

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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620B10592001 EN

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!

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.

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 an extended rest, regaining all their daily resources.

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.

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: If none of the characters wants a particular magic item, the group can sell it at the end of the session, using the information on pages 277-278 of *Rules Compendium*™. Divide the gold pieces received evenly among the party members.

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

Random Items

Use the following table to determine unidentified magic items, or choose from it based on the adventuring group's needs. Numbers in parentheses indicate the source of the item, as noted below the table.

TREASURE TABLE

d20	Result
1	2 potions of healing (1, 2)
2	+1 magic armor (1, 2)
3	+1 magic weapon (1, 2)
4	+1 amulet of protection (1, 2)
5	+1 magic wand, orb, or staff (1, 2)
6	+1 safewing amulet (1)
7	Shield of deflection (1)
8	+1 amulet of health (2)
9	+1 delver's armor (2)
10	Gloves of agility (2)
11	+1 warning weapon (3)
12	2 shiver-strike ammunition (3)
13	+1 lesser cloaked weapon (3)
14	+1 ebon armor (3)
15	Elixir of invisibility (3)
16	Eyes of charming (3)
17	Floating lantern (3)
18	+1 weapon of surrounding (3)
19	+1 wand of inevitability (3)
20	Roll twice more (reroll if 20 comes up again)

1. *Heroes of the Fallen Lands*

2. *Heroes of the Forgotten Kingdoms*

3. *Mordenkainen's Magnificent Emporium*

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.

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.

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.

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 wood-folk lie scattered in pastoral clearings within the vast forest, including Shadowdale, home to the famous mage Elminster; Mistledale, 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 Phoedeles was hired by a Sembian mage named Barcero, who seeks the *Diamond Staff* for his Shadovar masters.

Unfortunately for Barcero, Phoedeles 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 Phoedeles 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. Phoedeles, 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. Phoedeles is on her way to meet with her employer and hand over the staff.

Chapter 2

The characters pursue Phoedeles 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. Phoedeles 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 Phoedeles to Mistedale, 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

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.

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 no-show. 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 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 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?

SESSION 0: CHARACTER CREATION

The initial session of this D&D ENCOUNTERS season is intended to allow players to create characters. For this season, players can create characters using materials from any official 4th Edition rules source, including but not limited to *Heroes of the Fallen Lands* and *Heroes of the Forgotten Kingdoms*, as well as *Player's Option: Heroes of the Elemental Chaos*™, *Player's Option: Heroes of the Feywild*™, *Player's Option: Heroes of Shadow*™, and *Into the Unknown: The Dungeon Survival Handbook*™.

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 books mentioned above, as well as other official sources of rules, such as *D&D Insider*, *Player's Handbook*® 2, and *Player's Handbook* 3.

Classes

A player can choose to create a character using class options from any of the supplements mentioned above, as well as any other official sources of rules.

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, Hillsfarians, or others living anywhere in the Dalelands.

Elves and Eladrin: Most elves and eladrin 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.

Drow: A small number of dark elves are native to the Dalelands. The drow of House Jaelre and Clan Auzkovyn reside in well-hidden strongholds in the depths of the forest or the shallow Underdark. Dark elves have

a bad reputation in the Dalelands, and a drow character often comes under suspicion until that individual does something to earn the trust of the Dalesfolk.

Dragonborn, Tieflings, and Others: In general, characters of these 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.

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 cities, 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.

Warlock: Dalesfolk don’t cotton to sinister pacts with dangerous entities. Warlocks are not common in the Dalelands, and those who dwell here often attempt to pass for wizards and other arcanists.

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.

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.

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, mutters, "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 DC 15 History 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 500 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 Feldan'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.

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 non-magical items totaling up to 100 gp per character.

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.

FANGFIST MARAUDERS

Encounter Level 5

Setup

- 2 orc archers (A)
- 3 gray wolves (W)
- 7 orc savages (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:

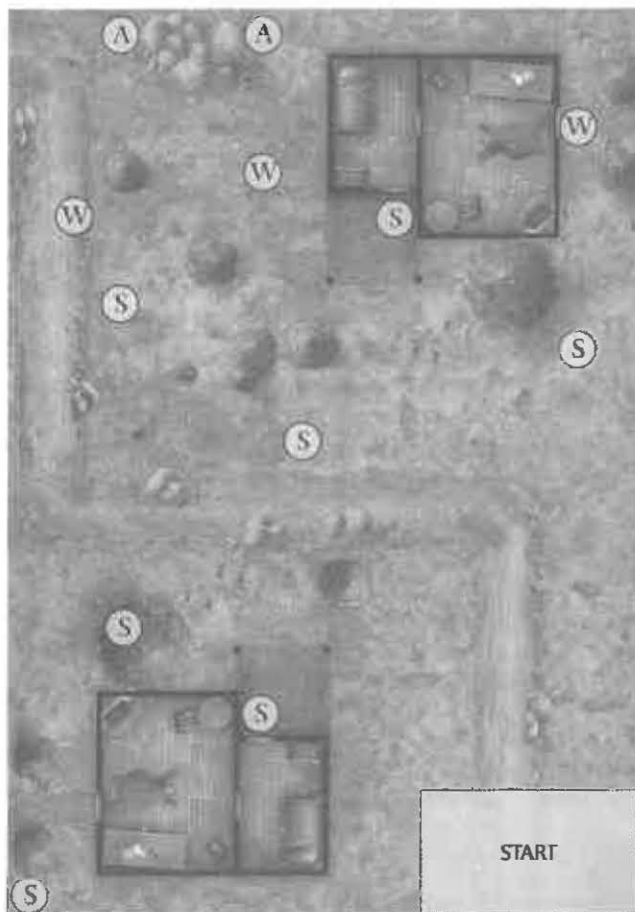
At the end of the main street, orc warriors wearing leather gauntlets studded with broken teeth are dashing from house to house. Wolves in iron collars race alongside them, snarling at anything that moves. Several villagers lie dead in the street as others run for their lives. Orcs with torches are attempting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

History or Nature DC 13: Their unique gauntlets mark the orcs as members of the Fangfist tribe.

2 Orc Archers (A)	Level 4 Artillery
Medium natural humanoid	
HP 42, Bloodied 21	Initiative +6
AC 16, Fortitude 16, Reflex 18, Will 14	Perception +2
Speed 6	Low-light vision
STANDARD ACTIONS	
① Handaxe (weapon) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d6 + 6 damage.	
✦ Longbow (weapon) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Ranged 30 (one creature); +11 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d10 + 6 damage, and the orc can push the target 1 square.	
✦ Clustered Volley (weapon) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Area burst 1 within 20 (creatures in the burst); +9 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d10 + 6 damage.	
TRIGGERED ACTIONS	
Savage Demise	
Trigger: The orc drops to 0 hit points.	
Effect (Free Action): The orc takes a standard action.	
Str 15 (+4)	Dex 18 (+6) Wis 10 (+2)
Con 12 (+3)	Int 8 (+1) Cha 9 (+1)
Alignment chaotic evil Languages Common, Giant	
Equipment leather armor, handaxe, longbow, 30 arrows	

7 Orc Savages (S)	Level 4 Minion Brute
Medium natural humanoid	
HP 1, a missed attack never damages a minion.	Initiative +3
AC 16, Fortitude 16, Reflex 14, Will 12	Perception +1
Speed 6	Low-light vision
STANDARD ACTIONS	
① Handaxe (weapon) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC	
Hit: 8 damage, or 12 with a charge attack.	
⑤ Handaxe (weapon) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); +9 vs. AC	
Hit: 6 damage.	
TRIGGERED ACTIONS	
Savage Demise	
Trigger: The orc drops to 0 hit points.	
Effect (Free Action): The orc takes a standard action.	
Str 16 (+5)	Dex 13 (+3) Wis 9 (+1)
Con 13 (+3)	Int 8 (+1) Cha 8 (+1)
Alignment chaotic evil Languages Common, Giant	
Equipment hide armor, 4 handaxes	

3 Gray Wolves (W)	Level 2 Skirmisher
Medium natural beast	
HP 38, Bloodied 19	Initiative +6
AC 16, Fortitude 14, Reflex 15, Will 13	Perception +7
Speed 8	Low-light vision
STANDARD ACTIONS	
① Bite ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +7 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d6 + 5 damage, or 2d6 + 5 against a prone target. If the wolf has combat advantage against the target, the target falls prone.	
Effect: The wolf shifts up to 4 squares.	
Str 13 (+2)	Dex 16 (+4) Wis 13 (+2)
Con 14 (+3)	Int 2 (-3) Cha 10 (+1)
Alignment unaligned Languages —	



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.

Tactics

The orc archers hang back in the middle of the street, watching for signs of opposition. When the characters appear, the archers direct the savages to rush any foes who close for melee; then they send the gray wolves around the edges of the fighting to harass characters who are trying to hang back. If all the orc savages 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: All doors are closed but not locked or barred. A character inside a house and adjacent to its door can bar the door as a minor action. It takes a DC 21 Athletics check to force open a barred door. A wolf can open an unlocked door with a DC 14 Athletics check made as part of a move action.

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 500 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 30 gp per 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 DC 14 History check or Religion 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 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)

7 orc savages (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.

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 chamber's 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.

Group Perception DC 10: 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.

Decrepit Flesh Golem (G)	Level 8 Elite Brute
Large natural animate (construct)	
HP 210; Bloodied 105	Initiative +2
AC 20, Fortitude 21, Reflex 18, Will 19	Perception +3
Speed 5 (cannot shift)	Darkvision
Saving Throws +2; Action Points 1	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⚔ Slam ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +11 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d10 + 9 damage.	
⬇ Golem Rampage ♦ Recharge [1]	
Effect: The golem moves up to its speed. During this movement, the golem can move through enemies' spaces. When the golem first enters a creature's space, it uses <i>slam</i> against that creature.	
TRIGGERED ACTIONS	
⬇ Berserk Attack ♦ At-Will	
Trigger: The golem takes damage.	
Effect (Immediate Reaction): The golem uses <i>slam</i> against a random target within its reach.	
Str 20 (+9)	Dex 7 (+2)
Con 15 (+6)	Int 3 (+0)
	Wis 8 (+3)
	Cha 3 (+0)
Alignment unaligned	Languages —

7 Orc Savages (O)	Level 4 Minion Brute
Medium natural humanoid	
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	Initiative +3
AC 16, Fortitude 16, Reflex 14, Will 12	Perception +1
Speed 6	Low-light vision
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⚔ Handaxe (weapon) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC	
Hit: 8 damage, or 12 with a charge attack.	
⚔ Handaxe (weapon) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); +9 vs. AC	
Hit: 6 damage.	
TRIGGERED ACTIONS	
Savage Demise	
Trigger: The orc drops to 0 hit points.	
Effect (Free Action): The orc takes a standard action.	
Str 16 (+5)	Dex 13 (+3)
Con 13 (+3)	Int 8 (+1)
	Wis 9 (+1)
	Cha 8 (+1)
Alignment chaotic evil	Languages Common, Giant
Equipment	hide armor, 4 handaxes

ADJUSTING DIFFICULTY

If the party consists of four characters, remove three orc savages from the encounter. In addition, reduce the golem's current hit points to 160. If the party consists of six characters, add five more orc savages. These orcs arrive outside the tower as reinforcements at the end of the fourth round of combat.

Tactics

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 a power 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.

The golem uses *golem rampage* only when it can move through three or more foes at once. 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.

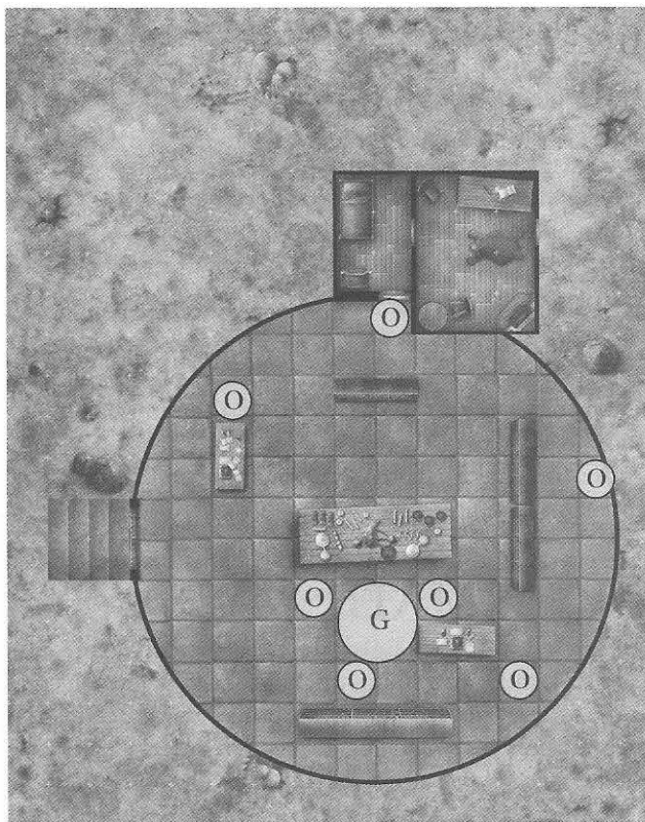
If an orc starts its turn adjacent to the golem, it attacks the golem. (You can allow players to make attack rolls for the orcs when they attack the golem.) Otherwise, an orc moves toward the nearest character and attacks that character.

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 adjacent to a lamp can take a standard action to throw it and smash it to the floor up to 5 squares away. That square is filled with burning oil.



A creature that enters a square of burning oil or starts its turn in one takes 5 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 adjacent to the table can use a minor action to unlock a flask and a standard action to throw it and smash it to the floor up to 5 squares 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 5 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 650 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 30 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 Frazzkk, a war chief among the Fangfists. He carries one garnet per character (50 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 group Perception 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 DC 14 Heal 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 5 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.

Skill Challenge: 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.

From this point on, following the Fangfists to their lair is a skill challenge.

Level: 4.

Complexity: 2 (requires 6 successes before 3 failures).

Primary Skills: Arcana, Endurance, Nature, Perception, Stealth. At least one Endurance check and one Stealth check must be attempted in the challenge.

Arcana (DC 21): The character detects magic, searching for the lingering essence of the *Diamond Staff*. Though the artifact has left the area, the character notices faint indications of its presence that give a hint of its direction.

Nature (DC 14): The character takes note of displaced and damaged foliage that marks the orcs' trail as they charge through the forest.

Perception (DC 10): The character picks out faint tracks and drops of blood along the rocky ground and in the undergrowth.

Endurance (DC 10; group check): The characters press on at a fast pace to overtake the retreating orcs.

Stealth (DC 14; group check): The adventurers keep noise to a minimum to avoid alerting their quarry.

Success: The characters discover the Fangfists' lair before the orcs can rest up after their raid. When the party explores the lair next session, the orcs are caught off guard. The players should note this success for the next session.

Failure: The orcs have had time to rest up after their raid on Hap by the time the characters explore the lair. The players should note this 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 a DC 10 Perception 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 DC 14 Perception 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. Phoedele 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.

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 2).

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.

A DC 14 group Stealth check allows the characters to spy on and surprise their foes. If the characters succeeded on the skill challenge in the previous session, the orcs have not had time to rest up, and they are caught off guard. Each character gains a +4 bonus to the group Stealth check.

Continue with the **Puppet Masters** encounter.

Doomspore Terrain	Level 4 Elite Hazard
Detect Dungeoneering or Nature DC 21 HP 100 AC 14, Fortitude 14, Reflex 14, Will – Immune poison, psychic, forced movement, all conditions; Vulnerable 10 area attacks and close attacks	Initiative –
STANDARD ACTIONS	
↖ Attack (poison, zone) ↗ Encounter	
Trigger: A creature touches the doomspore or enters its space. Attack: Close burst 2 (creatures in the burst); +7 vs. Fortitude Hit: 2d6 poison damage, and ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends). Effect: The burst creates a zone of lightly obscured squares that lasts until the end of the encounter or for 5 minutes. A creature that enters the zone or starts its turn there is subject to the attack, but can take the damage only once per turn.	
COMBAT ACTIONS	
↖ Avoid: Acrobatics or Dungeoneering DC 21. Requirement: The character makes the check while taking an action that can trigger the hazard. Success: The attack doesn't trigger.	

PUPPET MASTERS

Encounter Level 6

Setup

3 orc reavers (O)
2 Zhent soldiers (S)
1 Zhent war mage (M)

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 Frazzk is dead! We lost warriors to bring your witch her treasure. Now pay us!"

"Ah, but our bargain was with Frazzk," 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 Frazzk'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 says slowly. "Chief Korzzkul So be it, human."

3 Orc Reavers (O)	Level 5 Skirmisher
Medium natural humanoid	
HP 63; Bloodied 31	Initiative +7
AC 19, Fortitude 18, Reflex 18, Will 16	Perception +3
Speed 6 (8 when charging)	Low-light vision
TRAITS	
Charging Mobility	
While charging, the orc gains a +4 bonus to all defenses.	
Suggested Actions	
⚔ Battleaxe (weapon) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature), +10 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d10 + 8 damage.	
Effect: After the attack, the orc can shift 1 square.	
🏹 Javelin (weapon) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Ranged 20 (one creature), +10 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d6 + 6 damage, and the orc can push the target 1 square.	
Triggered Actions	
⚡ Blood-Crazed Charge ♦ Encounter	
Trigger: The orc hits an enemy.	
Effect (Free Action): The orc charges an enemy.	
Savage Demise	
Trigger: The orc drops to 0 hit points.	
Effect (Free Action): The orc takes a standard action.	
Str 18 (+6)	Dex 17 (+5)
Con 15 (+4)	Int 8 (+1)
	Wis 13 (+3)
	Cha 8 (+1)
Alignment chaotic evil Languages Common, Giant	
Equipment hide armor, battleaxe, 4 javelins	

If the characters failed the group Stealth check, one of the foes notices the party at this point, and a battle begins. Otherwise, the characters can attack with surprise.

2 Zhent Soldiers (S)	Level 5 Soldier
Medium natural humanoid, human	
HP 63; Bloodied 31	Initiative +6
AC 21, Fortitude 18, Reflex 17, Will 16	Perception +2
Speed 5	
TRAITS	
Zhent Phalanx	
While the soldier is adjacent to an ally, enemies cannot gain combat advantage by flanking the soldier.	
Suggested Actions	
⚔ Longsword (weapon) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature), +10 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d8 + 4 damage, and the target is slowed until the end of the soldier's next turn.	
🏹 Crossbow (weapon) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Ranged 15 (one creature), +10 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d8 + 4 damage.	
Triggered Actions	
⚔ Shield Bash (weapon) ♦ At-Will	
Trigger: A slowed enemy willingly leaves a square adjacent to the soldier.	
Attack (Immediate Interrupt): Melee 1 (one creature), +10 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d6 + 6 damage, and the target falls prone.	
Str 18 (+6)	Dex 15 (+4)
Con 15 (+4)	Int 10 (+2)
	Wis 11 (+2)
	Cha 12 (+3)
Alignment evil Languages Common	
Equipment scale armor, heavy shield, longsword, crossbow, 20 bolts	

Zhent War Mage (M)	Level 6 Artillery
Medium natural humanoid, human	
HP 56; Bloodied 28	Initiative +4
AC 20, Fortitude 18, Reflex 19, Will 18	Perception +3
Speed 6	
TRAITS	
Zhent Phalanx	
While the mage is adjacent to an ally, enemies cannot gain combat advantage by flanking the mage.	
Suggested Actions	
⚔ Dagger (weapon) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature), +11 vs. AC	
Hit: 3d4 + 4 damage.	
🔮 Magic Missile (force, implement) ♦ At-Will	
Effect: Ranged 20 (one creature), 10 force damage.	
☠ Black Vapors (implement, poison) ♦ Encounter	
Attack: Area burst 2 within 10 (creatures in the burst), +11 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: 1d6 + 7 poison damage, and the target takes ongoing 5 poison damage and a -2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends both).	
⚡ Zhent Flash (implement, radiant) ♦ Encounter	
Attack: Close burst 2 (creatures in the burst), +9 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 1d6 + 7 radiant damage, and the target is blinded until the end of the mage's next turn.	
Str 10 (+3)	Dex 12 (+4)
Con 14 (+5)	Int 19 (+7)
	Wis 11 (+3)
	Cha 14 (+5)
Alignment evil Languages Common	
Equipment robes, dagger, wand	



Tactics

The orcs rashly charge in while the Zhents hang back to make ranged attacks. The Zhent soldiers engage in melee only if they are forced to, or after two or more orcs fall. The war mage doesn't mind including orcs in his *black vapors* attack if doing 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. Surviving

ADJUSTING DIFFICULTY

If the party consists of four characters, remove one Zhent soldier from the encounter. If the party consists of six characters, add an orc reaver.

Zhents will attempt to flee first (before surrendering) if all the orcs and at least one Zhent are defeated, with the war mage reserving *Zhent flash* to cover his escape.

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 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 (Athletics DC 10 to climb).

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

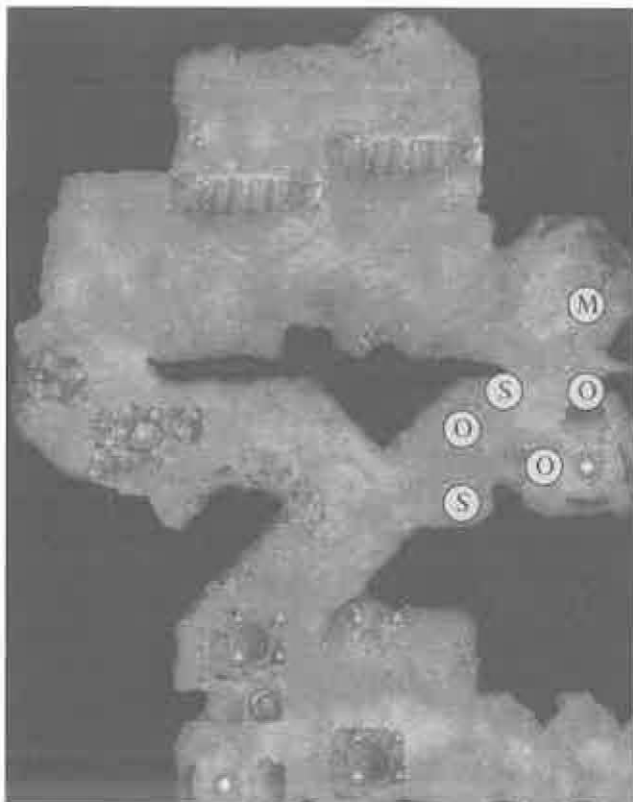
In the aftermath of combat, a search of the orcs turns up a unique magic item—a single-use wand that was used to break the wards protecting the *Diamond Staff*. Though the item's magic is spent, a character who succeeds on a DC 14 Arcana check knows its function. A result of 17 or higher confirms that the wand could have been crafted only by a very talented mage.

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 Phoelele, 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 Phoelele is taking the staff to her employer, a Sembian mage named Barcero.

Reward

Each character gains 600 XP for exploring the area and for facing the orcs and their Zhent employers.

Treasure: A small, locked wooden coffer (Thievery DC 14 to open) near the Zhents' bedrolls holds 80 gp per character and two magic items (see the Treasure Table, page 2).

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 Phoelele'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 Phoelele is unaware that you now know her mission—and her destination.

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

CHAPTER 2

In this chapter, the characters attempt to catch up with Phoelele 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: Phoelele isn't interested in handing over the artifact. She never shows up for the meeting, instead heading for Mistledeale 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 Phoelele 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 Phoelele. 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 DC 15 Nature check made to examine the trail through the hall reveals faint boot prints. 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 DC 15 Dungeoneering check confirms that the tower is safe to explore. A character who searches the interior and succeeds on a DC 10 Perception check turns up a half-buried iron coffer. The coffer contains a silver necklace worth 20 gp per character and one magic item (see the Treasure Table, page 2).

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. The characters must succeed on a DC 19 group Stealth check to approach undetected.

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 Phoelele.

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.

Arcana DC 15: The tattooed warriors are shadar-kai—dangerous humanoids from the Shadowfell. On a result of 22 or higher, the character also knows that shadar-kai have abilities involving teleportation and insubstantiality. They serve the Shadovar, the warrior-wizards that rule Netheril and dominate Sembia.

Religion DC 15: The undead are actually dread warriors, which are more dangerous than mere zombies. On a result of 22 or higher, the character also knows that dread warriors retain the combat skills they had in life, and they have special abilities to serve and defend their masters.

If the heroes failed the group Stealth check, read:

The Sembian sees your approach and gives you a puzzled frown. "You're not Phoelele," 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 combat breaks out, 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 Phoele—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 Phoele? “Lady Phoele 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 Phoele’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 roleplaying and appropriate DC 22 skill checks.

- ◆ They are amoral mercenaries happy to hunt down Phoele, 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 Phoele 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 Phoelele." He calls out to the two pale warriors and the undead guardians: "Slay them all."

Tactics

Barcero fights from behind the phalanx of his dread protectors, using *besshadowed mind* to hinder ranged combatants and *blackfire touch* against characters who press him in melee.

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

Barcero (B) Level 7 Elite Controller (Leader)	
Medium natural humanoid, human	
HP 152, Bloodied 76	Initiative +6
AC 21, Fortitude 17, Reflex 20, Will 19	Perception +5
Speed 6	Low-light vision
Saving Throws +2; Action Points 1	
TRAITS	
☼ Slipshadow Aura ♦ Aura 5	
Any ally that shifts while in the aura can shift 1 additional square.	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⚡ Blackfire Touch (fire, necrotic) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 3d6 + 5 fire and necrotic damage.	
Effect: Barcero slides the target up to 2 squares.	
✳ Beshadowed Mind (necrotic, psychic) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Ranged 5 (one or two creatures); +10 vs. Will	
Hit: 3d6 + 5 necrotic and psychic damage, and the target can't see more than 2 squares away from itself (save ends).	
✳ Death Bind (charm) ♦ Recharge if the power misses	
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +10 vs. Will	
Hit: Barcero chooses an ally within 10 squares of him (the ally cannot be an elite or a solo). The target is weakened when attacking any enemy other than the chosen ally. This effect lasts until the end of the encounter or until the chosen ally drops to 0 hit points.	
☠ Death Smoke (necrotic, zone) ♦ Recharge when first bloodied	
Effect: Area burst 1 within 10. The burst creates a zone that lasts until the end of Barcero's next turn. The zone is difficult terrain for enemies. Any enemy that enters the zone or ends its turn there takes 10 necrotic damage. An enemy can take this damage only once per turn.	
Sustain Minor: The zone persists until the end of Barcero's next turn, and Barcero can move the zone up to 4 squares.	
MOVE ACTIONS	
☼ Jaunt (teleportation) ♦ Encounter	
Effect: Barcero teleports up to 5 squares.	
TRIGGERED ACTIONS	
Blood Jaunt ♦ Encounter	
Trigger: Barcero takes damage while he is bloodied.	
Effect (Immediate Interrupt): Jaunt recharges, and Barcero uses it.	
Skills Arcana +12, Religion +12	
Str 10 (+3)	Dex 16 (+6) Wis 15 (+5)
Con 12 (+4)	Int 19 (+7) Cha 16 (+6)
Alignment evil Languages Common	

their devotion, though. If his allies are defeated, the Sembian flees. If escape is impossible, he surrenders.

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.

2 Shadar-Kai Chainfighters (C) Level 6 Skirmisher	
Medium shadow humanoid	
HP 68; Bloodied 34	Initiative +9
AC 20, Fortitude 18, Reflex 19, Will 17	Perception +5
Speed 6	Low-light vision
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⚡ Spiked Chain (weapon) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +11 vs. AC	
Hit: 3d4 + 7 damage	
⚡ Dance of Death (necrotic, weapon) ♦ Recharge 11	
Effect: The chainfighter shifts up to its speed and uses <i>spiked chain</i> up to three times at any points during the move. Each attack must target a different enemy. On a hit, the attack deals 1d6 extra necrotic damage.	
MOVE ACTIONS	
Shadow Jaunt (teleportation) ♦ Encounter	
Effect: The chainfighter teleports up to 3 squares and is insubstantial until the start of its next turn.	
Skills Acrobatics +12, Stealth +12	
Str 16 (+6)	Dex 18 (+7) Wis 14 (+5)
Con 12 (+4)	Int 10 (+3) Cha 11 (+3)
Alignment unaligned Languages Common	
Equipment leather armor, spiked chain	

3 Dread Protectors (P) Level 3 Soldier	
Medium natural animate (undead)	
HP 47; Bloodied 23	Initiative +3
AC 19, Fortitude 16, Reflex 13, Will 14	Perception +1
Speed 5	Low-light vision
TRAITS	
☼ Shield of Undeath ♦ Aura 1	
While the dread protector's master is within the protector's aura, the master takes half damage from melee and ranged attacks.	
Eyes of Undeath	
The dread protector's master can see or hear anything the protector can see or hear. The master can also speak through the protector.	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⚡ Greataxe (weapon) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +8 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d12 + 5 damage, and the target is marked until the end of the protector's next turn.	
MOVE ACTIONS	
Protector's Call (teleportation) ♦ At-Will	
Effect: The protector teleports up to 5 squares to a square adjacent to its master.	
Str 16 (+4)	Dex 10 (+1) Wis 11 (+1)
Con 15 (+3)	Int 4 (-2) Cha 8 (+0)
Alignment unaligned Languages understands Common	
Equipment scale armor, greataxe	

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. A 3-foot-high wall surrounds the well, granting a +2 bonus to saving throws to avoid falling in. A fall into the well is cushioned by the water and deals only 1d10 damage. It takes a DC 10 Athletics check to climb out.

The Next Lead

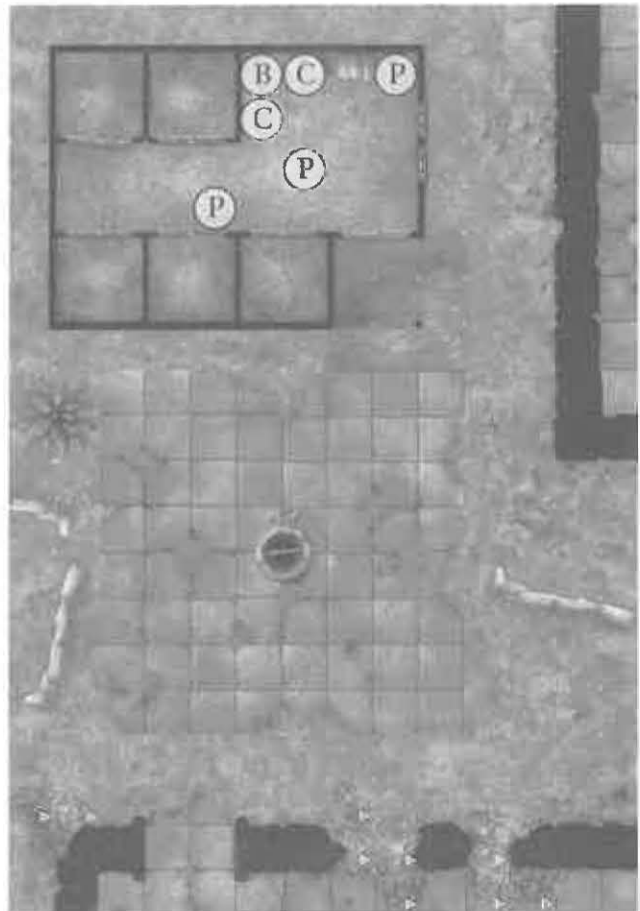
The characters can obtain the information they need to pursue Phoedele in one of a few different ways, depending on whether combat occurred and, if so, how it played out.

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 700 XP for exploring the area and dealing with Barcero.

Treasure: Barcero's possessions include a leather purse containing one 50 gp gem per character and a *potion of healing*. In addition, the Sembian is carrying one magic item (see the Treasure Table, page 2).

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 an extended 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 Phoedeles 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 Phoedeles also seeks.

When you're ready to start, read:

The Zhentarim agent Phoedeles 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 Mistle-dale, 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 Rauthawyr'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. Phoedeles 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 DC 15 History check or a conversation with any of the locals 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 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 lawkeeper 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.

Skill Challenge: 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.

Level: 5.

Complexity: 2 (requires 6 successes before 3 failures).

Special: If the characters took time to consult with Imani before coming here, they gain two automatic successes in the skill challenge. But the resulting delay in when they reach Peldan's Helm means that Nature and Streetwise checks in the challenge take a -2 penalty, since tracks and other signs have had time to fade, and villagers have had time to reconsider whether they want to talk about seeing strangers in the area.

Primary Skills: Arcana, Bluff, Diplomacy, Nature, Streetwise.

Arcana (DC 22): The character attempts to detect the unique arcane emanations of the *Diamond Staff*.

Bluff (DC 15): The character convinces the locals to share information about the location of the nearby elven ruins by being less than truthful regarding the

party's goals (for example, by convincing them that the adventurers are only seeking friends thought to be lost in the area).

Diplomacy (DC 15): The character persuades influential villagers that the Zhentarim are the true threat, and that the adventurers are dedicated to preventing the Zhents from using the magical power in the ruins for evil purposes.

Nature (DC 15): The character searches the local woodlands for signs of recent exploration.

Streetwise (DC 10): The character asks the locals about any recent strangers acting suspiciously, hoping to determine whether Phoede's company has been active in the area.

Lore: With each success in the challenge, the characters gain one of the following pieces of information. The first five items can be given out in any order, adjusted to suit the kind of skill 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. If the characters consulted with Imani before reaching Peldan's Helm, their first success in the challenge earns them three of these pieces of information (because they gain two automatic successes).

The final piece of information (the fact that another group is also pursuing Phoede and the Zhentarim) must be given out last. If the players fail the skill challenge, they do not know that the Cult of the Dragon is also at large in the forest.

- ◆ 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 DC 15 History 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 or 3 cult veterans (V)

6 human cultists (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 the skill challenge ended successfully, 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 can surprise the cultists with a DC 15 group Stealth check. If the check fails, the cultists spot the adventurers as they approach.

If the skill challenge ended in failure, 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!"

The cultists surprise the characters, assuming them to be the Zhentarim mercenaries. Add a third cult veteran to the foes here.

Tactics

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

The cult leader uses *word of thunder* to slide enemies into position for attacks by the cultists and veterans, knocking characters out of advantageous position. He uses *dragonfire curse* each round against whichever enemy poses the most serious threat, then uses *subjugation* to neutralize that enemy. *Curse jump* is useful for an escape from a troublesome foe.

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.

Features of the Area

Illumination: Bright sunlight.

Cabin: The cabin has no doors. The rotting remains of furniture are difficult terrain.

Human Cult Leader (L)	Level 7 Controller
Medium natural humanoid	
HP 77; Bloodied 38	Initiative +3
AC 21, Fortitude 18, Reflex 19, Will 20	Perception +11
Speed 6	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⚔ Staff (weapon) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +12 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d8 + 3 damage.	
⚡ Word of Thunder (implement, thunder) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Close blast 3 (enemies in the blast); +10 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: 1d10 + 6 thunder damage, and the leader slides the target up to 3 squares.	
Miss: The leader can slide the target 1 square.	
☞ Subjugation (charm, implement) ♦ Recharge ☞ ☞ ☞ ☞	
Attack: Ranged 5 (one slowed creature); +10 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: The target cannot use attack powers until the end of the leader's next turn.	
MOVE ACTIONS	
🌀 Curse Jump (teleportation) ♦ Encounter	
Effect: Close burst 5 (one slowed creature in the burst); the leader and the target teleport, swapping positions.	
MINOR ACTIONS	
⚡ Dragonfire Curse (charm, implement) ♦ At-Will (1/round)	
Attack: Close burst 5 (one enemy in the burst); +10 vs. Will	
Hit: The target is slowed. Whenever the target is hit by an attack or hits the cult leader with an attack, the target takes 5 fire damage.	
Skills Arcana +10, Nature +11, Stealth + 8	
Str 10 (+3)	Dex 11 (+3)
Con 13 (+4)	Int 15 (+5)
Wis 17 (+6)	Cha 14 (+5)
Alignment evil	
Languages Common, Draconic	
Equipment staff, robes	

Trees: The foliage is difficult terrain. A creature within the trees has partial cover.

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.

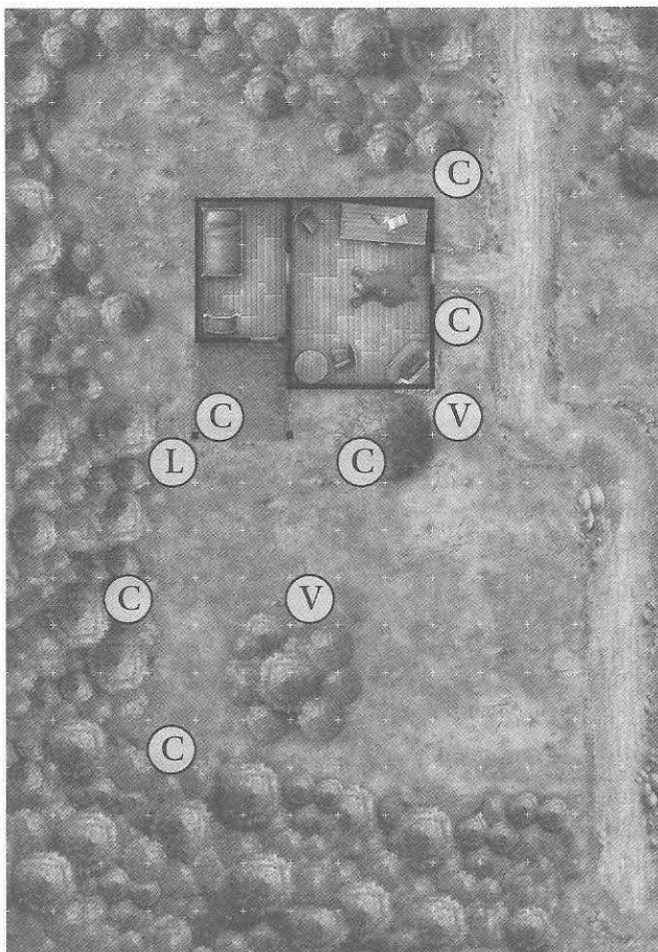
Reward

Each character gains 650 XP for the activities in and around Peldan's Helm, and for taking on the cultists.

Treasure: The cultists carry gems and coins worth 100 gp per character. In addition, the leader carries one magic item (see the Treasure Table, page 2).

2 Cult Veterans (V)	Level 6 Brute
Medium natural humanoid, human	
HP 86; Bloodied 43	Initiative +4
AC 18, Fortitude 20, Reflex 18, Will 16	Perception +3
Speed 6	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⚔ Bastard Sword (weapon) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +11 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d10 + 6 damage.	
⚔ Mighty Blow (weapon) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +11 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d10 + 6 damage, and the veteran can push the target 1 square and then shift 1 square to a square the target vacated.	
⚔ Swath of Death ♦ Recharge if either attack misses	
Effect: The veteran uses <i>mighty blow</i> twice.	
MINOR ACTIONS	
⚔ Forceful Shove ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: The veteran pushes the target 1 square.	
Skills Athletics +12, Stealth +9	
Str 19 (+7)	Dex 13 (+4)
Con 16 (+6)	Int 7 (+1)
	Wis 10 (+3)
	Cha 10 (+3)
Alignment evil	
Languages Common, Draconic	
Equipment studded leather, bastard sword	

6 Human Cultists (C)	Level 7 Minion Skirmisher
Medium natural humanoid	
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	Initiative +5
AC 21, Fortitude 20, Reflex 17, Will 18	Perception +4
Speed 6	
TRAITS	
Battle Fervor	
Whenever the cultist hits with a charge attack, the target grants combat advantage until the end of the cultist's next turn.	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⚔ Club (weapon) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +12 vs. AC	
Hit: 7 damage.	
Skills Stealth + 8	
Str 14 (+5)	Dex 11 (+3)
Con 13 (+4)	Int 10 (+3)
	Wis 12 (+4)
	Cha 13 (+4)
Alignment evil	
Languages Common	
Equipment robes, club	



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 spiderwebs.

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.

SESSION 6: RUINS OF UVAEREN

The characters have pursued the Zhentarim mercenary Phoedele and her followers to western Mistedale. 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 spiderwebs.

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, Phoedele 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.

A character who makes a successful DC 15 Nature check determines that unseen predators in the ruins 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.

Exploring the Area: The runes are unfamiliar, but a character who succeeds on a DC 15 Arcana check recognizes them as a style of magical writing used in the ancient elven realms of Cormanthor. A character who succeeds on a DC 15 Arcana check to detect magic or a DC 15 Perception check to search 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	Level 5 Trap
Object	
Detect Perception DC 22	Initiative –
Immune attacks	
TRIGGERED ACTIONS	
◀ Attack (poison) ♦ Encounter	
Trigger: A creature breaks the tripwire without disabling it.	
Attack: Close blast 5 (creatures in the blast); +11 vs. AC	
Hit: 3d4 damage, and ongoing 10 poison damage (save ends).	
Miss: 1d4 damage, and ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).	
Effect: The trap cannot be triggered again until reset.	
COUNTERMEASURES	
♦ Disable: Thievery DC 22. Success: The creature disables the tripwire before the trap is triggered.	

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. Phoelele 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 successful DC 15 Perception check to search the body finds one magic item (see the Treasure Table, page 2). A character who makes a DC 15 Heal 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)

2 chitine scouts (S)

5 chitines (C)

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.

3 Chitine Warriors (W)	Level 5 Brute
Medium natural humanoid (spider)	
HP 72; Bloodied 36	Initiative +5
AC 17, Fortitude 17, Reflex 18, Will 16	Perception +3
Speed 6, climb 6 (spider climb)	Darkvision
TRAITS	
Web Walk	
The chitine ignores difficult terrain composed of webs.	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
Ⓢ Ⓢ Daggers (weapon) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 or Ranged 5 (one or two creatures); +10 vs. AC	
Hit: 3d4 + 5 damage.	
⚔ Four Blade Strike (weapon) ♦ Recharge [☄] [☄]	
Effect: The chitine uses <i>daggers</i> twice.	
MOVE ACTIONS	
Web Line ♦ Encounter	
Requirement: The chitine must be climbing.	
Effect: The chitine flies 5 squares.	
Skills Acrobatics +10	
Str 15 (+4) Dex 16 (+5) Wis 13 (+3)	
Con 12 (+3) Int 8 (+1) Cha 10 (+2)	
Alignment chaotic evil Languages Common, Elven	
Equipment 8 daggers	

2 Chitine Scouts (S)	Level 5 Artillery
Medium natural humanoid (spider)	
HP 48; Bloodied 24	Initiative +6
AC 17, Fortitude 17, Reflex 17, Will 16	Perception +3
Speed 6, climb 6 (spider climb)	Darkvision
TRAITS	
Web Walk	
The chitine ignores difficult terrain composed of webs.	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
Ⓢ Ⓢ Daggers (weapon) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one or two creatures); +10 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d4 + 6 damage.	
Ⓢ Hand Crossbow (weapon) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Ranged 10 (one or two creatures); +12 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d6 + 6 damage.	
Poisoned Bolts (poison, weapon) ♦ Encounter	
Effect: The chitine uses <i>hand crossbow</i> , and each target hit by that power also takes ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).	
MOVE ACTIONS	
Web Line ♦ Encounter	
Requirement: The chitine must be climbing.	
Effect: The chitine flies 5 squares.	
Skills Acrobatics +11	
Str 13 (+3) Dex 18 (+6) Wis 13 (+3)	
Con 12 (+3) Int 8 (+1) Cha 10 (+2)	
Alignment chaotic evil Languages Common, Elven	
Equipment 2 daggers, 2 hand crossbows, 40 bolts	

5 Chitines (C)	Level 5 Minion Brute
Medium natural humanoid (spider)	
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	Initiative +4
AC 17, Fortitude 17, Reflex 17, Will 16	Perception +3
Speed 6, climb 6 (spider climb)	Darkvision
TRAITS	
Web Walk	
The chitine ignores difficult terrain composed of webs.	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
Ⓢ Ⓢ Daggers (weapon) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 or Ranged 5 (one or two creatures); +10 vs. AC	
Hit: 6 damage.	
MOVE ACTIONS	
Web Line ♦ Encounter	
Requirement: The chitine must be climbing.	
Effect: The chitine flies 5 squares.	
Str 15 (+4) Dex 14 (+4) Wis 12 (+3)	
Con 10 (+2) Int 8 (+1) Cha 9 (+1)	
Alignment chaotic evil Languages Common, Elven	
Equipment 8 daggers	

Tactics

Each chitine starts 1d4 squares 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 scouts stay on high ground, while the other chitines attack in close quarters and attempt to surround their foes.

ADJUSTING DIFFICULTY

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

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. It takes a DC 20 Athletics check to climb the walls.

Where the roof has collapsed, the tops of the walls are uneven and strewn with rubble. It takes a DC 15 Acrobatics check to move along the top of a wall.

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 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.”

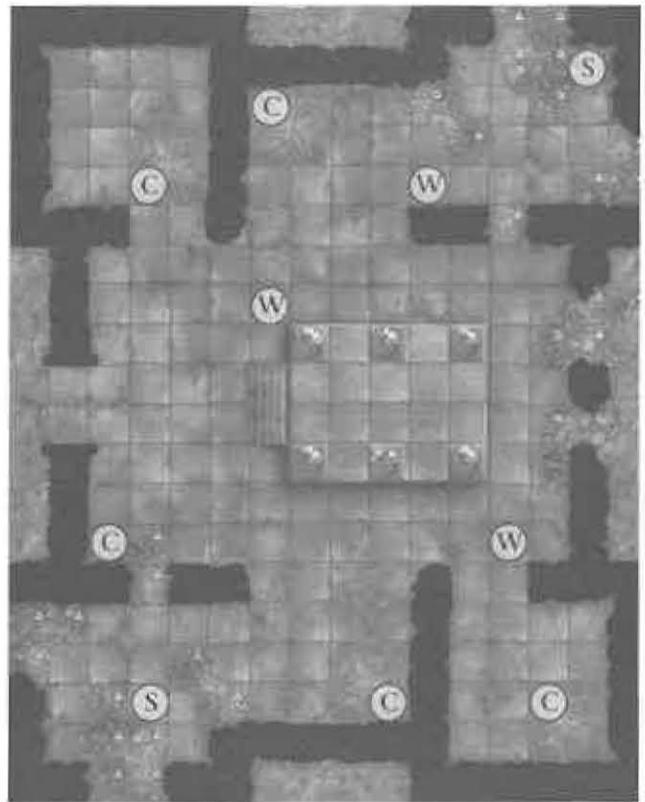
Development

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 650 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 (100 gp) per character and 25 gp per character, along with a *potion of healing* and two other magic items (see the Treasure Table, page 2). 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 an extended rest in preparation for the next session.

CHAPTER 3

The characters have tracked the Zhentarim to the Vault of Song. Within these enchanted chambers, Phoele 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 Phoele'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 Rellanic 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 eladrin or elf character, or a character who has training in Arcana or History, 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.

The flickering gem is magic (Arcana DC 11 to detect). 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 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 DC 15 group Perception check. If the check succeeds, the characters discover an intact, locked bin.

A character can attempt to unlock it by making a DC 23 Thievery check. If the check fails by 5 or more, 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 2).

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 or eladrin character gains a +2 bonus to any of these checks.

Arcana DC 15: The ceiling is an accurate representation of the night sky and shows five planets—Karpri, Chandos, Glyth, Garden, and H'Catha. On a result of 23 or higher, 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.

Dungeoneering or Thievery DC 11: The movement of the statue basins controls a lock that opens the stone door. Depress the five basins in the proper order, and the door will open.

Perception DC 11: Five of the stars in the ceiling are different from the others. They don't glimmer, but glow 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 DC 15 passive Perception checks 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.

Religion DC 15: The statue with the ewer at the fountain represents Selûne, the goddess of the moon. The other five statues are obscure mythological figures associated with the sky or stars. On a result of 23 or higher, 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.

Skill Synergy: If the characters succeed on both the Arcana check and the Religion check, they discern the relationship between the planets and the five statues even if neither check result is 23 or higher.

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: The door is a magically balanced slab of marble 2 feet thick. Forcing it open requires a DC 35 Athletics check. The door can also be opened with a Knock ritual and five DC 23 Arcana checks.

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)

3 Zhent soldiers (S)

Place the foes here only when the characters see them. It takes a DC 27 Perception check to notice the dragons as they emerge from stasis. The dragons otherwise attack with surprise.

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.

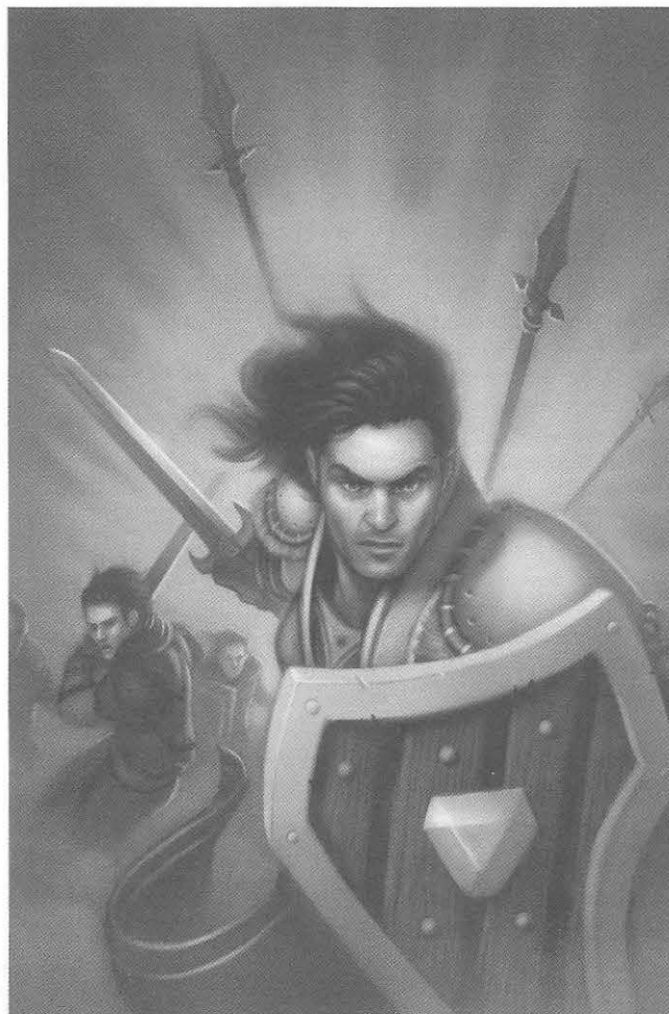
When the Zhents join the fight, read:

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 and two Zhents are defeated, the last soldier retreats or surrenders.



FANG AND BLADE

3 Uvaeranni Dragons (D)

Level 7 Skirmisher

Medium natural animate

HP 80; Bloodied 40

Initiative +9

AC 21, Fortitude 19, Reflex 19, Will 17

Perception +5

Speed 6

Darkvision

Immune petrification

TRAITS

Inanimate Seeming

Until the dragon is observed taking an action, a creature must succeed on a DC 27 Perception check to realize the dragon is a creature.

STANDARD ACTIONS

⬇ Bite ⬆ At-Will

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +12 vs. AC

Hit: 3d6 + 4 damage.

⬇ Twisting Assault ⬆ Recharge ⬆

Effect: The dragon uses *twisting movement* and can use *bite* twice at any points during the movement. If an attack hits, the dragon can slide the target 1 square or make the target fall prone.

MOVE ACTIONS

⬇ Twisting Movement ⬆ At-Will

Effect: The dragon moves up to half its speed, gaining a +5 bonus to all defenses while moving.

Str 19 (+7)

Dex 18 (+7)

Wis 14 (+5)

Con 16 (+6)

Int 7 (+1)

Cha 11 (+3)

Alignment unaligned

Languages —

3 Zhent Soldiers (S)**Level 5 Soldier**

Medium natural humanoid, human

HP 63; Bloodied 31

Initiative +6

AC 21, Fortitude 18, Reflex 17, Will 16

Perception +2

Speed 5

TRAITS**Zhent Phalanx**

While the soldier is adjacent to an ally, enemies cannot gain combat advantage by flanking the soldier.

STANDARD ACTIONS⊕ **Longsword (weapon)** ♦ **At-Will**

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. AC

Hit: 2d8 + 4 damage, and the target is slowed until the end of the soldier's next turn.

⊕ **Crossbow (weapon)** ♦ **At-Will**

Attack: Ranged 15 (one creature); +10 vs. AC

Hit: 2d8 + 4 damage.

TRIGGERED ACTIONS† **Shield Bash (weapon)** ♦ **At-Will**

Trigger: A slowed enemy willingly leaves a square adjacent to the soldier.

Attack (Immediate Interrupt): Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. AC

Hit: 2d6 + 6 damage, and the target falls prone.

Str 18 (+6)

Dex 15 (+4)

Wis 11 (+2)

Con 15 (+4)

Int 10 (+2)

Cha 12 (+3)

Alignment evil

Languages Common

Equipment scale armor, heavy shield, longsword, crossbow, 20 bolts

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 2d10 damage from the fall and the sharp shards. A narrow shelf spirals up out of the pit, aiding climbing (Athletics DC 20) or providing a precarious path (Acrobatics DC 15 to balance on the shelf over a total length of 60 feet).

Crystal: A DC 20 Arcana 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 (Athletics DC 15 to climb).

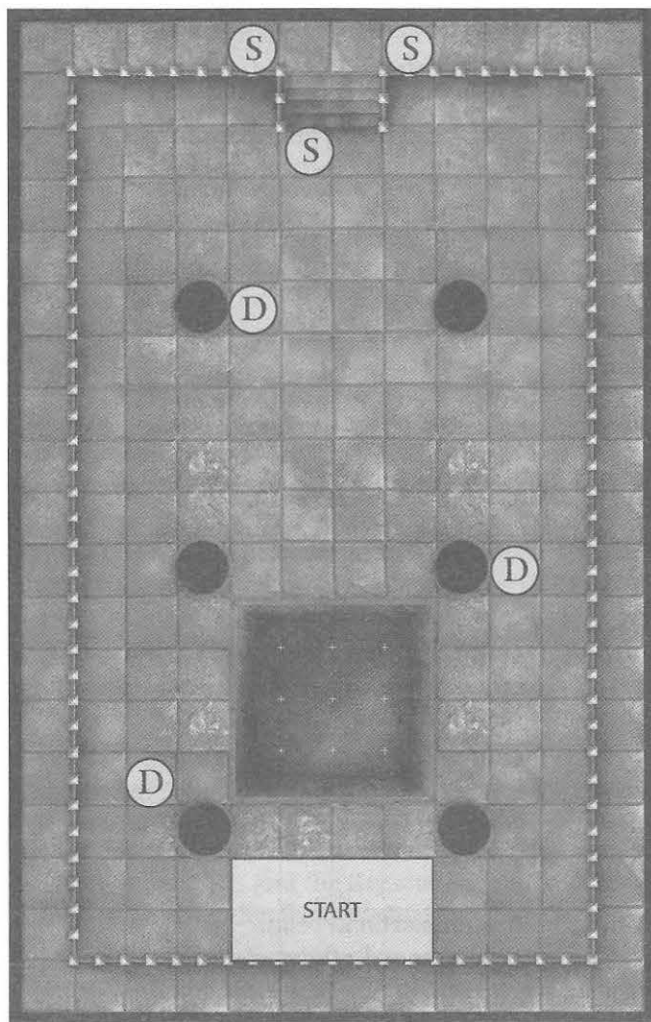
Stairs: The steep stairs leading from the floor to the ledge are difficult terrain.

Conclusion

If captured, a Zhent soldier confirms that Phoelele 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 650 XP for facing the puzzles and combat challenges in this 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.

Treasure: The Zhents carry 80 gp per character. A magic item is hidden among the shards at the bottom of the pit (see the Treasure Table, page 2).

Ending the Session

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

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.

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 an Arcana check notes that this chamber is filled with powerful magic, including the arcane forces that are responsible for suspending the crystal sculptures in midair.

Arcana DC 15: 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.

Arcana DC 23: 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 if the adventurers succeed on a DC 15 group Stealth check. 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 go 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. Phoedele 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 Phoedele's study of the lore gems. If the characters reach some kind of truce with Phoedele, 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

Phoedele (P)

3 Zhent soldiers (S)

This encounter normally begins when either the characters or the Zhentarim attack. If the characters arranged a truce with Phoedele, 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:

Phoedele 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

12 human cultists

When the cultists arrive, read:

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

Phoedele 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, Phoedele

attacks the characters, and the cult leader attacks whoever wields the *Diamond Staff*.

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."

Human Cult Leader Level 7 Controller

Medium natural humanoid

HP 77, Bloodied 38

AC 21, Fortitude 18, Reflex 19, Will 20

Speed 6

Initiative +3

Perception +11

STANDARD ACTIONS

① Staff (weapon) ♦ At-Will

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +12 vs. AC

Hit: 2d8 + 3 damage.

◀ Word of Thunder (implement, thunder) ♦ At-Will

Attack: Close blast 3 (enemies in the blast); +10 vs. Fortitude

Hit: 1d10 + 6 thunder damage, and the leader slides the target up to 3 squares.

Miss: The leader can slide the target 1 square.

➤ Subjugation (charm, implement) ♦ Recharge ☼ ☼ ☼ ☼

Attack: Ranged 5 (one slowed creature); +10 vs. Fortitude

Hit: The target cannot use attack powers until the end of the leader's next turn.

MOVE ACTIONS

Curse Jump (teleportation) ♦ Encounter

Effect: Close burst 5 (one slowed creature in the burst); the leader and the target teleport, swapping positions.

MINOR ACTIONS

◀ Dragonfire Curse (charm, implement) ♦ At-Will (1/round)

Attack: Close burst 5 (one enemy in the burst); +10 vs. Will

Hit: The target is slowed. Whenever the target is hit by an attack or hits the cult leader with an attack, the target takes 5 fire damage.

Skills Arcana +10, Nature +11, Stealth +8

Str 10 (+3)

Dex 11 (+3)

Wis 17 (+6)

Con 13 (+4)

Int 15 (+5)

Cha 14 (+5)

Alignment evil

Languages Common, Draconic

Equipment staff, robes

12 Human Cultists Level 7 Minion Skirmisher

Medium natural humanoid

HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.

AC 21, Fortitude 20, Reflex 17, Will 18

Speed 6

Initiative +5

Perception +4

TRAITS

Battle Fervor

Whenever the cultist hits with a charge attack, the target grants combat advantage until the end of the cultist's next turn.

STANDARD ACTIONS

① Club (weapon) ♦ At-Will

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +12 vs. AC

Hit: 7 damage.

Skills Stealth +8

Str 14 (+5)

Dex 11 (+3)

Wis 12 (+4)

Con 13 (+4)

Int 10 (+3)

Cha 13 (+4)

Alignment evil

Languages Common

Equipment robes, club

Phoedele (P) Level 7 Elite Brute (Leader)

Medium natural humanoid, human

HP 192, Bloodied 96

AC 19, Fortitude 20, Reflex 18, Will 19

Speed 6

Saving Throws +2, Action Points 1

Initiative +5

Perception +4

TRAITS

⚙ Tactical Insight ♦ Aura 5

Phoedele and allies in the aura have combat advantage against any creature that has another of Phoedele's allies adjacent to it.

Zhent Phalanx

While Phoedele is adjacent to an ally, enemies cannot gain combat advantage by flanking her.

STANDARD ACTIONS

① Longsword or Staff (weapon) ♦ At-Will

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +12 vs. AC

Hit: 2d8 + 9 damage.

⚡ Double Attack ♦ At-Will

Effect: Phoedele makes two melee basic attacks.

◀ Weapon Arc (weapon) ♦ Recharge ☼ ☼ ☼ ☼

Attack: Close burst 1 (enemies in the burst); +10 vs. Reflex

Hit: 3d8 + 7 damage, Phoedele can push the target 1 square, and the target falls prone.

Miss: Phoedele can push the target 1 square.

TRIGGERED ACTIONS

Cry of Glory ♦ Encounter

Trigger: An ally within 10 squares of Phoedele hits with an attack against an enemy that is granting combat advantage to the ally, and doesn't score a critical hit.

Effect (Free Action): Close burst 10 (triggering ally in the burst); the triggering ally instead scores a critical hit.

Skills Arcana +9, Athletics +12, History +9, Intimidate +11

Str 18 (+7)

Dex 14 (+5)

Wis 12 (+4)

Con 16 (+6)

Int 13 (+4)

Cha 16 (+6)

Alignment evil

Languages Common

Equipment plate armor, longsword, *Diamond Staff of Chomylla*

3 Zhent Soldiers (S) Level 5 Soldier

Medium natural humanoid, human

HP 63, Bloodied 31

AC 21, Fortitude 18, Reflex 17, Will 16

Speed 5

Initiative +6

Perception +2

TRAITS

Zhent Phalanx

While the soldier is adjacent to an ally, enemies cannot gain combat advantage by flanking the soldier.

STANDARD ACTIONS

① Longsword (weapon) ♦ At-Will

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. AC

Hit: 2d8 + 4 damage, and the target is slowed until the end of the soldier's next turn.

⦿ Crossbow (weapon) ♦ At-Will

Attack: Ranged 15 (one creature); +10 vs. AC

Hit: 2d8 + 4 damage.

TRIGGERED ACTIONS

⚡ Shield Bash (weapon) ♦ At-Will

Trigger: A slowed enemy willingly leaves a square adjacent to the soldier.

Attack (Immediate Interrupt): Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. AC

Hit: 2d6 + 6 damage, and the target falls prone.

Str 18 (+6)

Dex 15 (+4)

Wis 11 (+2)

Con 15 (+4)

Int 10 (+2)

Cha 12 (+3)

Alignment evil

Languages Common

Equipment scale armor, heavy shield, longsword, crossbow, 20 bolts

Tactics

Phoedele leads the Zhents from the front. Her soldiers fight in close formation to benefit from her aura and from *Zhent phalanx*. Phoedele uses the *Diamond Staff's* attack power during the battle, but does not add the staff's enhancement bonus or critical damage to her own powers.

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 *word of thunder*.

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.

ADJUSTING DIFFICULTY

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

Features of the Area

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

Shimmering Pool: The pool is 10 feet deep (Athletics DC 10 to swim). Climbing out of the water onto the edge of the pool requires a move action. The water is charged with radiant energy. A creature that ends its turn in the water takes 5 radiant damage but gains resist 5 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.

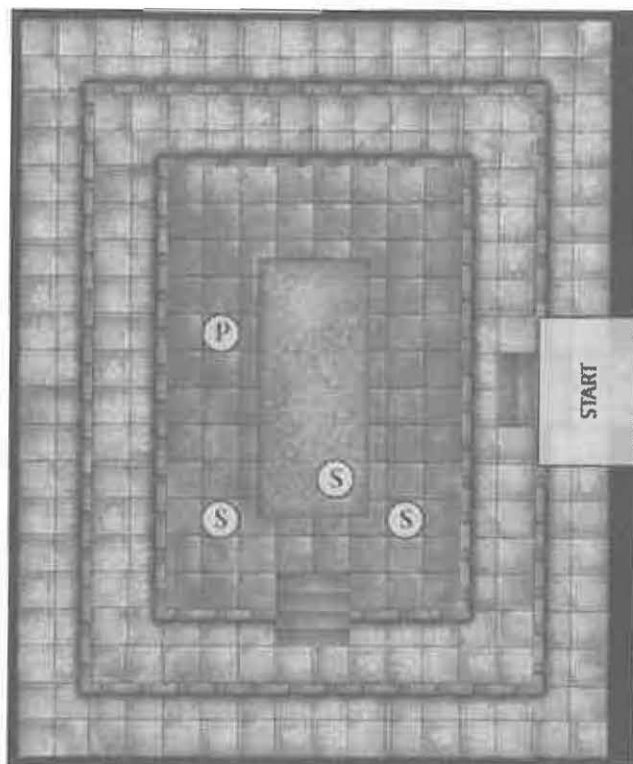
Steps: The steps between tiers are steep, and count as difficult terrain.

Tiers: Each tier is 10 feet above the next lower tier, but low walls along the inside of the top two tiers grant a +2 bonus to saving throws to avoid falling over an edge. The walls are smooth (Athletics DC 20 to climb).

Reward

Each character gains 800 XP for interacting with Phoedele and dealing with the combat challenge of this session.

Treasure: The defeated enemies have jewelry, gems, and coins worth 150 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 Arcana, must study one of the crystal structures for 8 hours without interruption, remaining within 5 squares 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.

- ◆ Training in Arcana, Dungeoneering, Heal, History, Nature, or Religion (character's choice).
- ◆ A permanent +1 increase to Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma (character's choice).
- ◆ A bonus feat, either Arcane Initiate, Iron Will, Linguist, or Skill Focus (character's choice).
- ◆ Knowledge of the location of a great treasure hoard or a special magic item (DM'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, 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.

Diamond Staff of Chomylla

Level 11 Rare

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

Implement: Staff 9,000 gp

Enhancement Bonus: +3 to attack rolls and damage rolls

Critical: +2d8 damage, and the target is dazed (save ends).

Properties

- ◆ You gain a +3 item bonus to knowledge and monster knowledge checks.
- ◆ You comprehend any language spoken to you, and you can make yourself understood to any creature that has a language.

Attack Power (Charm) ◆ Daily (Free Action)

Trigger: An enemy is hit by a melee attack made with this Implement.

Effect: The triggering enemy is stunned (save ends).

Utility Power ◆ Encounter (Free Action)

Trigger: You make an Arcana, Dungeoneering, Heal, History, Nature, or Religion check and dislike the result.

Effect: Reroll the check and use either result.

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 Phoede's defeat, the Zhents have no further interest in the *Diamond Staff* and the library-vaults of Uvaeren. Phoede 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 Mistedale. If she survives, Phoede 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. Phoede'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 500 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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