

**No Art Version**

# **In the Wake of the Zorkul**

# In the Wake of the Zorkul

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# Table of Contents

In the Wake of the Zorkul.....	ii
Introduction.....	5
Background.....	6
Hooks.....	7
Leveling during the Adventure.....	7
General Features, Resource Bookkeeping and Survival.....	8
Special Rooms.....	8
Cave Inn.....	8
Area 1-1: The Goose (Start).....	8
Area 1-2: Natural Cave.....	9
Natural caverns.....	10
Area 2-1: The Arduous Passage.....	10
Area 2-2: Lair of the Hunter Spiders.....	11
Area 2-3: The Maze (Extension Point).....	11
Area 2-4: The Wild Halfling Warrens.....	12
Area 2-5: An Empty Lair.....	13
Area 2-6: The Dripping Cave.....	13
Area 2-7: The Vine Forest.....	13
Area 2-8: The Chimney (Exit).....	14
The Eastward Zorkul Path.....	14
Area 3-1: A vast, triangular Passage.....	14
Area 3-2: Wizard Duel.....	14
Area 3-3: The Waterfall.....	15
Area 3-4: The Abyss.....	15
The Way of the Water.....	15
Area 4-1: The Sizzling Lake.....	15
Area 4-2: Along the Stream.....	16
Area 4-3: The Room of the Glowing Walls.....	16
Area 4-4: The Goblin Caves (Exit).....	17
The Westward Zorkul Path.....	19
Area 5-1: Another vast, triangular Passage.....	19
Area 5-2: The Chasm (Exit).....	19
Area 5-3: A rubble-blocked Passage.....	19
Area 5-4: The Zorkul.....	19
Area 5-5: The Landslide (Extension point).....	20
Abandoned Dwarf Mine.....	20
Area 6-1: A Vertical Shaft (Extension Point).....	20
Area 6-2: The Ogre Lair (Exit).....	20
Aftermath.....	21
Where to from here?.....	21
Appendix.....	22
Open Gaming License.....	22

## Monsters & Encounters

Zorkul.....	6
Harmless Wildlife.....	9
Hunter spiders.....	11
Warren Halfling.....	12
Vine Lurker.....	13
Possessing Spirit.....	15
Cave Octopus.....	16
Hlolph.....	17

## Introduction

One of the distinguishing features of the *Dungeon Crawl Classics Role Playing Game* is the funnel. Zero-level characters face an introductory adventure together and the surviving ones go on to be player characters. DCC works with rolling your characters, so you don't always get what you want, but you have a certain amount of choice about which of your several random characters you'd prefer keeping after the funnel is over.

I have played several wonderful funnels so far, either ones explicitly designed as such (Goodman Games' *The Portal under the Stars* or Purple Sorcerer's *Nebin Pendlebrook's Perilous Pantry* come to mind), or reusing other modules that also work as funnels (like Goodman Games' *Sailors on the Starless Sea*). I've also made up my own.

This adventure you see before you evolved from the idea of using a nigh-unbeatable monster. The Zorkul (see below) ended up being the central catalyst that gets the story going and may even be encountered during adventuring.

Funnels, and not only funnels, often tend to be a bit linear. Readers will notice there is not one central climactic conflict this adventure is driving the characters towards. That's because the other thing I wanted to include was an element of choice. Dungeons are often said to be rather linear affairs that limit player choice in many ways, but I think a dungeon

does not necessarily need to be a “megadungeon” to actually allow for meaningful player choice. In this module I present the players with three paths out. There is a choice. You can turn back. You can try to chose another path with another outcome. And each achieves your goal – escape and survival.

Will this mean that players will miss out on stuff in this adventure? Oh yes. As a Judge you might want to run it twice. I cannot guarantee different outcomes, but there's a good chance that different players will make different choices.

Finally I tried to create a dungeon that has at least a semblance of credibility even though it is set in the Underdark. There is no conscious agent who designed all of the surroundings, so there must be habitats. Creatures cannot survive without food and water. So in here you find areas that are “monster rooms” and others that could believably serve as habitats or hunting grounds. Also included is a list of harmless critters to make the underworld come alive.

Part of the fun is that players don't know any of this. They don't know that there are several ways out. They might fall prey to thinking that the price they paid for getting to a certain point commits them to a certain path. If one path to freedom seems too pricey, they can turn around and try another. But they don't know that. Exploring the game world and making your own decisions is to me one of the really fun parts of a roleplaying game, and I would not want to take it away from players. Each choice will create a different path with different results.

I hope you will like it.

# Background

Some entities are so large, calling them “monsters” is not even starting to describe it. Some are even larger than that ... Enter the Zorkul. When at rest, a Zorkul looks like a 70' high pyramidal glob. It doesn't have a maw or anything like it, it however is covered in a mass of writhing feelers. The most formidable feat of the Zorkul is that it absorbs the densest matter. It literally absorbs bedrock stone and transforms it into energy, bleeding of the excess into other dimensions beyond this physical world. To do this, the Zorkul pushes its shape towards a stone wall, compressing itself against it and its matter transformation begins resorbing the stone. It leaves 100' high triangular tunnels in its wake.

Normally, Zorkuls dwell in the deepest depths of the earth, shifting the deepest layers. Every few hundred years a Zorkul will come really close to the surface for a dozen years. Zorkuls in this state look for a mate. It is fortunate for everyone that there is no real Zorkul mating season. Imagine hundreds of these behemoths near the surface at the same time! Zorkuls have a natural sense of how deep they are, and they stay close to the surface, but on their own devices never exit the ground. A few hundred feet is close enough for them.

Ignorance is definitely bliss in this case, and the surface dwellers know no word to describe a Zorkul, but the Underdark goblins do. Zorkul means “Devourer” in their tongue, and many a cavern-dwelling demi-human community has been consumed by a Zorkul in the mood for some loving. Zorkuls are major contributors to the existence of an Underdark. Their triangular tunnels stretch forever, often interconnecting natural cave systems and other underground phenomena.

The only real danger to a Zorkul is an underground sea – a Zorkul can drown. Onrushing water or being dropped into water is too much matter for the Zorkul to resorb and it will simply drown. A drowning Zorkul

will detonate shortly afterward. Beyond dropping it from a height – unlikely as this is – the Zorkul is simply too massive to be hurt. Plus any creature coming close enough to wage melee on it – or into a range of 20' – is simply absorbed into the Zorkul.

A Zorkul near the surface is a dangerous thing. Tectonic shifts and upsets are bound to happen, and this is how it begins ...

## Zorkul

Pyramid-shaped glob covered in writhing feelers.

Stat Block (DCC) – Zorkul: Init -10; Atk Automatic Hit 20', 100hp damage; AC5; hp 150d12; hp 1,150; MV 10' (through stone), 30' (impeded by obstacles), 40' else; Act N/A; SP can sense matter density and living creatures 200', will resorb matter and beings, moves through stone, HOOOOOOM: required DC18 Fort save or be deafened, permanently on natural 1; SV Fort +45, Ref +0, Will +12.

A Zorkul that has taken 80-100 hp of damage in one attack or about 160-200hp of total damage will notice it is under attack. It will let out an ear-shattering HOOOOOOM. (Imagine the noise you get when blowing into a jug. Imagine the same attempt by a 70' high pyramidal glob!) Creatures hearing the noise are in danger of being deafened. And in danger of being charged by an enraged Zorkul! It can move surprisingly fast when “properly motivated” and it's coming for you...

Killing a Zorkul should yield 1-2 level-ups (Judge's decision) and lower the respective character's Luck score by 1d6. Killing part of the physical aspect of an earth god is bad news, usually.

## Hooks

### Option 1: Funnel / The Village Dance

Read the following to your players:

*Spring is a time of celebration, and many of the villagers of Hillkant have assembled in the inn to celebrate its arrival with a dance. Situated on a trade route crossing the foot hills of a low mountain range, Hillkant sees its fair share of merchants and visitors, and The Goose houses most of them. Both locals and visitors cheer the dancers. There's cider from the last of last year's apples. There's stomping and cheering from the dancers.*

*Just as things are nicely moving along, there's a sound like a god grinding its teeth. The ground shakes. The whole building suddenly tilts 45 degrees, people collide, furniture slips, and the whole begins to slide down. There's a rushing motion and the sound of stone sliding over stone. After minutes of a rough ride the motion seems to slow, there's a sensation like running a cart over very uneven cobblestones, then with a sudden slam the building comes to a halt. A few of the beams come down. There's chaos. People dousing spilt lantern oil. Smoke. Dust. People coughing. Then darkness descends and the earth shakes again.*

The original owner had built the *The Goose* over a cellar driven into the rock. Under the ground the Zorkul hit a stratum under tension, and it shattered – its kinetic discharge reaching as far as the surface. The ground tore upon and fractured, and the segment the inn was built on tilted and slid into the fault. After sliding more than a mile its accompanying rubble rolled into a cave the Zorkul had passed through. The descending rift ended here in a shape like a hockey stick – enough to slow the inn down before its impact in the cave wall.

The funnel characters are the survivors of the wild ride.

### Option 2: Experienced party / A disturbed rest

Read the following to your players:

*You have followed the merchant road into the foot hills, and at nightfall reached the small town of Hillkant. The people are used to merchants and people on the road, and have directed you to The Goose, a rather big inn. There's a dance going on, some sort of spring festival, but the road has made you weary and after some food and nicely cooled ale you retire to a room in the upper story. You tear your boots off and go to sleep.*

*You don't know how long you've slept, but a sound like a god grinding its teeth shakes you wake. And the ground is shaking, too! The whole building suddenly tilts by 45 degrees, you slam into each other, furniture slips. There's a rushing motion and the sound of stone sliding over stone. After minutes of a rough ride the motion seems to slow, there's a sensation like running a cart over very uneven cobblestones, then with a sudden slam the building comes to a halt. The earth shakes again. It is dark.*

Please see also *Option 1* for further details of what happened. The biggest difference is this: The lower story collapsed sideways, like a house of cards falling sideways, burying the dancers beneath. No one survived. Alternatively the dancers may have survived, but now the party is burdened with their survival as well. It's up to the Judge.

### Leveling during the Adventure

My recommendation would be to allow a level up during the course of the adventure. It is however unlikely that the characters have a chance of picking up key skills like spellcasting while underground. One option is for players to declare the intended class for a character, to roll the appropriate hit die to increase the hit point total, and to apply the heightened saving throw values. All the other class capabilities – including attack boni, spellcasting, turning undead,

thieves skills and such – are better withheld until the players had time for some training.

## General Features, Resource Bookkeeping and Survival

In Area 1-1: The Goose (Start) you will find a reference of what resources are available to the players, especially in a funnel. This is no accident. Since this whole adventure module plays underground, it's important to keep track of the use of resources – who holds a torch, how long does a journey take, etc. Underground exploration is an exhausting task. Rest and food are needed, and the amount of rations is limited. To dry oneself one has to make a fire, and fire needs fuel. Also, smoke needs a way to exit and might be impractical in smaller caverns. There are no natural light sources – except where stated otherwise.

Assume the following:

- Every adventurer eats a half-ration every four hours.
- Every adventurer needs a rest after about 8 hours.
- Going on for 4 more hours without sleep or food means all checks are made on a d16 – with the exceptions of Luck checks.
- Every torch burns one hour.

## Special Rooms

Three kinds of rooms are especially marked:

- Area 1-1: The Goose (Start) - this is where players begin their journey.
- Several other areas are marked as exits – this is where characters can return to the surface world.
- Finally, some areas are marked as extension points. Here you as Judge can insert further dungeons and challenges easily.

# Cave Inn

## Area 1-1: The Goose (Start)

Provided that the players take precautions, the inn makes a good location to rest and a defensible position in case of attack.

This area plays a bit differently depending on which of the hooks you chose (see pg. 7).

### Funnel

*After a short time in the darkness someone manages to light a lantern. Someone manages to calm the survivors down. For several any help would come too late – ceiling beams came down and smashed their bodies. Some of the dead are your friends, other are strangers. The room is in a desolate state, but it's a miracle the building held at all.*

Funnel adventurers didn't bring anything to the dance: no weapons, no trade items, no other spare equipment. The only available equipment must be looted from the inn itself:

### Equipment found in The Goose

1. Obviously, one unbroken **lantern**.
2. A **crowbar** and a **small hammer** can be found in a toolbox.
3. A **spear**, **shield** and **helmet** can be found in a cupboard in the innkeeper's room upstairs. (He was a militia man.) He also kept **13 gp** and **24sp** in a strong box. (DC14 Strength check to force open with crowbar.)
4. There's a barrel of pickles and a barrel of salted meat in the cellar. Combined with today's delivery of bread it's enough to create 8d6 **iron rations**.
5. There's two **small barrels of brandy** in the cellar, worth 5gp (cheap brandy) and 15gp (fine brandy) respectively. The wine barrel is

broken and also rolled over a waiter (deceased) before hitting a wall.

6. There's also a **rope** hanging from a hook in the cellar.
7. In an upstairs room lies the body of a dead wizard. He's been buried under a wardrobe. A **dagger, 57sp** and **two scrolls** can still be salvaged from the bloody mess. The scrolls were in a **waterproof sack**. The scrolls cannot be read until Read Magic has been cast on them. (The scrolls contain **Cantrip** and **Feather Fall**.)
8. There's two intact **bottles of oil**, a **crossbow**, **12 bolts**, a **blackjack** and a chest with **17 torches** behind the counter.
9. There's a poker next to the fireplace. It can be used as a sturdy **club**.

Since this is not enough to equip a party, allow the looting of flasks, bottles and the cutlery (to be used as knives/daggers). Knives bend out of shape on a natural 1 and become unusable for fighting, regardless of the results of the fumble roll. Make-shift clubs can be fashioned from the furniture. They break on a natural of 1, no matter what the result of the fumble table roll is. Torches can also be made by using the oil, furniture debris and cloth. Each bottle yields 4 more torches. Bringing some firewood might be a good precaution if adventurers think of it.

## Regular Adventure

*You somehow manage to open the door of your room. Other doors are wedged into their frames. A central beam came down. At the end of hallway the building broke open. Beyond it is the darkness of the cave.*

If the players want to look for survivors or salvage anything from the lower part of the inn, they have to dig through the rubble of the lower story. It takes 1 hour per attempt and is a DC14 Stamina roll. If a dwarven stonemason directs the clearing of rubble, it's a DC10 roll. Any attempt may yield goods from the ground floor. It takes three successful rolls before the cellar becomes accessible. The cellar is in the same

state as with the funnel option. The players probably need torches, rations, oil, rope and lantern the most (in that order).

## Area 1-2: Natural Cave

*As you exit from the house, you notice you're in an underground cave of impressive size. On one side there's a whole landslide's worth of rocks and boulders. This must be where the inn slid down. You try to orient yourselves, and for lack of better terms you agree that one cave wall is north, and one is south, and the rock slide is west. On second look it seems like the debris covers a caved-in tunnel. The building slammed into the east wall, close to an opening. It's 100' high and triangular. It leads into an equally-shaped tunnel. The southern wall seems to contain another exit, much smaller. It's barely 6' high.*

## Harmless Wildlife

It would be odd if the caves held no life but monsters. What would they eat? So here's a selection of other wildlife you can randomly add to the scenery:

1. Marsupial mice: *You see a little mouse scurry by. It has especially big eyes. A stripe runs down its back.*
2. Crab spider: *Something just slipped back into a pool of water. It looked like a crab. Or a spider. Definitely bigger than a regular spider. It moved rather slow.*
3. Cave leech: *A little black leech-like worm is crawling on the cave wall. It seems to be sucking the moss off the walls.*
4. Cave bat: *A swarm of small bats flies by. Do they know the exit?*
5. Various insects: *Insects seem to crawl over the floor here. Some look like fat roaches, you're sure you saw a centipede, too. Tiny biting bugs fill the air.*
6. Blind snake: *If it had not hissed, you would have stepped on it. A blind snake with no*



*eyes quickly scurries away.*

7. White snails: *Fat, ugly snails crawl over a colony of mushrooms in this area. They have tiny red dots on them, and the biggest ones are as wide and long as a child's arm. They take no interest in you as they ooze over their favorite dish.*
8. Cave frogs: *There's frog spawn in this puddle, but no frog to be seen or even heard. Strange.*

All of this wildlife has one thing in common: It's mostly harmless.

If the players try to explore whether they can exit the way they came from:

*Even though the rift is big, you can see from here that the second quake must have closed it again. There's no hint of daylight or an exit that way.*

The cave itself poses no dangers to the adventurers, but staying for too long would be unwise due to dwindling resources. There's two exits – a narrow passage to the south, leading to Area 2-1: The Arduous Passage, and a vast passage to the east, leading to Area 3-1: A vast, triangular Passage. These two paths will not converge again.

## Natural caverns

### Area 2-1: The Arduous Passage

*This passage is in many places only wide enough to let a man crawl through, but it may be worth the risk. It also seems to descend...*

It does descend, in fact. It will include climbing down rocks, squeezing through various narrows and other unhealthy activities. It narrows and widens over and over again. Passing through takes 2 hours and requires a DC12 climbing check (Dexterity or the associated thief skill).

Failing this check requires a DC14 Reflex save. On a success, take 1d4 damage, on a fail take 2d4. If the characters used a rope to secure the climbers to each other, reduce damage as follows: No damage on success, 1d3 on failure.

*You slowly traverse the passage. You climb over rocks, slowly descend down narrow pathways, following the occasional turn. You crawl through other passages, barely catching your breath. Or is it the weight of the stone itself pressing the breath out of your lungs? The torch smoke burns in your eyes. Finally you emerge in a tall chamber...*

Proceed to Area 2-2: Lair of the Hunter Spiders.

## Area 2-2: Lair of the Hunter Spiders

*This room seems rather wide and tall, it's hard to estimate. The ceiling is beyond your vision. You will have to turn one way or the other here, it seems. There's a smell like rotten eggs in here.*

Hunter spiders have made their lair here. These creatures evade other dangers of the cave system by dwelling on the ceiling of the room. They do not make webs, but they can lower themselves from a strand of silk. They also use threads to attach their victims to the ceiling where they let them rot (hence the smell) before they suck them dry. Characters with infravision might be able to spot them early if explicitly asking about the ceiling. With torchlight it is a DC13 Intelligence check.

### Hunter spiders

*These spiders appear 3' long and entirely black.*

Stat Block (DCC) – Hunter Spider: Init +1; Atk +1 mandibles d4 + poison; AC14; hp 1d8; hp 5; MV 30' walk, 20' climb; Act 1d20; SP poison requires DC15 Fort save or suffer effect for 1d4+1 turns: all actions are made -1d die shift, further poisoning has no effect, infravision 100', silent movement; SV Fort +1, Ref +1, Will +0; AL N.

There's 3d3+4 (7-13) Hunter Spiders in this cave, but at most 4-6 (1d3+3) of them attack at once. The rest will not challenge the players. Hunter spiders will retreat to cut their losses according to the morale rules. They will keep their distance. All remaining spiders will attack if players keep attacking them further, for example with missile weapons. If the players pay no attention to their surroundings, they may get a surprise round in combat.

If the characters chose to explore the chamber itself, they will find a pile of bones in a depression. This is essentially the spiders' midden. Included is a full

halfling skeleton, in an embryonic position clutching a **flint stone dagger**. Most other bones belong to smaller creatures.

The northern passage connects to Area 2-3: The Maze (Extension Point).

The southern passage connects to Area 2-6: The Dripping Cave.

## Area 2-3: The Maze (Extension Point)

*As you enter this cavern, you notice it has a low ceiling. Myriads of stone pillars connect the ceiling with the floor, making the passage complicated, creating multiple paths to choose from. You can't see from here where they lead. The chamber floor is also not even. This is a downright labyrinth.*

The Maze is huge and disorienting. Ask the players where they want to pass – north, west, south or east. There are exits in each direction from the Maze. Players can ease navigating the Maze (now or later) by marking a path.

The northern passage connects to Area 2-4: The Wild Halfling Warrens. The eastern passage connects to Area 2-5: An Empty Lair. The southern passage connects to Area 2-2: Lair of the Hunter Spiders. The western passage connects to Area 5-1: Another vast, triangular Passage after half an hour journey through narrow tunnels.

In principle, the Maze could lead to further areas of your own design. Following the rules above, players could attempt to reach further directions (e.g. NE, SE, SW, NW), and it is up to you what they would find.

### Navigating the Maze

1. Require Luck rolls for each character (or per player in case of multiple character, use highest Luck score).
2. The first traversal of the maze in any direction takes one hour plus another half

hour for each failed Luck roll.

3. Future traversals:

- a) If they did not leave any marks, future traversals take the same time.
- b) If they used charcoal, chalk, a small hammer or any other suitable means to mark their path:
  1. The minimum traveling time is always one hour.
  2. Backtracking an existing path takes one hour.
  3. Attempts to find their way into new areas are one hour cheaper. The minimum is one hour.

The area is habitat and hunting ground for many creatures. Roll 1d6 for an encounter every hour:

- On 1, they meet hostile creatures. These may include warren halflings and hunter spiders.
- On 5 or 6, they encounter some of the harmless creatures described on pg. 9.

## Area 2-4: The Wild Halfling Warrens

*This lair has two levels. Down here you see various possessions laying on the stone floor, deserted by their owners. Beyond your own light you see weak, bluish light that seems to come from the moss on the covering the walls. Warm air currents seem to pass upwards from below. If you look higher up, a sort of elevated gallery is 10' higher than the rest of the cave. You could swear you saw someones peek down from there just a moment ago.*

Long ago a traveling party of halflings of both genders was waylaid by goblins. Slaving away in the goblins' service for months they escaped during a clash with another tribe. The halflings were weakened and could not successfully navigate their way to the surface. They settled into this cave as their den and prospered soon enough. Their hunting grounds are in the maze, and they farm nutrition-rich mushrooms in a cave to

the north. The maze in Area 2-3: The Maze (Extension Point) protects them from subterranean aggressors.

The warren halflings are paranoid and not prone to trust outsiders. If the party proceeds further, they will attack.

The warrens house a total of 37 halflings, 22 of them are adults capable of defending the warren. The rest are children and elderly. A wave of 10 adults will open combat with a volley from an elevated position if provoked.

If the party still manages to befriend the tribe, they will be greeted by several of the warriors. Roleplay the corresponding scenes. The halflings speak a very slurred version of Common and are hard to understand. Their chiefs is Fists-of-Fury. They might trade with the adventurers for various things. They have flint-stone weapons, blowguns, edible mushrooms, potable water and snail poison for trade. The same things can be found in greater quantities if the tribe is overcome. The halflings have infravision, so they have no portable light sources. They grow a slightly fluorescent moss on their cave walls which gives off a weak, bluish light at about the strength of candlelight. If uprooted it loses this property within 2 hours.

The tribe doesn't know a way out. The air currents come from tiny fissures and do not indicate an exit.

### Warren Halfling

*This one would look like any other halfling – if it wasn't naked and covering its nether regions with moss.*

Stat Block (DCC) – Warren Halfling: Init +1; Atk +1 blowgun d3/d5, +1 flint stone daggers d4; AC12; hp 1d6; hp 4; MV 20'; Act 1d20 / 2d16 if dual-wielding; SP may use backstab attack with blowgun, automatic hit on a natural 16 on d16, but no crit, infravision 60'; SV Fort +0, Ref +2, Will +1; AL N.

Warren halflings usually evade direct combat and attack with blowguns. In close combat they dual-wield flint stone daggers.

## Area 2-5: An Empty Lair

*To the south-east there's an ascending passage. But you can see rubble has blocked it. To the north there's a passage, it seems to widen.*

When they enter:

*This cavern seems empty and reasonably dry. At the far end there is an elevated second level to it. Like from a platform there is a perfect view of the entrance. It would make a good camp site.*

It indeed does make a good camp site. No strings attached.

## Area 2-6: The Dripping Cave

*From a high ceiling drops of water fall to the ground, their impact in pools of water echoing back and forth. The sound is soothing. It's damp and cool in here. As you move closer, some wildlife scurries away.*

This area has pools of clean, potable water. Other inhabitants of the underground areas come here to drink or collect water, making it a convenient hunting ground for the hunter spiders.

A south-western passage leads to Area 2-7: The Vine Forest.

## Area 2-7: The Vine Forest

*It's hard to estimate the extent of this cavern, as an enormous mass of vines is suspended in it. Some reach to the ground, others do not. Some are entangled. Some hang freely. Even after a few dozen feet vine curtains block your vision. It's as if warm, humid air rises from below. The floor is warm and there are puddles of water in it. There's an air current that*

*makes the air bearable, as if there was a draft. You hear a rustle from the vines.*

Within this mass of vines hide 1d3+2 vine lurkers. They will seize an opportunity to attack the party.

### Vine Lurker

*This looks like a creature made up entirely of hairy arms. It swings from vine to vine in one fluid motion – towards you, hands stretched out!*

Stat Block (DCC) – Vine Lurker: Init +2; At +1 strangle; AC12; hp 2d6; hp 7; MV25'; Act 3d16; SP if two attacks “hit” the same target, strangulation of the victim (1d6 Stamina loss per round) will occur, infravision 60'; SV Fort +1, Ref +2, Will +0; AL C.

A Vine Lurker swings from vine to vine and tries to attack and strangle creatures. At the center of this ball of arms are mouths which can absorb food when it has been liquified through discomposure. Lurkers are abominations of nature and can be turned.

Enemies in a stranglehold are considered entangled according to the combat rules in the rulebook, pg. 78.

The vines absorb a lot of water from above and do not burn unless doused with oil. Setting the vine forest on fire will make reaching Area 2-8: The Chimney (Exit) very hard or impossible (Judge's discretion).

If the players get the idea of climbing the vines, they can make their way to higher ledges and discover that a long ascending chimney exits the cave upwards. If it is day in the upper world, sunlight reflexes can be seen above. Climbing the vines isn't hard and should not require a roll from any characters. Even if someone slips, it's easy enough to get a hold on another vine.

If the party chooses to explore the chamber after the attack from the lurkers it takes an hour and yields nothing.

The chimney itself is described in Area 2-8: The Chimney (Exit).

### **Area 2-8: The Chimney (Exit)**

*This shaft vertically ascends for at least 100' if not more. You can see sunlight at the other end. Birds nest on various ledges, and indeed in some spots there seem to be enough of a ledge to pause the climb. Below you see the wild green of the vine tangle in the cave.*

This is one possible way out. The shaft is a 115' climb, but there are ledges to pause and take a breath on. If the party takes precautions for the climb – trying to secure foot- and handholds, securing each other with ropes, etc – reward this by lowering the Climb check DC to 7. Else it's a DC11 climb. Falling isn't necessarily instant death here. If a falling party member makes a Luck Roll, he or she will drop on the vines tangle instead. This will lower fall damage to 1d4.

A smart party will send its best (and probably most lucky) climber ahead with a long rope. A sufficiently long rope can easily be manufactured from the vines.

This is also an excellent opportunity to remind the party that burning luck can save a character's life.

# The Eastward Zorkul Path

## Area 3-1: A vast, triangular Passage

*As you walk, your steps echo in the enormous passage. It's as if the ground gives off some warmth, but after you traveled an hour, the feeling slowly subsides. It just may be that you've got used to it, but now you feel cold in comparison. The walls are slightly irregular, covered by a wave-like pattern. Different strata can be seen as you walk past them.*

After a trek of 2 hours the tunnel intersects with Area 3-2: Wizard Duel. Another 1 hour trek into the darkness brings the party to the intersection with Area 3-3: The Waterfall. Finally, the long tunnel ends a four hour hike later in Area 3-4: The Abyss. Which is also a dead-end.

## Area 3-2: Wizard Duel

*The triangular tunnels seems to have cut into a enormous geode here. The walls are made of white crystals that end in purple sharp tips. Two crystals have grown into a strange shape. Or rather human bodies seem like fused to them. The shapes look like statues of wizards, frozen in a dramatic posture. Strange shapes emanate from their hands, forever frozen in time. What would they be doing down here?*

Phlogiston disturbance: Not a wizard's best friend. (See the Spell Duel rules on pg. 98 of the DCC rulebook for further details.)

These two statues were once wizards engaged in a wizard duel, in a bygone time in a different place. The chaotic nature of magic backfired on both of them, turning them into crystal. The spirit of the left one survived, however. It has inhabited this cave for a long, long time, long enough to forget its own name. The recent passage of the Zorkul opened the space up but did not release it. It needs a host, a human or demi-human body to inhabit.

If the party comes closer to examine the statues or look for something valuable, the spirit will start to accompany them. It will not take immediate action. Just take note of it.

### Possessing Spirit

An incorporeal spirit that is the leftover of the mind of a chaotic wizard who deceased eons ago.

Stat Block (DCC) – Possessing Spirit: Init +4; Atk +2 mind blast d6; AC12; hp 7d4; hp 17; MV 30' (float); Act 1d20; SP immune to all non-magical attacks, attacks requiring seeing the target or damaging a body; SV Fort +0, Ref +0, Will +5; AL C.

The spirit cannot be fought like a regular creature, the above stats only exist in case of magical attacks or attempts to turn undead. Attacks cannot rely on seeing the target. It has no body to hit. If it is injured it loses mental energy forever. It cannot heal up for further encounters. If a host is killed the spirit survives.

The spirit will make 3 attempts to take a party member over. This works as follows:

1. Pick a party member at random.
2. The spirit makes 3 takeover attempts which require DC11 Willpower saves.
  - a) If the character fails 2 of the 3 saves, he or she is taken over.
  - b) If the character manages to succeed in at least 2 saves, the spirit switches target.
3. After attempts on 3 characters the spirit gives up, and accompanies the party until they meet another group of humans or demi-humans.

This means the characters lose either one of their own to the spirit, or infect a tribe or village they encounter with it. What happens if the spirit takes over a player

character? That depends on your preferred style of play. You can either take the player aside and reveal it. The PC's alignment changes to chaotic and the driving spirit will attempt to increase its power at the expense of others. Alternatively you can later reveal the takeover to all players at a later stage when the spirit gets its first chance to betray them.

### **Area 3-3: The Waterfall**

*You hear the rushing noise of water. There is a gully bisecting the tunnel. It runs down a 7' tall shaft in the north wall and vanishes into a 5' shaft in the south wall.*

The Waterfall is actually a way out. It's certainly a way up. Both ways can be traversed, but the characters expose themselves to the icy-cold water while doing so. Both traversing up and down requires a Fortitude save of DC12. Failure incurs 1d3 points of cold damage.

Climbing down takes less than an hour and leads to area Area 4-1: The Sizzling Lake. It's also a dead-end. Climbing up takes two hours and leads to area Area 4-2: Along the Stream. There's only one check needed for the upward journey and the downward journey (which includes the return). Regular torches will extinguish on a 1-3 on a d4. Lanterns or torches additionally doused with oil will extinguish on a 1 on a d4.

### **Area 3-4: The Abyss**

*The tunnel ends here. Not in general, just for you. The shape does not change, but the tunnel slopes more and more downward and you won't be able to follow it anymore. You stare down the curve of the near-vertical drop. All you see is darkness.*

This is where the Zorkul rose from the depths of the earth.

## **The Way of the Water**

### **Area 4-1: The Sizzling Lake**

*You struggle downward, ledge by ledge, rock by rock. The cold water is washing over you at times. At other times you evade most of it, but there's always some spray or drizzle. Finally you arrive at an opening to a wider space. You see a cave, and within it waves spread over turquoise water as far as you can see. The water seems to sizzle like a carbonated beverage, 20' below. It smells of rotten eggs. The walls have yellow natural patterns spread over them.*

This underground lake is sulfuric acid. Entering the water means death.

### **Area 4-2: Along the Stream**

*As you pull yourself up the final ledge you see that you've reached the top of the waterfall. The brook that feeds it runs past you and drops into the darkness. You help your comrades up. You can see the stream descends more slowly here.*

When they progress upwards:

*You enter a cave where the water has made a small lake, filling the cave wall to wall and leaving it where you came in. Water enters in through a hole in the ceiling. You can see a shore on the other side, it's a bit hard to judge, but you might be able to wade over. The water has a slightly opaque quality to it.*

Well, now a ten foot pole or a spear might come in handy, unless players want to swim. The other shore is actually where the goblin tribe comes to get its water from.

There are two Cave Octopi dwelling in the water. Sometimes they hunt in the goblin tunnels, stealing their "livestock," but mostly they wait for their prey, lurking in the slightly opaque waters.

On the other shore various footprints of humanoids can be seen. The goblins have no choice but to fetch their potable water here, so water raids are made at irregular intervals.

The path departing the northern shore leads to Area 4-3: The Room of the Glowing Walls. The hike takes a turn. The southern shore exit leads back to Area 3-3: The Waterfall.

### Cave Octopus

Stat Block (DCC) – Cave Octopus (2 specimens): hp 9, 7.

Please see pg. 398 of the DCC rulebook for all further details on the Cave Octopus.

The tactic of the cave octopus is as follows: Surprise attack with all tentacles against one victim and force the opposed Strength check.

If the victim is killed or loses the check, it will be dragged under the next time the Cave Octopus acts in a combat round. Still-alive victims suffer 1d6 Stamina damage at the end of each combat round when being dragged under. The octopus will also attack with its beak once the victim is entangled. It does so at a +1d die shift (see pg. 78 of the DCC rulebook). A submerged octopus can only be attacked at -1d die shift.

Once the victim is dead it submerges further into the pool to feed on the body. It is beyond reach then.

### Area 4-3: The Room of the Glowing Walls

*You enter a rotund cavern. It is warmer here. It's also not so damp here, and you feel good. There are some large symbols crudely carved into the wall.*

If the players carry no artificial light, immediately reveal this:

*Every wall in this cave seem to slightly glow of its own.*

This cave has natural radiation. This same visual impression also become apparent if players decide to rest here, as it cannot escape your eyes forever. The symbols reveal this, but since they are crudely made in the goblin tribe's own idiom only a Read Languages check or an INT check of DC 16 will reveal that they warn of danger.

Resting here will do 1d3 damage for every full period of rest – which will be revealed after the fact. Radiation is a silent killer. There is no saving throw. Characters dying of radiation poisoning will puke convulsively. Characters with significant hit point loss will lose hair.

On the other hand, the goblins almost never come here – for fear of the octopi, and also because the cave is considered dangerous.

A path to the west leads back to Area 4-2: Along the Stream. A path to the north-east leads away to Area 4-4: The Goblin Caves (Exit).

### Area 4-4: The Goblin Caves (Exit)

This area is subdivided for greater clarity.

#### Area 4-4a: The Hlomph Cavern

When entering from Area 4-3: The Room of the Glowing Walls, the first room encountered is the huge Hlomph cavern.

### Hlomph

Stat Block (DCC) – Hlomph: Utterly harmless, MV 30', AL N.

Hlomphs are a subterranean species kept by the



goblins to provide milk, hides and meat. They look like anteaters, and lick cave moss off cavern walls with their long tongues. They can also walk on walls, making soft flopping noises with the suckers on their feet, which earned them the name after all.

Hlompfs breed fast when sufficient food is available, and here in the cave they find ideal conditions. There are no predators here except the Cave Octopi from Area 4-2: Along the Stream. Preying on Hlompfs has kept the Octopi away from the goblins in turn.

In order to minimize Hlompf losses and to protect their lair from the Octopi, the goblins installed what they call a “Clang!” A Clang! is simply a tripwire with bells and other noisy stuff on it. It is easy to spot – if the party pays attention and carries a light source the front marchers discover the Clang! if any of them succeed at a DC8 Spot check.

There is a 1-3 on d6 chance that a group of 3d3 goblin women is present, tending to the Hlompfs. They rely on the Clang! and easily overlook intruders that have any notion of stealth. They leave after 1d3 turns.

Triggering the Clang! attracts a band of 1d3+3 (4-6) goblins (see pg. 417 of the rulebook). They are armed with clubs. Their reaction at this point is paranoid and hostile, but maybe the group can work something out. More clan warriors prepare for battle when the alarm is raised. The goblin women flee.

A path to the south-west leads back to Area 4-3: The Room of the Glowing Walls. The only other exit leads to Area 4-4b: The Central Nexus.

#### **Area 4-4b: The Central Nexus**

*Here the tunnel has an intersection. It branches off left and right. It is wide enough for two men to walk abreast, while the branching tunnels are only wide enough for one. The ground ascends steeply here.*

If the alarm is raised in time (from Area 4-4a: The Hlompf Cavern) the goblins will make a stand here.

There's room for 2 men (or 3 halflings) in the first row, but for 3 goblins on the opposing side. The goblins have the higher ground advantage. Further goblins acting as slingers position themselves higher.

If the alarm was triggered, 2d3+3 (5-9) goblins are present. The first 3 act as front line, up to 4 more act as slingers. If the battle takes longer than 3 rounds, 2 more goblins appear as reinforcements from Area 4-4e: The Tunnel to the Outside (Exit). The goblins will fight a retreat into the branching tunnels if push comes to shove (they fail a morale roll). They will abandon the ascending exit.

If there's no alarm, two goblins stand guard here. They seriously pay no attention, and if they actually do get to raise an alarm, 2d3+3 (5-9) goblins will show up in response within 3d3 rounds.

The left tunnel leads to Area 4-4c: The Cave of the Females. The right tunnel leads to Area 4-4d: The Cave of the Males. Any inspection will reveal these are well-worn paths. The straight way ascends to Area 4-4e: The Tunnel to the Outside (Exit). Any inspection will reveal that this is the least-worn path as the goblins don't venture outside often. There's also a slight draft. Inspecting the junction takes 1 round.

The left and right tunnels are wide enough for only one man, dwarf or elf, but two goblins or halflings would fit side by side.

#### **Area 4-4c: The Cave of the Females**

*This cave has multiple sites for cooking, and lots of nest-like structures made from moss, twigs and hay. There's about two dozen goblins – you assume they are females – around, eying you defensively, snarling. Many goblin young scurry off as you approach.*

This is the cave holding all the women and children of the tribe, and also a fair share of its social life. Any intruder will be fought by the women (only a third has make-shift clubs, all else use their bite). Also the men

of the tribe will try to assault an intruding party from behind.

There are  $4d3+15$  (19-27) female goblins present, a third armed with clubs, the rest with their bite. They fight to the death as they are defending their young. They will not follow intruders if the party attempts to flee. Should shouts come from this cave,  $2d3+3$  (5-9) male goblins respond within  $3d3$  rounds. If the party isn't quick, this might block their escape.

#### **Area 4-4d: The Cave of the Males**

*This cave has many beds made from twig, moss and straw strewn around. Goblins warriors assemble as you enter, ready to defend their lair. An especially big one directs them. They are coming towards you.*

If the players make it here, they face any remainder of the goblin warriors and their chief.

- The total of regular male warriors in the tribe is 21, not including the chief.
- 2 are on guard in Area 4-4b: The Central Nexus.
- 2 more are on guard in Area 4-4e: The Tunnel to the Outside (Exit).
- Subtract all goblins encountered so far in previous areas and you have the number of goblins in this cave.

All goblins have clubs, a third has slings. The chief has the stats of a hobgoblin (see pg. 417 in the rulebook). He wears leather armor suitable for a human and has a total AC of 12. He's armed with a broadsword (1d6 damage).

The goblins will give pursuit if the characters flee. The goblins keep their "treasure" here: 37sp and 237cp. Plus a lot of worthless trinkets, hidden amongst which is also a silver ring.

#### **Area 4-4e: The Tunnel to the Outside (Exit)**

*The tunnel climbs further and becomes wider, enough for at least three men to walk side by side. You can see light fall in from an entrance. There's two goblin guards waiting close by, peering outside.*

This is it – one of the exits. If the characters want to overrun the guards, they can. There's enough space for them to do so, the goblins can't defend the exit. If players overrun them, the goblins might get two free attacks in total vs. the two characters with the lowest luck scores. The goblins won't pursue beyond the mouth of the cave.

# The Westward Zorkul Path

## Area 5-1: Another vast, triangular Passage

*As you walk, your steps echo in the enormous passage. It's as if the ground gives off some warmth, and after you traveled an hour, the feeling slowly increases. The walls are slightly irregular, covered by a wave-like pattern. Different strata can be seen as you walk past them.*

This is the way the Zorkul took in its search for a mate. It's carving its way roughly westwards, following a Ley line. The tunnel gets warmer because the transformation of rock into higher-dimensional energy leaves some residual heat behind.

If followed, 1 hour of walking leads to Area 5-2: The Chasm (Exit). If followed further, another 2 hours of walking lead to Area 5-3: A rubble-blocked Passage. Another half hour makes the party catch up with the passage's creator at Area 5-4: The Zorkul.

## Area 5-2: The Chasm (Exit)

*Here the tunnel is bisected by a 15' wide chasm. Looking down, it stretches beyond your field of vision. Looking up, you see daylight vaguely above. To the left and right the chasm continues. The walls are vertical and almost flat.*

Two possibilities arise here. It's either a 135' hard climb to an unlikely freedom, or the chasm needs to be crossed. Falling simply means death.

Climbing the walls is DC18 Climb check modified by Strength (see pg. 67 of the rulebook for more details.) This means even exceptionally strong level 0 characters have only a chance of rolling 15 or higher. Exceptionally strong neutral or lawful level 1 thieves have a chance at most of rolling 12 or higher. These are not very good odds unless you burn luck.

Unlike in Area 2-8: The Chimney (Exit), securing oneself is basically impossible. It is also unlikely the party has the needed 135-and-something feet of rope required to send one climber ahead as trailblazer. It is not impossible to exit here, it's just not a good idea since survival is the less likely outcome.

Crossing the chasm isn't hard. There's a stone needle that can be lassoed with a DC13 agility check. There's a jagged rock on the party's side to secure the rope to. Rolling a natural 1 on a lasso attempts means one lets go of the rope while throwing. One nearby character can try to grab the rope if this happens with a Luck check. Rolling a natural 20 on this Luck check means he catches the rope and is dragged off balance and down (to death).

There's bats hunting insects in the air currents, depending on time of day.

## Area 5-3: A rubble-blocked Passage

*As you follow further the triangular tunnel, you notice that it cuts through another pocket in the rock, but this one doesn't look natural. It's a collapsed room of sorts. There must have been a passage to the north. It is blocked by rubble. It's rather warm here.*

This area is part of an abandoned ancient dwarf mine. The strata the dwarves mined ended in this area. Clearing the rubble is possible, and takes 2 hours. Reduce this to 1 hour if at least one dwarven stonemason is in the party.

## Area 5-4: The Zorkul

*The vast passage comes to an end. You see, in the distance, a vast, writhing mass pressing itself forward, filling out all the tunnel. Whatever it is, it seems to make the tunnel. It's incredibly hot in this area.*

This is the Zorkul. See pg. 6 for further stats and details. The Zorkul ignores the characters. It is more a force of nature than an opponent.

It is in principle possible to follow the Zorkul. It would take another 3 hours to arrive at Area 5-5: The Landslide (Extension point).

### **Area 5-5: The Landslide (Extension point)**

*You've followed that enormous thing for a very long time now, as suddenly with a large sucking sound it passes into a hollow and takes on the shape of what you can only describe as a writhing pyramid. Still it moves forward. You follow its path into the cavern.*

The Zorkul will arrive at the other end in 1 turn. Then read this:

*As the thing hits another wall, the whole vast cave begins to shake. Again the grinding sound, there's falling rocks everywhere. In the middle of the mess you see the ceiling shift to the left while the ground remains where it is. You try to evade rubble rolling down from a newly opened rift, all the while rock shards and other debris falls from the ceiling. Rubble seals the passage after the giant thing, but at least then the shaking and the tremors turn into quickly subsiding aftershocks.*

Everyone not passing a DC12 Reflex save will be hit by falling or rolling rocks for 1d6+1 damage. On a natural 1 the respective character is buried under a stone slab forever.

This area would regularly be a dead end. If you want to append any dungeon of your own, here in the cavern is a good area to do so. The shift could have opened a passage or made a wall collapse, revealing an entrance.

Else players have to backtrack to another location.

## **Abandoned Dwarf Mine**

### **Area 6-1: A Vertical Shaft (Extension Point)**

*After you clear the rubble, you find that there is a tunnel 5' high and 3' wide which soon ends when it meets a vertical shaft going upwards. Somebody carved these tunnels from the stone. There are no stairs or ladders, but someone also carved holes into the wall which can easily serve as handholds. The shaft continues upward and downward.*

This is an exploratory shaft dwarven miners dug in search of minerals. They did not find anything worthwhile and abandoned the operation. If you stick with this narrative, the downward portion of the shaft ends 70' below in another exploratory horizontal shaft, and that shaft has been abandoned after it proved to be the third shaft without finding any interesting strata.

Alternatively, you can add any possible reason why the dwarves stopped exploring. Maybe they were looking for a certain cache or hidden location and found it? This could lead the players into another dungeon of your making – including finding the perished dwarves of that failed expedition.

If they follow the shaft upward, they find another exploratory shaft and finally arrive in Area 6-2: The Ogre Lair (Exit). The vertical shaft ends there.

### **Area 6-2: The Ogre Lair (Exit)**

*Here the vertical shaft ends, meeting a horizontal one. After a few steps you smell the stench of dead flesh and possibly feces or sulfur. Something has died in the vicinity not-so-recently. There is an entrance to what seems a larger room ahead.*

This was the excavated room the dwarven miners used as their base of operations. Mining tools and their possessions are long gone, and an Ogre (see pg. 422 of the rulebook) has made its lair here. There's bones and other stuff strewn around. The creature isn't exactly tidy to say the least.

If your remaining party is very weak or on 1-4 on a d6 the ogre is out hunting. Amongst the bones of the ogre

midden players find 27sp, 167cp, a short bow, and two daggers.

Another, wider shaft leads to an exit:

*There once was a brick gate here, narrowing the entrance. Someone or something big smashed it apart and the bricks are still strewn around. Beyond is a thicket and bushes, but also finally the outside world again!*

## Aftermath

No matter where your players exit the underworld, they have survived an initiatory adventure and can finally get the training they need to activate their chosen class' abilities. They might want to leave the caverns behind forever, or they might want to explore them again. In an effort to make this dungeon self-contained enough to be actually playable, most passages to other areas of the Underdark have been sealed off by the earthquakes resulting from the Zorkul's passing.

However, any area marked as *Extension Point* could easily be used to access another area or dungeon you might want to insert there. Preferably there would be an obstacle that a level 0 party cannot overcome, but a level 1 party might. This way your players could chose to come back later with ample resources.

Make entering an *Extension Point* unattractive to your players during a funnel – a door requiring the skill of a thief, for example.

## Where to from here?

Another consideration is that this funnel does barely yield any money or equipment for an aspiring party. It's a fight for survival. Any level 0 characters leveling up after the adventure will have bills to pay – for training in the arcane arts, for their first decent sword

or a coat of armor. They might be saddled with debt. They might sell themselves as swords for hire to the first bidder. In other words: They're already hooked for their first outing as real adventurers.

In the wake of the Zorkul various events could happen:

- The Zorkul tunnels become part of habitats. Various underdark mosses, mushrooms and small wildlife spread. Hunters follow suit.
- Instable parts collapse further. This is especially true for parts of the dungeon that had caveins or rifts in the adventure.
- Further subterranean shifts probably spell trouble for the community of Hillkant. After all a central part of town collapsed into a fault line already. Maybe the players are called to help reestablishing the community elsewhere nearby. They may be hired for scouting a new location, clearing out local dangers, and finally as caravan guards.
- Another collapse triggered in the Zorkul's wake could reveal an entrance to an ancient site nearby, hidden near the surface. Insert a dungeon adventure of your choice. Alternatively, the site becomes visible from above, but an entrance has to be found by navigating the underdark starting from areas found in this adventure.
- And what if the Zorkul successfully mates ... ?

# Appendix

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*In the Wake of the Zorkul* offers you and your players not only a funnel set in a detailed subterranean environment, it also offers several ways out. Your players might even find out what a Zorkul actually is...

This product is compatible with the Dungeon Crawl Classics Role Playing Game. It is designed to be played with characters of level 0 or 1. The DCC Role Playing Game rulebook is required to play.

