

# HAZARDOUS TERRAIN CHALLENGES

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**5E ENVIRONMENT SUPPLEMENT**

**MAPS AND MECHANICS TO ADD  
DANGER TO THE GAME WORLD!**



# DUNGEON MASTERS GUILD™

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## **DEDICATION**

As always, to my lovely wife Candyce, on the eve of our anniversary!

A love between a halfling and tiefling has never been so dear.

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# INTRODUCTION

**A**s a Dungeon Master the act of travelling from place to place can seem quite uneventful. Sure, it's easy to throw in a wilderness encounter here and there. But there are only so many times your group can be ambushed by bandits, attacked by goblins or incur the wrath of an angry beast in the wild before they get bored of these run of the mill combat scenarios. You may think to yourself that there must be some way to break up the monotony of traditional combat. That's where Hazardous Terrain Challenges come into play!

I've always enjoyed placing puzzles and intricate traps in my games to give my players something to do aside from roleplaying social situations then running to kill some creatures and repeating the process. Hazardous Terrain Challenges are similar to a trap or puzzle, but they are more complex than your average trap, more engaging than your average puzzle. The world itself comes into play and directly threatens your player characters.

The existence of a Hazardous Terrain Challenge in your game will keep your players alert to their surroundings at all times. When their skills are put to the test to traverse treacherous terrain, they find a new appreciation for the distances they travel, and the ever-present danger of the fantasy world they're exploring. Bring the world to life, and make it deadly!

In this volume there are two Hazardous Terrain Encounters for you to integrate into your game. They are more advanced forms of challenges that I created at my home table with my good friends while DMing some of my favorite personal campaigns. I have received a lot of positive feedback from the players who have engaged in these challenges, and that is why I've decided to hammer out the details, produce DM and player maps, descriptions and even difficulty scaling tables so you can run them no matter what level your players are.

I hope you enjoy playing these Hazardous Terrain Challenges much as I did creating them.

## HOW TO RUN A HAZARDOUS TERRAIN CHALLENGE

These challenges are designed to play like a combat encounter. Instead of rolling initiative, your players will choose a marching order. That will be the order that they take turns navigating the environment. They may move up to their normal movement speed (or slower in difficult terrain,) take one action to interact with the environment, and take one bonus action.

There are dangers lurking in the environment that are present throughout the entire challenge. In the cliff path challenge there is a strong wind feature which requires the DM to roll at the end of each round. This is similar to the enemy roll in a combat encounter. And in the shark infested water encounter there are sharks that attack the characters who are in the water at the end of their turn.

## MAPS

There are two maps for each encounter. The player map and the DM map. The player map is meant to be printed on a piece of normal printer paper (8.5 by 11 inches) so your players can have a play area for their minis, or a reference for theater of the mind. The DM map is labelled and correlates to the descriptions in each section, making the play similar to an official 5e module.

## THE RULES

These challenges should play like a combat encounter, only the enemy is replaced by the environment itself. If there are no specific instructions for how something should be done in the text of the challenge, refer to the standard 5e rules. You may find this useful for issues like jumping and carrying heavy objects.

The amount of falling damage taken in the cliff encounter is modified from the standard when the difficulty of the encounter is scaled to higher levels. This can be explained to your players by telling them that extra rocks fell from the cliff and landed on them, increasing the damage they took during the fall. Even the greatest rules lawyer cannot deny that logic!

## CUSTOMIZING THE ENVIRONMENT

These environments are living areas! You can hide treasures, place NPCs or integrate combat encounters in them. Make them your own and mold them to your campaign or setting! If your players are on the hunt for a specific creature, consider putting that creature inside the cave on the cliff path. If your characters are looking for a certain cultist NPC, perhaps that cultist likes to spend time at the Altar of the Elements high above shark infested waters.

Placing an item, enemy or NPC in one of these environments increases the fun and adventure of finding them!

## DEATH AND DISMEMBERMENT

These challenges can be very difficult at times, especially at low levels, or if the dice do not favor your group. If you do not wish for a character to die as a result of their wounds consider providing an alternate fate. For example, if a character would otherwise drown or be eaten alive by sharks, consider having them lose an appendage and wash up on shore instead. It would add a lot of a character, to have to replace that hand with a hook because a shark bit it off!

Perhaps, instead of falling to their death or being crushed into jelly, they are merely horribly disfigured and must be carried the rest of the way by another character. But as DM, it's up to you. Just know that it's very possible to make a fatal mistake in one of the Hazardous Terrain Challenges in these pages. Hint to your players to help each other!

# HAZARDOUS TERRAIN CHALLENGE 1

## DANGEROUS CLIFF PATH

This challenge can be placed within any module or adventure. It is recommended for use during wilderness excursions and travel through mountainous regions.

The path is comprised of rubble and loose rocks. It is difficult terrain.

### DIFFICULTY SCALING

This Hazardous Terrain Challenge is optimized for characters from levels 4 through 7. To run the challenge for players of different levels, please reference the Difficulty Scaling Chart on page 2.

The following areas correspond with labels on the DM map found on page 3. A Printable player map is on Page 4.

### 1. STARTING POINT

Read the description below at the beginning of this challenge:

Rising out of the ground before you stands a massive cliff face. Large stones jut out from the steep, craggy terrain. The only way to the top is a long and narrow path. Traversing the path will be treacherous, but you have no other choice if you wish to continue on your way.

**Strong Winds.** At the end of each movement round of this challenge, the DM will roll one d20. If the result is 16 or greater, a gust of strong wind is activated (refer to "DM Wind Roll" column on the scaling chart to adjust difficulty.) When a strong wind is activated read the description below.

A gust of strong wind cuts through the air, carrying debris from the cliff. Bits of sand and pebbles sting your face and your footing begins to falter.

Each player must make a DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check to prevent their self from falling. (refer to "Wind Save" column on the scaling chart to adjust difficulty.)

If a character falls, they land on the nearest space below them (in the direction of the 'Down' arrow marked on the DM map,) taking 1d6 bludgeoning damage (refer to "Damage Taken" column on the scaling chart to adjust difficulty.)

**Using Rope.** If the players tie a rope to rocks or terrain features it will come loose when a strong wind is activated.

The players may tie characters together. If any characters fall, the character(s) tied to them must make a DC 10 (Athletics) save to pull them up and prevent them from taking damage. (refer to "Rope Save" column on the scaling chart to adjust difficulty.)

If a character fails to save a character that they are tied to, they also fall.

### 2. FALLING BOULDERS

Teetering overhead looms a precariously balanced group of boulders.

When a player passes through this space the DM will roll one d20. If the outcome is greater than 16, the boulders fall. (refer to "DM Boulder Roll" column on the scaling chart to adjust difficulty.)

If boulders fall read the description below.

The boulders overhead come crashing down toward you!

When boulders fall each player within a radius of 10 feet must make a DC 10 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check to jump out of the way. (refer to "Boulder Save" column on the scaling chart to adjust difficulty.) If they fail, they take 1d6 bludgeoning damage and are knocked prone. (refer to "Damage Taken" column on the scaling chart to adjust difficulty.)

The boulders can only fall once during the challenge.

### 3. STONE DEBRIS

The path has been blocked by large chunks of craggy stone, you will have to climb over them to continue up the path.

When each character climbs over the craggy stones the player must make a DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check. If they fail, read the description below:

You lose your grip, falling to the path below. A jagged stone lands on you with a thud.

They land on the nearest space below them (in the direction of the Down arrow on the map,) and take 1d6 bludgeoning damage. (refer to "Damage Taken" column on the scaling chart to adjust difficulty.)

### 4. CAVE

There is an opening in the cliff face.

The cave is safe from the strong winds. If the players go inside the cave read the description below.

You can still hear the howling of strong winds outside as they rush past the cave entrance, but you are safe from their destructive force inside this cave.

If the party is progressing without much difficulty, consider placing an enemy or enemies inside the cave to increase the challenge.

#### (4. CAVE - CONTINUED.)

If the party is having difficulty with this environment challenge the cave can be used to take a short rest and/or use potions and spells to regain health.

The cave is dark, but if a character has darkvision or a light source they can see inside. an old wooden chest containing 200 gp and 1d4 *potions of healing*.

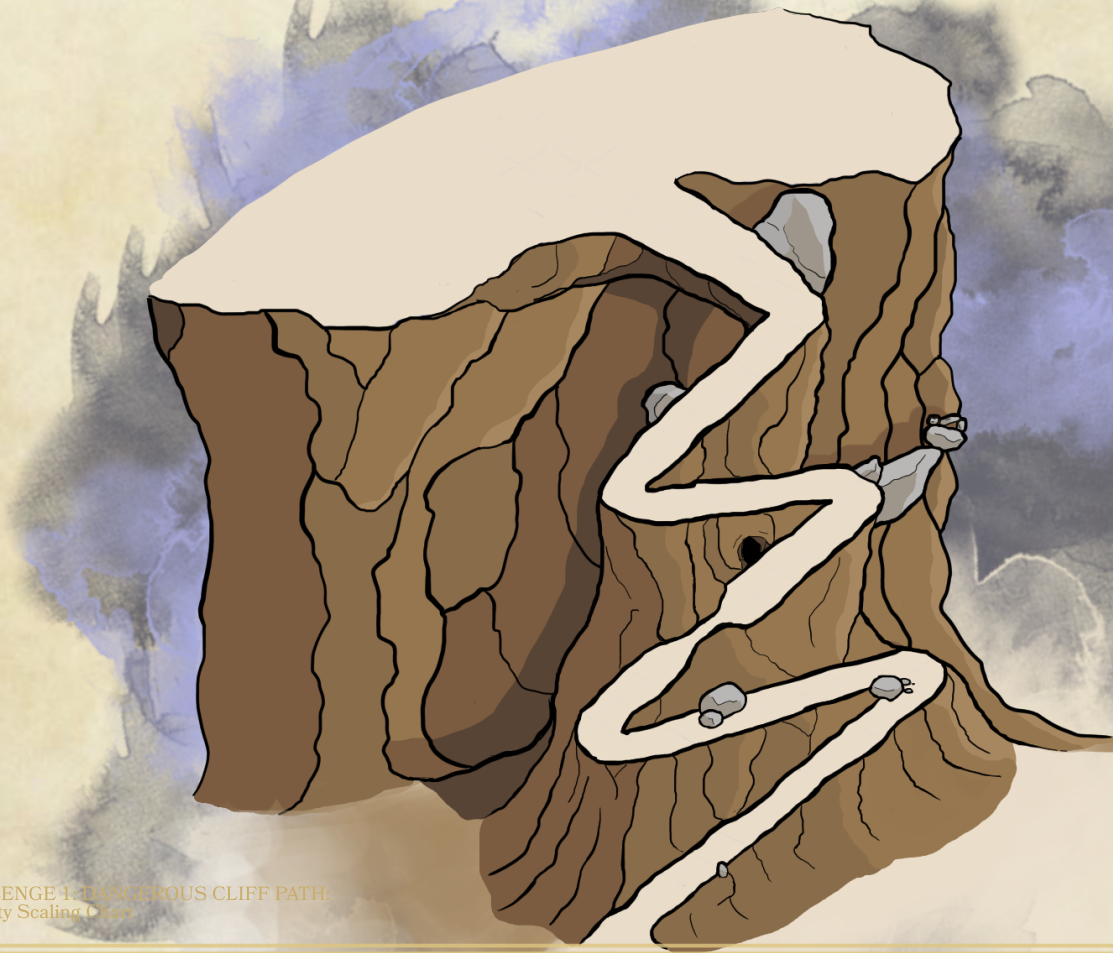
#### 5. SAFE ZONE

You have reached the top of the cliff! A sense of wellbeing overcomes you. The wind is not as strong up here. The terrain is a little rough, but much more welcoming than the pathway behind you. You can now proceed on your journey!

Once players have reached the safe zone, the strong winds no longer affect them. They have completed the hazardous terrain challenge and may continue on their way. Reward each player with 600xp!

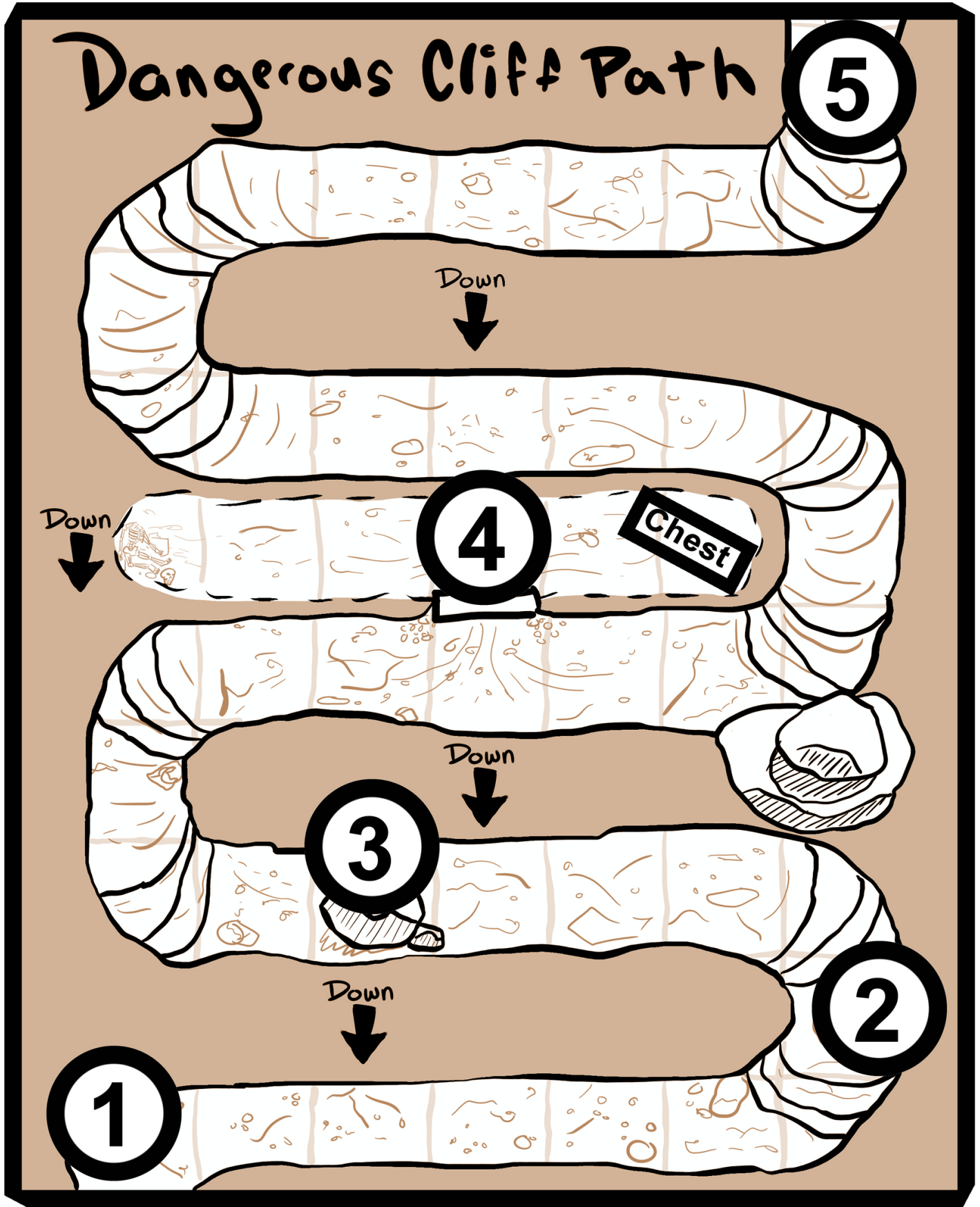
### DIFFICULTY SCALING CHART

Character Level Range	DM Wind Roll	Wind Save	Rope Save	Damage Taken	DM Boulder Roll	Boulder Save	Climbing Debris DC	Experience Reward
Levels 1-3	17+	10 Strength (Athletics)	10 Strength (Athletics)	1d4 bludgeoning	17+	5 Dexterity (Acrobatics)	5 Strength (Athletics)	175 XP
Levels 4-7	16+	10 Strength (Athletics)	10 Strength (Athletics)	1d6 bludgeoning	16+	10 Dexterity (Acrobatics)	10 Strength (Athletics)	600 XP
Levels 8-11	15+	10 Strength (Athletics)	15 Strength (Athletics)	2d4 bludgeoning	15+	10 Dexterity (Acrobatics)	10 Strength (Athletics)	900 XP
Levels 12-15	14+	10 Strength (Athletics)	15 Strength (Athletics)	2d6 bludgeoning	14+	10 Dexterity (Acrobatics)	10 Strength (Athletics)	3,200 XP
Levels 16-18	13+	15 Strength (Athletics)	15 Strength (Athletics)	3d4 bludgeoning	13+	15 Dexterity (Acrobatics)	15 Strength (Athletics)	6,000 XP
Levels 19-20	12+	15 Strength (Athletics)	20 Strength (Athletics)	3d6 bludgeoning	12+	15 Dexterity (Acrobatics)	15 Strength (Athletics)	8,000 XP

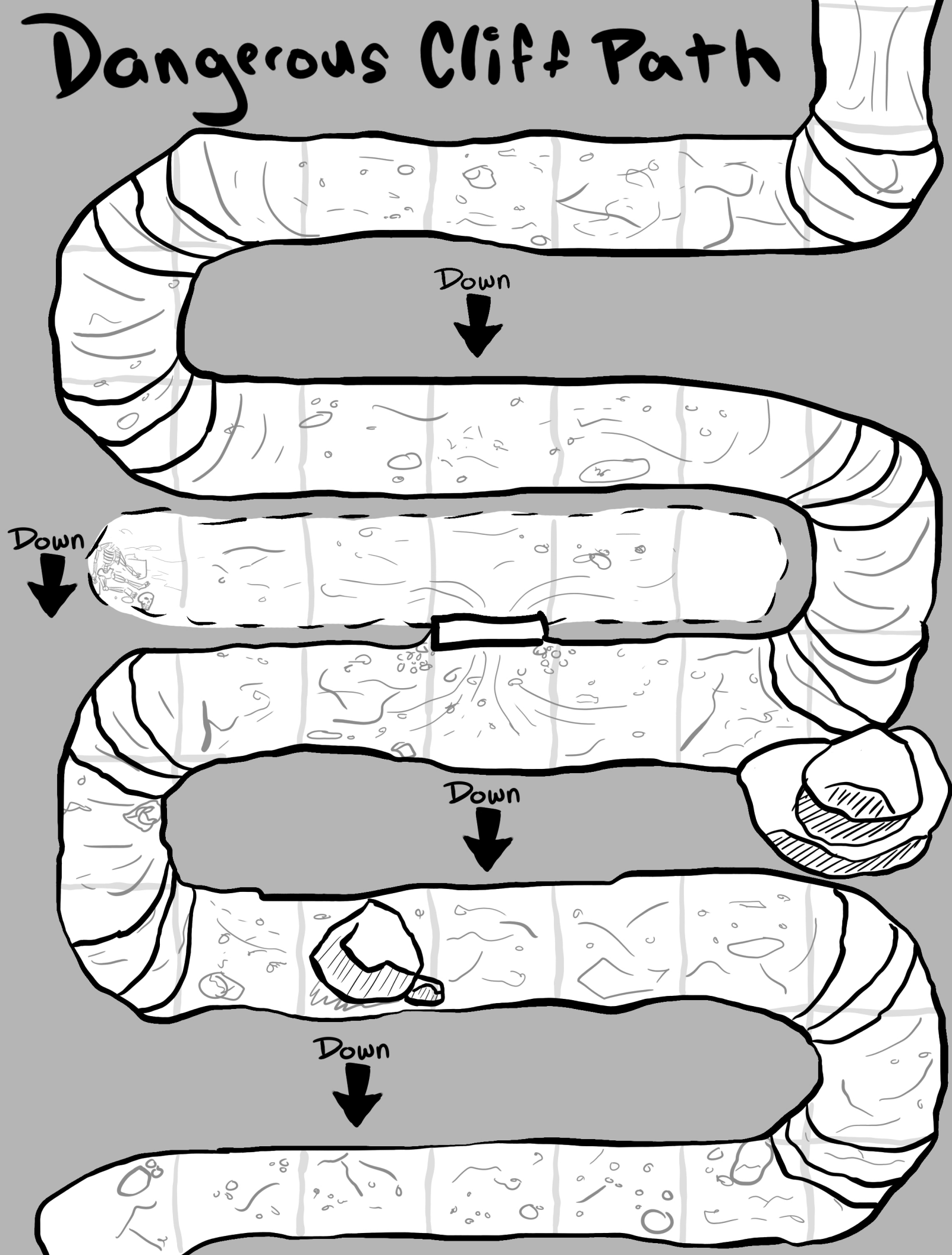


CHALLENGE 4: DANGEROUS CLIFF PATH:  
Difficulty Scaling Chart

# DM MAP



# Dangerous Cliff Path





# HAZARDOUS TERRAIN CHALLENGE 2

## SHARK INFESTED WATERS

This challenge can be placed within any module or adventure. It is recommended for use during wilderness excursions and travel through islands and beach regions.

### DIFFICULTY SCALING

This Hazardous Terrain Challenge is optimized for characters level 4 through 7. To run the challenge for players of different levels, please reference the Difficulty Scaling Chart on the next page.

The following areas correspond with labels on the DM map found on page 7. A Printable player map is on Page 8.

### 1. STARTING POINT

Read the description below at the beginning of this challenge:

You have come to the edge of a rocky cliff. The deep blue of the ocean can be seen twenty feet below. Shark fins fill the water. You can see the beach in the distance; this is the only way to get there.

**Using Rope.** The players may tie characters together. If any characters fall, the character(s) tied to them must make a DC 10 (Athletics) save to pull them up and prevent them from falling into the water. (refer to "Rope Save" column on the scaling chart to adjust difficulty.) If a character fails to save another, they also fall into the water.

### 2. STANDING LONG JUMP

There is a six foot clearing between you and sea stack, a small rocky outcropping jutting from the water.

There is not enough space to make a running start for this jump. The jump is 6 feet. In this situation a character can jump up to half of their strength score (in feet.)

A character who has already made it across can help others across, reducing the distance to 5 feet. The player who is providing assistance in this way must make a DC 10 strength (Athletics) check to succeed. (refer to "Jump Assist DC" column on the scaling chart to adjust difficulty.) If any character does not make it across the gap they fall into the water.

**Climbing Out of Water.** To climb out of the water, the player must succeed on a DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check. (refer to "Climb DC" column on the scaling chart to adjust difficulty.) If they succeed they make it to the other side. If they fail they remain in the water for the rest of the round.

Every time a character is in the water at the end of their turn, roll one d20. If the outcome is greater than 16, one shark bites them for 1d6 piercing damage, ignoring armor class. (refer to "Shark Roll" and "Shark Damage" columns on the scaling chart to adjust difficulty.) If a shark is killed, another shark takes their place.

### 3. ROCK WALL

There is a barnacle-laden wall of jagged rocks looming before you. If you want to proceed you must scale the wall.

It requires a DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check to reach the top. (refer to "Climb DC" column on the scaling chart to adjust difficulty.) On a failed attempt the character takes 1d6 bludgeoning damage and is knocked prone at the base of the wall.

**Using Rope.** If the players tie a rope to rocks or terrain features it will come loose. Rope can be tied to/held by another character or securely tied to the rope bridge. (see area 4 on this page.)

It requires a DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check to pull a character up with rope. (refer to "Rope Save" column on the scaling chart to adjust difficulty.)

### 4. THE ROPE BRIDGE

There are two ropes tied to a stake in the ground. The other ends of the ropes are tied to a stake on a small sea stack about fifteen feet away. You will have to cross carefully if you wish to continue on your journey. There is also a set of stone stairs leading in another direction.

It requires a DC 10 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check to safely cross the rope bridge. (refer to "Bridge DC" column on the scaling chart to adjust difficulty.) If a character does not make it, they fall in the water half way across and cannot move any more this round. Remember to roll to see if a shark bites them. They should land in the water within 5 feet of the nearest 'slippery rock' (see area 6.)

### 5. ALTAR OF THE ELEMENTS

At the top of the staircase there is a platform. An ornately carved stone altar rests upon the platform. On the altar are three statues. One is blue and shaped like a crashing wave. One is red and shaped like a roaring fire. The third one is brown and shaped like a crumbling mountain.

If a player takes a closer look at the statues, have them roll a DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check. If they succeed, they will notice that the statues have a stone lever carved into each one and there is metal a plaque below written in common that says, "Come together or suffer alone."

### (5. ALTAR OF THE ELEMENTS - CONTINUED.)

A successful DC 15 Wisdom check will let a player know that they must pull all three levers at the same time. If they are pulled separately the environment will respond.

If the brown statue is engaged rocks will fall from a cliff above, unless the other two are engaged at the same time. Players must make a DC 15 Dexterity (Acrobatics) saving throw or be hit with 1d6 bludgeoning damage from the rocks. (refer to "Rock Damage" column on the scaling chart to adjust difficulty.)

If the blue statue is engaged a giant wave engulfs the platform on which the altar stands, unless the other two are engaged at the same time. Players must make a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) save to hold on, otherwise they are knocked off the altar into the water below and become unconscious.

If the red statue is engaged, a fire will erupt, encasing the altar's platform in flames, unless the other two are engaged at the same time. Any creature within 5 feet of the altar will take 1d6 fire damage. (refer to "Fire Damage" column on the scaling chart to adjust difficulty.)

If only two statues are activated at once, then both of the traps are sprung. However, if the water and fire statues are activated at the same time, the tidal wave will put out the fire before it deals damage.

If all three levers are pulled at the exact same moment, the plaque below will spring open and a small ornate box will be revealed inside the altar. Inside the box is a *ring of swimming*, two *potions of fire resistance*, and a *rock*. If inspected closely the rock glints with a green sparkle; it can be cleaned to reveal an *emerald* worth 200gp.

Jumping from the alter will knock a character unconscious. If they are not rescued by another player, they will drown or be eaten alive by sharks. Carrying an unconscious body requires the normal amount of Strength required to carry any object, and cuts swim speed in half.

### 6. SLIPPERY ROCKS

From here you can see the rope bridge leading back in the direction from which you came. You can also see the shore in the distance. Between you and the shoreline there are several rocks jutting out from the water. Perhaps you can make your way across by jumping from rock-to-rock.

These rocks are very slippery. When a character jumps on one, it requires a DC 10 Dexterity check to safely find stable footing. A character can jump rock-to-rock 3 times each turn. If a character falls in the water they cannot get back up until their next turn. Remember to roll to see if a shark bites a character who ends their turn in the water.

Only one character may be on any rock at one time, unless they happen to be two tiny (smaller than small) characters. It requires a successful DC 10 Dexterity check to climb back onto a slippery rock and no other action can be taken during that turn.

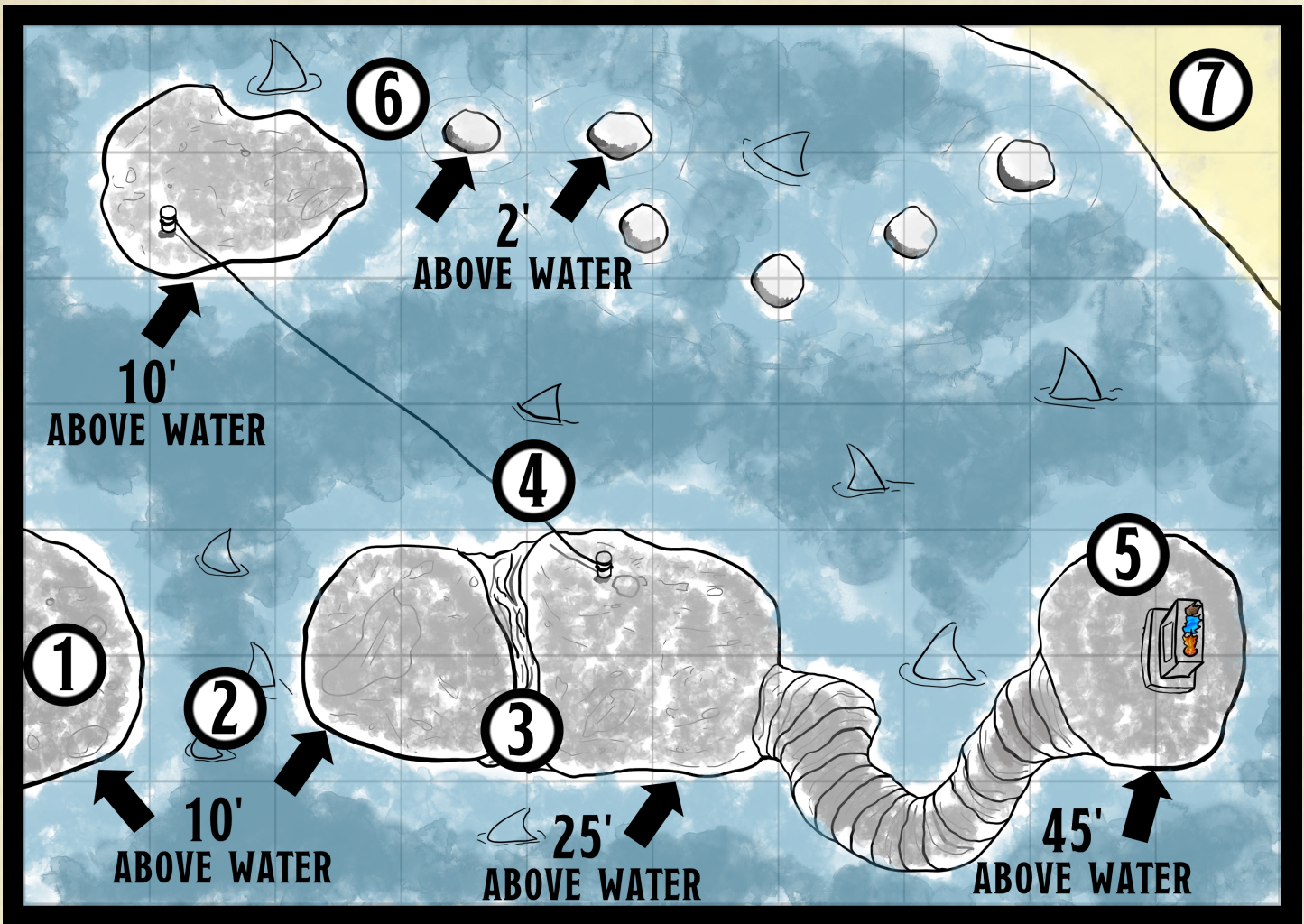
### 7. SAFE ZONE

You've made it to the beach! The shark infested water no longer hinders your progress. You may continue on your journey.

Once players have reached the safe zone they have completed the hazardous terrain challenge and may continue on their way. Reward each player with 600xp!



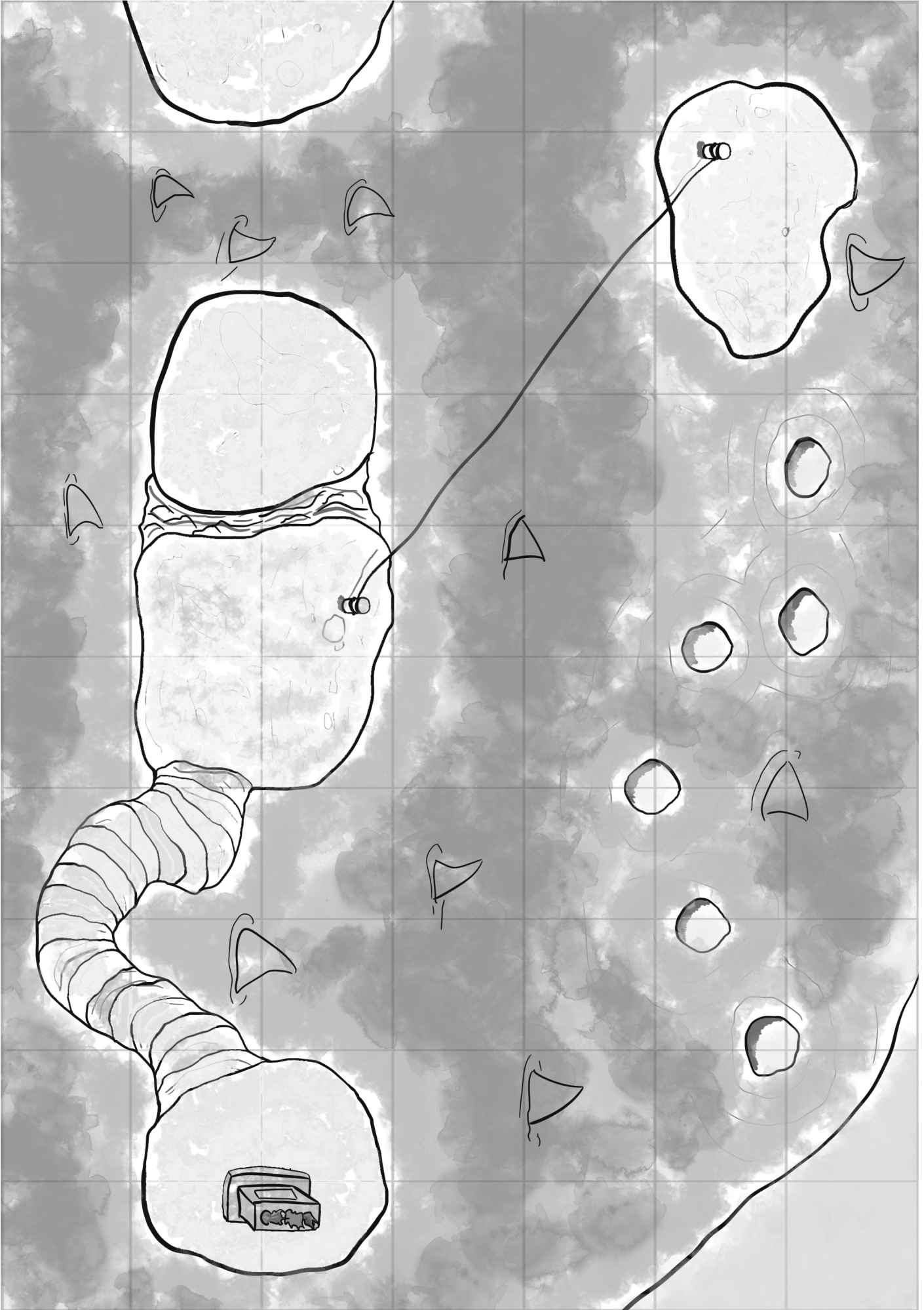
# DM MAP



## DIFFICULTY SCALING CHART

Character Level Range	Jump Assist DC	Rope Save	Shark Roll	Shark Damage	Climb DC	Bridge DC	Rock Damage	Fire Damage	Experience Reward
Levels 1-3	10 Strength (Athletics)	10 Strength (Athletics)	17+	1d4 piercing	5 Strength (Athletics)	5 Dexterity (Acrobatics)	1d4 bludgeoning	1d4 fire	175 XP
Levels 4-7	10 Strength (Athletics)	10 Strength (Athletics)	16+	1d6 piercing	10 Strength (Athletics)	10 Dexterity (Acrobatics)	1d6 bludgeoning	1d6 fire	600 XP
Levels 8-11	10 Strength (Athletics)	15 Strength (Athletics)	15+	2d4 piercing	10 Strength (Athletics)	10 Dexterity (Acrobatics)	2d4 bludgeoning	2d4 fire	900 XP
Levels 12-15	10 Strength (Athletics)	15 Strength (Athletics)	14+	2d6 piercing	10 Strength (Athletics)	10 Dexterity (Acrobatics)	2d6 bludgeoning	2d6 fire	3,200 XP
Levels 16-18	15 Strength (Athletics)	15 Strength (Athletics)	13+	3d4 piercing	15 Strength (Athletics)	15 Dexterity (Acrobatics)	3d4 bludgeoning	3d4 fire	6,000 XP
Levels 19-20	15 Strength (Athletics)	20 Strength (Athletics)	12+	3d6 piercing	15 Strength (Athletics)	15 Dexterity (Acrobatics)	3d6 bludgeoning	3d6 fire	8,000 XP

# SHARK INFESTED WATERS



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