

A HEROIC TIER ADVENTURE

AGE 12+

DUNGEONS DRAGONS

ENCOUNTERS™

SEARCH FOR THE DIAMOND STAFF™

AN ADVENTURE FOR CHARACTERS OF 4TH-6TH LEVEL
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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to DUNGEONS & DRAGONS ENCOUNTERS™, an exciting official DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® program. This adventure is a mini-campaign season designed to be played in one-encounter sessions once per week at your local Wizards Play Network location.

This season's adventure is *Search for the Diamond Staff*™. It takes place in the FORGOTTEN REALMS® setting, specifically in the Dalelands. Player characters begin the first session as 4th-level characters, and they advance beyond 6th level by the end of the season.

Playtesting D&D® Next

This season of D&D ENCOUNTERS includes an optional online component that allows players and Dungeon Masters to convert their games to the D&D Next playtest. To participate, follow these five steps.

1. Talk to the players at your store and your D&D Encounters organizer. Find out how many people are interested in playtesting D&D Next and how many want to continue playing 4th Edition. Gauge players' interest, and coordinate with other DMs to try to ensure that everyone (including you) has the opportunity to play in his or her preferred type of game.
2. Visit dndnext.com and sign up for the playtest.
3. Download the playtest packet and review the documents, paying close attention to the How to Play and DM Guidelines files.
4. Read and print the Search for the Diamond Staff conversion notes. This file contains instructions and guidelines for adapting the adventure to D&D Next.
5. Familiarize yourself with the adventure, and get ready to run D&D Next!

General Guidelines

In addition to the specific guidelines provided in this document, keep the following general points in mind.

Ability Checks: Where this conversion document refers to the difficulty of checks and tasks, the guidelines in the latest playtest packet are used to determine DCs for ability checks.

- Trivial task: DC 5
- Easy task: DC 10
- Moderate task: DC 15
- Hard task: DC 20
- Very hard task: DC 25

Perception: Whenever a Perception check is called for, a D&D Next character makes an Intelligence check if searching for something secret, or a Wisdom check if listening or spotting or noticing a hidden creature.

Distance: Whenever distance or movement is given in squares, 1 square equals 5 feet.

Rests: D&D Next characters can take short rests whenever time allows or when a short rest is called for in the adventure. When an extended rest is called for, characters take a long rest.

Blocking Terrain: This refers to objects or features that cannot be moved through or typically climbed over.

Tactics: Most converted encounters do not include a new Tactics section. Use the original adventure guidelines for the monsters' general tactics and mindset during the encounter. If a Tactics section describes a 4th Edition power that a D&D Next creature or NPC doesn't possess, substitute an action that the D&D Next creature possesses instead.

Bloodied: When a creature is bloodied, it has dropped below half its hit point maximum.

Number of Monsters: The conversion notes update the number of monsters of a particular type appearing during an encounter. Be sure to use the numbers from this conversion document rather than the numbers indicated in the original adventure.

Encounter Difficulty: You can adjust the difficulty of an encounter or customize it for larger or smaller groups. To do so, adjust the overall encounter XP by increasing or reducing the number of creatures, using the encounter building guidelines in the current D&D Next playtest packet.

PREPARING FOR PLAY

The DUNGEONS & DRAGONS ENCOUNTERS play kit provides all you need to run this adventure, including poster maps of encounter areas and a sheet of tokens to represent monsters, adventurers, and battlefield effects. Follow the steps below to prepare for play.

Before you run session 1:

- ◆ Go online to dndencounters.com and download the map of the Dalelands.
- ◆ Read the **Background** and **Adventure Summary** for the flow of the story.
- ◆ Read Session 1: Dark Dealings in Hap, page 8.

At the table for session 1:

- ◆ Ensure that each player has a character to play. Players can use one of the characters provided in the kit, or they can create their own personas using the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS rules.
- ◆ Acquire a session tracking sheet from the organizer. Record all the players' WPN (or DCI™/RPGA™) numbers on it, along with your own number. If you or any of the players don't have a WPN number, ask the organizer for a membership card.

TACTICAL PLACEMENT

This adventure provides a sample tactical setup for each encounter, including the location of the monsters and a start area for the characters. Tactical maps for each encounter present only one way to set up the encounter. If it doesn't make sense to place monster or adventurer tokens in the places indicated on the map, you can change the placement. The narrative of how your adventure is playing out should be the major mandate for character and creature placement. For example, if a character was sneaking around behind the monsters, then allow that player to place his or her character in an appropriate location.

During the session:

- ◆ Each session is one encounter. Run the encounter assigned for that week's session. Typical play time for a session is 90 minutes to 2 hours.
- ◆ Make decisions and adjudications that enhance the fun of the game. As the DM, you can adjust the adventure (see "A Changing Group") to maximize the fun for the players.

At the end of your first session:

- ◆ Have the adventurers take a short rest, but remind them to track their daily abilities. Daily resources do not refresh in between sessions, only at the end of each chapter.
- ◆ Give out treasure and experience points.
- ◆ Turn in your session tracking sheet to the organizer. Make sure you record all the DCI/RPGA numbers on it, along with names and the date of the event.
- ◆ Collect your special reward for providing your time as a DM to make the event happen. Your organizer has more details on this reward.

At the end of each chapter:

- ◆ The adventurers take a long rest, regaining all their daily resources.

TREASURE

As the characters progress, they have the opportunity to gain treasure in the form of gold pieces, valuables, and magic items. Whenever they discover treasure, follow the instructions provided in the adventure. Use the following rules to divide treasure among the characters.

Awarding Magic Items: When the characters find a nonconsumable magic item, the players can decide which character receives it. Usually, these decisions are easy, since certain items are better suited for certain characters. If this is not the case, then you should assign the new item to a character who has no nonconsumable magic items. If two or more characters lack nonconsumable magic items, have each of those players roll a d20. The player with the highest roll receives the new item.

Selling Items: Magic items cannot be sold during the adventure.

When to Gear Up: Characters can buy equipment at the start of each chapter.

RANDOM ITEMS

Use the following table to determine unspecified magic items, either by rolling randomly or choosing items as you see fit. See the Magic Items document in the most recent D&D Next playtest for more information, and to determine weapon and armor types, add details to items, and so on.

Feel free to simply choose magic items from the playtest document rather than using the table, or to reduce the number of magic items gained in the adventure to suit your campaign.

TREASURE TABLE

d20	Result
1–2	+1 armor
3–4	+1 weapon
5	Ring of protection
6	Ring of feather falling
7	Wand of magic missiles
8	Wand of enemy detection
9	Spellguard shield
10	Glamoured studded leather
11	Potion of climbing
12–15	Potion of healing
16	Potion of heroism
17	Potion of invisibility
18	Bracers of defense
19–20	Cloak of elvenkind

ADVANCEMENT

At the end of each session, you award experience points and treasure. The “Reward” section at the end of each session indicates how many XP to award the characters. The point total includes the encounter reward plus exploration and story awards. Each character receives the same amount of XP. Players record their rewards on their D&D ENCOUNTERS Play Trackers.

Leveling: DUNGEONS & DRAGONS ENCOUNTERS play uses an accelerated XP award system to allow players to experience their characters at a succession of levels. The player characters begin this adventure at 4th level. If a player attends every session, his or her character advances to 5th level before the start of chapter 2 and to 6th level before the start of chapter 3.

Changing Characters

Players can switch characters during the season. If a player wants to do so, he or she can bring a new character with experience points equal to those of the character he or she previously played in the season. The new character cannot keep treasure or items owned by the previous character.

A CHANGING GROUP

Since you can never tell who’s going to show up to a DUNGEONS & DRAGONS ENCOUNTERS session, you might wind up with a different group of players from week to week. Some players might have missed a session or two, and others might have played sessions with a different DM. That’s fine. Catch new players up with a summary of what has come before, and make sure that returning players have marked off resources they spent (healing surges, daily powers, and so on) since their last extended rest.

Majority Rules: If some element of the adventure plot hinges on the adventurers making a decision in a previous session, and the group is different during the current session, find out how the decision went down from the players. Go with the majority, and if it’s an even split, side with the result that favors the adventuring party. For example, if three of the five characters at your table decided to visit Imani before going to Peldan’s Helm, the group is considered to have visited Imani for your session this week.

Character Death

If a character dies during a session, the player has two choices. He or she can bring the same character back at the beginning of the next session, with four fewer healing surges, or start a new level-appropriate character. No other penalty exists for death.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

You can read the following to the players during the character creation session, or you can throw them right into the action and answer questions as they come up.

The Dalelands are an independent region of Faerûn located between the cold lands of the Moonsea to the north and the large empires of Sembia and Cormyr to the south. A dozen tiny realms of farmers and woodsfolk lie scattered in pastoral clearings within the vast forest, including Shadowdale, home to the famous mage Elminster; Mistedale, a pastoral land where the Dales Council meets; and Battledale, a lightly settled region where great battles were fought in years past, but which is peaceful in the present age. Encompassing the Dales is the great forest of Cormanthor, home to the elven realm of Myth Drannor. Cormanthor’s hidden depths hold the ruins of ancient elven kingdoms, many still harboring magical wonders and ancient terrors.

Formidable enemies are arrayed against the Dales. The rich land of Sembia is a mercantile powerhouse that has expanded northward over the centuries, threatening to absorb the southern Dalelands. In the last few generations, Sembia has become more dangerous, since the Shadovar of Netheril now dominate it. Tasseldale, Featherdale, and Scardale have all fallen under Sembian control to some degree during the previous century, and Battledale is the next obvious target for expansion. At the same time, the Zhentarim—a secret society of mercenaries and spies that was once the most ambitious of the Dalelands’ enemies—is again growing in strength and influence. The vile fanatics of the Cult of the Dragon also plague the Dalelands. These cultists worship undead dragons and conspire to bring all Faerûn under the dominion of dracoliches.

Your adventures in the Dalelands begin in the eastern reaches of Battledale, where the renowned sage Imani makes his home in the village of Hap. Imani has spent his life studying the ruins of Cormanthor, searching for the legendary library-vaults of the vanished elven realm of Uvaeren.

Recently, Imani found out that a long-lost Uvaeranni artifact, the *Diamond Staff of Chomylla*, was hidden in the vaults of the dracolich Dretchroyaster, and that the Cult of the Dragon was close to obtaining the staff to claim the power of Uvaeren for its own evil ends. Thus forewarned, Imani called on a number of groups of adventurers and organized an assault that successfully recovered the *Diamond Staff*. Now the sage of Hap is putting together an expedition to open an Uvaeranni library-vault using the artifact, and is looking for reliable adventurers to accompany him.

ADVENTURE SUMMARY

The adventure begins when a gang of orcs steals the recently recovered *Diamond Staff of Chomylla* from Imani's tower. The characters set out to get the artifact back, only to learn that the Zhentarim were behind the attack. A Zhent commander named Phoedele was hired by a Sembian mage named Barcero, who seeks the *Diamond Staff* for his Shadovar masters.



Unfortunately for Barcero, Phoedele decides to keep the artifact for herself, and to use it to break into one of the lost library-vaults of Uvaeren. The characters pursue the Zhent agent across the Dalelands, catching up to Phoedele and her sellswords in the elven ruins. Dretchroyaster's cultists are only one step behind their master's stolen treasure, setting up a climactic three-way battle for control of the staff.

Chapter 1

The characters meet the sage Imani in Hap, but their preparations for a journey to the vaults of Uvaeren are interrupted by a band of vicious orc raiders, the Fangfists. The characters defend Hap from the raiders, then pursue the Fangfists to their camp in a forest cave. There, they discover that a company of Zhentarim mercenaries is behind the orc attack.

Session 1: Dark Dealings in Hap. The characters meet the sage Imani and accept an assignment accompanying him as he seeks the vaults of Uvaeren. Before they can set out on their expedition, the Fangfists attack. The adventurers bravely defend the village, only to discover that a second force of orcs has struck at Imani's tower.

Session 2: Imani's Tower. The characters battle the last of the orcs that have attacked the tower, as well as the golem that normally defends Imani but has gone out of control. In the aftermath, they discover that the sage has been seriously injured and that the *Diamond Staff* is missing. Imani suspects that the orcs are working for some more powerful entity intent on stealing the artifact, and he urges the characters to pursue them. The characters track the orcs into the depths of the forest, discovering their lair in a cave a few miles from Hap.

Session 3: The Fangfist Lair. The characters explore the hideout of the Fangfists, battling the orcs and a pair of Zhentarim mercenaries who are behind the attacks on Hap. Phoedele, the leader of the Zhent band, has already left the cave with the *Diamond Staff*. From correspondence discovered on the guards, the characters learn that the Zhentarim were hired by a Sembian mage named Barcero. Phoedele is on her way to meet with her employer and hand over the staff.

Chapter 2

The characters pursue Phoedele across the Dalelands as they attempt to recover the *Diamond Staff*. They learn that the Sembian mage Barcero is an agent in the service of the Shadovar of Netheril. Phoedele has no intention of returning the artifact to her employer, however—the Zhent is off to search out the lost vaults of Uvaeren. The characters chase Phoedele to Mistledale, where the Cult of the Dragon puts in an appearance. They then successfully locate the ancient elven vault that the Zhent mercenary intends to pillage using the power of the staff.

Session 4: The Ghost Hold. The characters follow the clues recovered from the Zhentarim in the Fangfists' cave, racing to the outskirts of Tasseldale to break up the meeting between Phoedele and her Sembian employer. The meeting takes place in one of the

so-called Ghost Holds—an abandoned manor in the countryside. The characters deal with Barcero and his Shadovar allies, only to discover that Phoedele is a noshow. The Zhentarim mercenary has decided to keep the *Diamond Staff* and use it to break into the library vaults of Uvaeren herself.

Session 5: Rogue Agents. Although Phoedele is a step ahead of the characters, they know where the Zhentarim mercenary is fleeing with the staff. The adventurers set out

WHO ARE THE VILLAINS?

Search for the Diamond Staff is the story of three villains: Barcero, Phoedele, and Dretchroyaster. Barcero is the sly Sembian who puts events in motion by scheming to steal the *Diamond Staff* from Imani. Dretchroyaster, the staff's original owner, is a dracolich who wants his treasure back. Phoedele is the Zhentarim agent Barcero hires to get his hands on the staff, but she betrays him and keeps it for herself. The adventure revolves around Phoedele's theft of the staff and the effort to track her down and get it back.

Barcero is a Sembian mage who serves as an agent for the Shadovar who rule Sembia. He is a plump, middle-aged human male who cultivates a false geniality. He is lazy and more than a little cowardly, doing what he can to avoid the unpleasantness of combat or physical hardship. He has a first-rate mind, though, and is an ambitious schemer. When Barcero hears whispered rumors that the *Diamond Staff of Chomylla* has been recovered from the hoard of Dretchroyaster, he recognizes the artifact's potential value to his shade masters and hires the Zhentarim to steal the staff for him.

Phoedele is a mercenary warlord with magical skill of her own. A tall, dark-haired human female from the lands of the Moonsea, she has bewitching green eyes, and wears a cold smile of amusement and contempt seemingly etched on her features. As a young and ruthless adventurer, she attracted the notice of the Zhentarim and was recruited into their ranks, where she has flourished. The Zhentarim are sellswords and assassins who have fought under a dozen different banners, and who once dominated the Heartlands of Faerûn. Phoedele dreams of reclaiming that glory, and she works tirelessly to advance Zhentarim interests. She leads a company of Zhent sellswords and freebooters who serve her loyally.

Dretchroyaster does not put in a physical appearance during this adventure, but he influences both the beginning and the end of the story. A great undead dragon, Dretchroyaster has laired in the depths of Cormanthor for hundreds of years. The *Diamond Staff of Chomylla* was recently stolen from his vaults by a number of adventuring groups working together in a daring raid. (This raid is the subject of the D&D Game Day adventure *Vault of the Dracolich*.) More than just a part of the dracolich's hoard, the staff was central to Dretchroyaster's plan to seize the might of Uvaeren for himself and the Cult of the Dragon. Dretchroyaster has commanded his cultists to find the staff and return it to him.

for Peldan's Helm, a small village at the western end of Mistledale that stands close to multiple sites of mysterious elven ruins. When they arrive, they learn that Phoedele and her company did indeed pass through—and that the Cult of the Dragon is also pursuing her. The characters fight off a cult ambush, then resume their search for the Zhentarim agents.

Session 6: Ruins of Uvaeren. The characters follow Phoedele's trail to the overgrown site of a ruin of ancient of Uvaeren. Those ruins are guarded by deadly traps and swarming with savage spiderlike humanoids called chitines. The adventures persevere and discover the entrance to the Vault of Song—the hoard of arcane knowledge that Imani, Barcero, and Phoedele are all searching for.

Chapter 3

The final chapter of the adventure takes place in the Vault of Song, one of the lost library-vaults of the ancient elven realm of Uvaeren. After facing off against the dungeon's deadly guardians, the adventurers are caught between the Zhentarim and the Cult of the Dragon, with both groups hoping to use the *Diamond Staff* to unlock the vault's secrets.

Session 7: The Vault of Song. The characters enter the hidden library-vault of Uvaeren, dealing with its ancient traps and puzzles. In pursuit of Phoedele and her Zhentarim warriors, the adventurers must fight a deadly skirmish with the mercenaries and the draconic defenders of the vault.

Session 8: Chomylla's Key. The characters face off against Phoedele, and the Zhent captain has no interest in giving up the *Diamond Staff* without a fight. In addition, the Cult of the Dragon is only one step behind, leaving the characters caught up in a three-way battle. By choosing sides, the characters have a better chance of defeating their remaining foes—but even assuming they pick the winning side, can they gain control of the staff and unlock the secrets of the Vault of Song?

Connections to D&D Game Day

The events in this adventure continue on from the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS Game Day adventure *Vault of the Dracolich*. A player can take his or her surviving character from that D&D Next adventure to this one. The character keeps all XP gained during *Vault of the Dracolich*, and can retain up to one magic item.

If characters from the Game Day adventure are used in this adventure, they have previously met the sage Imani and know the lore of the *Diamond Staff*. Adjust play in this adventure accordingly, particularly Session 1 (in which the characters meet and are hired by Imani, and in which the lore of the *Diamond Staff* is revealed).

SESSION 0:

CHARACTER CREATION

The initial session of this D&D ENCOUNTERS season is intended to allow players to create characters. Instead of creating characters using 4th Edition materials, ask players signed up for the D&D Next playtest to create 4th-level characters using the material found in the most recent playtest packet. Existing 4th-level D&D Next characters can also be used. Newly created characters above 1st level can start with appropriate wealth and can possess common magic items at your discretion.

A player who misses this session can create a character elsewhere or start session 1 with one of the pregenerated adventurers provided in the play kit. Each player is responsible for bringing his or her character to each play session.

A player who joins in midseason can create a character of an appropriate level.

Races

A player can create a character from any of the races presented in the most recent playtest packet.

Classes

A player can choose to create a character using class options from the most recent playtest packet.

Dalelands Background

The Dalelands are a crossroads at the heart of Faerûn, and characters from across the continent find their way to this region. The Dales are a dozen small, independent human states that lie in the clearings and coves of the mighty forest of Cormanthor. Centuries ago, human settlers came to an agreement with the elven kingdoms of the forest, enabling the humans to make their homes in the open spaces as long as they respect the boundaries of the woodlands. The people of the Dalelands still honor this ancient Dales Compact, as do the elves of the forest realm of Myth Drannor.

Dalesfolk are a hardy breed, fiercely independent, with no great lords or kings to rule over them. They distrust authority, resent aristocratic privilege, and generally refuse to be told what to do. They can be quarrelsome and stubborn; some of the Dales harbor centuries-old grudges against their neighbors. It's rare for Dales to go to war against one another, however. Would-be conquerors have learned more than once that the best way to force the people of the Dales to cooperate is to present them with a common foe. Even so, settlement in the southern Dalelands and the occasional outright seizure of territory have brought Featherdale, Scardale, and Tasseldale under Sembian control.

Individual dales fall into one of two broad groups: pastoral places with no large settlements, and townships that are essentially small city-states. Battledale, Featherdale, Tasseldale, and Shadowdale are more or less pastoral, while Archendale, Deepingdale, Harrowdale, and Scardale are centered on good-sized towns. Mistedale is in between—a

hundred years ago, it would have been counted as one of the pastoral dales, but its capital, Ashabenford, has grown significantly in recent decades. That town now serves as the seat of the Dales Council and the capital of all the Dalelands (though most Dalesfolk wouldn't describe it as such).

Dalelands Characters

Travelers from all corners of Faerûn journey through the Dalelands, but most of the characters adventuring in this region are either Dalelands natives or natives of nearby lands. The following information provides a sense of how characters of various races fit into the Dalelands.

Humans: Humans make up most of the population of the Dalelands, the Moonsea cities, the Vast, Sembia, and Cormyr. Humans from neighboring lands often make their homes in the Dales or do business there. It's not unusual to see Cormyreans, Sembians, Hillsfarrians, or others living anywhere in the Dalelands.

Elves: Most elves in this area are natives of Myth Drannor. Many live in the restored elven capital, while others roam the broader forest as the mood takes them, or dwell in isolated towers or strongholds far from the great city of the Coronal.

Half-Elves: With humans and elves living in such close proximity, a large number of half-elves also dwell in the Dalelands. Half-elves are particularly common in Deepingdale and Shadowdale.

Halflings: Small numbers of halflings can be found in and around any of the human communities in the Dalelands, as well as in Cormyr, the Moonsea, and Sembia.

Dwarves: The dwarven settlements closest to the Dalelands lie in the Galena Mountains, near Damara and Vaasa, so dwarves are rare in these parts, but a number of dwarf exiles can be found in the western Dalelands. The mines of Tethyamar on the border of the Dalelands were once a rich dwarven kingdom that fell to monsters. A few dwarves who are descendants of Tethyamar's survivors still dream of reclaiming their ancestral realm.

Others: In general characters of other races aren't from around here. People in the Dales are used to seeing outlandish foreigners wander through and so they rarely give such individuals notice.

Character Hooks

Why is your character in the Dalelands? Consider the following possibilities for how you came to be looking for employment or adventure in the Dalelands.

Caravan Guard: It's not glorious, but it's work. Caravans crisscross all parts of Faerûn, and every mile of the long road seems threatened by bandits and monsters. Most caravans wouldn't reach their destinations without someone such as you to deter attacks, and trade across Faerûn would grind to a halt. The Dalelands are just one more spot you're passing through.

Elven Mysteries: The forest of Cormanthor was once home to the wondrous and advanced elf realms of old. The ruins of these civilizations lie within the depths of the forest, many holding magical wonders and rich treasures rarely seen in the current age. Whether you are an honorable

scholar or a base tomb robber, you are drawn to seek out these hidden treasures and claim them as your own.

Harper Agent: As a member of the legendary society known as the Harpers, you are sworn to fight tyranny and oppression wherever such appears. In these days, the Empire of Netheril poses the greatest threat to the free lands of Faerûn, so you have dedicated yourself to the battle against Shadovar supremacy—a conflict playing out across the Dalelands.

Hiding from the Past: Dalesfolk place stock in working hard and minding one's own business. Do both those things, and they're not likely to ask questions about who you are or where you come from. Perhaps you were forced to flee your native land after making an enemy of a high noble or a sinister guildmaster. Perhaps you dishonored yourself in some way—an illicit love affair, a death you might have prevented, or a crime you took the blame for. In order to protect someone else. Whatever the reason, you can't go home—and the Dalelands are a good place to start over.

Homegrown Hero: Your adventuring career began in the Dalelands because you were born and raised here. The Dales are well known for their stubborn, tough and independent people—but you were always a little more stubborn, tougher, and more independent than most. Between adventures, you go back to your farm your smithy or your workshop. But soon enough, trouble arises in some corner of the Dales or another, and it falls to you to put things right.

WHICH DALE IS HOME?

Although characters of any class can be found across the Dalelands, different parts of the realm lend themselves to certain character origins.

Cleric and Paladin: The Dales' larger settlements (especially in Archendale, Deepingdale, and Harrowdale) have small shrines devoted to common deities. In addition, fortified abbeys can be found throughout the Dalelands, including the Abbey of the Sword in Battledale and the Abbey of the Just Hammer in Tasseldale. Deities favored in the Dalelands include Amaunator, Chauntea, Selûne, Tempus, Tymora, and Torm.

Druid: The rural dales are more inclined to honor druidic traditions. Daggerdale, Mistledale, and Shadowdale are likely homes for a druid character.

Fighter: All the Dales produce doughty warriors, but formal martial training is rare in these lands. Archendale and Scardale have the strongest martial traditions among the Dales.

Ranger: The Dalesfolk have always fought their wars with stealth, ambush, and bow. Rangers are commonplace in Daggerdale, Deepingdale, and Shadowdale.

Rogue: Rogues are common in good-sized towns and dues, but few such settlements can be found in the Dalelands. The most likely places of origin for a rogue are Archendale, Harrowdale, and Scardale, which are the most populous settlements in the Dalelands.

Wizard: Despite the number of famous sages who have retired to their lands, the Dalesfolk are suspicious of arcane magic and rarely study it. Deepingdale and Shadowdale are the most mage-friendly of the dales.

Extra Time?

Combat in D&D Next can run more quickly than in 4th Edition. This season of D&D Encounters was designed with a 4th Edition timeframe in mind. As a result, it's possible that a D&D Next session finishes much earlier than its counterpart.

If you have extra time in your D&D Next sessions, consider adding an encounter or some additional exploration or roleplaying opportunities. The following are potential diversions that can be used to fill out a play session.

- **Session 1:** The characters must defend a farmstead near the village from a larger wolf pack that attacks after the first wave of orcs and wolves.
- **Session 2:** Rather than allowing the berserk golem to flee into the woods, the characters must pursue and destroy it before it reaches the village. Alternatively, add more orcs to the encounter, having them arrive from outside the tower before combat ends.
- **Session 3:** Expand the scope of any interrogation after the combat to create opportunities for roleplaying. Alternatively, let the foes in the encounter fight to the death, then have another group of Zhentarim return to the caves in the aftermath. The adventurers must overpower these foes in order to question them.
- **Session 4:** In the aftermath of battle with Barcero and his allies, the adventurers must contend with the ghosts and wraiths that haunt the ruins. If the characters agree to work for Barcero, use such an undead encounter in place of the original encounter.
- **Session 5:** When the characters reach the ruins of Uvaeren, chitine warriors quickly set upon the party.
- **Session 6:** The fight with the chitines draws the attention of Zhent soldiers working beneath the ruined council hall. They stage an ambush after the initial combat, determined to keep the adventurers from reaching the Vault of Song.
- **Session 7:** If the combat progresses too quickly, have more Zhent soldiers appear at the top of the stairs in groups of three. Alternatively, have one or more of the remaining three columns in the chamber transform into an Uvaeranni dragon when one of the original three dragons is slain.
- **Session 8:** Depending on how the fight unfolds between the three factions, have more cultists and Zhent soldiers arrive partway through the combat. Additionally, give the players opportunities to roleplay in order to shore up or create alliances even in the thick of battle.

CHAPTER 1

The characters come to the village of Hap in Battledale to meet the sage Imani, who seeks a reliable group of adventurers to accompany him on his search for the vaults of Uvaeren. Before the expedition can begin, the adventurers are caught up in an orc raid.

SESSION 1: DARK

DEALINGS IN HAP

After answering notices in nearby towns and villages, the characters assemble in Hap to seek employment with Imani the sage.

When you're ready to begin, read:

It is a cold, rainy afternoon in Hap, a tiny village on the outskirts of Battledale. You are sitting in the village hall, a humble structure with simple split-log benches and faded banners on the walls. Each of you has come to Hap in response to broadsheets tacked up on tavern doors and public halls throughout the nearby dales. A renowned sage and former adventurer named Imani is hiring a party for up to one month of work, with equal shares of treasure for each member of the venture.

Give the players an opportunity to introduce their characters. They can decide whether they answered the sage's notice as individuals, in small groups, or as a complete party in which each member already knows the others.

INTERVIEW WITH THE SAGE

When the players have finished their introductions, the meeting with Imani commences.

As Imani arrives, read:

The hall's door opens, and a tall, bearded human of fifty years or so strides into the room. He is a Turmishan, with deep brown skin and short, graying hair and he wears brown robes and a pair of spectacles. Beside him, a young human in a green tunic carries a large book and a writing quill. The older figure looks around, matters, "I suppose they'll do," and heads to a private room off the main hall.

The younger human with the book clears his throat. "If you are here to see the sage, please come forward."

Drindol, an earnest young human of nineteen, is Imani's scribe and helper. When the characters announce themselves, he greets them and ushers them into the private room with Imani.

When the heroes enter Imani's chamber, read:

The human in the brown robes is seated at the head of a small table. As you gather and sit, he begins to speak.

"I am Imani, the sage of Hap. I intend to mount an expedition to the ruins of Uvaeren, on the borders of Mistledale. The ancient libraries and vaults of that long-lost elven realm are still hidden within the forest, protected by spells of warding that have prevented entry to this day. But I have recently come into possession of a key.

"Your task will be to escort me to the ruins, protect me from bandits and monsters, help me defeat or bypass any old traps that still remain, and guard me while I open the Vault of Song and study its secrets. As your employer, I claim half of any treasures we recover on our journey to the vault. The remaining half will be equally divided among you. As for what is found in the Vault of Song, I alone must be allowed to decide its disposition. Those are the conditions. Are you willing to sign on?"

Imani's goal is to determine whether the characters are suitable for the job and (if so) to hire them on, and he is willing to negotiate and provide more information. Use the following guidelines to determine how the sage responds or reacts to questions and statements the characters might make.

What is Uvaeren? "Uvaeren was an elven kingdom that thrived in the western forest thousands of years ago. A realm of scholars and learning, it was destroyed by a falling star. Its vaults are said to hold unimaginable knowledge and lore."

A character who succeeds on a moderate Intelligence check knows that Uvaeren was one of the independent realms of ancient Arcorar—now the site of Cormanthor Forest. Around six thousand years ago, in an event historians call the Twelve Days of Fire, a falling star plunged to earth in western Cormanthor and destroyed Uvaeren. The long valley that makes up present-day Mistledale marks the place where the collision gouged a terrible wound in the ancient forest.

What is the Vault of Song? "One of the libraries of Uvaeren, said to hold a great store of arcane knowledge in the form of singing crystals. No one has entered the vault in centuries, and not even I know exactly where it is, though I do have some good general instructions. Its location matters not, though, until the staff is recovered."

You have a key? "The *Diamond Staff of Chomylla* was recently retrieved during an assault against the lair of the dracolich Dretchroyaster. Chomylla was a high mage of Uvaeren who was away from her realm when it was destroyed. Her staff is enchanted to open the magical wards of Uvaeren, which would otherwise be impossible to defeat." (If any of your players participated in the *Vault of the Dracolich* D&D Game Day adventure, they have heard rumors of the daring theft of the *Diamond Staff*.)

We want a bigger cut. "Indeed. State your counteroffer, then." Imani can be talked into giving an additional 20 percent of the treasure to the characters, or promising a generous bonus of up to 150 gp per character if the contents of the Vault of Song prove extremely valuable.

We accept. Imani instructs Drindol to record the characters' names, as well as their capabilities and areas of expertise.

When the characters agree to help, read:

The sage nods, satisfied. "We leave tomorrow morning, so provision yourselves for a long journey and be in the Millery Inn's courtyard by an hour after sunrise. Purchase what you need and put it on my account—the village's shopkeepers will be happy to accommodate you. I want to be in Peldan's Helm in three days' time."

If you downloaded and printed the map of the Dalelands from dndencounters.com, hand this out to the players now. Tell the players that if they want their own copy of the map, they can go online and download it.

Imani and Drindol leave the hall and return to Imani's tower (see below). If any characters want to accompany him, the sage politely declines, saying he has much to do and can't entertain guests at the moment. Thus, the characters have a few hours to look around Hap and perhaps do some shopping.

Exploring the Village

On the outskirts of a lightly populated dale, Hap is set in the proverbial middle of nowhere.

When the characters leave the village hall, read:

The tiny village of Hap spreads in a small cleared area in the southern part of the forest of Cormanthor, beneath a crag known as Haptooth Hill. Twenty buildings stand along or near its single main street. A cart track leads west a few miles to Rauthauvyr's Road, the main route through Battledale, while a footpath runs north and east around the shoulder of Haptooth Hill toward Featherdale and the treeless moor known as the Cold Field. The village's buildings feature sturdy timber frames on fieldstone footings, and include a smithy, a sawyer, a general store, a stable, and a shrine. The only place to stay in Hap is the Millery Inn.

Millery Inn

Old and weather-beaten, the Millery offers poor lodgings but is better than sleeping in the rain. The inn's common room serves as the only taproom in Hap, and a dozen or so villagers and farmers gather here in the evenings to gossip, smoke, and drink by the fire.

The proprietor is a tall, big-bellied human named Berndon. A good-hearted fellow, Berndon is overwhelmed by running the Millery and struggles to keep the place in good repair.

A private room at the Millery comes with two beds and costs 1 gp per night. Travelers on a budget can sleep on a pallet in the loft for 2 sp per night. The loft sleeps ten.

Lathander's Open Hand

This small shrine is a converted barn with stone walls and a wooden roof. A bell hangs above the front door in what was formerly a hayloft. Inside is a chapel with an altar dedicated to Lathander, the god of the dawn (known to most of his followers as Amaunator, the god of the sun). A small back room serves as the living quarters for the resident priest. A fist-sized chunk of amber carved in the shape of a heart and shining with a golden light is magically suspended fifteen

feet above the altar. This relic is known as the Blood of Lathander. If removed from the shrine, it teleports back to this spot one minute later unless it is borne by a dedicated follower of Lathander.

The priest of the shrine is Sister Tressa, a matronly human female and one of the few Lathanderites remaining in the Dalelands. She has five potions of healing hidden in her room, and is willing to sell them to characters who seem good-hearted (50 gp per potion).

Delmuth's Barrel

A venerable dwarf named Delmuth, an adventurer in his younger days, runs this general store. Two boisterous human boys, Bristan and Baleth, serve as clerks; Delmuth took them in six years ago when they were orphaned in an orc raid.

The Barrel stocks all manner of ordinary goods and provisions, such as flour, sugar, salt, smoked meats, dried fruits, everyday tools, blankets, and other mundane gear. Delmuth sells all adventuring gear items with a value of 20 gp or less, armor of 40 gp or less, weapons of 10 gp or less, and ammunition such as arrows and bolts.

Laumnoth Stables

A middle-aged halfling with prominent sideburns and a friendly manner, Laumnoth owns the only stable in Hap. He and his sharp-tongued wife, Neera, have a dozen riding horses for sale, along with several draft horses, ponies, and mules. Laumnoth Stables supplies all the necessary saddles, tack, and harness for the mounts they sell (included in the purchase price).

Imani's Tower

This small, round tower with an attached stone house is located a quarter-mile outside the village on the lower slopes of Haptooth Hill. A well-worn path leads down through the woods from the tower's door to the village's south end. Imani lives here with Drindol and an odd collection of pets and guardians.

Village Hall

The village hall consists of a large council chamber (the room where the characters meet Imani), with a small armory (presently empty) in the back. The hall serves as a meeting space, a dance hall, and a community center.

Fangfist Raid

When the characters go to the Millery Inn in the evening, things in Hap take a turn for the dangerous.

After the heroes enter the inn, read:

Outside, the shrine's bell suddenly begins to toll. The locals in the common room leap to their feet in alarm as the door flies open, and a burly young human in the leather apron of a smith bursts into the room. "Orcs!" he shouts. "Orcs and wolves are attacking!"

Continue with the **Fangfist Marauders** encounter.

PROVISIONING FOR A JOURNEY

For players who are wondering what their characters need for a long journey, a good guideline is a standard adventurer's kit and a riding horse for each character, plus a tent for the party. Imani's offer to pay for gear purchased from the shopkeepers in Hap covers nonmagical items totaling up to 20 gp per character.

FANGFIST MARAUDERS

Encounter Level 5

Setup

3 wolves (W)

7 orcs (S)

The Zhentarim forces seeking the *Diamond Staff* know that even though Hap has no militia, adventurers frequently pass through the village. The orcs' mission is to make sure that no one in the village interferes in the Zhents' planned attack on Imani's tower.

When the heroes leave the inn to investigate, read:

At the end of the main street, orc warriors wearing leather gauntlets studded with broken teeth are dashing from house to house. Wolves in iron collars race alongside them, snarling at anything that moves. Several villagers lie dead in the street as others run for their lives. Orcs with torches are attempting to set fire to the buildings, but dampness from the recent rain is making that difficult.

Easy Intelligence or Wisdom: *Their unique gauntlets mark the orcs as members of the Fangfist tribe.*

ADJUSTING DIFFICULTY

If the party consists of four characters, remove a wolf and an orc savage from the encounter. If the party consists of six characters, add four orc savages.

7 Orcs Medium Humanoid (Orc)

Armor Class 13 (studded leather)

Hit Points 11 (2d8 + 2)

Speed 30 ft.

Senses darkvision 60 ft.

Str 14 (+2) **Dex** 10 (+0) **Con** 12 (+1)

Int 7 (–2) **Wis** 11 (+0) **Cha** 10 (+0)

Alignment chaotic evil

Languages Common, Orc

TRAITS

Relentless: If an attack reduces the orc to 0 hit points or fewer but doesn't kill it outright, it is not knocked unconscious or killed as a result until the end of its next turn, provided it still has 0 hit points or fewer.

ACTIONS

Melee Attack—Greataxe: +5 to hit (reach 5 ft.; one creature). *Hit:* 8 (1d12 + 2) slashing damage.

Ranged Attack—Shortbow: +4 to hit (range 80 ft./320 ft.; one creature). *Hit:* 3 (1d6) piercing damage.

ENCOUNTER BUILDING

Level 3 XP 70

Tactics

Orc archers hang back in the middle of the street, watching for signs of opposition. When the characters appear, the other orcs rush any foes who close for melee; then they send the wolves around the edges of the fighting to harass characters who are trying to hang back. If all the orcs die, or if any five monsters die, the surviving orcs and wolves withdraw.

Features of the Area

Illumination: The setting sun and lamps inside buildings fill all areas of the encounter with bright light.

Trees: The space a tree occupies is difficult terrain. A tree provides partial concealment.

Doors: A character inside a house and next to a door can bar it at any time (no action required). Forcing open a barred door is a hard Strength task. A wolf can open an unlocked door with a moderate Strength check.

Conclusion

The encounter ends when the characters kill the orcs and the wolves, when surviving enemies flee (see "Tactics"), or when the characters flee the encounter or are all knocked unconscious. If the characters don't defeat the orcs, the monsters finish ransacking the village, then retreat into the forest.

Reward

Each character gains 700 XP for defeating the orcs and the wolves, as well as for dealing with Imani before the combat encounter.

Treasure: The orcs carry coins worth a total of 15 gp per

3 Wolves

Medium Beast

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 11 (2d8 + 2)

Speed 50 ft.

Senses low-light vision

Str 13 (+1) **Dex** 15 (+2) **Con** 13 (+1)

Int 2 (–4) **Wis** 12 (+1) **Cha** 6 (–2)

Alignment unaligned

Languages —

TRAITS

Keen Senses: The wolf gains a +5 bonus to all checks to detect hidden creatures.

Pack Tactics: The wolf gains a cumulative +1 bonus to attack rolls, to a maximum of +5, for each friendly creature that is within 5 feet of its target.

ACTIONS

Melee Attack—Bite: +5 to hit (reach 5 ft.; one creature). *Hit:* 1d8 + 1 piercing damage. If the attack deals maximum damage, the wolf also knocks the target prone.

ENCOUNTER BUILDING

Level 1 XP 20

party member. The coins are relatively new, struck with the image of a castle and a lightning bolt on one side and a skull on the other. With a moderate Intelligence or Wisdom check, a character recognizes the symbol on the coin as a mark of the Zhentarim—a society of evil human mercenaries known to operate in the Dalelands. The fortress pictured is known as Darkhold, and it stands west of Cormyr.

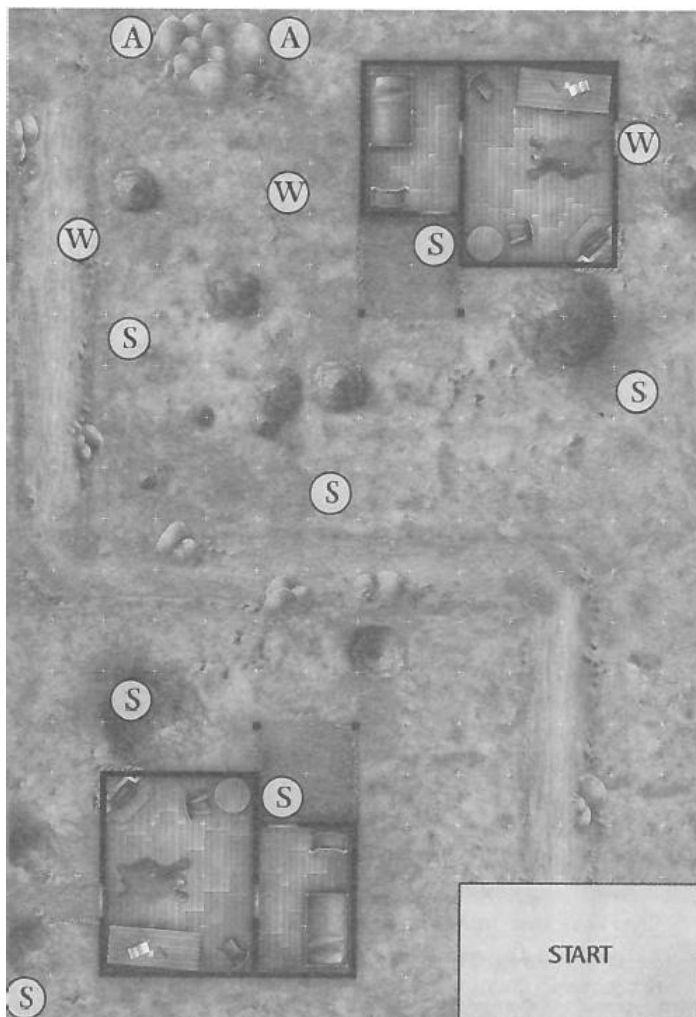
Ending the Session

After the characters defeat the Fangfists, they have the opportunity to search the orcs' bodies, then take stock of the aftermath of battle.

When the encounter is over, read:

The village falls quiet as the fighting comes to an end. Several more villagers have been killed, homes and workshops have been pillaged, and one house is burning. From the direction of Haptooth Hill and Imani's tower you hear the ringing of steel and faint shouting. You might have more orcs to deal with.

The characters can take a short rest before the next session.



SESSION 2:

IMANI’S TOWER

In the first session, the characters battled Fangfist orcs attacking the village of Hap, not knowing that those orcs were part of a larger group moving against the tower of Imani at the same time. While the orcs ransacked the village, others broke into the tower, cut down Imani, and stole the *Diamond Staff*. As the Fangfists headed back to their lair, a few orcs remained behind to loot—and found something they weren’t expecting.

When you're ready to start, read:
When you came to Hap to seek employment with the sage Imani, you didn't expect to have to defend the village against an orc raid. The village falls quiet as the fighting comes to an end, but from the direction of Haptooth Hill and Imani's tower you hear the ringing of steel and faint shouting. You might have more orcs to deal with.

The quarter-mile trek to the tower takes only a few minutes.

When the characters reach the tower, read:
The sage's home is a dilapidated stone tower with a cottage attached, located in a small clearing at the bottom of Haptooth Hill. Five badly burned orcs lie dead or unconscious

ADJUSTING DIFFICULTY

If the party consists of four characters, remove three orcs from the encounter. In addition, reduce the golem’s current hit points to 60. If the party consists of six characters, add five more orcs.
These orcs arrive outside the tower as reinforcements at the end of the fourth round of combat.

6 Orcs

Medium Humanoid (Orc)
Armor Class 13 (studded leather)
Hit Points 11 (2d8 + 2)
Speed 30 ft.
Senses darkvision 60 ft.
Str 14 (+2) **Dex** 10 (+0) **Con** 12 (+1)
Int 7 (–2) **Wis** 11 (+0) **Cha** 10 (+0)
Alignment chaotic evil
Languages Common, Orc

TRAITS

Relentless: If an attack reduces the orc to 0 hit points or fewer but doesn’t kill it outright, it is not knocked unconscious or killed as a result until the end of its next turn, provided it still has 0 hit points or fewer.

ACTIONS

Melee Attack—Greataxe: +5 to hit (reach 5 ft.; one creature). *Hit:* 8 (1d12 + 2) slashing damage.

Ranged Attack—Shortbow: +4 to hit (range 80 ft./320 ft.; one creature). *Hit:* 3 (1d6) piercing damage.

ENCOUNTER BUILDING

Level 3 XP 70

near the tower door. More orcs are inside the tower, their war cries carrying to you as they fight something you can’t yet see.

Continue with the **Berserk Golem** encounter.

BERSERK GOLEM

Encounter Level 5

Setup

1 decrepit flesh golem (G)
6 orcs (O)

When the orcs broke into his tower, Imani unleashed a battle-scarred flesh golem to defend it. “Destroy them all!” was the last command the golem heard from Imani before the orcs cut him down. The construct is now locked in a furious battle with the orcs, but its vaguely worded orders compel it to attack all creatures in the tower other than Imani.

Decrepit Flesh Golem

Large Animate
Armor Class 13
Hit Points 84 (8d10 + 40)
Speed 25 ft.
Senses darkvision 50 ft.
Str 19 (+4) **Dex** 9 (–1) **Con** 20 (+5)
Int 7 (–2) **Wis** 10 (+0) **Cha** 5 (–3)
Alignment unaligned
Languages understands Common

TRAITS

Berserk: While the golem is in combat, roll a d6 at the start of each of the golem’s turns. If the result is 6, the golem goes berserk. On its turn, a berserk golem attacks the nearest creature or some object smaller than itself if no creature is within reach.

Immunities: The golem cannot be charmed, frightened, paralyzed, stunned, or put to sleep. It is immune to disease, poison, and lightning damage. It does not need to eat, sleep, or breathe.

Lightning is Life: If the golem would take lightning damage, it instead regains hit points equal to half the damage it would have taken.

Magic Resistance: The golem has advantage on saving throws against magical effects.

Sapping Cold: If the golem takes cold damage, its speed is reduced by 10 feet during its next turn.

ACTIONS

Melee Attack—Slam: +6 to hit (reach 5 ft.; one creature). *Hit:* 1d6 + 4 bludgeoning damage.

Multiattack: The golem makes two *slam* attacks.

ENCOUNTER BUILDING

Level 6 XP 550

When the characters enter the tower, read:

This room appears to be a laboratory, with tables holding alchemical equipment and bookshelves set with hundreds of tomes. A table near the entrance containing a rack of flasks is still standing, but the chambers other furnishings have been smashed and strewn across the floor.

A hulking humanoid creature with mottled skin lumbers across the room, roaring as it chases after half a dozen orc warriors that strike at its back when it turns away. The monster grinds furniture underfoot and knocks stones out of the walls with every missed punch.

Imani's crumpled body lies at the foot of one of the bookshelves, his robes bloodied from a wound in his chest. A dead orc with dragon's teeth mounted on its dented helmet lies near the sage.

Moderate Wisdom check: *A door on the far side of the room leads into the cottage. A human face peeks out of a small grill set into the door about four feet above the ground. The prisoner is Drindol, Imani's scribe, and he looks frightened.*

Tactics

The flesh golem has already gone berserk when the characters enter combat.

Because the golem and the orcs are fighting each other, the characters can count the monsters as either allies or enemies. For example, a character who uses an ability that targets enemies can choose to not affect the orcs. In addition, orcs help the characters flank the golem, and the golem helps the characters flank the orcs.

The uncontrolled golem attacks enemies at random. If no targets are within reach at the start of its turn, the golem moves to the nearest creature and attacks. Make this tactic apparent to the players so they can exploit it if they choose to.

Instinctively avoiding harming itself the golem does not willingly enter or stay in any space that contains a damaging hazard (such as burning oil or acid; see "Features of the Area"). If faced with a choice between taking damage from staying where it is or taking damage from moving, it moves away from as many sources of damage as possible.

When no foes remain in the tower, the golem moves out the door and attacks any creatures outside. If the construct can make no attacks for 3 consecutive rounds, it rambles off into the woods, bashing trees and uprooting shrubs, and is never seen again.

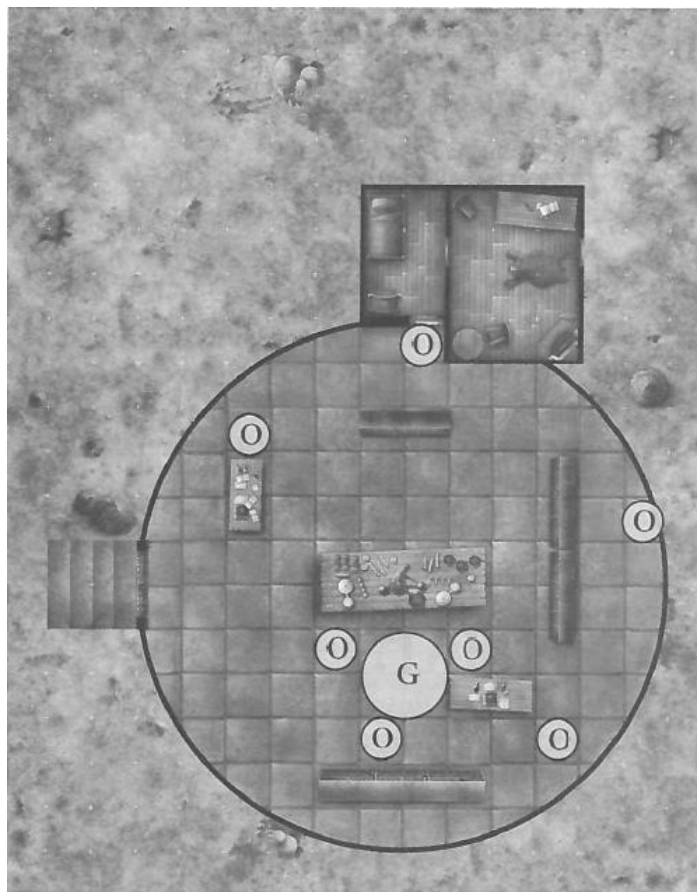
If an orc starts its turn adjacent to the golem, it attacks the golem. (You can allow players to make attack rolls for the orcs when they attack the golem.) Otherwise, an orc moves toward the nearest character and attacks that character.

Features of the Area

Illumination: Dusk has fallen, creating dim light outside the tower. Inside, oil lamps fill the area with bright light.

Furnishings: Other than the two squares containing the table nearest the entry doors, squares containing furnishings are filled with the smashed remains of those items, and count as difficult terrain.

Lamps: Four oil lamps hang from the walls of the tower chamber, one centered between the entry doors and the



cottage door, and the others spaced evenly around the perimeter. A character next to a lamp can use an action to smash it to the floor up to 25 feet away. That square is filled with burning oil.

A creature that enters a square of burning oil or starts its turn in one takes 3 (1d6) fire damage. A creature can take this damage only once per turn. For each area of fire, roll a d20 at the end of each round. On a result of 1-10, the fire goes out and its effect ends, on 11-15 it keeps burning in the same square, and on 16-20 it continues to burn and spreads to an adjacent square.

Table: The table nearest to the tower entrance holds a rack containing three flasks of acid individually locked to it. A character next to the table can use an action to unlock a flask of acid and smash it to the floor up to 25 feet away. That square becomes filled with acid and fumes that make the area lightly obscured. A creature that enters a square of acid or starts its turn in one takes 3 (1d6) acid damage. A creature can take this damage only once per turn. For each area of acid, roll a d20 at the end of each round. On a result of 1-10, the acid is neutralized and its effect ends.

Reward

Each character gains 950 XP for defeating the orcs and the golem, and for dealing with Imani and the other characters.

Treasure: The orcs carry coins worth a total of 15 gp per party member. As with the coins carried by the orcs in session 1, these coins are new, struck with the image of a castle and a lightning bolt on one side and a skull on the other. If the characters did not previously recognize the mark of the Zhentarim, Imani explains its significance.

The orc with the dragon-tooth helm was Frazzlk, a war chief among the Fangfists. He carries one garnet per character (25 gp each), and a *potion of healing* he had no chance to use.

Conclusion

The encounter ends when the characters defeat all the monsters. The characters can also end the encounter by fleeing the tower. In that case, the golem kills the remaining orcs within a few rounds, then rampages off into the woods.

Continue with **Aftermath** when the characters investigate the tower.

AFTERMATH

When the characters finish the battle, Imani is unconscious. Drindol and Mara, the housekeeper, are locked in the tower's storeroom. If the characters succeeded on their moderate Wisdom check at the start of the encounter, adjust the following read-aloud text as appropriate.

When the last enemy is defeated, read:

A loud thumping comes from a heavy door to the north. Drindol, Imani's scribe, peeks out through a small grill set into the door four feet off the ground. "Help!" he calls. "Those orcs struck down Imani and stole the Diamond Staff! You have to do something!"

An aged halfling female pulls herself up to peep over the edge of the grill in front of Drindol. "And let us out of this cottage! We're locked in."

When Imani was seriously wounded, the orcs chose to knock the sage unconscious rather than kill him, hoping to interrogate him later regarding hidden treasure in the tower. The application of healing magic or a moderate Wisdom check enables him to regain consciousness.

If the characters don't help him immediately or if they take a short rest before doing anything else, the sage wakes up after 10 minutes.

When Imani wakes up, read:

The sage groans and stirs. "Oh, my head," he mutters. "What happened? I was taking notes and making a list of supplies we would need on our journey, when a gang of orcs burst in through the front doors! Are Drindol and Mara safe? Wait a moment... where's the Diamond Staff?"

When he learns that the staff has been stolen, Imani tries to persuade the characters to recover the artifact as quickly as possible. Use the following guidelines for the conversation.

Why was Drindol locked in? "I told Mara and Drindol to lock themselves in the cottage, and I ordered my golem to protect the tower. I intended to join Mara and Drindol, but the orc chief hit me before I could get to safety."

What about the Diamond Staff? "The *Diamond Staff of Chomylla* is the elven artifact that is the key to the hidden vaults of Uvaeren. I had it protected here under magical wards that should have prevented any but the most skilled arcanist from seizing it."

Did the orcs take anything else? Drindol replies to this question. "They grabbed whatever they could from the

shelves and tables, but as soon as the leader saw the staff he seemed to recognize it. Another orc tapped the staff with some kind of wand, and its protective wards fell. He grabbed the staff and the orcs bolted."

Who would want the staff? "The *Diamond Staff* is priceless. Anyone interested in elven knowledge or secrets of arcane magic would want to gain entry to the vaults of Uvaeren. I don't understand how orc marauders could have seized it in this way. More sinister forces are at work here. The orcs must be found, and the staff reclaimed."

Where did the fleeing orcs go? Drindol says, "I watched through the cottage windows and saw them head north into the forest. They can't have gotten far."

Mara: The housekeeper Mara is a matronly halfling female of sixty years. She lives in a farmhouse on the edge of Hap with her husband, their children, and their children's families. Mara keeps the tower tidy to earn a few silver pieces a week. She doesn't know much about Imani's studies or plans, but she can confirm that Imani and Drindol are telling the truth.

Chasing the Fangfists

The orcs have only a short head start on the party. By following their trail, the characters can track them to their lair in the hope of getting the staff back.

When the heroes set out in pursuit, read:

The dark and the rain make it hard to see, but the soft ground holds tracks well. Footprints around the tower lead away to the north, and indicate that the orcs were dragging a body. At the forest's edge, the path is marked by a discarded book and a smashed wine jug. A few steps farther along, an orc lies dead, its chest crushed. In the rocky ground beyond, the trail disappears from sight.

The book (a history of the heraldic arms of Cormyr's noble families) and the wine jug were looted from the sage's tower. The other orcs dragged their companion (injured by the golem) this far before he died.

The characters can easily follow the Fangfist orcs to their lair. However, how quickly they travel there determines how difficult it will be to enter the lair in the next session. To determine how quickly the party reaches the lair, ask the players to have their characters each make two ability checks from among the following options. (If the party contains four or fewer characters, have each character make three checks.)

Each character must make at least one Dexterity check or Constitution check.

Dexterity: With a successful moderate Dexterity check, a character maintains maximum stealth while following the Fangfist orcs.

Constitution: A successful moderate Constitution check allows a character to pursue the orcs at a fast pace.

Intelligence: A successful moderate Intelligence check allows a character to note the lingering essence of the *Diamond Staff*. A character can use a detect magic spell to gain an automatic success with this check.

Wisdom: A successful moderate Wisdom check allows a character to easily note the telltale signs of the orcs' flight through the forest.

When all the characters have made their checks, total up the number of successes. If more than half the checks were successful, the party catches the orcs off guard when they explore the lair in the next session. If half or more of the checks were failures, the orcs have had time to rest up and are ready for the adventurers. Keep track of this overall success or failure for the next session.

Ending the Session

After the characters complete the skill challenge, they discover the orcs' cave lair in the forest.

When the heroes have finished following the orcs' trail, read:

A few miles from Hap, your pursuit leads you into a bramble-choked ravine. At the end of the ravine, a dark cave mouth is half-blocked by gnarled tree roots and moss. The area is marked by many tracks and strewn with discarded bones and rotting refuse. A trace of dark smoke escapes from the cave mouth and vanishes into the mist above.

If they have not already done so, the adventurers can take a short rest in preparation for the next session.

SESSION 3:

THE FANGFIST LAIR

In session 2, the characters investigated the fighting at Imani's tower and discovered a number of orcs battling a berserk flesh golem. After dealing with the monsters, the adventurers learned that another group of orcs had fled with the *Diamond Staff* having somehow overcome the protective wards set upon it by the sage Imani.

The adventurers pursued the orcs into the forest on the eastern edge of Battledale, tracking the monsters to a deserted cave. In this session, the characters explore the Fangfist lair, discover that the orcs are working for the Zhentarim, and learn that the staff is already on its way to the Zhents' masters.

At the beginning of this session, the characters are outside the mouth of the orcs' cave lair.

When you're ready to begin, read:

The orc attack on the village of Hap was no simple raid. You now know that the monsters' true objective was the Diamond Staff. Though the orcs fled quickly, you have tracked them to a ravine a few miles north of the village. At the end of the ravine, a cave mouth is half-blocked by gnarled tree roots and moss. The area is marked by many tracks and strewn with discarded bones and rotting refuse. A trace of dark smoke escapes from the cave mouth and vanishes into the mist above.

The characters have a number of options.

Enter the Cave: If the adventurers want to enter immediately, continue with "Exploring the Cave."

Wait or Observe: It's now an hour after sunset. The Zhentarim agents in the cave plan to rest here for the night, then leave in the morning. If the characters wait until then, they can ambush the Zhents shortly after sunrise when they exit the cave.

If someone observes the cave for a few minutes, allow that character an easy Wisdom check. With a successful check, the character hears the soft nickering and hoof-falls of the horses stabled in the entrance cave.

Examine the Tracks: A character who makes a successful moderate Intelligence or Wisdom check to investigate the tracks determines that a dozen or more Medium humanoids in boots have been coming and going from the cave for several days. In addition, the tracks of shod horses are mixed in among the humanoid tracks.

Exploring the Cave

The cave is a temporary lair. A tenday ago, the Zhents sent the Fangfists to this area with instructions to find a place to lie low near Hap and await orders. The cave suited the orcs' needs and offered shelter from sunlight. They have been hunting and foraging in the area around the cave for several days now, which accounts for the tracks and the discarded bones and debris.

Only the last section of the cave complex, the flowstone cave, is shown on the tactical map. The characters explore the other areas in the order given below before undertaking the tactical encounter.

Entrance Cave

The cave mouth opens up into a large, irregular cavern with a dirt floor. A number of sacks and barrels are heaped up carelessly along the walls, most marked by a brand showing the black castle and lightning bolt of the Zhentarim. Two passageways lead deeper into the cave, one dark and the other glowing with dim firelight.

Three riding horses are stabled to one side of the cave. Their saddles and harnesses are piled nearby.

The cave mouth leads into a large cavern that the Fangfists and the Zhents use for storage and stabling mounts. Sunlight from outside fills the area with dim light during the day.

Horses: The horses are ordinary mounts. If a character examines the area, he or she discerns that more horses were stabled here but are gone now. Phoele and two of her guards have already departed with the *Diamond Staff*.

Sacks and Barrels: The containers hold various provisions, including salted pork, oats, and ale.

Fungal Passage

This narrow passage smells musty. Huge, pale puffball fungi with knee-high stalks grow thickly in patches on the rocky floor. A dead orc lies face down on a pathway winding through the chamber about twenty feet from the entrance.

A doomspore patch mixed among harmless fungi makes this passage extremely dangerous. The orcs discovered the patch when they initially explored this cavern, and now they avoid the area. Characters who follow the path through the chamber trigger the doomspore when they move adjacent to the dead orc, whose body is fuzzy with new fungal growth.

Doomspore Hazard (moderate Intelligence or hard Wisdom check to notice): Whenever any creature enters an area of doomspore, that creature must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, the doomspore is triggered. The creature that triggered the hazard and all creatures within 10 feet of that creature must each succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or take 7 (2d6) poison damage. On a successful save, the damage is halved.

The area within 10 feet of the creature that triggered the doomspore becomes lightly obscured for 5 minutes or until the end of the encounter. Any creature that enters the area or starts its turn there must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or take 2 (1d4) poison damage. A creature can take this damage only once per round.

Treasure: The orc is lying on top of a magic item he found hidden in the cave when the Fangfists moved in. A character who searches the body can claim the item (see the Treasure Table, page 3).

Orc Den

Rank-smelling, poorly cured hides and furs are arranged to form crude beds in this broad cavern. In the center of the area, the hot coals of a large fire pit glow dimly. Satchels, tattered cloaks and tunics, and scraps of armor and broken weapons litter the area.

A smoldering fire pit with glowing coals provides dim illumination along the second passage from the entrance, opening up into this large chamber.

This cavern serves as the Fangfists' common area. The few orcs still dwelling here are the last of those that returned from the raid on Hap, but they are currently with the Zhentarim in the final cavern. The rest of the orc band has already left the cave for the orcs' real lair several miles away.

Flowstone Cave

Weird and beautiful sheets of flowstone decorate this dry cavern. Torches gutter along the fluted walls, showing scattered hide beds and a more orderly camp in the process of being set up. From ahead, you hear several voices bickering in Common.

The orcs recently cleared out of this spacious cavern, which the Zhents have claimed for themselves. This area is depicted on the tactical map for the encounter.

Three Zhentarim agents have remained behind to make sure the Fangfists move on after the raid on Hap. They are currently arguing over payment with the last of the Fangfist orcs.

To sneak up on the foes in the subsequent encounter, a character must succeed on a moderate Dexterity check. If the adventurers were successful in reaching the lair quickly (see the previous section), each character gains a +4 bonus to this Dexterity check.

Continue with the **Puppet Masters** encounter.

PUPPET MASTERS

Encounter Level 6

Setup

1 orc leaders (O)
2 orcs (O)
2 Zhent soldiers (S)
1 Zhent war mage (M)

Any characters who succeeded on the Dexterity check to sneak up in the flowstone cave (above) have surprise when they attack. As the characters approach, they have the opportunity to listen in on, and possibly surprise, their enemies.

When the heroes reach the cave entrance, read:

The voices you heard are those of three orcs and three humans arguing. The orcs are lightly armored, carrying javelins and battleaxes. Two of the humans are dressed in dark scale armor under black cloaks, while the third wears a dark, hooded robe. The orcs are agitated, but the humans appear indifferent.

"You said the old human's tower would be easy to take!" the first orc snarls. "But war chief Frazzku is dead! We lost warriors to bring your witch her treasure. Now pay us!"

"Ah, but our bargain was with Frazzku," the robed human replies. "We owe you no more than you have already been paid. If you do not care for how much we pay, you are free to find other employment."

Another soldier speaks to the largest of the three orcs. "It seems to me that with Frazzku's death, we should negotiate with you in the future. We're happy to offer you the same terms we offered him for your next job."

The orc frowns, thinking it over. "Korzzku is chief now," he

2 Orcs

Medium Humanoid (Orc)

Armor Class 13 (studded leather)

Hit Points 11 (2d8 + 2)

Speed 30 ft.

Senses darkvision 60 ft.

Str 14 (+2) **Dex** 10 (+0) **Con** 12 (+1)

Int 7 (–2) **Wis** 11 (+0) **Cha** 10 (+0)

Alignment chaotic evil

Languages Common, Orc

TRAITS

Relentless: If an attack reduces the orc to 0 hit points or fewer but doesn't kill it outright, it is not knocked unconscious or killed as a result until the end of its next turn, provided it still has 0 hit points or fewer.

ACTIONS

Melee Attack—Greataxe: +5 to hit (reach 5 ft.; one creature). *Hit:* 8 (1d12 + 2) slashing damage.

Ranged Attack—Shortbow: +4 to hit (range 80 ft./320 ft.; one creature). *Hit:* 3 (1d6) piercing damage.

ENCOUNTER BUILDING

Level 3 XP 70

says slowly. "Chief Korzzku! So be it, human."

Tactics

The orcs rashly charge in while the Zhents hang back to make ranged attacks. The Zhent soldiers engage in melee

2 Zhent Soldiers

Medium Humanoid (Human)

Armor Class 16 (scale mail, shield)

Hit Points 37 (5d10 + 10)

Speed 30 ft.

Str 14 (+2) **Dex** 11 (+0) **Con** 14 (+2)

Int 10 (+0) **Wis** 10 (+0) **Cha** 8 (–1)

Alignment lawful evil

Languages Common

TRAITS

Zhent Phalanx: While the soldier is next to an ally, enemies cannot have advantage on attack rolls against the soldier.

ACTIONS

Melee Attack—Long Sword: +5 to hit (reach 5 ft.; one creature). *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) slashing damage.

Ranged Attack—Crossbow: +5 to hit (range 30 ft./120 ft.; one creature). *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

ENCOUNTER BUILDING

Level 3 XP 80

Orc Leader

Medium Humanoid (Orc)

Armor Class 16 (chain mail)

Hit Points 32 (5d8 + 10)

Speed 25 ft.

Senses darkvision 60 ft.

Str 16 (+3) **Dex** 11 (+0) **Con** 14 (+2)

Int 11 (+0) **Wis** 11 (+0) **Cha** 12 (+1)

Alignment chaotic evil

Languages Common, Orc

TRAITS

Relentless: If an attack reduces the orc to 0 hit points or fewer but doesn't kill it outright, it is not knocked unconscious or killed as a result until the end of its next turn, provided it still has 0 hit points or fewer.

ACTIONS

Multiattack: The orc makes two greataxe attacks or two shortbow attacks.

Melee Attack—Greataxe: +5 to hit (reach 5 ft.; one creature). *Hit:* 9 (1d12 + 3) slashing damage.

Ranged Attack—Shortbow: +2 to hit (range 80 ft./320 ft.; one creature). *Hit:* 3 (1d6) piercing damage.

Battle Cry (1/Day): Friendly creatures with the Relentless trait that can see or hear the orc gain a +5 bonus to damage rolls until the orc's next turn.

ENCOUNTER BUILDING

Level 5 XP 340



only if they are forced to, or after two or more orcs fall. The war mage doesn't mind including orcs in his attacks if doing

Zhent War Mage

Medium Humanoid (Human)

Armor Class 14 (mage armor)

Hit Points 27 (5d6 + 10)

Speed 30 ft.

Str 9 (–1) **Dex** 14 (+2) **Con** 14 (+2)

Int 17 (+3) **Wis** 12 (+1) **Cha** 13 (+1)

Alignment lawful evil

Languages Common

TRAITS

Zhent Phalanx: While the war mage is next to an ally, enemies cannot have advantage on attack rolls against the war mage.

ACTIONS

Melee Attack—Dagger: +3 to hit (reach 5 ft.; one creature).

Hit: 3 (1d4 + 1) piercing damage.

Shocking Grasp (Cantrip): The mage chooses a creature within 5 feet of it. The target must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw. **Failed Save:** 9 (2d8) lightning damage, and the creature can't take reactions until its next turn.

Spells: The mage has the following spells (save DC 15).

Cantrips: *mage armor*, *mage hand*, *shocking grasp*.

1st-level (4/day): *color spray*, *expeditious retreat*, *magic missile*, *shield* (see reactions).

2nd-level (3/day): *invisibility*.

3rd-level (2/day): *stinking cloud*.

REACTIONS

Shield (1st-Level Spell): When hit by an attack or targeted with *magic missile*, the war mage can gain a +2 bonus to AC and immunity to *magic missile* for until the start of the mage's next turn.

ENCOUNTER BUILDING

Level 5 XP 310

so means catching more adventurers in the area.

The orcs fight to the death, but the Zhents are willing to surrender if the battle goes against them. When the first Zhent soldier is slain, the Zhent war mage casts *stinking cloud*, then *expeditious retreat* before making his escape.

ADJUSTING DIFFICULTY

If the party consists of four characters, remove one Zhent soldier from the encounter. If the party consists of six characters, add two orcs.

Features of the Area

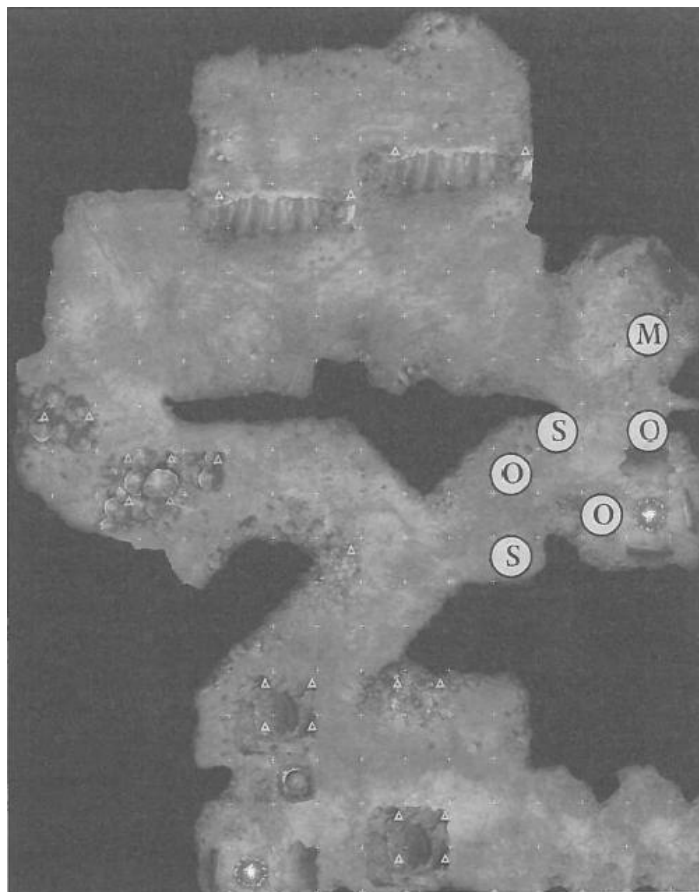
Illumination: Torches burning in sconces on the walls provide bright light.

Fire Pits: Two campfires and a pit of smoldering, reddish coals are burning low. A creature that enters a square containing a campfire, or the pit of coals, or starts its turn in one of these locations takes 2 (1d4) fire damage. A creature can take this damage only once per turn.

Hide Beds: Two stacks of hides and furs near one of the campfires remain behind from when the larger force of orcs laired here. They are difficult terrain.

Ledges: The ledges to the north are 10 feet high. Climbing a ledge is an easy Strength task.

Puffball Mushrooms: These clusters of 1-foot-tall fungi near the west edge of the map are difficult terrain. They give off clouds of harmless spores if any creature moves through them.



The Plot Thickens

In the aftermath of combat, a search of the orcs turns up a unique magic item—a single-use wand that was used to break the wards protecting the *Diamond Staff*. A character examining the spent wand can attempt a moderate Intelligence check or use a *detect magic* spell to know its function and to confirm that only a talented mage could have crafted it.

If the characters search the Zhentarim agents, they discover a leather satchel containing a letter.

Phoedele,
I have need of your services again. My sources inform me that Imani of Hap is now in possession of a unique treasure known as the Diamond Staff. Shaped of indestructible clear crystal, it is six feet in length and an inch and a half in diameter, with ancient Elven runes scribed along its six sides. The item accompanying this note will easily break any sorcerous wards the sage can muster, allowing you to retrieve the staff. Use any means necessary to do so, then meet me in the ruins of Sandersal Manor in southern Battledale. I will see to it that you receive the customary fee, plus a handsome bonus for your usual discretion.
—Barcero

Questioning Captives

If the orcs or the Zhentarim are captured, the adventurers have a chance to question them. The orcs know only that the Zhents hired them to steal the staff. The Zhentarim agents know more, and are willing to talk if the characters promise to spare them. A captured Zhent admits that he is a member of the Zhentarim under the leadership of Phoedele, a skilled mercenary captain. She recruited the Fangfists to attack Hap and seize the *Diamond Staff* but she left with the staff shortly before the characters arrived at the cave. The Zhents believe that Phoedele is taking the staff to her employer, a Sembian mage named Barcero.

Reward

Each character gains 850 XP for exploring the area and for facing the orcs and their Zhent employers.

Treasure: A small, locked wooden coffer lies near the Zhents' bedrolls. Opening the locked coffer is a moderate Dexterity task. The coffer holds 50 gp per character and two magic items (see the Treasure Table, page 3).

Conclusion

The encounter ends when the characters defeat the orcs and the Zhents flee, surrender, or are defeated. If the characters fail to defeat the orcs and the Zhents, the mercenaries abandon the cave and scatter, fearing that other adventurers might also be in pursuit. (The characters can still find Phoedele's letter, giving them an important clue for the next session.)

Ending the Session

The *Diamond Staff* is gone, but the characters know where the Zhents are taking the artifact.

When the characters are finished, read:

The stabled horses, the cryptic letter, and the human mercenaries here all hint at deep plots surrounding the theft of the Diamond Staff. The Zhent captain Phoedele is unaware that you now know her mission—and her destination.

With this chapter ended, the adventurers advance to 5th level and can take a long rest in preparation for the next session.

CHAPTER 2

In this chapter, the characters attempt to catch up with Phoedele at an abandoned manor, where she is supposed to turn the *Diamond Staff* over to the Shadovar agents that seek it. There's only one problem: Phoedele isn't interested in handing over the artifact. She never shows up for the meeting, instead heading for Mistledale and the vaults of Uvaeren to seize their valuable lore for herself

SESSION 4:

THE GHOST HOLD

Information discovered at the end of session 3 leads the adventurers across Battledale to an abandoned estate called Sandersal Manor. Here, they believe, the Zhent captain Phoedele will present the *Diamond Staff* to her employer, the Sembian mage Barcero.

When you're ready to begin, read:

In pursuing the orcs that stole the Diamond Staff you discovered that Zhent sellswords were behind the theft. The captain of the Zhent band rode off with the staff before you found the orcs' lair and stormed it. Clues you found there pointed toward a clandestine meeting in an abandoned manor.

Leaving Hap behind, you ride across Battledale to catch the Zhents at Sandersal Manor. Battledale is the most lightly populated of the Dalelands. Homesteads are few and far between, and you might ride for miles without seeing another soul. Here and there among the hills and valleys stand abandoned farms and crumbling manors. The people of Battledale call these places "ghost holds," their histories lost to the years. Luckily, Sandersal Manor is a well-known local landmark, and you are able to find the place without difficulty.

You arrive at the ruined manor a little after sunset. The western sky glows red and the shadows are long and deep. Little remains of the fortified manor house except walls of bare stone, a stable, and a dilapidated tower with its roof caved in.

If the characters decide to observe the manor for a time, they see no sign of any activity, because Barcero and his servants are waiting quietly for Phoedele. When the characters decide to search the grounds, continue with **Exploring the Manor**.

Exploring the Manor

Sandersal Manor was a fortified house owned by a wealthy Sembian noble who used it as a country retreat. When the noble's family came on hard times, they abandoned the place. In the decades since, the manor has served as a shelter for

travelers and a base for bandit gangs and hungry monsters. It has also been the object of numerous confidence schemes, in which the place has been sold and resold to unsuspecting individuals lured in by the prospect of owning an estate.

Only the last two areas of the manor, the well court and the carriage house, are shown on the tactical map. The characters explore the other areas in the order given below before undertaking the tactical encounter.

Burned Hall

This formerly elegant manor house burned down to charred ruins years ago. The roof and upper stories have collapsed, leaving a thick layer of blackened beams and broken stones inside an open hall. A faint trail winds through weeds and piles of rubble.

Sandersal was once three stories tall, but a fire has long since gutted the main hall and the upper floors, and the roof has fallen in, filling the interior with rubble. The walls are strong, however, and remain 30 feet high in places, marking the old building's perimeter.

A moderate Intelligence or Wisdom check notes faint boot prints along the trail through the hall. They suggest that several individuals passed this way in the last day or two, including two creatures that walked with a plodding, dragging step.

Kitchen

The rear portion of the old manor is in better condition than the front hall. Several large hearths indicate that this area was once a kitchen. Open doorways lead out to a courtyard with a well, and back into the burned-out hall.

This portion of the manor remains standing, though the roof is sagging. The doors and windows are long gone.

Dilapidated Tower

A battlement-crowned watchtower is anchored to one end of the manor building. Wooden steps still climb up the interior, though piles of rubble inside the tower show where parts of the upper floors have collapsed. The whole tower leans to one side.

This tower was formerly the library and personal residence of Sandersal's lord.

A successful moderate Intelligence or Wisdom check confirms that the tower is safe. A character who searches the interior and succeeds on an easy Intelligence check discovers an iron coffer containing a silver necklace (worth 10 gp per character) and one magic item (see the Treasure Table, page 3).

Well Court

This courtyard stands between the wings of the manor house, its cracked flagstones overgrown with clumps of grass. In the middle of the courtyard is a small stone well.

This area, to the south of the carriage house, appears on the tactical map. If the adventurers are not cautious as they

explore this area, the Shadovar agents hiding out in the carriage house note their presence. To approach the carriage house unnoticed, all the characters must make Dexterity checks contested by Barcero's Wisdom check.

Carriage House

Across the well court from the main house stands a stable with an attached carriage house. The stable is in better condition than the main hall. Though its doors and windows are long gone, the roof is still intact. Old ashes and half-burned firewood scattered around outside the building suggest that creatures occasionally make camp here.

This old stable is the most intact part of the manor. It appears on the tactical map.

Barcero and his Shadovar allies are currently hiding out in the carriage house, waiting for Phoedele.

When the heroes can see inside, read:

A faint gleam of lantern light and the sounds of hushed voices alert you to the presence of someone in the carriage house. Packs and bedrolls are arranged on the floor, and a shuttered lantern glows dimly on an old wooden table.

Several figures can be seen, including a portly middle-aged human who wears a Sembian waistcoat and vest. A pair of axe-wielding zombies in scale armor stand at attention. Across the room lurk two pale, slender warriors covered with tattoos and piercings, both wearing tight-fitting leather and spiked chains wrapped around their bodies. The Sembian paces impatiently from window to window.

Moderate Intelligence check: The tattooed warriors are shadar-kai—dangerous humanoids that channel a mysterious shadow magic. If the result achieves a successful hard check, the character also knows that shadar-kai have abilities involving teleportation and resistance. They serve the Shadovar, the warrior-wizards that rule Netheril and dominate Sembia.

Separate moderate Intelligence check: The undead are actually dread warriors, which are more dangerous than mere zombies. If the result achieves a successful hard check, the character also knows that dread warriors channel powerful magic and that they serve and defend a specific master.

If any of the characters failed the Dexterity check to approach unnoticed across the well court, Barcero sees them and speaks:

The Sembian sees your approach and gives you a puzzled frown. "You're not Phoedele," he says. "Who are you, and what are you doing here?"

Whether or not the characters surprise Barcero and his allies, they can choose to approach and talk; see “Delicate Negotiations” below.

If the characters attack at once regardless of Barcero’s overtures, any characters who succeeded on the Dexterity check have surprise when they attack; continue with the **Barcero’s Wrath** encounter.

Delicate Negotiations

As long as the characters take no overtly hostile actions, Barcero sees no reason to attack.

If the heroes attempt to speak to Barcero, read:

Though he appears wary, the Sembian nods politely as he speaks. “Perhaps introductions are in order. I am Barcero, a gentleman of Sembia. These are my bodyguards. I am afraid these are dangerous times, and a man of my station must take precautions when traveling abroad. I’m meeting a dear friend here, but it seems that she has been delayed. Might I ask what brings you to Sandersal Manor?”

Barcero adopts a friendly manner as he attempts to discover whether the characters are looking for Phoedeles—and particularly whether they know of and are seeking the *Diamond Staff*. He avoids discussing anything about the staff or the vaults of Uvaeren unless it’s clear that the characters already know this information. Additionally, he hopes to establish whether the characters might be useful to him.

Use the following guidelines to determine Barcero’s responses to the characters’ questions.

What is your relationship to the Zhents? “They are reliable mercenaries with a reputation for obtaining results, and they have always had a presence in the Dalelands. I’ve employed them before and have been satisfied with their work.”

Who is Phoedeles? “Lady Phoedeles is a captain in the Zhentarim, whom I hired to help me find something I need. Have you seen her, by any chance? She should have been here last night, but it seems she has been delayed—or has reneged on our agreement and decided to keep my prize for herself. Why do you wish to know?”

Why do you want the *Diamond Staff*? “I see you are well-informed folk and not mere mercenaries. I assume you thus know that the staff is an artifact of some monetary value, but my primary interest is in the lore that the *Diamond Staff of Chomylla* might unlock. If you happen to get your hands on the staff before I do, I will reward you handsomely for it. Now, might I ask what inspires your own interest in the relic?”

Do you know the Zhents sent orcs to raid Hap? “I suppose that might be true. I do not inquire after Lady Phoedeles’s methods, and I left the details of the task to her discretion. If her efforts were excessive in some way, I am deeply troubled—but this is her doing, not mine. Could you tell me what happened?”

How did you know Imani had the staff? “I make it a point to remain informed of noteworthy events in the Dalelands. The Cult of the Dragon is anxious to recover Dretchroyaster’s stolen treasure. If my own agents had not

visited the sage, the cultists would have done so soon enough.”

Depending on how the conversation goes, Barcero might decide that he has nothing to gain by attacking the characters. If the players reach a similar conclusion, it is easy to avoid combat in this session. For Barcero to decide that he can allow the characters to walk away, they must convince him of the truth of one of the following facts, through effective role-playing and hard Charisma checks to bluff or engage him diplomatically.

- ◆ They are amoral mercenaries happy to hunt down Phoedeles, kill her, and bring the *Diamond Staff* to Barcero for a suitable reward.
- ◆ They are agents of Netheril who can be counted on to recapture the staff and proceed in the empire’s interests.
- ◆ They have no further interest in Phoedeles or the staff, and are ready to drop the matter.

If Barcero is convinced that the characters are potential allies or beneath his worry, he allows them to go about their business, and combat is avoided. Go to “The Next Lead” on page 23.

If the characters fail to convince him, Barcero orders his allies to attack. Continue with the **Barcero’s Wrath** encounter.

BARCERO’S WRATH

Encounter Level 7

Setup

Barcero (B)

3 dread protectors (P)

2 shadar-kai chainfighters (C)

This combat encounter is initiated if the characters attack Barcero, or if the mage decides he has no use for the adventurers after his initial conversation with them.

If the characters attack Barcero, read:

“You fools!” the Sembian mage snarls. “I had no quarrel with you!” He falls back, raising his hands as his undead guardians move to protect him. The two pale warriors unfurl their spiked chains as they step forward to engage you.

If Barcero attacks the characters, read:

Barcero sighs heavily. “Well, that interchange was not as useful as I’d hoped. And I can’t have you underfoot when I deal with Phoedeles.” He calls out to the two pale warriors and the undead guardians: “Slay them all.”

ADJUSTING DIFFICULTY

If the party consists of four characters, remove a shadar-kai from the encounter. If the party consists of six characters, add one shadar-kai.

Tactics

Barcero casts *death smoke* to harry ranged attackers, but otherwise avoids combat in order to control the battlefield with his magic. He casts *invisibility* on himself to get behind

cover, then uses *cause fear* and *hold person* to leave the adventurers at the mercy of his shadar-kai and dread protector servants.

The chainfighters use their reach to strike while avoiding melee counterattacks, staying in constant motion with dance of death. Each dread protector fights at Barcero's side, moving to protect him in its aura and using protector's call whenever forced movement separates the creature from its master.

Barcero's allies are devoted to him, and they fight to the death to protect their master. Barcero does not return their devotion, though. If his allies are defeated, Barcero casts *expeditious retreat* before fleeing. If escape is impossible, he surrenders.

Features of the Area

- Illumination:** The sunset outside and the shuttered lantern in the carriage house fill the area with dim light.
- Dead Tree:** This 15-foot-tall tree is blocking terrain.
- Debris:** Squares filled with crumbling masonry or heaps of debris are difficult terrain.
- Well:** The well is 50 feet deep and is half filled with water.

Barcero
Medium Humanoid (Human)
Armor Class 14 (mage armor)
Hit Points 38 (7d6 + 14)
Speed 30 ft.
Str 10 (+0) **Dex** 15 (+2) **Con** 14 (+2)
Int 18 (+4) **Wis** 16 (+3) **Cha** 17 (+3)
Alignment neutral evil
Languages Common

ACTIONS

Chill Touch (Cantrip): Barcero chooses a living creature within 5 feet of him. The target must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw. *Failed Save:* 9 (2d8) necrotic damage, and the target cannot regain hit points until the start of Barcero's next turn.

Death Smoke (3rd-Level Necromancy Spell): Barcero creates a 10-foot-radius cloud of black smoke centered on a point he can see within 50 feet of him. The cloud's area is lightly obscured. The cloud lasts for 1 minute or until Barcero's concentration is broken.

When the cloud appears, each living creature in it must make a DC 16 Constitution saving throw. A creature that enters the cloud or ends its turn there must also make the saving throw, but no more than once per turn. *Failed Save:* 21 (6d6) necrotic damage, and the target is frightened for 1 minute. As an action, the target can make a DC 16 Wisdom check, ending the frightened condition on a success. *Successful Save:* Half damage.

Spells: Barcero has the following spells (save DC 16).
Cantrips: *chill touch*, *mage armor*, *mage hand*.
1st-level (4/day): *cause fear*, *expeditious retreat*, *false life*.
2nd-level (3/day): *hold person*, *invisibility*, *spider climb*.
3rd-level (3/day): *death smoke*.
4th-level (1/day): *dimension door*.

ENCOUNTER BUILDING

Level 6 XP 550

2 Shadar-Kai Chainfighters
Medium Humanoid
Armor Class 14 (leather)
Hit Points 59 (7d10 + 21)
Speed 30 ft.
Senses low-light vision
Str 13 (+1) **Dex** 17 (+3) **Con** 16 (+3)
Int 11 (+0) **Wis** 14 (+2) **Cha** 10 (+0)
Alignment neutral evil
Languages Common

TRAITS

Dance of Death: If the chainfighter moves at least 15 feet or uses *shadow jaunt*, it can make a *spiked chain* attack at the end of its movement.

ACTIONS

Melee Attack—Spiked Chain: +6 to hit (reach 10 ft.; one creature). *Hit:* 8 (1d10 + 3) slashing damage.

MOVEMENT

Shadow Jaunt (Recharge 6): Instead of moving, the chainfighter teleports to any location it can see within 15 feet of it. Until the start of its next turn, the chainfighter is resistant to all damage.

ENCOUNTER BUILDING

Level 5 XP 390

3 Dread Protectors
Medium Undead
Armor Class 14 (scale mail)
Hit Points 22 (3d10 + 6); see Traits below
Speed 25 ft.
Senses darkvision 60 ft.
Str 16 (+3) **Dex** 10 (+0) **Con** 14 (+2)
Int 5 (−3) **Wis** 12 (+1) **Cha** 6 (−2)
Alignment neutral evil
Languages understands Common

TRAITS

Damage Resistance: The protector is resistant to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from a nonmagical source.

Eyes of Undeath: The protector's master can see or hear anything the protector can see or hear. The master can also speak through the protector.

Immunities: The protector is immune to disease and poison. It cannot be put to sleep and does not need to sleep, eat, or breathe.

Shield of Undeath: While the protector is within 5 feet of its master, the master shares the protector's Damage Resistance trait.

ACTIONS

Melee Attack—Greataxe: +5 to hit (reach 5 ft.; one creature). *Hit:* 9 (1d12 + 3) slashing damage.

MOVEMENT

Protector's Call (Recharge 6): Instead of moving, the protector teleports up to 25 feet to a location it can see beside its master.

ENCOUNTER BUILDING

Level 4 XP 150

A 3-foot-high wall surrounds the well; any creature pushed into the well can attempt an easy Dexterity saving throw to grab onto the low wall and avoid a fall. A fall into the water deals only 3 (1d6) bludgeoning damage. Climbing out of the well is an easy Strength task.

The Next Lead

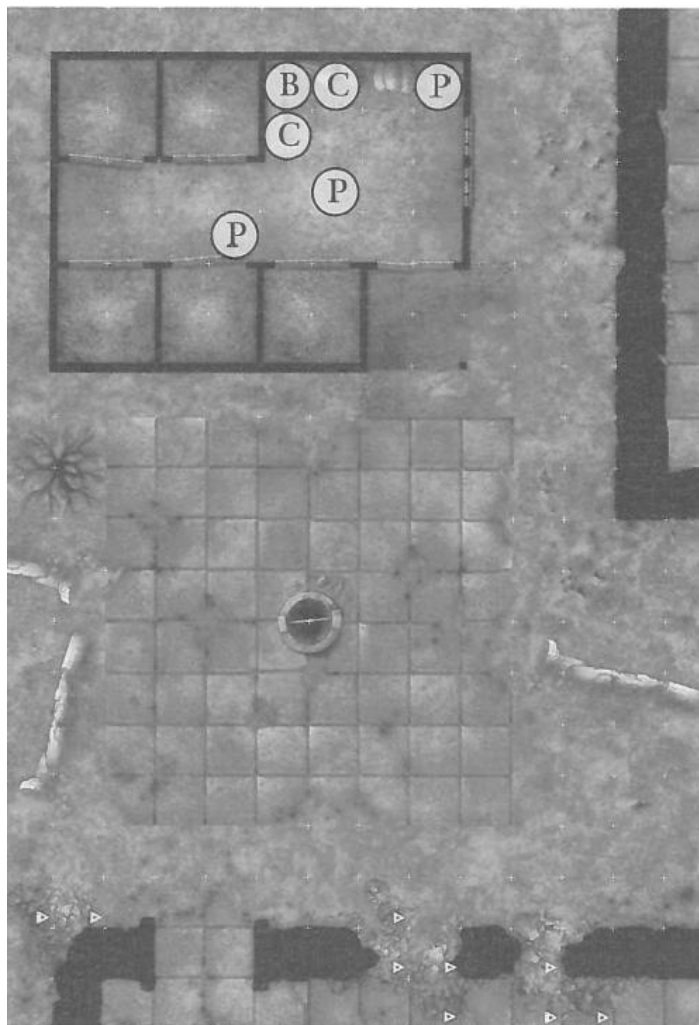
The characters can obtain the information they need to pursue Phoedele in one of a few different ways, depending on whether combat occurred and, if so, how it played out.

The characters convinced Barcero. If the characters earn Barcero's trust, the Sembian tells them that he believes Phoedele is heading for Mistedale to attempt to find the Vault of Song and seize its lore for herself. Like Imani, Barcero has gleaned the rough location of the vault from ancient records and lore. The Sembian believes that, given Phoedele's failure to meet him, she must have stolen that same information from him when she hatched her plot to seize the *Diamond Staff*. He suggests the characters travel to the village of Peldan's Helm, near which the vault is rumored to be hidden.

The characters take Barcero alive. If Barcero surrenders or is otherwise spared after combat, the Sembian mage is willing to tell the characters what he knows. He believes that Phoedele is most likely heading for Peldan's Helm in Mistedale, with the intent of opening one of Uvaeren's library-vaults and seizing its treasured lore. He believes that Phoedele managed to steal the location of the Vault of Song from his own records as the first step in her betrayal.

Barcero escapes or dies. A search of the Sembian mage's pack turns up a simple map showing Mistedale and the village of Peldan's Helm. The map marks an approximate location for one of the vaults of Uvaeren in the forest near Peldan's Helm.

Barcero defeats the characters. Even if the agents of the Shadovar are victorious in the fight, an adventurer who was left for dead during the fray or a character who fled the battle can sneak back to spy on Barcero in the aftermath. The character overhears the Sembian telling his allies that Phoedele "will be making for the Vault of Song. We must find someone who can pick up her trail from Peldan's Helm, since I dare not show my face in Mistedale." The villains then depart.



Reward

Each character gains 1,650 XP for exploring the area and dealing with Barcero.

Treasure: Barcero possesses a leather purse containing one 25 gp gem per character, a *potion of healing*, and one magic item (see the Treasure Table, page 3).

Ending the Session

When the characters have defeated these foes or dealt with Barcero, they can take stock of the situation.

When the characters are finished, read:

The double-cross by the Zhent agent Phoedele has put the Diamond Staff farther out of your reach, but at least you know where she is headed. The Vault of Song is said to be hidden in the forests of Mistedale, near the village of Peldan's Helm. By moving directly to that location, you might catch the Zhentarim there.

As this session ends, the adventurers can take a long rest in preparation for the action of the next session (which occurs after several days of travel).

SESSION 5:

ROGUE AGENTS

In Sandersal Manor, the characters encountered the Shadovar agent Barcero, and discovered that Phoedele was a no-show at her expected meeting. The Zhentarim captain intends to keep the *Diamond Staff* for herself, and Barcero has guessed that she seeks the wealth of lore hidden in the library vaults of Uvaeren. To recover the staff, the characters must locate the Vault of Song that Phoedele also seeks.

When you're ready to start, read:

The Zhentarim agent Phoedele never showed up to deliver the Diamond Staff to her employer, the Sembian mage Barcero. This double-cross by the Zhent agent has put the staff farther out of your reach, but at least you know where she is headed. The Vault of Song is said to be hidden in the forests of Mistedale, near the village of Peldan's Helm. By moving quickly, you might catch the Zhentarim there.

The distance from Sandersal Manor in Battledale to the village of Peldan's Helm in western Mistedale is sixty miles if you cut through the forest—about the same amount of travel time as going the ninety miles along Rauthauvyr's Road. Returning to Hap to talk to Imani will no doubt help you in locating the Vault of Song, but doing so would add two days to the trip.

The characters begin their journey from Sandersal Manor the next morning. The trip takes three days on foot or two days by horse, unless the characters return to Hap to question Imani. If they do, the sage provides the best information he has about the probable location of the ruins. This side trip gives the characters both an advantage and a disadvantage in the upcoming skill challenge.

Scouring Peldan's Helm

Peldan's Helm is a small village at the western end of Mistedale. Phoedele and her Zhents traveled straight here from Hap and arrived in the village at about the same time the characters were visiting Sandersal Manor.

When the heroes arrive in Peldan's Helm, read:

Peldan's Helm stands at the end of a cart track a couple of miles from the ancient road known as the Moonsea Ride. Its cottages are made of fieldstone and turf and a stout palisade surrounds the settlement. To the west and north, the great green wall of the forest rises a mile or so from the village. South and east, the rolling downs of Mistedale are home to small farms and open pastures.

The characters explore the village by means of a skill challenge (see below). Add color to the skill challenge with the following details.

Lore: A moderate Intelligence check or a conversation with the locals relays the history of the village relays the story of how a weary soldier named Peldan came to this spot in years gone by, drove his sword into the ground, and set his helm on top of it. He then claimed everything within sight of

Connections to D&D Game Day

If some of the characters in the party participated in *Vault of the Dracolich*, they automatically recognize the mysterious monks as members of the Cult of the Dragon. At your discretion, some of the cultists might recognize the characters who defiled Dretchroyaster's lair. Rework the encounter's read-aloud text as appropriate.

his helmet as his own freehold. Many people in the village name themselves as descendants of Peldan.

Firehand Inn: The village's only inn and tavern is a raucous, cheerful place called the Firehand Inn. A large portrait of an unknown wizard hurling fireballs in all directions hangs in the taproom. Locals have no firm recollection of who this wizard was, but several theories abound. The inn's owner is a handsome human female of forty years named Leisha, renowned for her stubbornness and sharp tongue.

Constable Gherrin: The area's chief law-keeper is a strapping but taciturn human male of thirty named Gherrin. The constable is smarter than he lets on, but rarely uses two words when one will do.

Iandra Greenhood: A female half-elf hunter and forester, Iandra knows the forest trails well and is familiar with the various ruins in the woods nearby. She doesn't know the names or contents of these ruin sites, so she can't lead the characters directly to the Vault of Song, but she can point them in the direction of likely locations.

Locating the Zhentarim

This skill challenge begins when the characters reach Peldan's Helm and begin looking for signs that the Zhentarim are in the area. Characters might search the forest, gather information from villagers, or spy out the village and the nearby farms in hopes of finding the Zhents coming or going from the Vault of Song. The people of Peldan's Helm are hesitant to direct strangers to the local elven ruins, fearing that interlopers will unleash ancient curses or dangerous monsters.

In Peldan's Helm, the characters search for signs of the Zhentarim and attempt to question the locals regarding mysterious activity in the area. To determine how much information they uncover, ask the players to have their characters each make two ability checks from among the following options. (If the party contains four or fewer characters, have each character make three checks.)

If the characters decided to return to Hap to talk to Imani before journeying to Peldan's Helm, the information they gain from the sage allows them to turn two failed checks into successes. However, the extra travel time means that the trail of the Zhentarim has grown colder. The following ability checks each take a –1 penalty.

Intelligence: A successful moderate Intelligence check allows a character to note the lingering essence of the *Diamond Staff*. A character can use a *detect magic* spell to gain an automatic success with this check.

Wisdom: With a successful moderate Wisdom check, a character is able to find signs of the Zhents' movement and exploration in the local woodlands.

Charisma: With a successful moderate Charisma check, a character convinces the villagers to share information about the local elven ruins, or to support the adventurers against the Zhentarim threat.

Lore: Each time a character succeeds on a check, give out one of the first five pieces of information presented below. Do not initially give out the last piece of information (“The Zhentarim are not the only strangers in the area . . .”)

The first five pieces of information can be given out in any order, adjusted to suit the kind of ability check being made. If you can’t logically give out a piece of information for a particular check, give out two pieces for a subsequent successful check. Even if a piece of information isn’t given out, keep track of the successful check.

If the first five pieces of information are given out on successful checks, let the players continue until each character has made two checks (or three checks for a smaller party). Then total up the number of successes. If more than half the checks were successful, the characters gain the final piece of information. If half or more of the checks were failures, the characters do not gain this information, and the cultists from the Cult of the Dragon ambush them in the subsequent encounter.

- ◆ Many of the ruins close to Peldan’s Helm are little more than the shattered outer walls of long-lost settlements. Farther from the village, ancient fortresses and vaults are hidden within the forest.
- ◆ The name “Vault of Song” isn’t known among the people of Peldan’s Helm. However, in the woods far from the village, the sound of crystal chimes can sometimes be heard on the wind.
- ◆ The ruins in the deeper woods are said to be haunted by bands of terrible and deadly spiderlike humanoids, as adept at combat as they are at laying subtle traps.
- ◆ The Zhentarim passed by yesterday (or three days ago, if the adventurers returned to Hap to talk to Imani). A group of five armed warriors on horseback, they were well provisioned and appeared to know where they were going.
- ◆ None of the Zhentarim openly carried anything resembling the *Diamond Staff* but their leader carried a long bundle wrapped up tight and slung alongside her saddle.
- ◆ The Zhentarim are not the only strangers in the area. Another group passed through just this morning—monks in gray robes, following a purple-robed leader. A character who makes a successful moderate Intelligence check recognizes the color scheme as belonging to the Cult of the Dragon.

Cult of the Dragon

The Cult of the Dragon is also on the trail of the Zhentarim, seeking to recapture the *Diamond Staff* for the dracolich Dretchroyaster. After hearing of the attack against Imani, a group of cultists in Battledale became convinced that the sage had a hand in the original theft of the staff. These

cultists are now hot on the same trail the characters are following.

When the adventurers depart Peldan’s Helm and set out in search of the Vault of Song, make note of the outcome of the skill challenge and continue with the **Unexpected Foes** encounter.

UNEXPECTED FOES

Encounter Level 6

Setup

1 human cult leader (L)

2 cult veterans (V)

6 human berserkers (C)

As members of the Cult of the Dragon pursue the Zhentarim, their path crosses that of the adventurers. The characters’ success or failure in the previous skill challenge plays a part in the setup of this scenario.

When the heroes set out into the forest, read:

Following a track that winds between the trees, you make your way carefully through the scattered ruin sites of Mistledale. After a short time, the trail you follow opens up suddenly to a small clearing, in which stands an old trapper’s cabin.

If more than half the checks in the previous section were successful, read:

A number of gray-robed humans are pacing around the cabin, as if they had just searched it. Their leader wears a purple robe and is yelling at the others. “We waste our time in these accursed woods! We must find the Zhentarim’s trail again. The praise of the dread master shall be ours.”

The characters must make Dexterity checks contested by the cult leader’s Wisdom check to gain surprise. If the checks fail, the cultists spot the adventurers as they approach.

If half or more of the checks in the previous section were failures, the cultists ambush the characters as they approach, gaining surprise; read:

Suddenly, a number of gray-robed humans burst out from the trees around the cabin—it’s an ambush!

“Slay the unbelievers and take the staff!” a human in purple robes shouts. “The praise of the master shall be ours!”

Additionally, the cult leader has previously cast invisibility on the two cult veterans. The cultists surprise the characters, assuming them to be the Zhentarim mercenaries. Add a third cult veteran to the foes here.

Tactics

The human berserkers wade into melee against the toughest-looking adventurers, letting the cult veterans skirt around the edges of the fray. The veterans use *multiattack* to engage characters trying to avoid being locked down in combat.

The cult leader uses word of *thunderwave* enemies into position for attacks by the cultists and veterans, knocking characters out of advantageous position. He uses *fireball* each round against whichever enemy poses the most serious threat, then uses *cause fear* to neutralize that enemy. *Wall of fire* is useful for an escape from a troublesome foe.

Features of the Area

- Illumination:** Bright sunlight.
- Cabin:** The cabin has no doors. The rotting remains of furniture are difficult terrain.
- Trees:** The foliage is difficult terrain. A creature within the trees has half cover.

ADJUSTING DIFFICULTY

If the party consists of four characters, remove one cult veteran from the encounter. If the party consists of six characters, add an additional cult veteran.

Human Cult Leader
Medium Humanoid (Human)
Armor Class 14 (mage armor)
Hit Points 40 (7d6 + 16)
Speed 30 ft.
Str 10 (+0) **Dex** 14 (+2) **Con** 14 (+2)
Int 17 (+3) **Wis** 14 (+2) **Cha** 16 (+3)
Alignment lawful evil
Languages Common, Draconic

TRAITS

Evoker: When the cult leader casts an evocation spell that deals damage to all creatures within an area of effect, the leader can pick a number of creatures in the area up to the spell’s level + 1. The chosen creatures take no damage from the spell during the turn the spell is cast.

ACTIONS

Melee Attack—Quarterstaff: +4 to hit (reach 5 ft.; one creature). *Hit:* 4 (1d6 + 1) bludgeoning damage.

Shocking Grasp (Cantrip): The cult leader chooses a creature within 5 feet of it. The target must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw. *Failed Save:* 9 (2d8) lightning damage, and the creature can’t take reactions until its next turn.

Spells: The cult leader has the following spells (save DC 15).
Cantrips: *mage armor*, *mage hand*, *shocking grasp*.
1st-level (4/day): *cause fear*, *magic missile*, *thunderwave*.
2nd-level (3/day): *invisibility*, *Melf’s acid arrow*.
3rd-level (3/day): *dispel magic*, *fireball*.
4th-level (1/day): *wall of fire*.

ENCOUNTER BUILDING

Level 6 XP 530

Conclusion

The encounter ends when the characters defeat the cultists. If the cultists are victorious, the survivors leave the area when they determine that the characters are not carrying the *Diamond Staff*. They reappear again in session 8.

Reward

Each character gains 1,550 XP for the activities in and around Peldan’s Helm, and for taking on the cultists.
Treasure: The cultists carry gems and coins worth 50 gp per character. In addition, the leader carries one magic item (see the Treasure Table, page 3).

2 Cult Veterans
Medium Humanoid (Human)
Armor Class 14 (studded leather)
Hit Points 45 (6d10 + 12)
Speed 30 ft.
Str 14 (+2) **Dex** 13 (+1) **Con** 14 (+2)
Int 10 (+0) **Wis** 12 (+1) **Cha** 9 (–1)
Alignment lawful evil
Languages Common

ACTIONS

Melee Attack—Bastard Sword: +6 to hit (reach 5 ft.; one creature). *Hit:* 7 (1d10 + 2) slashing damage. If the attack deals 8 or more damage, the veteran pushes the target up to 10 feet away or knocks it prone.

Multiattack (Recharge 5–6): The veteran makes two bastard sword attacks.

ENCOUNTER BUILDING

Level 4 XP 170

6 Human Berserkers
Medium Humanoid (Human)
Armor Class 12 (hide armor)
Hit Points 13 (2d8 + 4)
Speed 30 ft.
Str 14 (+2) **Dex** 11 (+0) **Con** 14 (+2)
Int 8 (–1) **Wis** 7 (–2) **Cha** 10 (+0)
Alignment chaotic neutral
Languages Common

TRAITS

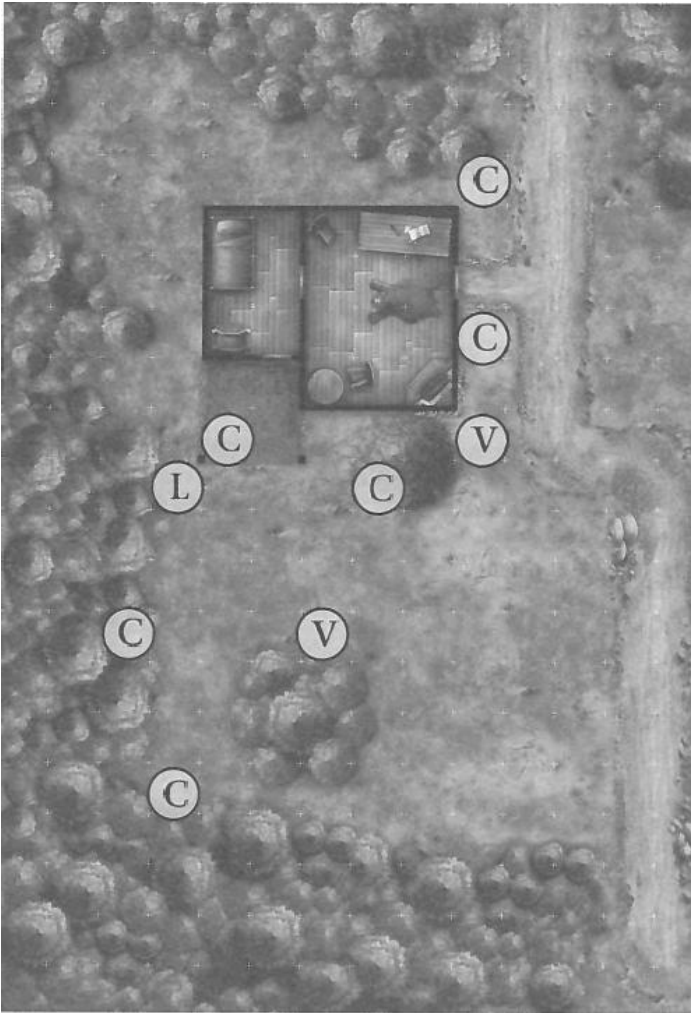
Rage +5: The berserker can take disadvantage on any melee attack roll to gain a +5 bonus to that attack’s damage roll.

ACTIONS

Melee Attack—Greatsword: +5 to hit (reach 5 ft.; one creature). *Hit:* 8 (1d12 + 2) slashing damage.

ENCOUNTER BUILDING

Level 2 XP 30



SESSION 6:

RUINS OF UVAEREN

The characters have pursued the Zhentarim mercenary Phoede and her followers to western Mistledale. The village of Peldan's Helm stands near the ancient ruins of Uvaeren—which includes what the sage Imani believes to be the location of the Vault of Song. In and around the village, the adventurers unearthed clues that enabled them to follow the Zhentarim to a specific elven ruin.

When you're ready to start, read:

Pushing on past the site where you fought the cultists, you soon pick up the trail of a half-dozen horses that recently passed this way. As you approach a clearing, ancient ruins rise up from the gloom before you. The remains of a shattered keep stand directly ahead, its crumbling walls sunken into the forest floor. A path leading into the ruins is shrouded by sheets of spider-webs.

Eight horses are picketed in the clearing in front of the tower. Saddles and saddlebags are heaped up nearby, along with several bedrolls and a pair of folded tents. The gear is marked with the symbol of the Zhentarim, a black castle and a lightning bolt. The animals seem nervous, but not from your presence. Something else is bothering them.

These ruins are haunted by a tribe of chitines—spiderlike monsters that fiercely defend their territory. After experiencing an unpleasant encounter with these creatures, Phoede and her mercenaries struck a bargain with them, offering payment of coin, weapons, and one dead Zhentarim in return for entry into the Vault of Song.

When the characters first approach the ruins, a successful moderate Wisdom check determines that unseen predators are spooking the horses. The animals' attention is centered on the webs shrouding the entrance to the fallen keep.

Only the last section of the ruins, the ruined council hall, is shown on the tactical map. The characters explore the other areas in the given order before undertaking the tactical encounter.

Chomylla's Monument

The webs present in the rest of the ruins are strangely absent from this old plaza. A ring-shaped colonnade stands in the center, each column twelve feet tall and carved from blackened marble. Silver runes are incised in each of the columns. At the center of the colonnade stands a statue of a weeping elf looking up at the sky, one arm thrown over her face as if to shield her eyes.

A monument stands in a courtyard near the center of the ruins, placed there by the high mage Chomylla five thousand years ago. The chitines don't like the magic here, and they avoid the area.

Chomylla returned here after the kingdom of Uvaeren was destroyed, and found to her sorrow that there was nothing she could do to restore it. She created this colonnade as a memorial to those who died.

Ending the Session

After dealing with the cultists, the adventurers can continue to the ruins of Uvaeren.

When the characters are finished, read:

Pushing on past the abandoned cabin, you soon pick up the trail of a half-dozen horses that recently passed this way. As you approach a clearing, ancient ruins rise up from the gloom before you. The remains of a shattered keep stand directly ahead, its crumbling walls sunken into the forest floor. A path leading into the ruins is shrouded by sheets of spider-webs.

Eight horses are picketed in the clearing in front of the tower. Saddles and saddlebags are heaped up nearby, along with several bedrolls and a pair of folded tents. The gear is marked with the symbol of the Zhentarim—a black castle and a lightning bolt.

The adventurers can take a short rest in preparation for the next session.

Exploring the Area: The runes are unfamiliar, but a successful moderate Intelligence check allows them to be recognized as a style of magical writing used in the ancient elven realms of Cormanthor. A character who succeeds on another moderate Intelligence check, or uses a *detect magic* spell, notes the presence of a latent spell effect that can be triggered by the runes.

Any living, intelligent creature can receive the memorial's magical message by touching one of the silver runes on the pillars.

If the runes are triggered, read:

The image of a beautiful female sun elf in regal robes appears within the ring of pillars. She looks at you sadly as she says, "I am Chomylla, the last high mage of Uvaeren. I raised this monument in memory of my people. The star that destroyed us appeared in the waning days of summer, growing brighter each night. It was a potent sign, and we wondered at its meaning. At the last sunset, it blazed brighter than Selûne in her fullness. But then its terrible purpose was revealed when it smote the ground not five leagues from this spot, and threw a wall of fire through the forest a full forty leagues eastward.

"Tianaphor, Draes Magyssia, Seldonyriphir, Yaeron of the Three Pools—all were erased in the blink of an eye. Then came the Twelve Nights of Fire. The few who had survived the star's fall perished in the conflagration that followed, laying low fair Uvaeren, the Lorelands of Arcorar. It was not my fate to die with my people, but now I go to my rest among them. Look long upon these burned stones, stranger, and grieve for lost Uvaeren."

The elf's image regards you a moment longer, then turns away as it fades.

When its message has been delivered, the monument remains silent for 5 minutes, after which touching any of the runes activates it again. If the characters did not hear the story of Uvaeren in chapter 1, the magic of this place imparts that knowledge to them. In addition, the characters know that Tianaphor, Draes Magyssia, Seldonyriphir, and Yaeron of the Three Pools were cities of Uvaeren. After thousands of years, only their names survive.

Moon Arch

The path leads through a white marble wall inset with an archway whose top is carved in the shape of a crescent moon. Tiny star-shaped ornamentation around the horns of the moon appears to represent the Tears of Selûne.

As the adventurers move deeper into the ruins, they push closer to the lair of the chitines—and stumble across one of those creatures' deadly traps.

If a character detects the trap, read:

An almost-invisible strand of webbing has been strung across the path in the archway, just above the ground.

If no one detects the trap, read:

A tripwire made of webbing snaps as you walk across it. From out of the marble wall, a volley of darts is unleashed.

Poisoned Dart Wall Trap (moderate Intelligence check or hard Wisdom check to notice): Whenever a creature breaks the trap's tripwire, that creature and all others within 25 feet of the triggering creature must make a moderate Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, the target takes 9 (3d4) piercing damage and 9 (3d4) poison damage. On a successful save, the target takes 3 (1d4) piercing damage and 3 (1d4) poison damage.

A creature that notices the trap before it is triggered can disable the tripwire with a hard Dexterity check.

Ruined Portico

This covered portico was the entrance to a grand hall, but the building beyond the doorway has collapsed. Only the entrance and its splendid colonnade remain standing. The heavy webbing here features a number of cocoons hanging at different heights. These cocoons enclose a variety of forest animals, including squirrels, marmots, and deer, as well as one human in dark chainmail.

The remains of this once-grand hall now serve as the larder of the chitines. Their victims are preserved in webbing until eaten.

The human is a Zhent mercenary who was killed during an initial skirmish with the monsters. Phoedele included the corpse as part of the bribe she paid to the chitines, but did not know that the dead mercenary was carrying treasure. If the heroes take the corpse down, a character who makes a moderate Intelligence check to search the body finds one magic item (see the Treasure Table, page 3). A character who makes a moderate Wisdom check determines that the mercenary died from numerous stab wounds.

Ruined Council Hall

This large structure near the middle of the ruins looks as though it might have been a magnificent council hall. Much of the ceiling has collapsed, leaving an empty shell of a building. The webbing is heaviest around the old windows and doorways leading inside.

The chitines use this old council hall as their den, defending it from intruders. The entrance to the Vault of Song is here. This area appears on the tactical map.

Any edged weapon can cut through the webs to create a way into the ruined hall. Alternatively, any character who scouts around the area before entering finds a spot where the webs are only partially attached; this location serves as the chitines' entrance.

When the characters are on the verge of entering the ruined council hall, continue with the **Chitine Nest** encounter.

CHITINE NEST

Encounter Level 6

Setup

3 chitine warriors (W)

7 chitines (C and/or S)

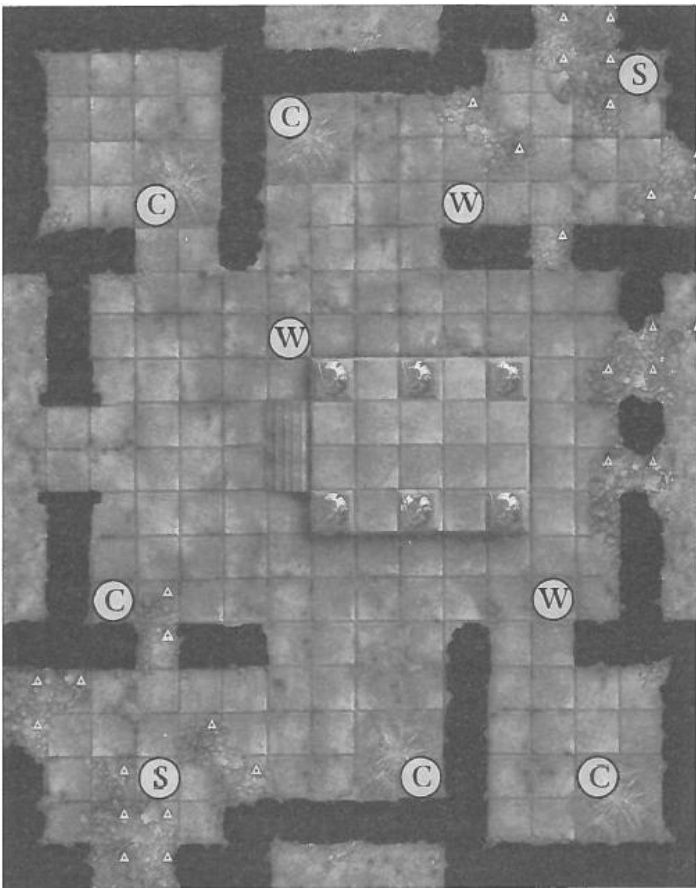
The characters can't spot the chitines without entering the council hall, nor can the chitines see the characters coming. Neither side can gain surprise in this encounter.

When the characters enter the ruined hall, read:

The interior of this ancient hall hangs heavy with webbing. Sheets of the stuff have been formed into crude, tent-like structures, suspended high up along the walls and above a central platform lined with statues of elf warriors. A half-dozen pale, spindly humanoids with four arms and spiderlike fangs lurk among the webs, drawing weapons as soon as they see you.

ADJUSTING DIFFICULTY

If the party consists of four characters, remove one chitine warrior and one chitine from the encounter. If the party consists of six characters, add one chitine warrior and one chitine.



3 Chitine Warriors

Medium Humanoid

Armor Class 13

Hit Points 45 (6d10 + 12)

Speed 30 ft., climb 30 ft.

Senses darkvision

Str 13 (+1) Dex 15 (+2) Con 14 (+2)

Int 8 (–1) Wis 14 (+2) Cha 10 (+0)

Alignment chaotic evil

Languages Common, Elvish

TRAITS

Spider Climb: The chitine can climb on smooth walls and upside down on horizontal surfaces. It ignores movement restrictions due to webbing, including that from a *web* spell.

ACTIONS

Melee Attack—Dagger: +5 to hit (reach 5 ft.; one creature). *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage and 2 (1d4) poison damage.

Ranged Attack—Hand Crossbow: +5 to hit (range 30 ft./120 ft.; one creature). *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage and 2 (1d4) poison damage.

Multiattack: The warrior makes two dagger attacks, two hand crossbow attacks, or one dagger attack and one hand crossbow attack.

MOVEMENT

Web Line (Recharge 6): The chitine launches a web line that allows it to fly up to 25 feet. This movement doesn't provoke opportunity attacks. The chitine must land at the end of this movement.

ENCOUNTER BUILDING

Level 4 XP 200

7 Chitines

Medium Humanoid

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 22 (4d8 + 4)

Speed 30 ft., climb 30 ft.

Senses darkvision

Str 12 (+1) Dex 13 (+1) Con 12 (+1)

Int 8 (–1) Wis 12 (+1) Cha 10 (+0)

Alignment chaotic evil

Languages Common, Elvish

TRAITS

Spider Climb: The chitine can climb on smooth walls and upside down on horizontal surfaces. It ignores movement restrictions due to webbing, including that from a *web* spell.

ACTIONS

Melee or Ranged Attack—Dagger: +3 to hit (reach 5 ft. or range 20 ft./80 ft.; one creature). *Hit:* 3 (1d4 + 1) piercing damage and 2 (1d4) poison damage.

Multiattack: The warrior makes two dagger attacks.

MOVEMENT

Web Line (Recharge 6): The chitine launches a web line that allows it to fly up to 25 feet. This movement doesn't provoke opportunity attacks. The chitine must land at the end of this movement.

ENCOUNTER BUILDING

Level 2 XP 60

Tactics

Each chitine starts 5 to 20 above the floor, climbing down walls and statues initially to reserve its *web line*. When using web line, a chitine can end its flying movement in a suspended web, effectively ending the movement in midair. The warriors stay on high ground, while the other chitines attack in close quarters and attempt to surround their foes.

Features of the Area

Illumination: Sunlight through the shattered ceiling fills the area with bright light.

Rubble: Areas of crumbled masonry are difficult terrain.

Walls: The walls of the ruined hall are 20 feet high and covered with webs. Climbing the walls is a moderate Strength task.

Where the roof has collapsed, the tops of the walls are uneven and strewn with rubble. Moving along the tops of the walls is an easy Dexterity task.

Webbing: Areas of webbing along the floor are difficult terrain. If a square of webbing takes any fire damage, it ignites and burns away in 1 round. Any creature that enters a burning web or starts its turn in one takes 5 (1d10) fire damage. A creature can take this damage only once per turn.

Excavation: The doorway in the southwest opens up to recently excavated stairs leading down. See “Ending the Session.”

Development

The chitines fight fiercely to defend their lair, but (as they did with the Zhentarim) they are willing to negotiate to prevent or halt hostilities. For a payment of 10 gp or more per character, they allow the adventurers to pass through the lair, and they point out which way the Zhents went.

Reward

Each character gains 1,550 XP for exploring the area and defeating or negotiating with the chitines.

Treasure: The chitines keep a small hoard of treasure in a cocoon against one wall of the council hall. This wealth consists of 1 gem (50 gp) per character and 15 gp per character, along with a *potion of healing* and two other magic items (see the Treasure Table, page 3). Fifty of the gold coins are newly struck with the castle-and-lightning emblem of the Zhentarim.

Ending the Session

After the characters defeat the chitines, they discover where the Zhentarim have pushed deeper into the ruins.

When the characters are finished, read:

At the southwest corner of the ruined council hall, a doorway opens up to stairs leading down. Heaps of recently cleared debris are piled before the doorway, with discarded picks and shovels standing along the stairs. Tracks in the area suggest that the Zhentarim were here—and have recently descended into the darkness.

The characters stand at the entrance to the Vault of Song, and are ready to pursue the Zhentarim and take back the *Diamond Staff*.

With this chapter ended, the adventurers advance to 6th level and can take a long rest in preparation for the next session.

CHAPTER 3

The characters have tracked the Zhentarim to the Vault of Song. Within these enchanted chambers, Phoedele and her mercenaries intend to use the *Diamond Staff of Chomylla* to plunder the magical lore of Uvaeren. It's up to the characters to reclaim the staff and put a stop to Phoedele's plots—but the Cult of the Dragon is on her trail as well.

SESSION 7:

VAULT OF SONG

The Vault of Song lies beneath the council hall, at the bottom of a twisting flight of stairs.

When the characters are ready to begin, read:

At the southwest corner of the ruined council hall, a doorway opens up to stairs leading down. Heaps of recently cleared debris are piled before the doorway, with discarded picks and shovels standing along the stairs. Tracks in the area suggest that the Zhentarim were here—and have recently descended into the darkness.

As you descend, you note the delicate carvings of winding vines and leafy branches that adorn the stairway walls like a living arbor captured in stone. The steps are wide and shallow, carved of polished marble with silver veins. At each turn of the stairway, statues of robed and hooded elves hold basins of water that glow with a blue light, illuminating your path.

Exploring the Vault

The vaults of Uvaeren resemble great elven palaces, and were crafted and reinforced with magic to resist the passage of time.

Only the last section of the vault complex, the chamber of the crystal well, is shown on the tactical map. The characters explore the other areas described here before undertaking the tactical encounter.

Singing Fountain

At the bottom of the stairs, a large hall opens up. Seven silver plaques covered in ancient Elvish script hang from the walls. In the center of the chamber, a magic pool is set upside down in the ceiling, with a small fountain that shoots water downward to within five feet of the floor before it “falls up” into the pool again. Where the sound of splashing water should be, a soft chiming fills the air. Two passages lead out of the fountain hall.

The magical music that gives the Vault of Song its name can be heard here.

The plaques and their inscriptions are quotations from ancient elf philosophers and mages. Any elf character, or a character with knowledge of magical lore or political lore, is familiar with the names and quotations. They deal with the nature of knowledge, the value of enlightened life, and the need to safeguard lore for future generations.

The passages lead to the chamber of broken portals and the scriptorium.

Chamber of Broken Portals

Six alcoves line the walls of this chamber each framed by a lavish stone archway carved with intricate images of creeping ivy, leafy branches, or delicate flowers. In the center of the room stands a pedestal set with six hand-sized crystals. Five of these are blackened and hollow, as if they had been burned from the inside. The last is a dull gray that occasionally flickers with a faint green glow.

This room was a nexus for teleportation magic, its doorways leading to portals across the world. The magic of the doorways is now all but spent.

An easy Intelligence check or *detect magic* spell determines that the flickering gem is magic. If a character touches the gem while it flickers, a portal briefly opens.

If the flickering gem is touched, read:

One of the six empty alcoves suddenly fills with the image of a shadowed forest. Broken elven ruins of yellow stone litter the ground, shrouded in ferns and bedecked by flowing vines. The image lasts for a brief moment, then flickers out again.

The image shows an elven ruin in the Wealdath, a forest of the southern Sword Coast. The portal is functional while the image endures, but it lasts only for a moment. A small object can be tossed through quickly, but any creature that attempts to traverse the portal takes 10 (3d6) force damage and falls prone on the floor in the alcove as the magic fails.

This area has no other exits.

Ruined Scriptorium

A golden disk at the apex of a domed ceiling fills this chamber with light. The disk is carved in the image of a stylized sun with a benevolent face at its center. A dozen ancient wooden desks are arranged across the room, so old they seem ready to crumble. Small bins made of smooth white metal, each about two feet wide and six inches high, line the walls. Some hang open, showing the moldering remains of books and scrolls.

Across from the passageway through which you entered, another arched passage leads out of this room.

This room was used to transcribe and imbue written lore into magic gemstones that were the archives of the elves of Uvaeren.

Hundreds of metal storage compartments line the walls here. If the characters search the bins, have them make a moderate Intelligence check. If the check succeeds, the characters discover an intact, locked bin.

A character can attempt to unlock it by making a very hard Dexterity check. If three Dexterity checks are failed during the attempt to open the bin, the bin's protective magic fails and its contents are ruined. If the characters successfully open the bin, they find one magic item (see the Treasure Table, page 3).

The exit passageway leads to the Five Maidens.

Five Maidens

The thirty-foot-high ceiling of this octagonal chamber is set with glimmering points of light like a starry night sky. Across the room stands a doorway sealed by a slab of white stone. Closer to you stands a small fountain in the form of a beautiful female elf pouring water from a slim ewer. The water glows softly, and a silver chalice stands on the lip of the fountain.

A beautiful sculpture depicting five female elves stands at the center of the room. The statues stand in a ring, each facing outward and holding a basin in its outstretched hands. The first is a young girl dressed in a garment of leaves. The second is a stern woman with a tiara and staff. The third is a young dancer wearing a cloak of swan feathers. The fourth is an older matron dressed in veils of mourning, and the fifth is an armored warrior with a sorrowful expression. The arms of all the figures, as well as the basins they hold, are subtly articulated, and look as though they might move.

To proceed, the characters must solve a riddle set here by ancient elf loremasters. (Phoedele was not delayed here, because she carried the staff when she came this way.)

The figures represent five of the planets seen in Toril's night sky, which were held in special favor by the ancient Uvaeranni astronomers. To open the sealed stone door, the characters need to fill each figure's basin with water from the fountain in the right order—from the planet highest in the sky to the planet lowest in the sky, as shown by the ceiling map. The difficulty is that this particular representation of planets is obscure to any characters not acquainted with Uvaeranni astronomy.

The correct order is: dancing swan girl, sorrowful warrior, mourning woman, stern mage-queen, and girl with leaves. These represent the planets Karpri, Glyth, Chandos, H'Catha, and Garden and their positions in the represented sky, from highest to lowest.

When a basin is filled, read:

The weight of the water causes the arms of the statue to sink. A subtle click comes from the sealed stone doorway on the other side of the room.

Puzzle Clues: The characters have at least some familiarity with the night sky, and might recognize elven artistic motifs. Skill checks can tell the characters more; an elf character gains a +2 bonus to any of the ability checks made in this section.

Intelligence: A moderate Intelligence check made to examine the ceiling notes that it is an accurate representation of the night sky and shows five planets—Karpri, Chandos, Glyth, Garden, and H'Catha. If the check result equals or exceeds a hard DC, the character also understands the relationship between the planets and the five statues, and knows to fill the basins in order, from the highest planet in the sky to the lowest.

Dexterity or Wisdom: An easy Dexterity check made to examine the mechanism of a statue's basin, or an easy Wisdom check made when a basin is filled with water, determines that the movement of the basin controls a lock

that opens the stone door. If the five basins are depressed in the proper order, the door opens.

Intelligence or Wisdom: An easy Intelligence check made to examine the ceiling notes that five of the stars there are different from the others, glowing with a steady bright light.

A character who watches the starry ceiling notes that one of these steadily glowing stars becomes brighter while a basin is filled. (If no one thinks to look up, allow an easy Wisdom check for characters to notice.) The star that glows is different for each statue, and it corresponds to the correct planet in the ceiling's depiction of the night sky.

Intelligence: A moderate Intelligence check made to examine the statues determines that they represent Selûne and other mythological figures associated with the sky or stars. If the check result equals or exceeds a hard DC, the character also understands the relationship between the planets and the five statues, and knows to fill the basins in order, from the highest planet in the sky to the lowest.

Combined Knowledge: If the characters succeed on three or more Intelligence or Wisdom checks in this section, they discern the relationship between the statues and the planets, and know the correct order in which to fill the basins, even if the check results would not normally determine that information.

If the basins are filled in the incorrect order, read:

When the last basin is filled, one more click comes from the sealed doorway. Then all the basins slowly tip over, spilling out their water. The arms of all five statues slowly rise back into their original positions.

If the basins are filled correctly, read:

With a scraping sound, the great slab of white stone slides open, revealing another passageway beyond.

Stone Door: Forcing the door is a very hard Strength task. The door's magic lock can be suppressed for one minute with a *knock* spell, but only if the spell is followed by a successful very hard Intelligence check.

Chamber of the Crystal Well

This chamber is skirted by a raised ledge and holds several huge pillars carved in the shape of sinuous dragons. The ceiling thirty feet above is another glowing representation of a starry sky. In the floor before you is a pit twenty feet across, above which hangs a five-foot fragment of dull gray crystal, suspended by a thick, silvery chain. Another doorway opens on the opposite side of the room, at the top of a steep flight of stairs leading up to the ledge.

The Uvaeranni placed magic guardians in this room to protect against unauthorized entry. This area is depicted on the tactical map.

Three Uvaeranni dragons guard this area, preserved in magical stasis that makes them indistinguishable from the other carved pillars. (Phoedele and her mercenaries were able to enter this area safely by using the *Diamond Staff*.)

Continue with the **Fang and Blade** encounter.

FANG AND BLADE

Encounter Level 7

Setup

3 Uvaeranni dragons (D)

4 Zhent soldiers (S)

Place the foes here only when the characters see them. Noticing the Uvaeranni dragons as they emerge from stasis is an Intelligence or Wisdom task (see the creature's statistics block). The dragons have surprise against characters who do not notice them.

When the dragons attack, read:

With a rasping whisper and a flicker of shadow, the stone dragons begin to twist off their pillars and attack.

The sounds of combat catch the attention of Zhent guards that are standing watch in the passageway beyond the stairs to the north. At the start of the round after the first dragon is defeated, or if the adventurers attempt to flee combat by entering the passageway to the north, the Zhent soldiers appear at the spots marked on the map. They act first in the initiative order during the round in which they appear.

When the Zhents join the fight, read:

Black-cloaked mercenaries are taking cover at the top of the staircase, their crossbows aimed at you.

Tactics

The *Diamond Staff* still protects the Zhents, so the dragons don't attack them. The soldiers are content to make ranged attacks while the dragons engage in melee. Only when it becomes clear that the characters are winning do the Zhents descend the stairs to fight.

The dragons fight until destroyed. If the dragons are defeated, the Zhent soldiers fight until only one remains. That last soldier then retreats or surrenders.

Features of the Area

Illumination: The stars gleaming in the magic ceiling fill this area with dim light.

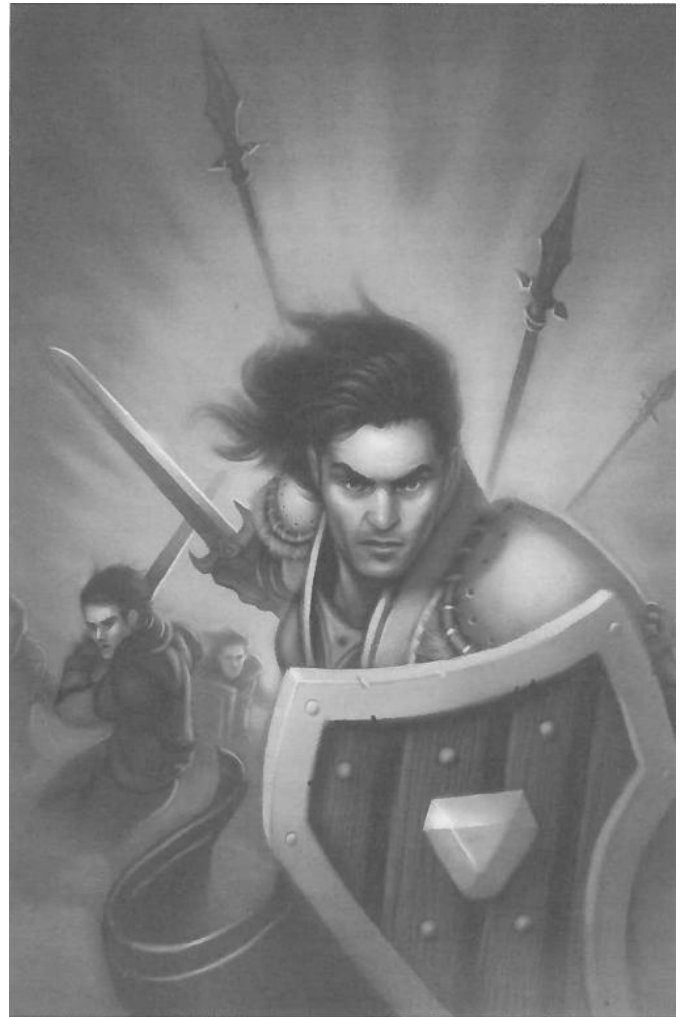
Pit: The bottom of this 15-foot-deep pit is littered with shattered crystal. Any creature that falls into the pit lands prone and takes 4 (1d6) bludgeoning damage and 4 (1d6) piercing damage from the fall and the crystal shards. Climbing the wall of the pit is a hard Strength or Dexterity task.

Crystal: A moderate Intelligence check determines that the huge crystal here was used as a focus for arcane lore stored elsewhere in these vaults. Fragments of the crystal were broken off and fell into the pit below, where they were used as components in Uvaeranni lore rituals.

Pillars: The pillars are blocking terrain.

Ledge: The ledge that surrounds the room is 10 feet above the floor (a moderate Strength task to climb).

Stairs: The steep stairs leading from the floor to the ledge are difficult terrain.



3 Uvaeranni Dragons

Medium Construct

Armor Class 17

Hit Points 51 (6d8 + 24)

Immunities petrification

Speed 30 ft.

Senses darkvision

Str 18 (+4) Dex 16 (+3) Con 18 (+4)

Int 7 (–2) Wis 12 (+1) Cha 7 (–2)

Alignment neutral

Languages —

TRAITS

Inanimate Seeming: When not moving, the Uvaeranni dragon appears to be an inanimate statue. A DC 20 Intelligence or Wisdom check reveals that the statue is, in fact, a creature.

ACTIONS

Melee Attack—Bite: +5 to hit (reach 5 ft.; one creature). *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage. If the attack deals 9 or more damage, the dragon can push the target 5 feet away and then knock it prone.

Multiattack: The dragon makes two bite attacks.

ENCOUNTER BUILDING

Level 5 XP 350

4 Zhent Soldiers

Medium Humanoid (Human)

Armor Class 16 (scale mail, shield)

Hit Points 37 (5d10 + 10)

Speed 30 ft.

Str 14 (+2) **Dex** 11 (+0) **Con** 14 (+2)

Int 10 (+0) **Wis** 10 (+0) **Cha** 8 (–1)

Alignment lawful evil

Languages Common

TRAITS

Zhent Phalanx: While the soldier is next to an ally, enemies cannot have advantage on attack rolls against the soldier.

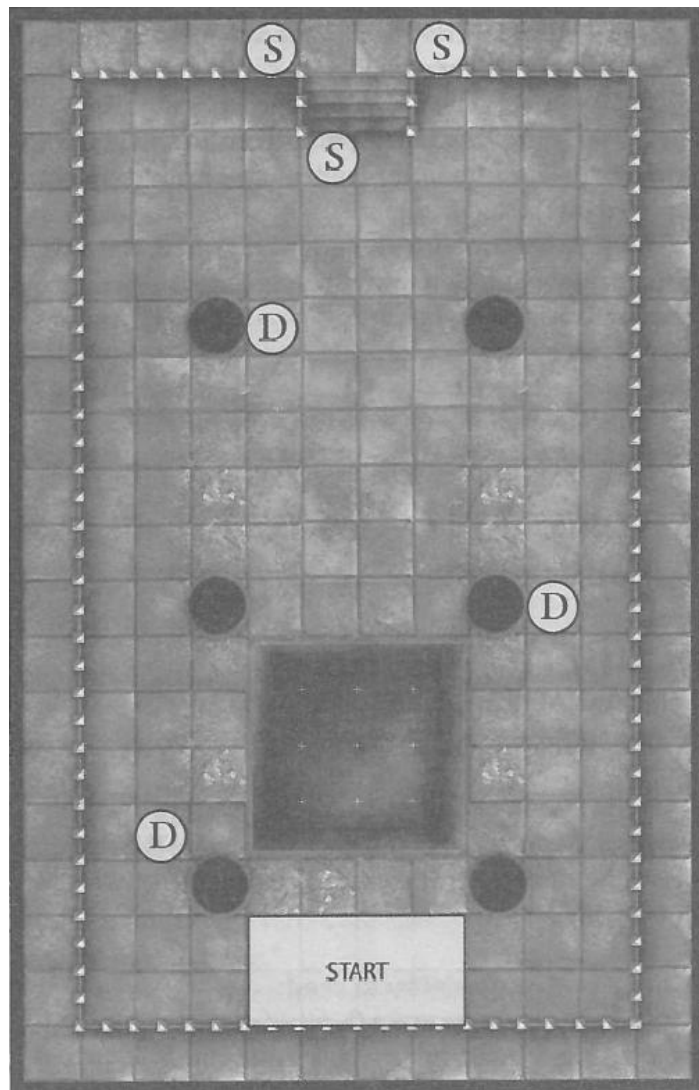
ACTIONS

Melee Attack—Long Sword: +5 to hit (reach 5 ft.; one creature). *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) slashing damage.

Ranged Attack—Crossbow: +5 to hit (range 30 ft./120 ft.; one creature). *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

ENCOUNTER BUILDING

Level 3 XP 80



Conclusion

If captured, a Zhent soldier confirms that Phoedele has the *Diamond Staff* and reveals that she and her veteran mercenaries are in a large chamber at the end of the passageway beyond the northern door.

Reward

Each character gains 1,750 XP for facing the puzzles and combat challenges in this session.

Treasure: The Zhents carry 40 gp per character. A magic item is hidden among the shards at the bottom of the pit (see the Treasure Table, page 3).

Ending the Session

After defeating the guardians of the chamber, the characters have only one way to go in pursuit of Phoedele.

When the characters are finished, read:

Beyond the stairs rising up to the ledge, the archway that the dragons and the Zhents were guarding leads to a long, echoing corridor with a floor of darkly polished stone. A grand double door emblazoned with Elven runes stands open at the end of the passage. From somewhere ahead comes the sound of a female voice, chanting softly.

The adventurers can take a short rest in preparation for the final session.

ADJUSTING DIFFICULTY

If the party consists of four characters, remove one dragon from the encounter. If the party consists of six characters, add one dragon.

SESSION 8:

CHOMYLLA'S KEY

While exploring the ancient Vault of Song, the characters catch up with Phoedele, the Zhent mercenary who now has the Diamond Staff

When the characters are ready to begin, read:

You have overcome the puzzles and guardians left by the ancient Uvaeranni to make your way deep into the legendary Vault of Song. Beyond the stairs rising up to the ledge in the chamber of the crystal well, an archway leads to a long, echoing corridor with a floor of darkly polished stone. A grand double door emblazoned with Elven runes stands open at the end of the passage. From somewhere ahead comes the sound of a female voice, chanting softly.

The Crystal Library

Beyond the double door, the hallway slopes downward and travels about a hundred feet before opening into a huge chamber. This room consists of three successively lower tiers, descending toward a shimmering pool at the bottom. A vaulted ceiling rises forty feet overhead. Floating in midair above the pool are eight luminous crystal columns of fantastic complexity and beauty. Musical tones like faint wind chimes softly fill the chamber.

Down near the pool, a human female in black plate armor stands with a six-foot staff of clear crystal raised in her hands. She is concentrating on one of the suspended sculptures and chanting in Elven. Runes emblazoned along the length of the staff give off a silver light. Other warriors in dark armor stand near her, keeping watch over the rest of the room.

This part of the vault was normally sealed. Its builders intended for the chamber of the crystal well (the previous encounter site) to serve as the primary means of obtaining the knowledge stored here.

A character who succeeds on moderate Intelligence check, or casts a *detect magic* spell, notes that this chamber is filled with powerful magic, including the arcane forces that are responsible for suspending the crystal sculptures in midair.

Moderate Intelligence check: The loremasters and archmages of ancient elven kingdoms preserved their

knowledge in magic gemstones called *tel'kiira* and *selu'kiira*. These were normally small lore gems, not more than an inch or two across. The floating crystal structures here are *selu'kiira* of immense size.

Hard Intelligence check: Not only could lore gems store information in the same way as traditional tomes, they could also serve as spellbooks, preserve memories, and impart or teach arcane ability. A particular *selu'kiira*, for instance, could instantly bestow the knowledge and spellcasting ability of an archmage. Most *selu'kiira* have a kind of self-awareness, and have been known to destroy characters they deem unworthy of being their owners.

Confronting Phoedele

The female warrior in dark plate armor is the Zhentarim captain Phoedele, an accomplished mercenary with martial and magical training. Under the watchful eye of her Zhent soldiers, she is engaged in cautiously assessing the contents of the library preserved in the floating *selu'kiira*. It's possible to surprise the enemies here, requiring all the characters to make Dexterity checks contested by the Zhent soldiers' Wisdom checks. If the characters fail to surprise the Zhents, or otherwise wait to attack, Phoedele initiates a dialogue.

If Phoedele has a chance to speak, read:

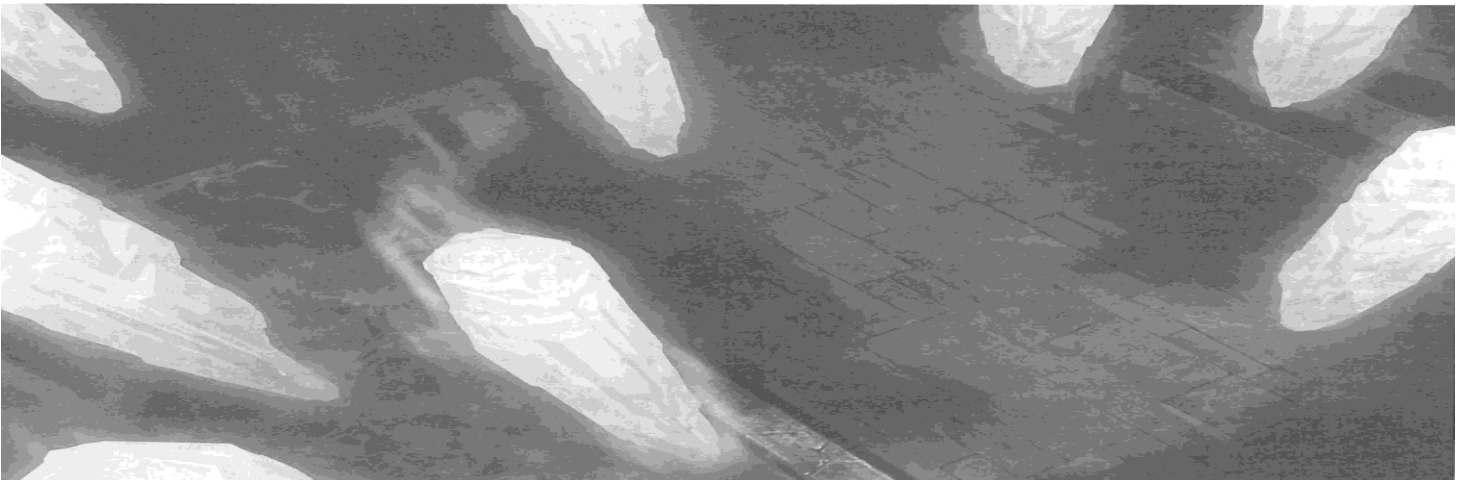
The warrior holding the Diamond Staff breaks off her chant and steps back from the floating crystal. She eyes you warily, one hand on the hilt of her sword. "I don't know who you are," she says, "but we found the vault first. I don't intend to be run off by the first band of tomb robbers to show up. There's nothing in here you can carry away, so look for elven treasure somewhere else."

Phoedele wants to find out what the characters are doing here, then persuade them to leave. She is willing to promise almost anything, since she doesn't intend to honor any bargain she strikes. Use the following guidelines to determine her responses to the characters' questions.

What are you doing? "Reading elven lore that you wouldn't understand. And if you don't mind, I prefer to work without distraction."

Give us the staff. "I think not. But I am willing to sell it to you when I'm done with it." (This statement is a lie. Phoedele fully intends to keep the staff.)

You attacked Hap. "Oh, is that what this is about? The



orcs were a little overzealous in their attack, it's true. Let me finish here, and I'll return to Hap with you to make restitution to anyone who suffered." (This statement is a lie. Phoedeles has no interest in Hap or its citizens.)

Why did you betray Barcero? "The Shadovar already have enough arcane strength. The last thing Faerûn needs is for Barcero and his patrons to master elven high magic. The secret to defeating Netheril and the Shadovar might be found among these crystals—but only if you let me finish!"

Combat breaks out when the characters attack or announce their intention to stop Phoedeles's study of the lore gems. If the characters reach some kind of truce with Phoedeles, her attempts to continue her work are interrupted by the sudden appearance of agents of the Cult of the Dragon. Continue with the **Thieves and Cultists** encounter.

THIEVES AND CULTISTS

Encounter Level 9

Setup

Phoedeles (P)

Zhent war mage

3 Zhent soldiers (S)

This encounter normally begins when either the characters or the Zhentarim attack. If the characters arranged a truce with Phoedeles, the agents of the Cult of the Dragon trigger the encounter when they show up a few minutes into the Zhent captain's continued attempts to study the lore gems. If the cultists initiate the combat in this way, start with "Development" below, and adjust the read-aloud text as needed.

When combat breaks out, read:

Phoedeles snarls as she brandishes the Diamond Staff like a weapon. "Kill them all!" The Zhentarim fighters draw their weapons as they surge forward to attack.

Development

At the start of the third round of combat, agents of the Cult of the Dragon charge into the area, arraying themselves around the doors.

Human cult leader

3 cult veterans

6 human berserkers

When the cultists arrive, read:

A sudden rush of footsteps comes from the entrance to the vault. More than a dozen dray-robed human cultists pour into the room, led by a human male in rich purple robes.

Phoedeles sneers. "Dretchroyaster's minions, of course! What else could go wrong?" She looks to the members of your party, her anger suddenly softened. "The dracolich wants his staff back, but I suspect you would like to avoid that as much as I do. These cultists will leave none of us alive. What do you say? Do we set aside our quarrel and cooperate to slay these dogs? Decide swiftly!"

"Our fight is only with those who hold the Diamond Staff," the purple-robed human retorts. "Aid us against the Zhents, strangers, and you will earn our allegiance!"

The cultists that the characters defeated in session 5 were part of this larger group. If any cultists survived that session, they are here as well.

The characters can choose whether to team up with the Zhents or the Cult of the Dragon. Allow the players a moment to decide which side they choose. If the players don't agree on a side, the Zhents and the Cult of the Dragon each throw half their forces at the characters and half at the other faction. In such a case, Phoedeles attacks the characters, and the cult leader attacks whoever wields the *Diamond Staff*.

Zhent War Mage

Medium Humanoid (Human)

Armor Class 14 (mage armor)

Hit Points 27 (5d6 + 10)

Speed 30 ft.

Str 9 (–1) **Dex** 14 (+2) **Con** 14 (+2)

Int 17 (+3) **Wis** 12 (+1) **Cha** 13 (+1)

Alignment lawful evil

Languages Common

TRAITS

Zhent Phalanx: While the war mage is next to an ally, enemies cannot have advantage on attack rolls against the war mage.

ACTIONS

Melee Attack—Dagger: +3 to hit (reach 5 ft.; one creature).

Hit: 3 (1d4 + 1) piercing damage.

Shocking Grasp (Cantrip): The mage chooses a creature within 5 feet of it. The target must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw. *Failed Save:* 10 (2d8) lightning damage, and the creature can't take reactions until its next turn.

Spells: The mage has the following spells (save DC 15).

Cantrips: *mage armor*, *mage hand*, *shocking grasp*.

1st-level (4/day): *color spray*, *expeditious retreat*, *magic missile*, *shield* (see reactions).

2nd-level (3/day): *invisibility*.

3rd-level (2/day): *stinking cloud*.

REACTIONS

Shield (1st-Level Spell): When hit by an attack or targeted with *magic missile*, the war mage can gain a +2 bonus to AC and immunity to *magic missile* for until the start of the mage's next turn.

ENCOUNTER BUILDING

Level 5 XP 310

2 Zhent Soldiers

Medium Humanoid (Human)

Armor Class 16 (scale mail, shield)

Hit Points 37 (5d10 + 10)

Speed 30 ft.

Str 14 (+2) **Dex** 11 (+0) **Con** 14 (+2)

Int 10 (+0) **Wis** 10 (+0) **Cha** 8 (–1)

Alignment lawful evil

Languages Common

TRAITS

Zhent Phalanx: While the soldier is next to an ally, enemies cannot have advantage on attack rolls against the soldier.

ACTIONS

Melee Attack—Long Sword: +5 to hit (reach 5 ft.; one creature). *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) slashing damage.

Ranged Attack—Crossbow: +5 to hit (range 30 ft./120 ft.; one creature). *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

ENCOUNTER BUILDING

Level 3 XP 80

Phoedelee

Medium Humanoid (Human)

Armor Class 16 (chain mail)

Hit Points 67 (8d10 + 24)

Speed 25 ft.

Str 17 (+3) **Dex** 14 (+2) **Con** 16 (+3)

Int 13 (+1) **Wis** 15 (+2) **Cha** 13 (+1)

Alignment lawful evil

Languages Common

TRAITS

Tactical Insight: If a creature has one of Phoedelee's allies next to it, Phoedelee gains advantage on attack rolls against that creature.

Zhent Phalanx: While Phoedelee is next to an ally, enemies cannot have advantage on attack rolls against her.

ACTIONS

Melee Attack—Diamond Staff: +9 to hit (reach 5 ft.; one creature). *Hit:* 8 (1d4 + 6) damage, and if Phoedelee had advantage on the attack roll, she pushes the target up to 10 feet away from her or knocks it prone.

Melee Attack—Long Sword: +6 to hit (reach 5 ft.; one creature). *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) damage, and if Phoedelee had advantage on the attack roll, she pushes the target up to 10 feet away from her or knocks it prone.

Multiattack: Phoedelee makes two melee attacks.

REACTIONS

Cry of Glory (Recharge 6): When an ally within 30 feet of Phoedelee has advantage on attack rolls and hits with an attack, that attack is treated as a critical hit.

ENCOUNTER BUILDING

Level 6 XP 620

2 Cult Veterans

Medium Humanoid (Human)

Armor Class 14 (studded leather)

Hit Points 45 (6d10 + 12)

Speed 30 ft.

Str 14 (+2) **Dex** 13 (+1) **Con** 14 (+2)

Int 10 (+0) **Wis** 12 (+1) **Cha** 9 (–1)

Alignment lawful evil

Languages Common

ACTIONS

Melee Attack—Bastard Sword: +6 to hit (reach 5 ft.; one creature). *Hit:* 7 (1d10 + 2) slashing damage. If the attack deals 8 or more damage, the veteran pushes the target up to 10 feet away or knocks it prone.

Multiattack (Recharge 5–6): The veteran makes two bastard sword attacks.

ENCOUNTER BUILDING

Level 4 XP 170

Human Cult Leader

Medium Humanoid (Human)

Armor Class 14 (mage armor)

Hit Points 40 (7d6 + 16)

Speed 30 ft.

Str 10 (+0) **Dex** 14 (+2) **Con** 14 (+2)

Int 17 (+3) **Wis** 14 (+2) **Cha** 16 (+3)

Alignment lawful evil

Languages Common, Draconic

TRAITS

Evoker: When the cult leader casts an evocation spell that deals damage to all creatures within an area of effect, the leader can pick a number of creatures in the area up to the spell's level + 1. The chosen creatures take no damage from the spell during the turn the spell is cast.

ACTIONS

Melee Attack—Quarterstaff: +4 to hit (reach 5 ft.; one creature). *Hit:* 4 (1d6 + 1) bludgeoning damage.

Shocking Grasp (Cantrip): The cult leader chooses a creature within 5 feet of it. The target must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw. *Failed Save:* 10 (2d8) lightning damage, and the creature can't take reactions until its next turn.

Spells: The cult leader has the following spells (save DC 15).

Cantrips: *mage armor*, *mage hand*, *shocking grasp*.

1st-level (4/day): *cause fear*, *magic missile*, *thunderwave*.

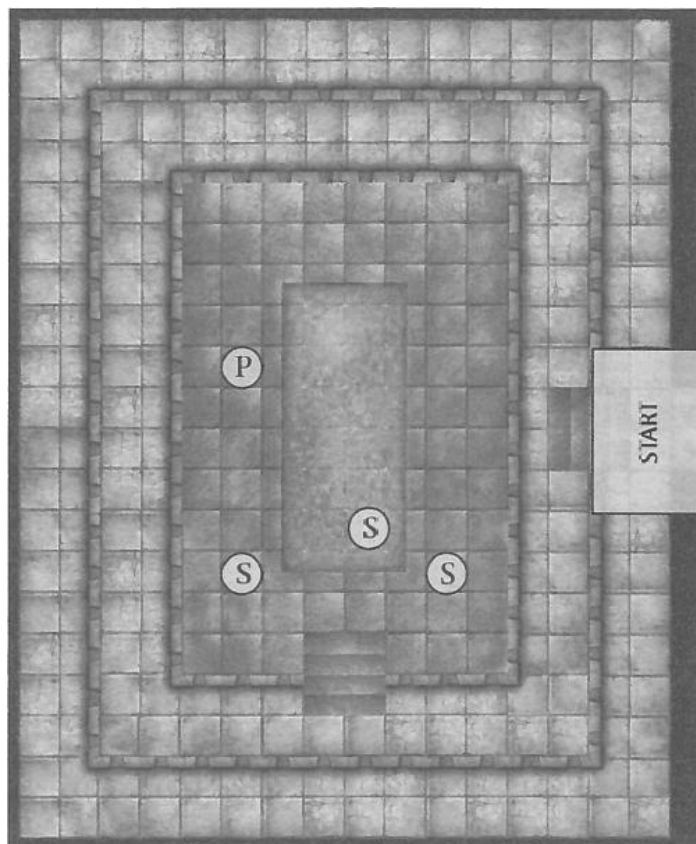
2nd-level (3/day): *invisibility*, *Melf's acid arrow*.

3rd-level (3/day): *dispel magic*, *fireball*.

4th-level (1/day): *wall of fire*.

ENCOUNTER BUILDING

Level 6 XP 530



ADJUSTING DIFFICULTY

If the party consists of four characters, remove one Zhent soldier and three human berserkers from the encounter.

If the party consists of six characters, add one Zhent soldier and four human berserkers.

The battle resumes as soon as the characters choose a side, leaving no time for further dealing. Roll initiative for the cultists and continue. If the characters choose a side, allow the players to make attack rolls and damage rolls for their temporary allies, and see "Tactics."

Tactics

Phoedele leads the Zhents from the front. Her soldiers fight in close formation to benefit from her *tactical insight* and from *Zhent phalanx*. During combat, Phoedele attacks with the *Diamond Staff*. She can make use of the staff's charges to stun her foes. The staff has 10 charges at the start of combat.

The cultists charge into melee, while the cult leader remains on the upper tiers to make ranged and area attacks. Although the leader honors any bargain he makes with the characters, he doesn't worry about harming his newfound allies with *thunderwave*. The cult leader fights until no cultists are left, then flees. Phoedele flees when the last of the Zhent soldiers falls.

An allied faction remains loyal until the characters break any agreement or until the rival faction is defeated. Since all sides want the *Diamond Staff* the surviving faction turns against the characters if they try to claim the artifact.

6 Human Berserkers

Medium Humanoid (Human)

Armor Class 12 (hide armor)

Hit Points 13 (2d8 + 4)

Speed 30 ft.

Str 14 (+2) **Dex** 11 (+0) **Con** 14 (+2)

Int 8 (–1) **Wis** 7 (–2) **Cha** 10 (+0)

Alignment chaotic neutral

Languages Common

TRAITS

Rage +5: The berserker can take disadvantage on any melee attack roll to gain a +5 bonus to that attack's damage roll.

ACTIONS

Melee Attack—Greatsword: +5 to hit (reach 5 ft.; one creature). *Hit:* 8 (1d12 + 2) slashing damage.

ENCOUNTER BUILDING

Level 2 XP 30

Features of the Area

Illumination: The glowing crystal columns fill the area with bright light.

Shimmering Pool: The pool is 10 feet deep. Swimming in the pool is an easy Strength task. A creature climbing out of the magic water onto the edge of the pool must use its movement to do so. The water is charged with radiant energy. A creature that ends its turn in the water takes 5 (1d8) radiant damage but is resistant to necrotic until the end of the encounter.

Suspended Crystals: The crystal columns are 20 feet tall. Each crystal's lower end is 10 feet above the pool.

Steps: The steps between tiers are steep, and count as difficult terrain.

Tiers: Each tier is 10 feet above the next lower tier, but low walls along the inside of the top two tiers allow characters pushed off those tiers to attempt an easy Dexterity saving throw to avoid falling. Climbing the smooth walls of each tier is a hard Strength task.

Reward

Each character gains 2,000 XP for interacting with Phoedele and dealing with the combat challenge of this session.

Treasure: The defeated enemies have jewelry, gems, and coins worth 75 gp per character. The characters can also claim the *Diamond Staff of Chomylla*.

Opening the Vault

If the characters defeat the Zhents and the cultists, the Diamond Staff comes into their possession. Imani is waiting for their return, but the characters are free to first study the vault's contents for themselves—or to keep the artifact for their own use.

Unlocking all the resources of the Vault of Song is beyond the ability of the adventurers. But any character in the party can use the staff to access a small portion of the lore and magical might of Uvaeren. First, a character who is an elf or a half-elf, or who has training in magical lore, must study one of the crystal structures for 8 hours without interruption, remaining within 25 feet of the structure during that time. At the end of the study period, each character in the group takes a turn holding the staff aloft and expressing his or her first preference from among the following benefits.

- ◆ Gain any one recall lore skill and become fluent in Elvish. In addition, gain knowledge of the location of a great treasure hoard or a special magic item (DM's choice).
- ◆ Gain a permanent +1 increase to Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma (character's choice).
- ◆ Gain one of the following feats as a bonus feat: Arcane Dabbler, Healing Initiate, Skill Focus, or Use Magic Device (character's choice).

Each character receives the requested boon immediately, and instinctively realizes that only one choice is allowed—that is, trying to use the staff to gain a second boon will not produce the desired result. If a character fails to heed this provision and makes a second request, the staff vanishes,

Diamond Staff of Chomylla

This six-foot-long scepter is carved from a single enormous crystal, with a perfect transparent globe at its head.

Property: You gain a +3 bonus to the attack rolls and the damage rolls you make with this staff.

Property (Attuned): You must be a wizard, an elf, or a half-elf to become attuned to this item.

While you hold the staff, you have advantage on Intelligence checks to recall lore. In addition, you comprehend any language spoken to you, and you can make yourself understood to any creature that has a language.

Once per day, you can expend one charge when you hit with a melee weapon attack using this staff; the staff begins each day with 10 charges. The target of the attack must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw. For each additional charge you expend beyond the first, up to a maximum of three, the DC increases by 2. *Failed Save:* The target is stunned until the end of your next turn.

Secret: The staff's secret is revealed the first time an elf or half-elf character wields it. The *Diamond Staff* functions as a key to the lost library-vaults of Uvaeren. The DM determines the specific details of the lore contained in a vault and how it is accessed. In general, such access requires specific knowledge of the location of the long-lost vault and eight hours or more of concentrated effort.

Rarity: Legendary.

teleporting away to a random location to await discovery by a more worthy possessor.

Permanent bonuses such as the ones described here should be an unusual event in any campaign. Then again, it's not every day that characters unlock the secrets of a millennia-old elven library. If you intend to continue this campaign, you might want to have the vault become more unreliable—or dangerous—as additional characters try to draw on its power.

CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

When the heroes defeat the Zhents and the operatives of the Cult of the Dragon to claim the *Diamond Staff* their mission ends successfully. The characters can now decide what to do with the storehouse of elven lore they have discovered and any villains they have captured.

With Phoedele's defeat, the Zhents have no further interest in the *Diamond Staff* and the library-vaults of Uvaeren. Phoedele was working on her own, and did not inform her superiors that she intended to betray the trust of a Shadovar agent or pursue elven artifacts in the woods around Mistledale. If she survives, Phoedele keeps the secret of the Vault of Song to herself and moves on to other personal projects—including marking the characters for vengeance at some future time.

Dretchroyaster's agents in the Cult of the Dragon continue to search for the staff, but the defeat of the cultists in this adventure is a significant setback. Hoping to gain the dracolich's special favor, these cultists kept their suspicion of

a connection between Imani and the staff to themselves, not wanting any other cult cell to find the artifact. With those secret-keepers now dead, the connection between Imani and the staff is safe for a time. The dracolich has a long memory, though, and any rumored association between the adventurers and the *Diamond Staff* will inevitably inspire its revenge.

If the mage Barcero survives, he continues his plotting on behalf of the Shadovar of Netheril, even as he yearns to pay back the adventurers for any betrayal. Phoedele's duplicity turns out to be only the start of a broader move by the Zhents to resist Netherese control. A major confrontation between the Shadovar and the Zhentarim is not far off, and that matter of urgency prevents Barcero from chasing after the characters.

Imani the sage is no longer eager to mount a dangerous expedition into monster-haunted ruins. His brush with death during the Fangfists' raid has convinced him that his adventuring days are indeed over, but he does understand that the *Diamond Staff* must be secured and protected until it is needed again. Imani arranges for the staff to be hidden away in the custody of someone better able to watch over it. In gratitude for the characters' efforts, he awards them 250 gp each for returning the artifact, and provides them with a map, a bit of ancient lore, or some other clue to a new adventure.

UNCOVER ANCIENT SECRETS

The *Diamond Staff of Chomylla*, an artifact with the power to unlock the mysteries of an ancient elven civilization, has at long last been found. When orcs steal the staff, though, it's up to a group of heroes to stop them. Why orcs should want the staff is anyone's guess, and the quest to find the truth might well lead the adventurers across the Dalelands and into the depths of the lost library-vaults of Uvaeren.

Search for the Diamond Staff™ is a **DUNGEONS & DRAGONS®** Roleplaying Game adventure designed for the June and July 2013 season of the **D&D ENCOUNTERS™** official play program. The adventure comes with two full-color battle maps, eight ready-to-play encounters, and information on the **D&D ENCOUNTERS** program.

This season also includes an optional online component, which allows players and Dungeon Masters to convert the adventure to the **D&D®** Next playtest. Find out more about the playtest at www.dndnext.com.



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