

WATCHERS IN THE DARK

Watchers in the Dark is a single-session adventure for four or five players of 4th-level characters using the fifth edition of the world's greatest roleplaying game.

BY KELSEY DIONNE

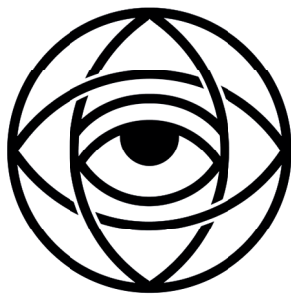


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SYNOPSIS

- The adventure begins in the days after a meteor crash shakes the surrounding countryside. The characters encounter crazed wild **boars** attacking a wizard. Hooks and clues from the encounter lead the characters to the meteor's crater.
- The characters enter the **warrens** below the crater and find it overrun with ankhegs who are behaving like the crazed boars. The group discovers crystalline **splinters** lodged in the ankhegs, which were also in the boars.
- The characters find their way to the lower chambers of the crater. There, they confront the remaining ankhegs and attempt to destroy an alien **mind-shard** controlling creatures infected with the crystalline shards.

BACKGROUND

- A few days before the adventure begins, a 40-foot long **meteor** crashed into a forest near where the characters are located.
- The meteor housed an invasive alien species called a mind-shard. When the meteor struck the earth, the impact scattered yellow crystal splinters around the crash site. If these splinters becomes embedded in a living being, they allow the mind-shard to take **control** of that creature.
- The mind-shard's meteor crashed into an underground **ankheg** warren, providing the mind-shard an easy army of ankheg slaves. The ankhegs now guard the mind-shard and search for new victims to infect with its crystal splinters.
- Wild **animals** that were hit with crystal splinters in the initial impact have also fallen under the mind-shard's control. They attack other beings and try to bring new victims to the warrens to be infected with crystal splinters.

A WORD TO THE GM

This adventure is meant to be run at a glance with **minimal preparation** and a **natural delivery**. This required re-thinking the normal adventure presentation a bit. Here's what you'll find included:

- Each encounter contained on one page.
- Bulleted lists. **Bolded** keywords.
- Hyperlinks to monsters and rules online for quick reference.
- Printable cards for each monster and PC so you can run encounters using a card stack. A short video walkthrough of this method can be found **here**.
- Printable cards for special treasure handouts.
- Short room and area descriptions. No paragraphs of droning flavor text — set the scene naturally and embellish as desired.
- Briefly explained non-encounter rooms. Again, embellish as desired!
- GM maps and player-safe digital maps for use with virtual tabletops.
- A short video walkthrough of the adventure that can be found **here**.

PACING/TRANSITIONS

A dramatic question is presented with most scenes. Once that question has been answered, the tension of the scene is resolved. That's your cue to work toward the **transition** provided at the end the scene — even if that means summarizing the end of a clearly decided combat, or in the case of clever players, skipping combat altogether. Keep the game moving toward the next challenge!

Room descriptions that are usually long blocks of literary read-aloud text have been left short and informational in this adventure. Many Game Masters prefer to paraphrase read-aloud text and set the scene based on what tone and level of detail his or her group finds engaging. Anything listed before a **Development** section is safe to share however you prefer to do so.

A SAVAGE ATTACK

The adventure begins while the characters are traveling through a wilderness environment. Two days prior, the shockwave from a nearby meteor crash caused quakes and knocked down vast circles of trees. A cloud of dust still hangs in the air, creating a constant fog effect.

THE CRAZED BOARS

- Hazy **dust** in the air provides all creatures with half-cover and limits visibility to 60 feet.
- The enraged bellowing of **wild animals** erupts out of the dust cloud about 80 feet away, followed by a horrified **scream**.

DEVELOPMENT

- PCs who pass a DC 12 Intelligence (Nature) check know the animals are two **giant boars**.
- The screaming man is **Torvaine Yaru**.

Torvaine Yaru, LN human **mage**
"There's always something trying to kill me!"

- *Appearance.* Bald. White robes with gold trim. Wears a gold ring that says "Iskavol."
- *Does.* Scrawls real-time notes in his diary.
- *Secret.* Has a **glabrezu** bound in his tower that his missing partner, Iskavol, controls.

DRAMATIC QUESTION

Can the characters stop the boar attack and learn about the meteor?

COMBAT

- Torvaine has 20 HP and only 2nd-level and lower spell slots remaining.
- The mind-shard **controls** the **giant boars**. PCs can notice their unnatural intelligence by passing a DC 15 Intelligence (Insight) check.
- The boars have yellow shards of **crystal** lodged in their hide. Characters can remove them with a DC 15 Strength check. Without the shards, the boars become non-hostile.

Sidebar: Crystal Splinters

- The **mind-shard** can telepathically control a creature that has a crystal splinter from the mind-shard's meteor piercing its body.
- Treat crystal splinters as daggers.
- At the end of each hour a creature has a splinter in its body, it must make a DC 14 Charisma save. On a failure, the mind-shard controls its actions for the next 24 hours.
- Removing the splinter ends these effects.

WHAT TORVAINE KNOWS

- Torvaine is traveling from his wizard's tower to seek help finding his partner, Iskavol, who has been **missing** since the meteor impact.
- Packs of crazed wild animals have been roaming the countryside attacking travelers.
- Torvaine believes the meteor site holds the **secret** to these recent disasters. He shares the below adventure hooks with the group.
- Torvaine's **diary** also contains notes on the above details and following adventure hooks.

APPEAL TO REWARD

Torvaine will create one custom magic item of Uncommon rarity for the group if they return Iskavol to him. If Torvaine is dead, his diary says Iskavol will create the item instead, if rescued.

APPEAL TO HEROISM

The wild animal attacks have been growing vicious and frequent. Several people have gone missing. The local baroness has proclaimed she will award a manor home and five loyal **guards** to anyone who stops the attacks.

APPEAL TO DISCOVERY

Nobody has yet explored the meteor crash site. It may hold valuable treasure, otherworldly secrets, or relics of power.

TRANSITION

When the group approaches the meteor site, go to *It Fell From The Sky*.

IT FELL FROM THE SKY

THE CRATER

- The meteor **crater** is in a forest two miles from the nearest town.
- Thick dust and smoke grant all creatures half-cover and limit **visibility** to 30 feet.
- The muddy crater is dusted in smoking, grey ash from burned trees.

DEVELOPMENT

- The **crater** is 100 feet across and has a steep decline to its 40-foot deep center.
- In the crater's center, a 15-foot tall, mottled tail of an iron **meteor** juts from the mud. It's hot to the touch and covered in thin splinters of amber crystal.
- PCs who pass a DC 13 Wisdom (Survival) check find the **tracks** of many creatures in the mud. Characters who pass by 5 or more notice tracks from large insect-like animals and wolves, as well as drag marks.
- There are two **tunnels** at the extreme north and south of the crater that lead into the ankheg warrens below.
- Each round the characters spend exploring the crater, there is a cumulative 10% chance three **ankheg tunnelers** burrow from the mud to attack them (these tunnels collapse).

COMBAT

- The ankhegs use their 60-foot **tremorsense** to attack the PCs with Acid Spray from outside the characters' range of vision.
- Ankhegs stay in combat for 1d4 rounds before **retreating** to the warrens via the north or south tunnels.

DRAMATIC QUESTION

Can the characters enter the warrens beneath the crater?

Sidebar: Creatures In The Crater

- All creatures residing near the meteor crater are infected with crystal splinters. They are under the control of the **mind-shard** unless otherwise noted.
- The splinters inside these creatures are deeply embedded. To remove one, a character must pass a DC 15 Intelligence (Medicine) check while the target creature is grappled, incapacitated, or restrained.

TRANSITION

The narrow tunnel in the north of the crater leads to Area 1 in *North Warrens*. The winding tunnel in the south of the crater leads to Area 6 in *South Warrens*.



NORTH WARRENS

AREA 1: THE METEOR

- The lightless tunnel opens up to a 30-foot tall **cavern**. The stone walls drip and flow as if they had once been liquid.
- The body of the iron **meteor** thrusts through the ceiling and into the earth below. Every few minutes, a yellow crystal **splinter** writhes out of its surface and clatters to the ground.

DEVELOPMENT

- Creatures with a crystal splinter embedded in their bodies can **pass** through the meteor as though it were water. Creatures have 60 feet of **blindsight** while inside the meteor.
- Creatures that can't breathe underwater must hold their breath inside the meteor.

AREA 2: COLLAPSED TUNNELS

- These thin burrows end in collapses.

Treasure

In one tunnel, a gold ring carved with the name Torvaine lies on the ground. It's worth 50 gp.

AREA 3: PRISONERS

- A delirious half-elf woman, a deer, and a dead ankheg are bound to the wall in yellow webs.

DEVELOPMENT

- The half-elf, **Roslin**, has a crystal shard in her arm but isn't under the mind-shard's control.

Roslin Boggs, LG half-elf **commoner**
"An unnatural evil was driving those wolves..."

- *Appearance.* Freckles. Raven hair. Wolf bites on her arms and legs.
- *Does.* Begs to get the voice out of her head.
- *Secret.* Wants to become a ranger after her elven father. Her mother disapproves.

WHAT ROSLIN KNOWS

- Wolves attacked her outside of town two nights ago and dragged her down into the warrens.
- The hideous bugs stabbed a shard of yellow glass into her arm. Then a cold, mental **voice** demanded she obey it. She resisted the voice, so the bugs imprisoned her here.



Treasure

If the characters rescue Roslin, she gives them a bone-and-tooth **necklace** worth 30 gp. It grants advantage on Charisma checks to influence the local rangers.

AREA 4: EGG HATCHERY

- Twisted **stalactites** dot the ceiling. Two dozen ostrich-sized **eggs** nestle in a honeycomb of brown gel at the back of the cavern.

DEVELOPMENT

- The six stalactites are motionless **ankheg warren drones**. They wait until the group is close before scuttling down to attack.

DRAMATIC QUESTION

Can the PCs survive the ankheg attack?

COMBAT

- The **ankheg warren drones** each spit acid before moving in to bite and grapple.
- They focus on any PCs holding an egg.
- Each ankheg **flees** into the meteor in Area 1 once below 15 HP. Characters can observe this from any point in the room.

TRANSITION

If the group goes to Areas 5 - 7, go to *South Warrens*. Moving through the meteor allows passage to the surface or Area 8 in *Sub Crater*.

SOUTH WARRENS

AREA 5: ACID POOL

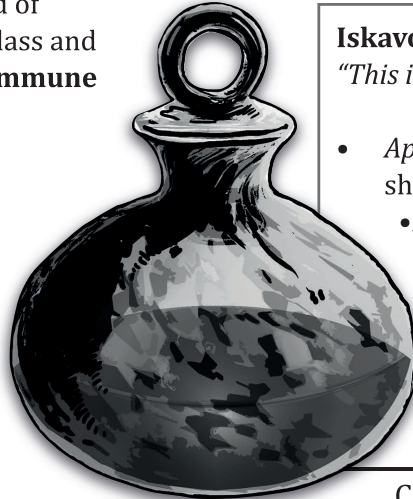
- A hissing pool of green **acid** boils in the stone floor. It's eight feet deep and smells of bile.

DEVELOPMENT

- Creatures and objects take 7 (2d6) acid damage each round of contact with the acid. Glass and crystalline objects are **immune** to the damage.

Treasure

Characters who pass a DC 18 Wisdom (Perception) check spot a glass bottle on the bottom of the pool. It's a *Potion of Hill Giant Strength*.



AREA 6: MEMBRANES

- Eight bulging, yellow **membranes** hang from the ceiling. The cave smells wet and acrid.

DEVELOPMENT

- The flimsy membranes are full of **acid**. PCs moving beneath must pass a DC 15 Dexterity (Stealth) check or 1d4 membranes fall.
- Each PC within 10 feet of a falling membrane must pass a DC 15 Dexterity save or take 7 (2d6) acid damage (half on a success).

AREA 7: HUSK CAVERN

- This winding cavern is filled with cast-off ankheg husks. A soft, disembodied **voice** mutters, "Get out of my mind! Get out!"

DEVELOPMENT

- **Iskavol** is hiding in the ankheg husks and has cast *greater invisibility* on himself.
- He is at 20 HP and only has 3rd-level and lower spell slots remaining.

- He is not under the mind-shard's **control** but must make a Charisma saving throw against it 1d4 rounds after the PCs enter Area 7. If he **fails**, the mind-shard forces him to attack.
- He **resists** attempts to remove the crystal shard in his back unless a PC passes a DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check to calm him.
- If a character **harms** Iskavol, he casts *magic missile* against the offender.

Iskavol Hattori, LE tiefling mage

"This is my mind. I am my own master. Get out!"

- *Appearance.* Blue skin and horns. White, sharp teeth and black tongue.
 - *Does.* Calls out deliriously for Torvaine.
 - *Secret.* His mother, an **oni**, is impersonating a top official in the nearest large city.

DRAMATIC QUESTION

Can the characters save Iskavol from the mind-shard's control?

TALKING TO ISKAVOL

- If the characters save Iskavol, he tells them an invasive, alien **intelligence** arrived inside the meteor. Its minions have been capturing creatures near the crater for it to enslave.
- Iskavol says there is some way to pass through the **meteor** to an underground cave.
- If the characters give Iskavol the **ring** from Area 2, this selfless act changes his alignment to lawful neutral. He will fulfill a boon or deed to help the group in the future.

Treasure

Iskavol carries spell components worth 300 gp.

TRANSITION

If the group goes to Areas 1 - 4, go to *North Warrens*. Moving through the meteor allows passage to the surface or Area 8 in *Sub Crater*.

SUB CRATER

AREA 8: MIND-SHARD'S HIVE

- The interior of the **meteor** is dark, silent, and tastes like blood. Its narrow point comes to rest against the floor of a 30-foot tall, lightless cavern.
- A five-foot tall amber **crystal** stands buried in the ground at the side of the meteor. A low hum emanates from it.
- Two **ankhegs** and three smaller **ankheg warren drones** flank the crystal. An **ankheg tunneler** skitters in the shadows at the edge of the cave.
- Two steaming pools of **acid** burble on opposite sides of the meteor. They're 10 feet deep.

DEVELOPMENT

- The crystal is the **mind-shard**. It blasts the characters' psyches with feelings of hopelessness and fear and commands its minions to attack.
- Creatures and objects take 7 (2d6) acid damage each round of contact with the pools. Glass and crystalline objects are **immune** to the damage.

DRAMATIC QUESTION

Can the group defeat the mind-shard?

COMBAT

- The **mind-shard** tries to knock the characters unconscious rather than kill them.
- It uses *gust of wind* to push PCs away or into the acid pools. It uses *hold person* and *levitate* to disable strong melee fighters. It waits for an advantageous moment to use a legendary action for *reverse gravity* or *compulsion*. On its turn, it takes the **Dodge** action.



- The ankhegs **defend** the mind-shard and grapple enemies away from it. The **ankheg tunneler** stays back and focuses Acid Sprays on enemy spellcasters or ranged combatants.
- Every 1d4 rounds, the mind-shard summons two new **ankheg warren drones** from patrols aboveground (maximum six). They appear in any square adjacent to the meteor.

DEFEATING THE MIND-SHARD

- Destroying the mind-shard instantly **ends** its control over any creatures.
- The ankhegs **revert** to an animalistic intelligence and are indifferent toward the characters, only attacking if provoked.

Treasure

A diamond-hard piece of the mind-shard's core serves as a +1 *short sword* called **Mindsplinter** (see Appendix C: New Magic Items).

TRANSITION

After the battle with the mind-shard is over, go to *Aftermath*.

AFTERMATH

CAPTURED

- If the mind-shard and its minions defeat the characters, the mind-shard **enslaves** them rather than kill them. The characters wake up in Area 3 without any equipment (it's all held in Area 8).
- The characters are **infected** with crystal splinters and are restrained by a sticky web. It requires a DC 12 Strength check to burst. A patrol of four **ankheg warren drones** checks on the characters every 1d4 hours.

THE METEOR AND CRATER

- Without the presence of the mind-shard, the meteor stops producing crystal **splinters**.
- There is enough quality **star metal** at the meteor's core to be worth 500 gp.
- If any **ankhegs** survive, they re-build their warren and continue life as if nothing had happened. They are indifferent to all creatures unless attacked.

TORVAINE AND ISKAVOL

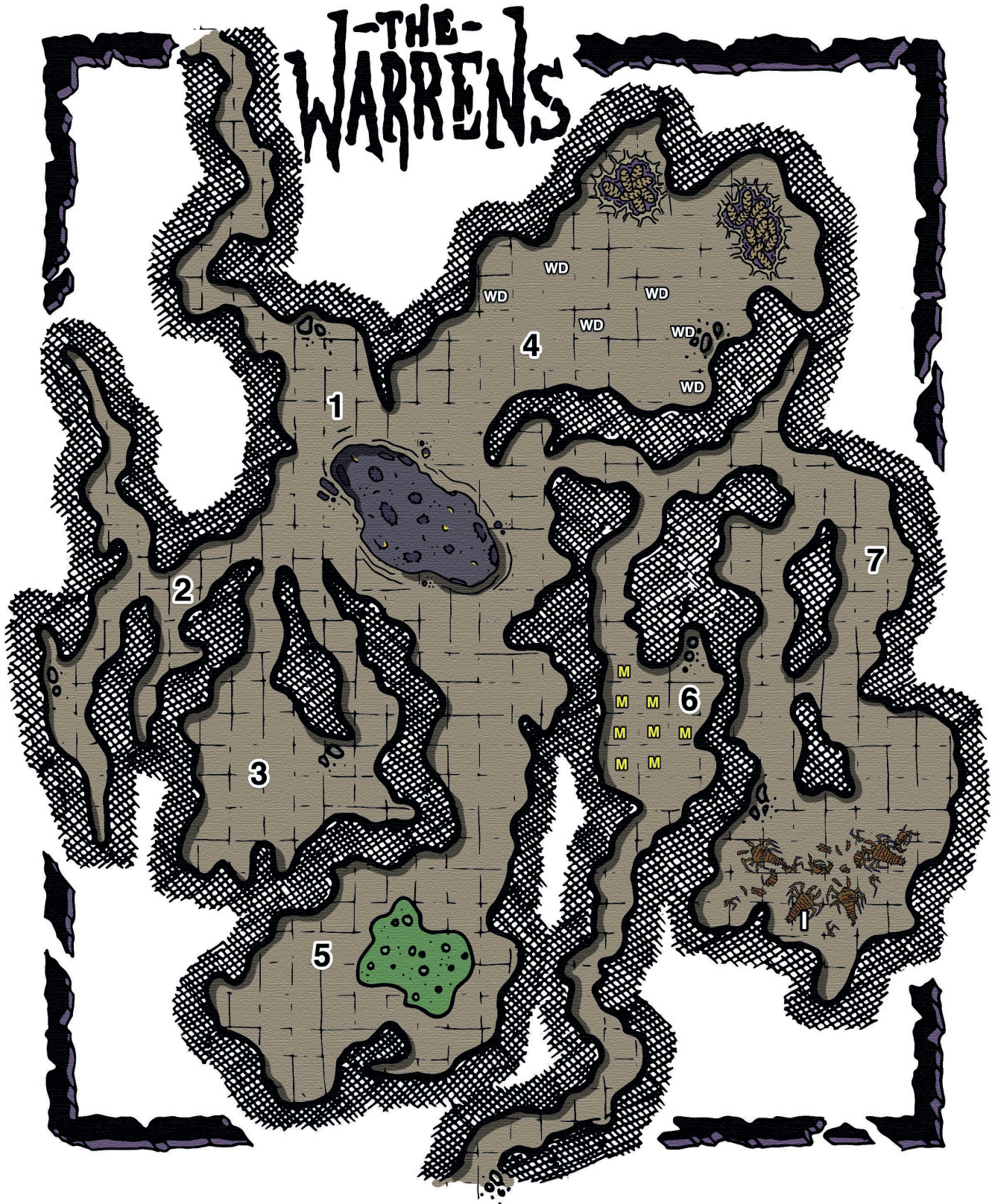
- If either Torvaine or Iskavol survive, they make good on their promise to create an Uncommon **magic item** for the group.
- If both wizards survive, they view the characters as trusted allies and will **help** them in the future.

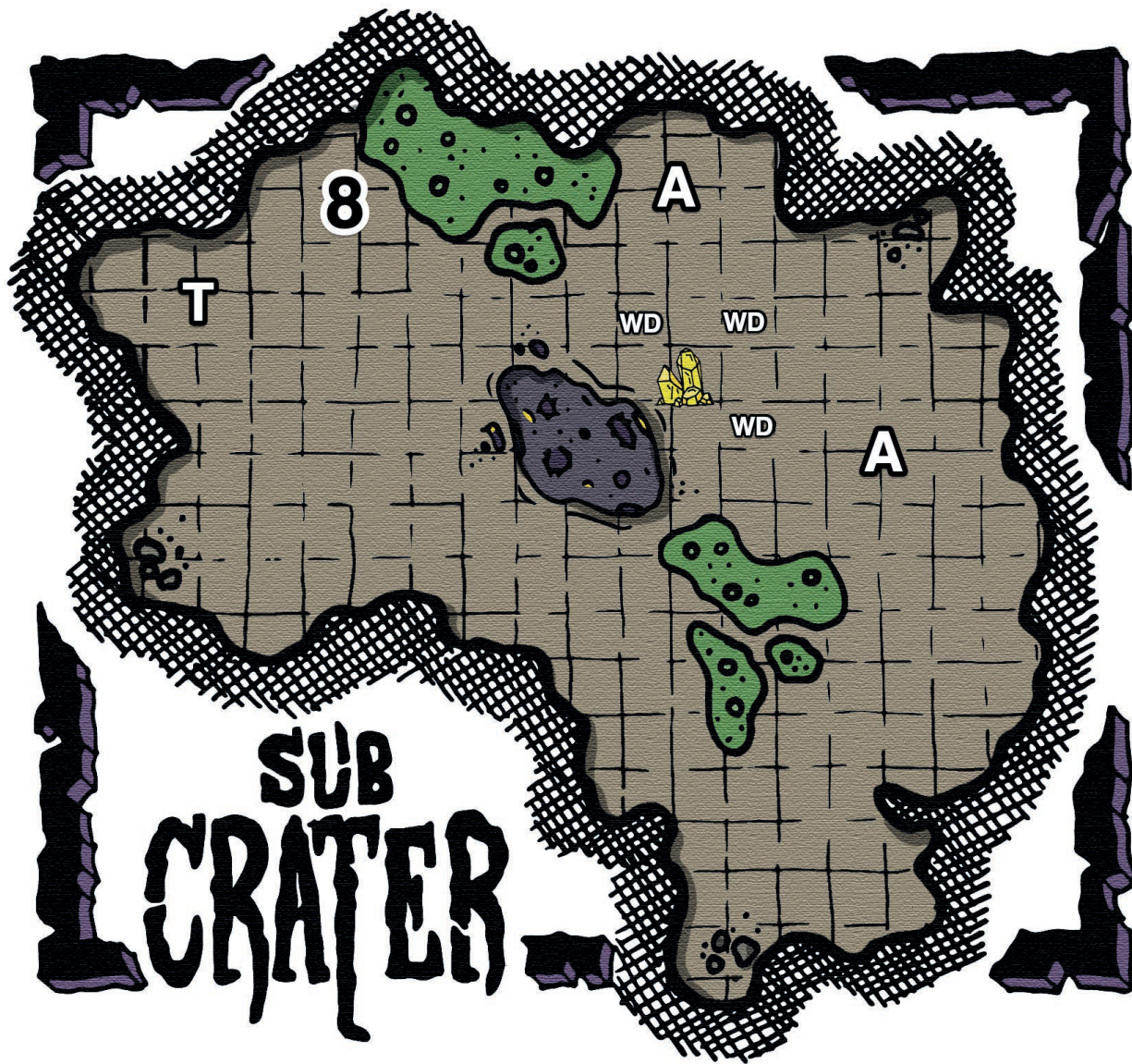
FUTURE ADVENTURE HOOKS

- Iskavol may decide it is too dangerous to keep a bound **glabrezu** in his and Torvaine's wizard tower. Simply releasing it is not an option; he hires the characters to help him "dispose" of it.
- Iskavol's **mother** may summon the characters for a sensitive task she needs completed as discreetly as possible.
- The **rangers** who patrol the forest near the meteor site might recruit the characters for a matter relating to pesky albino goblins...
- Further **meteors** carrying mind-shards might land in other places. How many of them are there? Is this the first stage of a larger invasion?



APPENDIX A: MAPS





APPENDIX B: NEW MONSTERS

Ankhegs

Acid drips from high above in the dim cavern, burning hissing holes in the ground at your feet. The false stalactites move, revealing ankhegs who skitter across the ceiling. Larger ankhegs erupt from the earth in a shower of dirt, shooting goutts of acid from their chattering mandibles.

Colonizers. Ankhegs transform into new shapes to fill different roles as needed by their colony. Some molt into smaller, lithe workers who scavenge resources and tend to the broods of eggs. Others begin producing more acid to become tunnelers who expand the warrens. Some ankhegs remain in their original form, serving as the colony's protectors and hunters.

ANKHEG TUNNELER

Large monstrosity, unaligned

Armor Class 14 (natural armor), 11 while prone
Hit Points 39 (6d10 + 6)
Speed 30 ft., burrow 10 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	16 (+3)	13 (+1)	1 (-5)	13 (+1)	6 (-2)

Senses darkvision 60 ft., tremorsense 60 ft., passive Perception 11
Languages —
Challenge 1 (200 XP)

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (2d6) slashing damage plus 3 (1d6) acid damage. If the target is a Large or smaller creature, it is grappled (escape DC 13). Until this grapple ends, the ankheg can bite only the grappled creature and has advantage on attack rolls to do so.

Acid Spray (Recharge 4-6). The ankheg spits acid in a line that is 60 feet long and 5 feet wide, provided that it has no creature grappled. Each creature in that line must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 10 (3d6) acid damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

REACTIONS

Acid Burst. A creature that hits the ankheg tunneler with a melee weapon attack takes 7 (2d6) acid damage.

ANKHEG WARREN DRONE

Medium monstrosity, unaligned

Armor Class 13 (natural armor), 11 while prone
Hit Points 27 (6d8)
Speed 30 ft., climb 10 ft., burrow 10 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	1 (-5)	12 (+1)	6 (-2)

Skills Perception +4, Stealth +4
Senses darkvision 60 ft., tremorsense 60 ft., passive Perception 13
Languages —
Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

False Appearance. While the ankheg warren drone remains motionless, it is indistinguishable from a cave formation such as a stalactite or stalagmite.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) slashing damage plus 2 (1d4) acid damage. If the target is a Medium or smaller creature, it is grappled (escape DC 12). Until this grapple ends, the ankheg can bite only the grappled creature and has advantage on attack rolls to do so.

Acid Spray (Recharge 6). The ankheg spits acid in a line that is 30 feet long and 5 feet wide, provided that it has no creature grappled. Each creature in that line must make a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw, taking 7 (2d6) acid damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Mind-Shard

An amber, jagged shard of crystal juts from the point of an iron meteor buried deep in the earth. The crystal strobos with internal light, and the compulsion to lay down your weapons and draw closer to it batters your mind in relentless waves.

Invasive Species. Mind-shards arrive on new planets via meteors, the impact scattering their infective crystal shards over a large area. They enslave nearby creatures hit by their shards, controlling them telepathically from the safety of the meteor's smoking crater.

Purpose. Mind-shards' alien intelligence serves only one cause; to dominate other creatures' minds. Whether they work only to ensure their own survival, or for some larger purpose, is unknowable even to those infected by their crystalline splinters.

Inscrutable. Mind-shards are sentient, living beings whose bodies are made of a brittle, gem-like substance. They communicate in wordless, telepathic feelings devoid of emotion or humanity.

MIND-SHARD

Large construct, neutral evil

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points 38 (7d10)

Speed 0 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
1 (-5)	1 (-5)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities blinded, deafened, grappled, exhaustion, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained

Senses blindsight 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages telepathy 2 miles

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Innate Spellcasting. The mind-shard's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no components of any kind:

At will: *darkness*, *detect thoughts*, *gust of wind*, *levitate*, *light*, *ray of enfeeblement*

3/day each: *hideous laughter*, *silence*

1/day each: *compulsion*, *hold person*, *reverse gravity*

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

The mind-shard can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The mind-shard regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Minor Flux. The mind-shard casts an at-will spell.

Flux Wave (Costs 2 Actions). The mind-shard casts a 3/day each spell.

Flux Storm (Costs 3 Actions). The mind-shard casts a 1/day each spell.

APPENDIX C: NEW MAGIC ITEMS

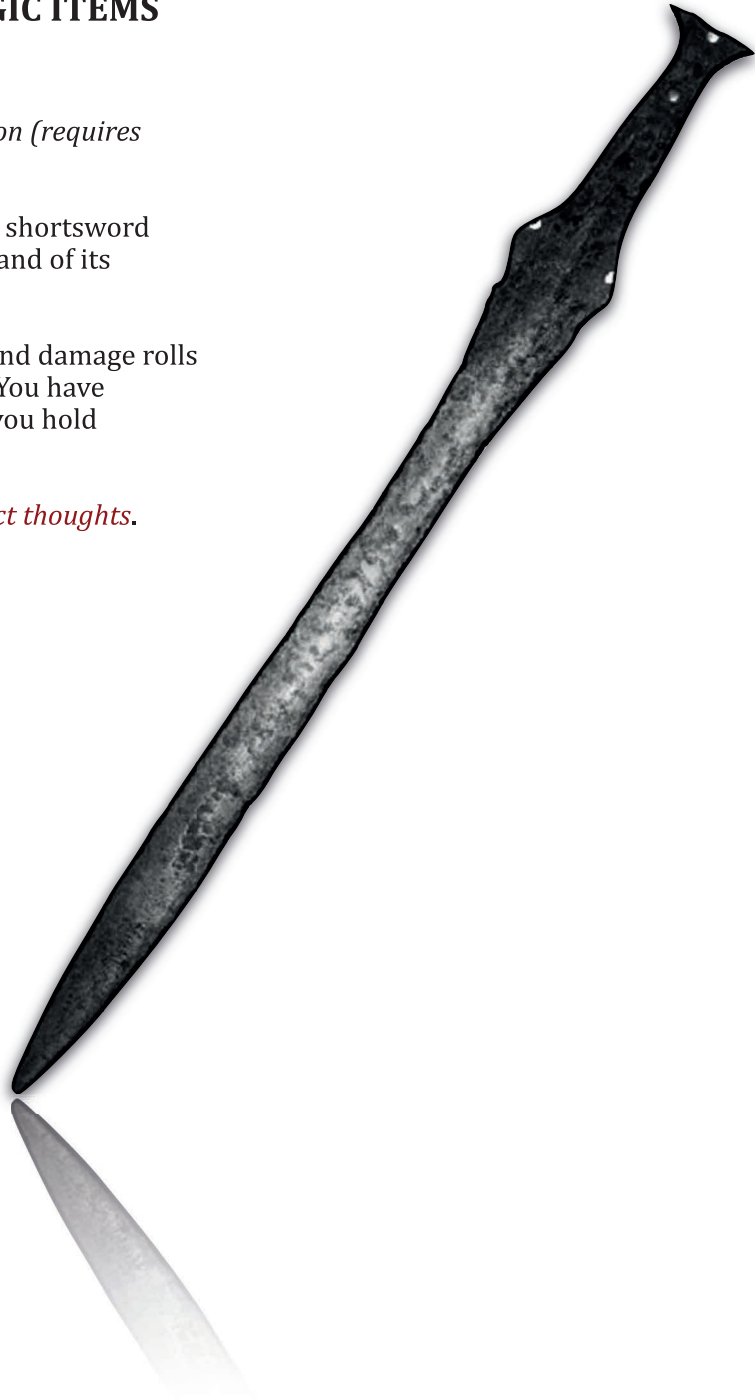
MINDSPLINTER

Weapon (shortsword), uncommon (requires attunement)

This crystalline, amber-colored shortsword radiates a silent hum into the hand of its wielder.

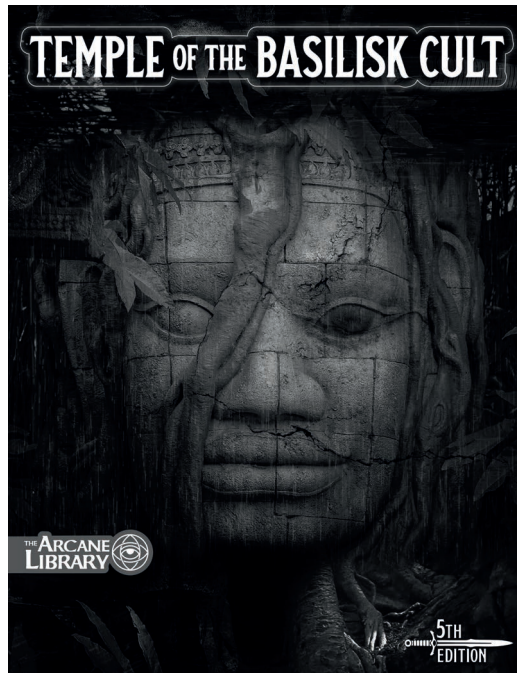
You have a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon. You have blindsight out to 10 feet while you hold Mindsplinter.

Once per day, you can cast *detect thoughts*.



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If you **join The Arcane Library's** newsletter, you'll get a FREE copy of *Temple of the Basilisk Cult*, a 1st-level adventure set in the jungle!



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This adventure is dedicated to my dear sisters, Meg and Katie, who each make up one third of our Triforce.

Art Credits

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