club** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+6 vs. AC; 4 damage.

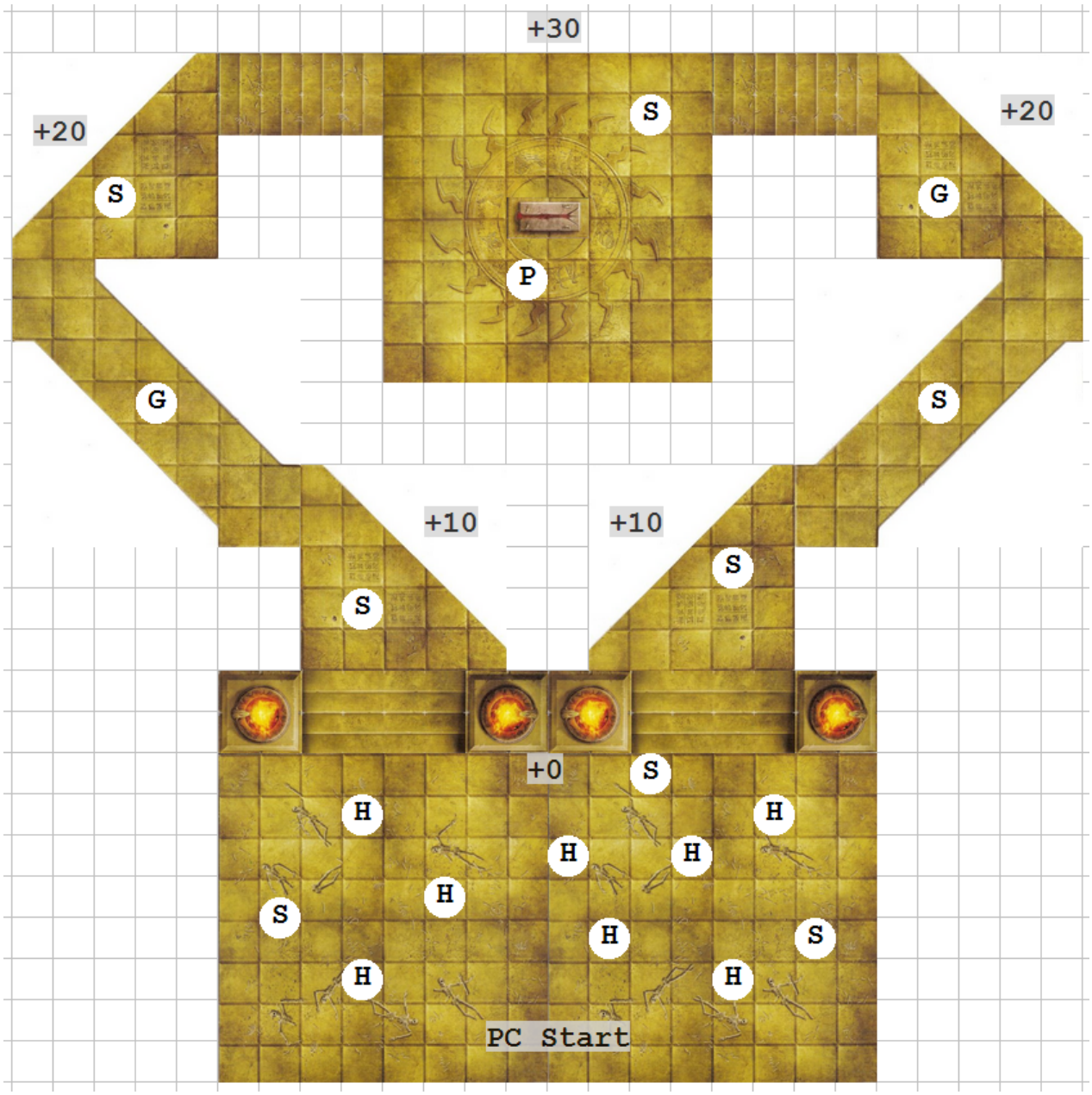
Mob Rule
The human rabble gains a +2 power bonus to all defenses while at least two other human rabble are within 5 squares of it.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common
Str 14 (+3) **Dex** 10 (+1) **Wis** 10 (+1)
Con 12 (+2) **Int** 9 (+0) **Cha** 11 (+1)
Equipment club

Encounter 5: "Dining Philosophers" Map

Dire Tombs

Altar / Portcullis	2x1	x1
Stairs / Hall	4x2	x2
Stairs with Cauldrons / Webs in Hall	8x2	x2
Corner / Runes	5x5	x2
Mummy Corner / Runes	5x5	x2
Diagonal Floor / Diagonal Floor	7x7	x2
Floor w/webs / Floor	8x8	x2
Throne Room / Sun Room	8x8	x1



The elevation of each level is shown on the map (+0 feet at the entrance, +30 feet at the very top level)

Encounter 6: Purification

Setup

The PCs have come to the heart of the corruption that has been plaguing Ioma. They have defeated the minions of the Abolethic Sovereignty who sought to unleash a terrible ritual across the entire Nelanther Isles. Now all that remains is to cut the tenuous threads linking this place to the Far Realm, and the Sovereignty's plans will be undone.

The aberrations have been destroyed, but the ritual seems to have taken on a life of its own. The profane energies of the Far Realm continue to pour into the crystal chamber in all directions, radiating out through the entire mountain. The ritual seems to be building to some sort of crescendo. As the power builds, within the crystalline walls, you begin to see dark, amorphous shapes moving. Tentacles scrape against the other side of the crystals even though you know that there is nothing there but solid rock. The boundaries between the world and the Far Realm are weakening in this place. You sense that you haven't got much time to reverse the corruption before the floodgates open.

Tainted characters must force themselves to take action during this scene, as the corruption within them actively fights their free will, trying to prevent them from participating in the party's efforts to undo the ritual. A Tainted character must succeed on a saving throw (with a -2 penalty) to take any action that would work to disrupt or destroy the ritual. A failed saving throw means the character falls prone, gibbering and thrashing madly, for one round.

Breaking the Ritual

You can allow the player characters to unmake the ritual, if they are so inclined, or you can let them call in the cavalry at this point. The death of the grell philosopher has set off an uncontrolled magical chain reaction that Zylem and the other Cowled Wizards can sense even through the wards that normally protect the island. They lower the remaining wards long enough to allow themselves to teleport to the ritual chamber, where they quickly assess the situation and conclude that someone must step into the pillars of energy to break the flow of energy and disrupt the ritual. If the PCs have been inquisitive throughout the adventure, however, they will probably want to figure this out for themselves. An Arcana check (DC 20) would allow the party to evaluate the situation and come to the same conclusion.

There are four pillars of energy, but any number of characters can step into them simultaneously. This insertion of non-aberrant energy (the characters' own bodies) is sufficient to disrupt the flow and cause the ritual to fall apart, reversing all the corruption that has occurred. The following text assumes that at least one PC participates in breaking the ritual; modify it as necessary. (Tainted characters might have a tough choice to make, as they can't be sure if entering the pillars will cleanse them of the corruption or magnify it.)

Read the following when the characters confront the ritual's power directly:

Stepping into the pillar of energy, you feel a powerful force rip into your body. It takes a tremendous effort of willpower simply to hold yourself in place. The racing energies pluck and tear at you, pulling you in all directions simultaneously. All around you, howling madness rages. Whispers, singing, screaming, babbling… all this and more envelops you in a haze of insanity.

But something about you, the reality of your existence, is anathema to the energies of the ritual. You are not an aberration; you are of the world, and the world is of you. The energy pounding against your body seems to slacken and lose its intensity. The sense of corruption, of absolute wrongness, begins to fade and dissipate. You dimly sense that all around you, the tainted crystals are burning with a brilliant, purifying light, blinding and glorious to behold.

A single image burns into your mind, a glyph-scribed obelisk wrapped in an eternal storm, soaring above the world. Tentacles slither and writhe along its surface, as the glyphs constantly shift and mutate, incomprehensible yet speaking a truth so horrible that it would shatter your mind to contain it. And within that obelisk…

The vision ends abruptly, like a door slamming shut in your mind's eye. Suddenly you realize that you are no longer standing within the pillar of energy, that you are lying on the cold crystal floor of the ritual chamber, and the incessant purple light has faded away. A sense of peace washes over you, and you know that the dark ritual has been reversed.

Ioma is safe.

Concluding the Adventure

Once the ritual has been dissipated, the corruption of all the Iomic crystals that were affected by the Sovereignty (both here and elsewhere in the world) is immediately reversed. All of the miners and other people of Ioma Town who were transformed into aboleth servitors have their curses broken, and the PCs are cleansed of any aboleth taint as well.

The Cowled Wizards and the High Houses of Amn are extremely grateful to the characters, as are the residents of Ioma Town. Working together, these three groups produce a special token for each player character – a customized Iomic crystal, cut and set in a style of the character's choosing, with the symbols of the various merchant houses of Amn visible in the facets depending on how you angle the crystal toward the light. This token marks each character as being highly favored in Amn (see the story object CORE14 *Iomic Sigil of Amn* for details).

Read or paraphrase the following:

Thanks to your efforts, the plans of the Abolethic Sovereignty have been thwarted. The residents of Ioma Town, the Cowled Wizards, and the ruling Houses of Amn combine their efforts to present each of you with a personal token, a unique Iomic crystal that has been carved and shaped to your specifications. Such favors carry great weight in the right circles.

With the curse broken and the Iomic crystals cleansed, life can return to normal here. You may take satisfaction in a job well done. The Cowled Wizards offer to transport you via mundane and magical means to any place you wish to go. Truly, you are on the cusp of becoming far more than just an ordinary adventurer.

And yet, every once in a while, you find yourself staring off into empty space, with maddening whispers echoing in your brain while images of a cyclopean, rune-carved, tentacle-covered obelisk writhe unbidden through your mind…

Treasure

The Cowled Wizards offer to create magic items for the characters using some of the Iomic crystal fragments that they discovered during their adventure. Cleansed of any taint, these items are unique in their appearance, but otherwise function exactly like normal magic items of their type. The PCs are offered either *diamond bracers* (low-level only) or *bracers of iron arcana* (high-level only), along with a *solitare (citrine)*. See the New Rules section for details on these magic items, which come from the Adventurer's Vault sourcebook. If any of the PCs wish to keep the pair of *sending stones*, the Cowled Wizards are happy to oblige.

For characters who are interested in the Cowled Wizards' arcane knowledge, the wizards offer to create a custom ritual book. The character may choose any rituals from the *Player's Handbook* or *Forgotten Realms Player's Guide* to be entered into the book, up to a total market price of 650 gp (low-level only) or 950 gp (high-level only). The total market price of the chosen rituals cannot exceed the listed value. Any unused value is lost.

They don't have much, but the miners and other common folk of Ioma Town are very grateful to the PCs for delivering them from the evil of the Abolethic Sovereignty. They take up a collection, with every man, woman, and child on the island contributing a few copper or silver coins. This amounts to 25 gp per PC, or 50 gp per PC if the characters specifically knocked the aboleth servitors unconscious instead of killing them (which enabled them to be purified and return to their normal lives). It's not much coin for such mighty adventurers, but it's presented with heartfelt gratitude by people who have very little to call their own, so of all the rewards the characters are given, this might be the most valuable.

Experience Points (Quest Award)

For completing the Major Quest and thwarting the Sovereignty's plans, each PC receives an additional 125 / 160 XP. A character must have either the *Contact with the Cowled Wizards* story object from CORE1-3 or the *Aboleth Taint* story object from CORE1-4 in order to qualify for this Major Quest XP award. A character doesn't need to have both story objects; either will do.

A character who doesn't have either of these story objects does not earn the bonus quest XP, but still gets all the other rewards listed in the adventure.

Major Quests must be completed in order, so a 7th-level character who plays this adventure and then goes back and plays CORE1-4 before reaching 8th level still does not qualify for the award.

Each PC who earns the Major Quest award also gets the story object CORE13 *Notice of the Abolethic Sovereignty* to commemorate their accomplishment. This concludes the Major Quest, so the story objects CORE07 *Contact with the Cowled Wizards* and CORE09 *Aboleth Taint* are now resolved and may be voided. CORE13 may well have a purpose in future adventures, however, as the Sovereignty will surely not forget those who have thwarted its plans…

Rewards Summary

At the conclusion of the adventure, the PCs earn experience points, treasure, and possibly story awards. All totals listed here are per PC. A number before the slash is the low-level value; after the slash is the high-level value.

Important DM Information

It is critical that you enter the PC rewards accurately on the tracking form, and ensure that the information is reported and entered online in a timely manner. While players will be able to track their character's information on paper, the online information serves as an important backup and verification of play. Ask the players for their RPGA numbers and character numbers (usually a single digit) when you begin to fill out the tracking form.

Experience Points

Give PCs a full award for each encounter they successfully completed, and a half award if they were unsuccessful. Give no award if the characters did not play the encounter at all.

Encounter 1: Ioma Town
0 / 0 XP
Encounter 2: Triangulation
160 / 240 XP
Encounter 3: Squamous Guardians
320 / 500 XP
Encounter 4: Gibbering Nest
375 / 520 XP
Encounter 5: Dining Philosophers
420 / 580 XP
Quest Award: The Sovereignty Thwarted
125 / 160 XP

Total Possible Experience
1,400 / 2,000 XP

Treasure

Each PC receives treasure in the form of gold pieces as well as one share from a treasure bundle. The treasure bundle may give the PC more gold, a magic item, or some other item of value. Each player makes one selection for their character; players may choose the same treasure bundle. Mark the one-letter bundle ID on the tracking form next to any character that selects a bundle; note that it is possible (and likely) that some characters will not select a bundle for each session of play.

If characters buy or sell magic items or other gear during the adventure (or pay for services) add or subtract that amount from the total gold the PC receives at the end of the adventure. If a player selects an option that gives their character more gold, add that to the gold all characters receive, and ensure you enter the total amount of gold gained (minus any expenditures) online. You can have a negative number and enter that negative online. PCs receive 20% of a magic item's purchase price for any item they sell.

If a player selects a magic weapon or suit of armor for their PC that is not specific on the type of item listed, they must select the exact item at the time they choose that bundle. For example, if a *duelist's weapon +1* is listed as a choice in a bundle, a player selects the form of the weapon amongst the choices possible for that magic item (light blades). If the player selects the item as a *+1 duelist's dagger*, the player writes that information down on the PC's adventure log and the item is forever after that specific weapon.

An asterisk next to a magic item means that it is an item that appears in the **New Rules** section.

Gold per PC
150 / 200 gp
(Encounter 1: 50 / 75 gp, Encounter 3: 25 / 35 gp; Encounter 4: 25 / 40 gp; Conclusion: 25-50 / 25-50 gp)

Each PC Selects One of the Following

Bundle A: PH / FRPG Ritual Book (650 gp value) (low-level version only)
Found in Encounter 6

Bundle B: *diamond bracers** (low-level version only, AV, 9th level)
Found in Encounter 6

Bundle C: *rope of climbing* (PH, 10th level)
Found in Encounter 3

Bundle D: *sending stones (pair)* (PH, 11th level)
Found in Encounter 1

Bundle E: *strikebacks** (AV, 10th level)
Found in Encounter 4

Bundle F: *solitaire (citrine)** (AV, 11th level)
Found in Encounter 5

Bundle G: PH / FRPG Ritual Book (950 gp value) (high-level only)

Found in Encounter 6

Bundle H: *bracers of iron arcana* (high-level version only, AV, 14th level)
Found in Encounter 6

Potion plus Gold: If a player doesn't want to select one of the bundles listed above for their character, they can choose to add a *potion of healing* plus 300 / 450 gp to their total gold. The player should write the potion gained on their adventure log.

More Gold: If a player doesn't want to select one of the bundles listed above for their character, they can choose to add 350 / 500 gp to their total gold.

Story Awards

Award these if the PC completes the condition for the award in the adventure. Pass out certificates to the players for their story awards. Make sure to mark the story award codes next to each character that earned them on the tracking form.

CORE13 ***Notice of the Abolethic Sovereignty***
You have put a stop to a far-reaching plot hatched by agents of the Abolethic Sovereignty. If not for your intervention, all of the Nelanther Isles could have fallen under the Sovereignty's sway. In so doing, you have also cleansed yourself of the aboleth taint that you acquired in a previous adventure (you may now void the story object CORE14). This story object commemorates your completion of a Major Quest. Your efforts have no doubt drawn the attention of the Sovereignty itself, which now knows that you are a potential threat to its plans. Take care when you find yourself in the vicinity of the Sea of Fallen Stars, for the shibboleths of Xxiphu are always watching and waiting for their chance to strike.

CORE14 ***Iomic Sigil of Amn***
Thanks to you, the miners of Ioma Town have been spared from a fate worse than death. In gratitude, the miners have created a special token for you. You have been gifted with a custom-cut Iomic Crystal in a setting of your choice (necklace, ring, pendant, bracelet, brooch, or other purely decorative item). This trinket is of only nominal value due to the fact that Iomic Crystals do not really possess the miraculous powers that are commonly attributed to them. Nevertheless, it represents the gratitude of not only the miners themselves, but also the High Houses of Amn and the Cowled Wizards. This entitles you to several benefits, most notably giving you the right to use arcane magic as you see fit within the borders of the nation of Amn (you are now considered fully licensed). In future adventures, you may openly display this token to be regarded in a more positive light by any representative of Amn or the High Houses. Of course, such favors are only good so long as you do not abuse them...

Adventure Questions

Mark the answers to the following adventure questions on the tracking form.

1. Were the PCs able to locate the hidden chamber and stop the grell from completing their ritual?

a. Yes, the PCs defeated the grell and stopped the ritual.

b. No, the PCs discovered the ritual chamber, but they were defeated by the grell.

c. No, the PCs never discovered the ritual chamber, or were defeated in one of the earlier encounters.

2. How do you (the DM) rate this adventure? (Please also feel free to e-mail specific feedback to the author or the campaign staff.)

a. Five stars (best possible rating)
b. Four stars (very good)
c. Three stars (average)
d. Two stars (below average)
e. One star (really awful)

3. How do the players rate this adventure? (You can average their individual ratings or come up with whatever other method works for everyone.)

a. Five stars (best possible rating)
b. Four stars (very good)
c. Three stars (average)
d. Two stars (below average)
e. One star (really awful)

4. How many of the player characters earned the Major Quest award for completing the adventures in the correct order?

a. All of the PCs had the correct story object and earned the Major Quest award in this adventure.

b. At least half of the PCs had the correct story object and earned the Major Quest award.

c. Less than half of the PCs had the correct story object and earned the Major Quest award.

d. None of the PCs had the correct story object, so none of them earned the Major Quest award.

New Rules

Bracers of Iron Arcana Level 14
Favored by spellcasters, these iron bracers are covered in esoteric runes that help deflect physical attacks.
Item Slot: Arms (21,000 gp)
Power (Daily): Minor Action. Gain an item bonus to AC equal to your Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma modifier until the end of your next turn.
Source: Adventurer's Vault, page 115

Diamond Bracers Level 9
These clear crystal vambraces of interlocking plates can protect you from virtually anything, for a time.
Lvl 9 (4,200 gp)
Item Slot: Arms
Power (Daily): Minor Action. Until the end of the encounter, gain resist 10 against a damage type from which you were dealt damage since the end of your last turn.
Source: Adventurer's Vault, page 116

Solitaire (Citrine) Level 11
This irregular yellow crystal channels healing power to you in battle.
Wondrous Item 9,000 gp
Power (Encounter ✦ Healing): Free Action. Use this power when you score a critical hit on your turn. You spend a healing surge.
Special: You cannot use more than one *solitaire* in an encounter.
Source: Adventurer's Vault, page 177

Strikebacks Level 10
Backed with spikes, these vicious gauntlets hurt those who hurt you.
Item Slot: Hands (5,000 gp)
Property: Gain a +1 item bonus to opportunity attacks.
Power (Encounter): Immediate Reaction. Use this power when an adjacent enemy hits you. Make a melee basic attack against that enemy.
Source: Adventurer's Vault, page 136