

SIX SUMMONED SWORDS

A 4-Hour Adventure for 5th-10th Level Characters



A chance encounter on an unassuming road leads to a dangerous and lucrative opportunity. But what seems simple on the surface turns out to be much more below. Thrust into a world where every enemy has an enemy and everyone has their own dark motive, the only chance to survive is to ally with the right foe. Sometimes “doing the right thing” comes only in shades of black.

By Andrew Bishkinskyi



Six Summoned Swords

The first adventure of the *Swords Below the Moonsea* saga

Adventure Code: CCC-PHA-01

Optimized For: APL 8



Design and Writing Andrew Bishkinskyi

Phantasm Gamer's Equinox Administration David Watson

"A View to a Death" Art Bartolomeo Argentino with "Underdark" background by Andrew Bishkinskyi

"Weave" Art Emmanuel Tragakis

"Lemethra" Art Dean Spencer

"Donna" Art Grae Hunter

Other Art DMsGuild/WoTC, used with permission

"Deathcab" Icon Lorc

"Daemon pull" Icon Delapouite

Maps Xavier A. Devenoges

Playtesting Keith Christensen & group, David Morris & group, Kenneth Antonio, Matthew Chung, Mike Humfrey, Creepy Jim, Zvi S., Brad Clark

Special Thanks Wayne Chang

Organized Play: Chris Lindsay

D&D Adventurers League Wizards Team: Adam Lee, Chris Lindsay, Mike Mearls, Matt Sernett

D&D Adventurers League Administrators: Lysa Chen, Bill Benham, Travis Woodall, Claire Hoffman, Greg Marks, Alan Patrick

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CCC-PHA-01 *Six Summoned Swords*

Introduction

Welcome to *CCC-PHA-01 Six Summoned Swords*, a D&D Adventurers League™ adventure, part of the official D&D Adventurers League™ organized play system and Con Created Content Program.

This adventure takes place in Moonsea.

This adventure is designed for **three to seven 5th-10th level characters** and is optimized for **five characters with an average party level (APL) of 8**. Characters outside this level range cannot participate in this adventure.

Adjusting This Adventure

This adventure provides suggestions in making adjustments for smaller or larger groups, characters of higher or lower levels, and characters that are otherwise a bit more powerful than the adventure is optimized for. You're not bound to these adjustments; they're here for your convenience.

To figure out whether you should consider adjusting the adventure, add up the total levels of all the characters and divide the total by the number of characters (rounding .5 or greater up; .4 or less down). This is the group's APL. To approximate the **party strength** for the adventure, consult the following table.

Determining Party Strength

| Party Composition | Party | Strength |
|-------------------|------------------|-------------|
| 3-4 characters, | APL less than | Very weak |
| 3-4 characters, | APL equivalent | Weak |
| 3-4 characters, | APL greater than | Average |
| 5 characters, | APL less than | Weak |
| 5 characters, | APL equivalent | Average |
| 5 characters, | APL greater than | Strong |
| 6-7 characters, | APL less than | Average |
| 6-7 characters, | APL equivalent | Strong |
| 6-7 characters, | APL greater than | Very strong |

Some encounters may include a sidebar that offers suggestions for certain party strengths. If a particular recommendation is not offered or appropriate for your group, you don't have to make adjustments.

Before Play at the Table

Before you start play, consider the following:

- Read through the adventure, taking notes of anything you'd like to highlight or remind yourself of while running the adventure, such as a way you'd like to portray an NPC or a tactic you'd like to use in a combat. Familiarize yourself with the adventure's appendices and handouts.
- Gather any resources you'd like to use to aid you in running this adventure--such as notecards, a DM screen, miniatures, and battlemaps.
- Ask the players to provide you with relevant character information, such as name, race, class, and level; passive Wisdom (Perception), and anything specified as notable by the adventure (such as backgrounds, traits, flaws, etc.)

Playing the Dungeon Master

You have the most important role—facilitating the enjoyment of the game for the players. You provide the narrative and bring the words on these pages to life.

To facilitate this, keep in mind the following:

You're Empowered. Make decisions about how the group interacts with the adventure; adjusting or improvising is encouraged, so long as you maintain the adventure's spirit. This doesn't allow you to implement house rules or change those of the Adventurers League, however; they should be consistent in this regard.

Challenge Your Players. Gauge the experience level of your **players** (not the characters), try to feel out (or ask) what they like in a game, and attempt to deliver the experience they're after. Everyone should have the opportunity to shine.

Keep the Adventure Moving. When the game starts to get bogged down, feel free to provide hints and clues to your players so they can attempt to solve puzzles, engage in combat, and roleplay interactions without getting too frustrated over a lack of information. This gives players "little victories" for figuring out good choices from clues. Watch for stalling—play loses momentum when this happens. At the same time, make sure that the players don't finish too early; provide them with a full play experience.

Adventure Primer

The purpose is to experience fear, fear in the face of certain death, to accept that fear, and maintain control.

— Spock

Adventure Background (DM Only)

Deception, betrayal and foul magic – these are the implements of the drow. When drow houses fight, these deadly tools become playthings in the arms of the power-hungry and the ambitious.

Deep in the Underdark, the Noble House Vith'tyl betrays and usurps the smaller House Axcelon, leaving only a single survivor of the bloodline. A group of assassins led by Shintyrr Vith'tyl is quickly dispatched to track down this renegade.

The last of her house, Axcelia Axcelon flees. Desperate but not powerless, she performs a dangerous summoning ritual and calls forward a fiend of great power to serve her. The first part of the ritual succeeds beyond her wildest hopes and the summoned creature is greater in power than anything she has ever witnessed. The binding ritual, however, strains her sorcerous powers and isn't entirely complete by the time that the House Vith'tyl assassins track her down.

A battle and chase ensue, with Axcelia's fiend wreaking havoc among the assassins. The aftermath finds the key participants in dire situations. Axcelia survives the battle, but her control over the fiend is strained to the point of breaking as it flees her and seeks to sever the bond created by the unfinished ritual. Shintyrr finds his assassins slain and himself gravely injured. In a desperate attempt to survive, he flees, eventually finding a way to the surface, where he passes out in pain.

Three Zhentarim bounty hunters chance upon the injured drow just off the main road a couple of days' journey from the City of Phlan. They stop to consider whether it would be best to kill and rob the man or to take him back to town in hopes of a reward. It is this scene that the company of adventurers comes across...

Location and Non-Player Character (NPC) Summary

The following NPCs, locations and entities feature prominently in this adventure. Portrait cards for main NPCs are provided in Appendix A.

Axcelia Axcelon (Axe-sell-ya). Female drow mage, last surviving member of House Axcelon.

House Axcelon. A lower house of the Zethlentyn Protectorate. Worshipers of Lolth and until recently the purveyors of a large diamond mine - a joint-venture with House Vith'tyl.

House Vith'tyl. The 7th house of the Zethlentyn Protectorate. This house does not worship Lolth. Instead, they draw their power from summoning and/or enslaving devils.

Lemethra Vith'tyl (Le-meth-ra). Drow War Priest of House Vith'tyl.

Shintyrr Vith'tyl (Shin-teer). Drow Assassin of House Vith'tyl

S'sheneth'rah (Shae-net-RAH). A fiend summoned by Axcelia.

Three Sisters. Zhentarim bounty hunters. The three sisters are females of different races: a tabaxi named Misty, a kenku named Donna and a dark-skinned human named Bleak.

Zethlentyn Protectorate. A geopolitical alliance of drow houses. The protectorate is religion-agnostic and allows houses of different faiths to co-operate in trade and mutual protection from external threats.

Adventure Overview

Part 1. The characters come across an odd situation on the road and end up rescuing a Drow noble that engages them in an escort mission.

Part 2. Following their charge's directions through the Underdark, the group learns about their strange environs, discovers the grisly fate of Shintyrr's companions and is ambushed by predators.

Part 3. Seeking respite after their battle, the characters encounter Axcelia's fiend and must deal with the consequences.

Part 4. The group must make an uneasy alliance and battle a powerful opponent.

Adventure Hook

Headed to Phlan. The adventure begins on the side of the road leading from Zhentil Keep to Phlan. The adventurers are likely headed to Phlan in search of work or for reasons of their own. Along the road they have met their companions and are traveling together for the sake of safety in numbers and good cheer.

The Swords Below the Moonsea Saga

This adventure is the introduction to the *Swords Below the Moonsea* saga, which is planned to span three adventures. This adventure is intended to be played on its own and is entirely self-contained. The follow-up adventures pick up some time later and deal with Axcelia Axcelon's attempts to return to the Underdark.

Making it your own

A note on “read-aloud” or “boxed text”: As always in pre-written adventures, the boxed text is provided as a suggestion and can be paraphrased or made your own by the DM. Sometimes, a loud gaming environment or the particular composition of players is not conducive to reading longer passages.

To help with this, some of the longer read-aloud sections in the later parts of this adventure contain additional sections titled **Making It Your Own**. These contain a bullet-point summary of the boxed text that can be used to help you describe things in your own words and easily hit on the key plot points.

Finally, certain aspects of any adventure – violence, blood, presence of spiders, etc. – may not be appropriate for every audience. If you’re unsure, check with your players beforehand and adjust descriptions as best suits the table.

The short, the long and the rest

Only weaker parties should be given a short rest after Part 1, with no possibility of a long rest at that time.

Parties should absolutely NOT be given any kind of rest in the Cavern of Death immediately after Part 2.

Most choices available in Part 3 result in a long rest for the party. The choice that doesn’t is clear to the players since it’s a result of their own aggression.

Character focus

This adventure highlights the abilities and activities of a number of notable personages. It is intended to introduce powerful and interesting personalities that the players become invested in knowing. As such, these characters are given opportunities to shine in key moments. Keep in mind that most of these moments are enabled by player actions and should not feel as though they’re “stealing spotlight” from the player characters, but rather are a result of player decisions.

While not necessary or expected, having a co-DM or assistant play the roles of some of the major NPCs or the narrator at key moments can help enhance the player experience.

NPCs and combat

While there are stat blocks provided for the NPCs in the adventure, unless they are in confrontation with the players, it is recommended that their parts in battles are told as a story rather than played out with rolls and stats. This both simplifies combat and gives more play time to the players over the DM.

Encounters assume that NPCs are not assisting the party unless stated.

Some NPCs use deathward to prevent untimely deaths for narrative purposes. For all intents and purposes however, deathward triggering signals their defeat and end of the encounter as described.

Subsequent adventures in this series will provide opportunities to deal with some of these characters in a more “permanent” way.

No light, no light

The adventure begins in the morning and in bright sunshine. In the Underdark, there is no light except for fire-wreathed demons and enchanted swords that shed light around them.

Knowledge checks

The adventure is designed with the full intent that characters will fail certain checks and will NOT have full information about what is going on. There is no need to spoon-feed players information which they have failed to obtain.

Part 1. Living Through Daylight

Estimated Duration: 30-45 minutes

Story Beat: The adventurers encounter three bounty hunters who in turn have come upon an injured drow. Unexpected guests crash the party, forcing diplomacy to take place mid-combat.

Roleplaying the “Three Sisters”

The bounty hunters are three females of different races – a Tabaxi, a Kenku and a Human. They are nicknamed “The Three Sisters” and their names are Misty, Donna and Bleak respectively.

They do not have any mission relating to the drow and have just chanced upon him. They did have time to notice that he is a noble or some kind of important personage and were in the middle of deciding whether to rob him or simply to drag him back to Phlan in the hopes of a reward. They are not particularly attached to the drow, but don’t want to walk away empty-handed.

The Three Sisters are old-timers in the bounty hunting business and members of the Zhentarim. They conduct themselves with self-assurance and skill. The Tabaxi – Misty – is in charge and does most of the talking for the party. When speaking, they inevitably address each other as “sister”, much to the puzzlement of others.

Fate: The ultimate fate (life or death) of the Three Sisters is not important to the main storyline.

The tree line on the left side of the road opens up, revealing a clearing that leads to a rocky outcropping. Several horse lengths from the rock face, is a humanoid figure in an elaborate purple cloak slumped against the trunk of a large pine tree.

Standing above the figure is an odd but well-armed and armored group of three females – one with birdlike features, one a dark-skinned human with a large topknot of black hair atop an otherwise bald head and what can only be described as a large bipedal housecat in expensive armor.

The catlike humanoid speaks in a gruff voice to the others saying: “...easier to just take his head sisters, he would probably die on the—” She stops abruptly, noticing your presence. She looks towards you and shouts: “move along down the road and mind your own business!”. The words are accompanied by a pointing of her sword in turn toward you and then at the road ahead.

Development

The adventurers are not required to interfere, if they decide to move on or to do nothing, unleash the trolls.

If the characters choose to examine the scene prior to responding, they can ascertain the following via DC 13 skill checks of their choice:

- **Wisdom (Perception):** The three females are well-equipped but do not carry any obvious insignias or uniforms. Their equipment, while high quality, is clearly of mixed make and indicates that they are likely fellow adventurers, bandits or bounty hunters. The figure slumped against the three is seems to be unconscious. His clothing is stained with blood, though it is difficult to see specific wounds from this distance. (This is actually Shintyrr Vith’tyl, a drow. His dark skin is hard to spot from a distance.)
- **Intelligence (any):** The three females do not look like they were just in a fight. Their weapons (except for the one being used to point at the road) are sheathed and they seem largely unconcerned. None of the weapons or armor have blood on them. It seems unlikely that they are the cause of the figure’s wounds.
- **Wisdom (Insight):** The three armed females, while imposing, do not seem to be eager for a fight and genuinely want you to move along and not interfere in their business.

Unbeknownst to all participants, the large amount of potential loot and food has attracted the attention of a couple of nearby trolls. No matter the characters’ initial response to the request, three trolls attack from the trees. The characters and the Bounty Hunters must now figure out who is friend or foe while in combat!

Your words are drowned out by a fearsome shout as hulking forms charge out from the trees!

Adjusting the Encounter

This encounter is not meant to be of great combat challenge to the party, but should last at least 3-4 rounds. If the players make too quick work of initial trolls, add another to keep the tension up.

- **Weak or Very Weak party:** remove a troll
- **Strong Party:** Add one troll
- **Very Strong Party:** Add two trolls

DM Tips:

- Be creative in adding some flair to the Three Sisters’ movement and combat communications – have they developed a short form from years of working together? Do they use military-style hand signals? Have fun!

- If the players lack motivation to engage in conversation, have the sisters yell at them or have the drow call out for help before passing back out.
- If you know your party to be particularly lacking in heroism (mercenaries that don't care for others, etc.), you may want to have at least one troll attack the party regardless of the percentile roll result.

Friend or Foe?

Roll percentile dice: 50% or lower, all trolls attack the party, 51-75%, one troll attacks the bounty hunters and the other(s) attack the party, 76%-100% all trolls attack the bounty hunters.

Bounty Hunter reaction: Regardless of scenario - if at any point, the players purposely attack the Three Sisters, they turn hostile and are hard to turn back other than by being incapacitated.

- **Scenario 1.** If all the trolls attack the Bounty Hunters, they assume that this is an ambush set up by the players' party. It would take two DC15 checks to persuade them otherwise (Persuasion, Intimidation or Deception can all work, give advantage for creative RP). The characters would need to offer assistance in order to have any chance at succeeding on the checks. A strong character attack against a troll or an action to defend one of the sisters can count as a successful check, but at least one social check would still need to be made. If the players fail to convince them, the Three Sisters move to the natural bunker-type rocks near the cave and set up a defensive position in it – they block the entrance and the low overhang makes it difficult for trolls to get inside. They may also try to snipe at any casters that the players have as they would assume that these are controlling the trolls. If any of the Sisters are reduced to below 30% HP, they all attempt to flee.
- **Scenario 2.** If all the Trolls attack the player characters, the Bounty Hunters ready their weapons, setup a defensive position and do nothing but observe for two turns. Two successful DC13 Charisma checks are required to get them to assist the players (Persuasion, Intimidation or Deception can all work, give advantage for creative RP). On the third combat turn, if the players' social checks have been successful, the Bounty Hunters join the players' side and help put down the trolls. If the players have failed to convince the Bounty Hunters or have attacked them, the bounty hunters circle around to a position that provides cover and an easy escape

and then snipe at distance – they may attack both players and trolls as their goal is to get the two sides to weaken each other. If their position is threatened, they retreat and (try to) escape.

- **Scenario 3.** If the trolls split their attacks, the Bounty Hunters are motivated to work together with the player characters. Only one DC10 check is required to persuade them to join the players' side (Persuasion, Intimidation or Deception can all work, give advantage for creative RP)

The imperiled drow. As long as the players enter the fighting in some way, Shintyrr Vith'tyl sneaks out from behind the distracted Bounty Hunters and sneaks around through the trees to whichever player is closest to the tree line. Time this as you see fit and read or paraphrase the following:

A whimpering cough catches your attention. Kneeling behind a bush is an injured drow elf in an elaborate purple cloak, which is currently stained with much blood. He tries to speak but ends up spitting out a wad of blood and subsequently loses his footing and collapses. It seems that in all the commotion, he used the last of his strength to get away from his would-be captors. He looks up at you from the ground and gives you a toothy smile that may have been charming, were his mouth not full of blood. "You!" he says in excellent Common: "I know you not, but know this – if you ensure my safety, you will be well rewarded! Help me.." He coughs up more blood and seems to have difficulty saying any more than he already has.

A DC13 Wisdom (Perception and/or Insight) check at this point reveals that he's entirely serious about the proposition and that he seems to be outfitted in rather pricey gear and a rich cloak that signifies nobility. If the players push for more from him, he merely signals them to fight and potentially passes out (but is considered stable.)

Development

Once the fight is over – the Three Sisters move toward the slumped drow and demand that he be handed over to them. They wish to drag him back to Phlan and potentially earn some reward. In truth, there is no certainty of any reward and it does not take much to persuade them to leave him be.

If you feel that the players have the upper hand, it takes a DC13 Charisma (Persuasion, Intimidation or Deception) to get them to leave the drow alone.

If you feel that the Bounty Hunters have the upper hand after the battle, it takes a DC15 check.

If the players' negotiation involves a bribe, the DC of the check is lowered by 1 for every 20g offered. If the negotiating player is a member of the Zhentarim, the DC is instead lowered by 2 for every 20g offered.

Roleplaying Shintyrr Vith'tyl

Shintyrr is above all a skilled operator. His skill with the blade is bested only by his skill at manipulating others. His mind hatches schemes and these schemes in turn hatch more. If one were to unravel his deception, one would only find another layer beyond.

He is a smooth and charismatic talker, with a talent for being able to quickly evaluate his mark and alter plans accordingly. He also knows that sprinkling in just the right amount of truth helps sell the biggest lies. His main goal is to secure passage back home, without being killed en route by the fiend that has slain his retinue.

His secondary goal is complete his mission of tracking and slaying the last member of the house Axcelon. If he can accomplish both— even better.

Shintyrr has decided that it is best to keep the adventurers in the dark regarding the true danger of the journey and that the genuine promise of reward should be enough. Even if subjected to a zone of truth or similar measures, he will be able to dance around the questions.

If the players have acted with particular heroism during the battle, he will play to their vanity by praising their deeds and skill in saving him – this is done with taste and subtlety, not over-theatrical boasting.

Fate: It is important to the storyline that Shintyrr survives until the start of Part 3 of this adventure.

With the bounty hunters gone, the drow seems to regain his voice and introduces himself to the party. "I am Shintyrr Vith'tyl of the House Vith'Tyl, of the Zethlentyn Protectorate. I thank you for saving me. Please, accept this small payment as recompense for your trouble." The drow reaches into a velveteen pouch on his belt, produces two small diamonds (worth 50g each) and holds them out as payment.

"Some of you may be hesitant," he continues, "I know that encounters with my kind are fraught with peril for surface-dwellers, but rest assured that I am in no condition to do you harm, nor would I wish to. As a matter of fact, perhaps your able sword hands could be of further use. Regardless, take your earned reward and perhaps tell me more of who you are and why you are here."

Development

During the ensuing conversation, the party is able to learn the following (not ALL details need be revealed at this point and Shintyrr will not overshare important info once the party has agreed to aid him):

- He is a noble of good standing of the moderately influential house Vith'tyl.
- A DC13 Intelligence (History) check confirms the existence and placement of this house and the likelihood that they would greatly value the return of one of their nobles. (A person of Drow lineage or relevant background may have advantage on this check.)
- He was traveling from one drow outpost to another with several companions when they were attacked and his companions slain. It is not uncommon to be attacked in the Underdark. His companions – while not untrained— were not combat experts and were overwhelmed by superior numbers. He was injured but managed to escape with his life, just barely making it to the surface, where he was found.
- A successful DC 18 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals that there is something off about the story. The story seems to be true, but his descriptions of the attackers are somewhat vague. If pressed, he reveals that the attackers were of the house Axcelon and likely a result of the recent hostilities between the two houses, which he doesn't elaborate on: "I won't bore you with the political details." If the previous history check had succeeded, it can also be revealed that House Axcelon is known to be a far lower ranked house than House Vith'Tyl.
- Shintyrr offers the party a reward of 1000g worth of diamonds for escorting him through the caves and the Underdark to the border of the Zethlentyn Protectorate or the first friendly patrol that they would come across.
 - A DC10 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals the he is being entirely truthful about the reward and fully intends to pay the adventurers.
 - A DC10 Charisma (Persuasion) check not only results in him coughing up a pair of 50g diamonds upfront, but in also writing out a note that – in the event that he should perish during the journey -- could be delivered to House Vith'Tyl and see the party rewarded. Part of the note is in common and deals with the circumstances of his meeting the characters and their reward. Inside the envelope is a second note that he says is addressed to his

sister and that is sealed. He hands the envelope – including both notes to one of the players for safekeeping and to demonstrate his trust in them.

- At any later time, the characters may attempt to open and read the second note. Demand Sleight of Hand, Deception or other checks as required – reward players for their sneakiness – Shintyrr would! In truth, these checks automatically succeed due to the fact that Shintyrr is not paying particular attention and because he fully expected the note to be read at some point. The interior note is written in Undercommon and reads: *“Dearest Sister Lemethra, if this note finds you, then I have perished. Please know that I was not able to reach my destination for the negotiations with Duranna’s daughter and her aide. If we are to have peace, you must send another set of ambassadors or even come yourself. Please reward the carrier of this note as I have instructed.”*
- If they question Shintyrr about the note after opening it, he feigns disapproval at the party’s meddling, but begs them to still deliver the note in case of his death. He again says that he does not want to bother them with the political details, but shares that “he was on the way to meet with two representatives of House Axcelon and negotiate an end to their conflict.” This is technically true, but he is careful to not elaborate further.
- Shintyrr stresses that time is of the essence for them to begin their journey, as his path had been clearly marked with his blood and the assailants would have an easy time tracking him here to the surface if they chose to do so. He says that he knows the passages below well and would be able to guide the party in a different direction, where they would be safe and able to take a longer rest. If the party is particularly weak, consider granting them a Short Rest that happens “while they tend to Shintyrr’s wounds”.

Treasure:

In addition to anything offered by Shintyrr, the trolls have 1000g in various coins and jewelry. If the three sisters are killed, they have another 300g and a variety of mundane equipment that matches weapons noted in their stat blocks.

What’s my motivation?

It is expected that most reasonable parties will find motivation to accept the mission for the large amount of gold offered or to simply help an injured person.

In the unlikely event that the party absolutely does not wish to help Shintyrr (perhaps on the count of him being perceived as “an evil drow” by overly good characters), consider using **Shintyrr’s Backup Deception** detailed at the end of Part 2. The motivation here would be to “stop an evil mage with an evil demon!”

This option should only be used as a last resort and will require additional DM adjustments throughout.

Part 2: Always Lie Twice

Estimated Duration: 60-75 minutes

Story Beat: The adventurers escort Shintyrr through the Underdark and find that its reputation for housing deadly and dangerous things is well earned. Eventually they discover the fate of Shintyrr's party and are ambushed.

Through the Underdark

- The party proceeds through the caves leading into the Underdark. Where caves end and the Underdark begins is hard to tell. At several points, characters with darkvision and a passive Wisdom (Perception or Survival) of 13 or higher are able to spot a blood trail. The blood is Shintyrr's (and only his) and confirms that he had indeed fled this way. The freshness of the blood confirms the timeline if required and there is no sign of other passage.
- Orientation note: **Map 2: Underdark Passages** shows the "correct" route that Shintyrr would lead the party along. Most passages (but not caverns) contain additional turns that the group does not take and that may result in the group being lost forever in the Underdark. Should Shintyrr perish prior to Part 3 of the adventure (not recommended!), his body contains a rough map that indicates the path to the ambush-site from the surface.
- Eventually the party comes to a T-junction in the caves (marked on **Map 2**). Shintyrr points out his own blood trail and that it leads off down the passage to the right. He suggests going left to avoid the possibility of encountering any potential pursuit. In truth, there is no pursuit and his goal is simply to avoid the area where his assassins were ambushed, so as to not raise the group's suspicions. If the group becomes suspicious about his motives, he quickly praises their courage in being willing to face danger and agrees to lead them through the right passage.
- Regardless of the path the characters choose, Shintyrr stays near the back of the group, although he does not insist on going last. There is no hidden motive to him staying back - he is injured and does not wish to be a liability in combat (or to be injured in it!)
- Mechanically, there is no significant difference in the path that the party chooses. Both paths contain two mostly empty chambers, the purpose

of which is to give them clues about Underdark terrain.

Tricks of the Trade:

While there are no enemies in the first two caverns, these areas' purpose is to establish a false sense of security (or a sense of paranoia) in the party. For this reason, it is recommended that you take as much care in describing (or drawing out if you use a grid) these two as you do the third one. Allow the party to make some checks for safety, but don't let them waste a lot of time in the empty chambers.

Going Left: Cavern L1

If the group follows Shintyrr's recommendation and heads left, the eventually reach cavern L1 (**Map 3a**), this is a typical Underdark cavern and contains little of significance other than some fine examples of stalagmites, stalactites and poisonous mushrooms.

The passage opens into a large cavern about 120 feet in diameter and 20 to 40 feet high in places. The area is quiet and smells of wet earth and mushrooms. The floor is uneven, but not particularly hard to pass, except for several natural-looking fissures in the floor that look to be only a few feet deep. Dark and moist pyramids of five foot tall stalagmites extend up from the ground in several places. Almost mirroring them, stalactites of similar size hang like ominous dark icicles from above. These are fine examples of Underdark geology.

- Closer examination of the room reveals no dangers or much of interest.
- The floors of the fissures in the room contain some glowing and odd-smelling fungi. A DC13 Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Medicine) check reveals that closer exposure to the smell may have adverse effects. You DO NOT want to stop and smell these mushrooms! If one touches or inhales the odor of the mushrooms from within 5ft of them, they must succeed on a DC15 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1 minute.
- Characters that have not journeyed extensively in deep caves or that are attuned to nature would likely find the stalagmites and stalactites to be fascinating.
- There is a clear path leading deeper into the Underdark on the other side of the chamber and Shintyrr bids the characters to proceed.

Going Left: Cavern L2

- This is a typical Underdark cavern and contains no enemies (**Map 3b**). The purpose here is to establish atmosphere and provide some clues for the future.

The passage opens into a(nother) large cavern about 100 feet in diameter and 30 to 50 feet high in places. There are sounds of dripping and moving water. The source of these is a small pool on the east side of the room that is fed by a tiny stream. The edge of pool is next to a one of two fissures in the room and in spots water trickles down to its bottom. Both the stalactites and stalagmites in this room are slightly larger than in the last room, ranging from 10 to 15ft in height. The idea of flat, featureless terrain seems entirely out of place here.

- The fissures in the floor contain the same glowing and odd-smelling fungi as room L1. A DC13 Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Medicine) check reveals that closer exposure to the smell may have adverse effects. You DO NOT want to stop and smell these mushrooms. If one touches or inhales the odor of the mushrooms from within 5ft of them, they must succeed on a DC15 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1 minute.
- A DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals a skeleton in one of the corners of the cavern. A DC15 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Medicine) check reveals that the bones are about 6 months old and in very good condition, yet there is absolutely no sign of rotting meat or any remains of the dead person's flesh. If this check is performed, Shintyrr shrugs and remarks nonchalantly that "there are things in the Underdark that eat EVERYTHING..."
- DC13 Intelligence (Nature or History) check allows characters to ascertain that the stalagmites and stalactites get larger as you go deeper and that contrary to typical geology, there isn't always a matching one above the other (whether this is due to decay or magic is unclear, but it does seem common).
- The pool is harmless and the water is clear. Characters may refill their water skins if they wish. Every time someone touches the water, there seems to be a barely audible and indecipherable whisper from the pool. It's creepy, but seems to have no ill effects and there is no way to ascertain its nature. If the characters persist, Shintyrr advises that "there are many strange and ancient

things in the Underdark. Men become lost and mad seeking to solve such mysteries."

- Once again there is a clear path leading deeper into the Underdark on the other side of the chamber and Shintyrr bids the characters to proceed.

Going Left: A Blocked Path

Shintyrr's plan of avoiding the room with the slaughter fails as the path he was going to take is found to be collapsed. He knows better than to try to find a new path through the Underdark and instead decides to take his chances going through the cavern where his squad was attacked – even if this means that adventurers figure out what really took place.

Proceeding away from the cavern with the pool, the path comes to another T-junction with a well-worn path leading to the right and another, smaller and less prominent passage going left. Shintyrr instructs you to proceed left, but after a hundred feet or so you come to a dead end. It seems that the passage has recently collapsed. Shintyrr rushes forward to examine the collapse and mutters a curse in Undercommon – he was not expecting this. "This collapse is recent," he says, and after a brief pause continues: "but these things happen, come, we must go the other way." He then points back the way the group had come, toward the T-junction.

Should anyone in the group wish to investigate further, they do confirm that indeed the collapse was entirely natural, a few days old and extensive - it cannot be cleared or passed through, even with magic.

From here, the group takes the other path and enters chamber LR3 – the Cavern of Death. (Skip the **Going Right** paragraph below.) Take care to describe/map this cavern in a similar way to the previous two, so as not to ruin the surprise!

Going Right: Caverns R1 and R2

Use the same descriptions as chambers L1 and L2 (in the same order and refer to **Map 3a** and **3b**). Vary the layout and overall size of the chamber somewhat, but ensure that the stalagmites and stalactites get 5-10ft bigger in the second cavern. Both caverns should also feature traces of Shintyrr's blood, but no sign of pursuit (DC13 Wisdom (Survival) for the latter). There is no weird pool in the second cavern on this side.

Cavern LR3: The Cavern of Death

This is the cavern where the confrontation between the assassins of house Vith'tyl and Axcelia Axcelon took place (**Map 3c**). The fresh bodies have since attracted **three ropers**. They will wait until the party approaches before striking.

The ropers have already fed, but with there being plenty more meat for later, they have setup a position to defend their newfound food supply. Ropers are extremely adept at using their camouflage to their advantage. Short of the group being on specific lookout for ropers or firing blindly at the creatures, the ropers surprise the party once it has moved into the cavern. If the party is cautious and succeeds on an active Wisdom (Perception) check of DC25, then the central roper does not gain surprise. If the party has noticed the difference in the size of the stalagmites and stalactites, they may have advantage on the active check.

The passage opens into a large oval-shaped cavern about 90 feet long and 60 feet wide at its longest points. The ceiling here is 20 to 40 feet high. The area is quiet and smells of wet earth, moisture and mushrooms. The floor is relatively flat, except for a few of the natural fissures you had seen before. There are more fine examples of stalactites and stalagmites here, these ones somewhat smaller, at seven to eight feet each. Slumped against the base of one such stalagmite in the center of the room is the body of a drow. Not far from it and spread out in a rough semi-circle are four more such bodies.

Once the party has entered the cavern and done their PER check (if any), trigger the event.

The Assassin stat block can be used for Shintyrr, he also has an a vial of special liquate that functions as an *Oil of Slipperiness* that he uses immediately upon seeing the Ropers and then hides. [This item is not available as treasure.]

A closer look at the slumped drow reveals that it is somehow hollow or diminished – like a fruit that has been squeezed or dried. Shintyrr, who had been staying back moves forward to look. His expression changes suddenly to one of alarm as he turns to you and utters a curse in Undercommon. But it is too late – bursting through the ribcage of the slumped drow – an appendage reaches forward! The stalagmite seems to turn in place and a horrific maw full of teeth opens in hunger...

The center roper activates right away, as does the one on the ceiling above the entrance (behind the players). Use your own discretion for the third roper and/or other creatures.

Tricks of the Trade

With certain parties, it may be fun to play up the aspect of keeping Shintyrr safe from the ropers. Should you decide to do this, ensure that he “miraculously” survives this encounter even if the players fail to protect him.



Adjusting the Encounter

This encounter is intended to be very difficult and to drain most of the party's resources ahead of their interaction in Part 3.

- Weak or Very Weak party: remove two (ceiling) ropers, add one Umber Hulk (behind party)
- Strong Party: Add one umber hulk (behind party)
- Very Strong Party: Add two umber hulks

Tactics:

The ropers are positioned in such a way so as to be able to reach party members from most places in the room. They are unlikely to move unless they have to. The ceiling ropers remain on the ceiling!

For added challenge, you can have the ropers use one of their tendrils attacks to instead toss grappled players into the fissures with the fungi. Use the following rules:

- Tossing a creature that is small or a Dwarf automatically succeeds in accurately hitting one of the fissures.
- Tossing a medium creature succeeds in the throwing but has a 50% chance of missing the fissure.
- Tossing a creature that is large or has the Powerful Build trait automatically fails and the creature is released safely 10ft from where it was grappled.

Tossed creatures must succeed on a DC15 Dexterity saving throw to avoid taking 2d4 bludgeoning damage. Creatures successfully tossed into a fissure must ALSO succeed on a DC15 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1 minute.

DM Tips:

- Tracking the attacks of each of the ropers' four tendrils and who they have grappled can get complex. It's beneficial to prepare special materials (tokens/ chart/etc.) for this. A set of such tokens is included in **Appendix D**.
- Wrapping up: Ropers have high AC and take a while to defeat. Don't be afraid to call the encounter to an end once the players have demonstrated their ability to finish it with minimal further resource expenditure.

Once the battle ends, Shintyrr is sincerely apologetic about not having spotted the ropers sooner. He is tired and injured and (unbeknownst to the players) more concerned with his deception than party safety.

Treasure:

The players find several sets of mundane equipment that include hand crossbows, scimitars and 2 vials of poison (PHB).

Development

Examination of the scene and environs reveals the following:

- DC13 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Investigation) – all drow bear longsword wounds as well as bites from Underdark creatures.
- DC13 Wisdom (Medicine) – the drow were clearly killed by the sword wounds and not by any of these creatures. It is pretty clear that the creatures have been eating the dead flesh. A result of 20 or higher reveals that there are also Umber Hulk bites in addition to roper.

The following two special checks may be attempted **ONLY** if characters with appropriate skills or backgrounds are present. They are NOT required to progress in the mission. As the players are given the option of performing these, Shintyrr interferes and tries to get them on their way quicker and away from the bodies by suggesting they move on.

(1) DC17 Intelligence (History) – ONLY a character with the Leadership feat, Soldier background, Assassin class or a similar class or background feature that grants in-depth knowledge of combat tactics may make this special history check. They gain advantage and may add their proficiency bonus to the check even if not proficient.

If successful, the check reveals that these particular drow had assumed a defensive tactical position, implying no small amount of training. Coupled with their equipment (much of which was recovered), this very much looks like a very specialized combat unit. (An Assassin or Spy doing the check would specifically identify it as a "hit squad", while other characters might not know the exact purpose).

(2) DC20 *Special* (Investigation) – ONLY a character that is proficient with and has actively wielded a one-handed sword (including Rapier) during this adventure may perform this check. They gain advantage and instead of Intelligence (Investigation), they may use their sword attack modifier (ability + proficiency) to add to the roll. A character with the two-weapon fighting style or dual-wielder feat gains advantage on the roll. A character with both automatically succeeds. The check can only be assisted by characters that meet the criteria for making the check. **If the character succeeds**, read the following:

Your superb expertise with the blade allows you to easily identify the wounds as having been made by longswords. Their precision, however, is impressive even by your standards. As you try to visualize the maneuvers and specific strikes that the assailants had to perform in order to inflict wounds in this fashion, you find yourself dumbfounded – it simply should not be possible.

- What is not overtly revealed by the check is that the real reason for the odd placement of the wounds is due to them having been inflicted by multiple swords striking simultaneously from the same source. Do not share this, but allow the players to come up with theories such as magical weapons, weird creatures with blades for arms, etc. They have no way to know for sure at this point!
- If questioned further by the party Shintyrr does his best to maintain the deception. He is adept enough to know that speaking in half-truths is more likely to be accepted than lying. When pressed, he will use (truthful) statements such as “we were ambushed”, “we were seeking a member of another house”, “they attacked with swords”, “I’m certain they serve house Axcelon, one had an insignia”, “I was wounded and out of the fight and took my chance to escape”, “you’re being paid well to deliver me safely, what do these details matter – my men are dead and we must move if we’re to avoid their fate!”

Development

Shintyrr is a good liar and his story is very plausible. Do not feel the need to “feed” the players more than this unless they are overly suspicious. If the party had succeeded on the two optional INVESTIGATION checks AND a subsequent Wisdom (Insight) check of DC20 checks on Shintyrr, he senses this breaking point and moves on to his **backup deception** (see sidebar). If the party does not push him to this, skip the backup deception section and continue to **moving forward**.

Shintyrr’s Backup Deception

This section is only to be used if specific triggers direct you here. Otherwise, skip to **Moving Forward**.

Read or Paraphrase the following:

Shintyrr hesitates momentarily as if coming to a decision. His breathing and demeanor all seem to change in subtle ways and he is somehow less helpless, he seems to not care as

much for his wound and his expression is one of stern determination. “I suppose it’s time I tell you the truth.”

He then reveals the following to the characters:

- His name is indeed Shintyrr and he is a trained assassin of house Vith’tyl.
- A powerful mage of house Axcelon had gone rogue and was attempting a dangerous summoning. The summoning was perilous because it was unlikely that the mage had enough power to control the fiend. The exact nature of the summoning was not known to him, as this was all scryed by his sister Lemethra.
- He led a squad of assassins to track down and kill the rogue mage before the ritual was completed.
- His squad was ambushed by some kind of sword-wielding assassin, the likes of which he’d never seen. She came out of nowhere and moved with supernatural quickness, making it hard to make out her form, he was knocked away early in the fight and all he saw from the distance was a multitude of flashing swords and his men screaming. He knew they were overwhelmed and ran. He is sure that magic was involved as his men were highly trained and would not have succumbed to a simple warrior – no matter her skill.
- If questioned about the nature of the “rogue mage”, he explains that she was a rather unhinged mage of a low house – unable to gain power or even a mentor within the protectorate. She had stolen some scrolls which would allow her a summoning far beyond her binding powers. This was unacceptable for multiple reasons – if she failed in the binding, an out of control fiend would be let loose, free to do unspeakable evils, if she succeeded, she would be in control of a powerful entity and would like use it to try and build an army or leave the Underdark altogether and strike at the surface...

Eventually he cuts off the players questions with a new proposal: *“Yes, I did what I had to do to convince you to escort me. The fact is that you are being paid, so you should not care. Now that you know the truth, nothing has changed, you will still be rewarded. As a matter of fact, I have a better, more lucrative offer for you!*

Should we encounter Axcelia, help me complete my mission and defeat her and any of her minions. If allowed to reach the surface, she would certainly commit acts of unspeakable evil there. Stopping her suits us both! If that is not enough, you can consider your reward doubled if we are to defeat her. What have you to lose? You’ve already come this far and you seem more than capable.”

Moving Forward

The party is expected to choose to continue forward and aid Shintyrr. If they do so, he tells them that it’s unwise to rest in this cavern as it has multiple entry points and the bodies are sure to attract more

predators. He knows that the next major cavern has some high ground and a more easily defensible position where they could take a longer rest. (This is 100% true from his point of view.)

If the party insists on resting in this cavern, prod them along before the rest completes with the sounds of Umber Hulks Approaching from behind, but allow them to spot these from a long distance away and avoid confrontation (if they try to engage, the umber hulks burrow and are lost to sight. Shintyrr would then prod the party again to go forward to the next cavern). A fight with the Umber Hulks would only waste time.

Tricks of the Trade

In the unlikely event that the characters choose to give up the mission and/or head to the surface and are undeterred by the Umber Hulks, you can adjust Part 3A to happen in their current location and go from there.

Part 3A: A View to a Death

Estimated Duration: 30-45 minutes

Story Beat: Before the adventurers can rest, they encounter the summoned fiend, who has her own agenda – one that doesn't include Shintyrr.

Tricks of the Trade

During this part of the adventure, the story has an opportunity to branch off or shift in a variety of different ways. If you have not already done so, it is strongly recommended that you familiarize yourself with all possible outcome options in Parts 3 and 4, so that you are able to react to arising situations appropriately. A reference flowchart is also included as **Appendix C**.

The Cavern of Fallen Spikes

The remainder of the adventure (including part 4) takes place in this massive cavern. It is so big that its end cannot be seen (darkvision limits this also). If you are drawing the cavern's map, only the "front" part of it need be drawn at this point. (Refer to **Map 4** in Appendix).

Shintyrr guides you through several more cavelike passages. Conscious of his injury and potential threats, he keeps to the back of the party, allowing the more capable and better armed of you to lead the way. Eventually, the way opens into a vast cavern, larger than any that you had passed. Reaching as high as 120ft in places, the cavern floor is covered by what appear to be a myriad of fallen stalactites that must have come crashing down from the ceiling quite some time ago.

Some of these had broken while falling, while many of the larger ones instead became embedded in the floor and now form a forest of platforms of different sizes and heights. On top of one such platform in the distance is a series of rocks that have been arranged the shape of a small fence. "Up there," Shintyrr says, pointing at what can barely be called a structure, "we should be able to rest there."

DM Tip: The following confrontation with S'sheneth'rah occurs out in the open, BEFORE the party gets a chance to proceed to the camp.

The chamber is empty of threats and immediate checks confirm this. A magical check made specifically to detect fiends and reaching at least to 350ft away would confirm that there is definitely a strong presence, along with a general sense of there

being more beyond (the Underdark has evil things in it!).

The Sounds of Silence

As the party moves into the cavern, but before they reach the platform, the characters MAY hear a series of quick "swoosh" sounds from somewhere in the distance.

Unbeknownst to the party, these are the sounds of a creature teleporting 120ft at a time toward them. There are a total of 3 identical but progressively closer "swoosh" sounds to be heard: a passive perception of 20 is required to hear them.

A character that hears the approach will not be subject to disadvantage on initiative, should it be required.

Read or use the subsequent "in your own words" sidebar to paraphrase the following:

It all seems to happen in a flash – in a horrific half-moment that is barely long enough for your minds to register it. As some of the party look for the source of the distant "swoosh" sound, an imposing figure materializes directly ahead.

Illuminated by the magical glow of two longswords in her outstretched arms, the stern face and shapely gold-plated chest of a woman reveal themselves from the darkness. Even at this distance, the uncanny greenish glow of her eyes can be seen. Below those demonic eyes, two more arms emerge from where none should be, then two more below those.

The four additional arms all hold longswords as well. With a malicious smile, the creature simultaneously twirls the emerged swords, causing the four of them to light up with the same magical glow as the two in her upper hands. The added light clearly illuminates the coiled tail of green scales that forms the bottom of her body in place of legs. The tail is capped with a golden spike.

It is at this precise moment that Shintyrr peeks out from his position at the back of the party. "Liar!!!" hisses the creature as her entire body spins and she disappears from sight in a cloud of dust and with a – now loud – "swoosh". In the blink of an eye she is beside Shintyrr.

He staggers a step and reaches for his blade, but isn't quick enough. (...continued next page)

The first sword strikes him just below the left knee, cutting through bone with barely a sound. The second sword strikes - almost simultaneously - below his right knee, forever depriving him of any hope of walking. The third sword severs his sword hand – the scimitar in it falling to the ground with his fingers still clutching its handle. The fourth sword deprives him of his other arm, this time at the elbow. The look of shock on his face is replaced by recognition and his initial scream of pain with a gurgling of blood that emerges in cherry-coloured bubbles from his mouth.

The fifth sword skewers him through the left side of his chest, allowing the creature to hold him aloft as her sixth sword quickly lops the head clean off his shoulders. As the head is about to fall off with its now lifeless eyes frozen in shock, it is struck from behind - mid-air - with a puncturing spike that emerges like a third bloody eye from its forehead. The creature holds the head aloft with her tail and turns it to face you.

She shakes her tail playfully and the gruesome whitehaired head briefly looks animated, like that of an old doll only with strands of bloody flesh hanging from its neck instead of sewing threads.

She looks to you and says in heavily hissed common: “Thiss one wass a liar,” and violently flings the head off her tail and across the room where it splatters against a particularly sharp rock, leaving a grey oozing stain before sliding down and out of sight.

She brings the spiked end of her tail to her mouth and relishingly licks the tip with a forked tongue. “You are not like thiss dark one...” she continues “Do you sserve him? Do you wissssh to avengeshhh him?”

This is the marilith S’sheneth’rah.

Making It Your Own

If paraphrasing the above text box, the key points to communicate are:

- A Six-armed, half-snake, half-female fiend (marilith) appears.
- The Marilith recognizes and viciously slays Shintyrr before the party can react.
- She demonstrates incredible speed and skill – striking seven times – and it should be clear to the party that she may be well beyond their ability to defeat.
- After slaying Shintyrr, she speaks to the party in broken common.
- Roleplay and combat strategy for the Marilith can be found hereafter.

If a character does anything other than provide her with a clear and peacefully-intended answer, it is suggested that the rest should proceed in initiative order.

All players have disadvantage on initiative for this encounter, S’sheneth’rah has advantage. After initiative is determined, if S’sheneth’rah is determined to go first, she instead goes second (this is done to allow her to respond to any player speaking.)

Note that this is not meant to be a winnable combat for the party. However, it is fully expected that some violence may occur and the general feeling of dread and imminent defeat will only add to the experience!

S’sheneth’rah – Roleplay and Strategy:

S’sheneth’rah is a Marilith. She was summoned into service by Axcelia, but the binding ritual was interrupted and she managed to get away. She is now in a conflicted “half-bound” state the result of which is similar to having dual personalities.

The bound part of her tells her to serve Axcelia – to destroy Shintyrr and any others of his house. On the other hand, her true self wishes only to break free of the binding. You may want to accent the different sides of her by having her cock her head a certain way or by giving her additional mannerisms such as using her head to unsuccessfully shake-off “that other voice”. She always hisses when she talks.

A Marilith is an evil creature by nature, but also one that is brilliantly intelligent and a master tactician. She is unable to directly attack Axcelia and sees the adventurers as an opportunity to break the bond for good. To this end, her intent is to parlay with the adventurers.

However, she is impatient and fully aware of her power – if the adventurers do anything to provoke her, she will knock out the specific offender (but not kill them) and then attempt to bargain again and so on until someone agrees to help her.

As a master strategist, she knows exactly who is a threat to her and will focus her attacks accordingly. Her goal is not to kill the adventurers but to demonstrate her power and to silence those that are preventing the party from agreeing to aid her.

Fate: S’sheneth’rah is an important NPC throughout all 3 parts of Swords Below the Moonsea. If she is somehow defeated in this adventure, it should be by being forced to retreat and not death.



Adjusting the Encounter

The Marilith is meant to be a no-win scenario for a Tier 2 party, as such, no adjustments need be made to scale her down for weaker parties.

S'sheneth'rah has Legendary Resistance and the maximum possible HP of 270. She is also subject to the Planebound condition that leaves her unaffected by certain spells.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If S'sheneth'rah fails a saving throw, she can choose to succeed instead. (Tactically, she is more likely to use this to resist debilitation spells such as Slow than pure damage spells. She is aware of her Planebound condition and does not use it on Banishment)

Planebound:

Due to the nature of Axcelia's ritual, S'sheneth'rah is forcefully prevented from traveling to another plane. This prevents her from returning to her own plane – both willingly and unwillingly.

If any spell (such as Banishment or Dispel Good & Evil) is cast on S'sheneth'rah that forces her to move planes, the spell automatically fails (slot is used up) and instead has this result (read aloud):

"As your spell takes shape, it does not have its intended effect. Instead, you momentarily see a set of ghostly spectral chains that seem to be binding S'sheneth'rah to this plane. As your spell hits, she is pulled and the chains strain but hold her down. She howls in agony at the stress. You sense that whatever it is that is binding her to this plane is beyond your power to break."

S'sheneth'rah also takes 2d10 points of force damage, but only the first time that this happens.

Potential Outcomes

Successful Parlay

If the party manages to have a civilized conversation with S'sheneth'rah, proceed to the **Revelations from S'Sheneth'rah** section below.

Unsuccessful Parlay:

All out combat (S'sheneth'rah prevails). If the party – despite being given multiple opportunities to parlay – insists on fighting to the death, run the fight until only one party member remains standing and then proceed to **3B: Axcelia Intervenes**.

All out combat (Party Prevails). In the unlikely event of S'sheneth'rah dropping below 50hp, proceed to **3B: Axcelia Intervenes**, as she does.

Unforeseen situations. 3B: Axcelia Intervenes can be timed as you see fit. However, the players should deal with the consequences of their interactions with S'sheneth'rah rather than be given an easy way out.

Character Death. It's intended that a character death to the marilith and the promise of revivification from Axcelia would provide additional motivation to co-operate with the drow mage. However, if a character is subject to an effect external to this adventure that prevents resurrection – such as the death curse from the Tomb of Annihilation – Axcelia should intervene prior to such a death occurring!

Treasure:

Shintyrr's body contains 900g in diamonds (3x300g). These are only recovered in the event of a successful parlay with S'sheneth'rah.

Revelations from S'Sheneth'rah

- She was summoned by a drow named Axcelia.
- Axcelia tried to bind her with a complex ritual of great power, but the ritual was interrupted and the marilith tried to get away, hoping that distance would break the bond. Distance has weakened, but not broken it.
- The ritual did have some effect, though she is unsure of the full extent of it. She knows that she is unable to hurt Axcelia. She also feels very strongly the need to slaughter any drow bearing the mark of House Vith'tyl. She readily and gleefully admits to single-handedly (technically six-handedly) dispatching the entire squad of assassins.
- She can feel the link with Axcelia in her mind, but it is unstable. She knows Axcelia is seeking and will eventually find her, though she believes that Axcelia has been injured and is still some distance away.
- She asks the players to help her and slay Axcelia. If asked about reward, she offers their lives and as well as an opportunity to rest safely while she keeps watch (a long rest). A DC15 Charisma (Persuasion) check convinces her to offer up further reward "if treasure is what motivates you, I will offer you some trinket of value". (She has a gemmed bracelet worth 3000g)
- Should the players seek to find out more about the binding ritual via Arcana, Detect Magic or similar means, they discover that the ritual that had been

used was extremely powerful and beyond their full comprehension or ability to influence/break. A DC17 Intelligence (Arcana) check reveals the details of S'sheneth'rah's "planebound" condition.

- If asked about her plans after she is set free, S'sheneth'rah plays coy. "Maybe, I will return to my own plane. Maybe I will go hunting in the underdark. Maybe I will go play with some more dark oness. Maybe I will come to the ssssurface and vissit you in the night." A Wisdom (Insight) check reveals that all of the above are equally true.
- Assuming the players agree to assist, they are able to take a long rest, which is uneventful except for **ONE** of following OPTIONAL **Interactions with S'sheneth'rah** that may take place.

Interactions with S'sheneth'rah

If the characters successfully parlay with S'sheneth'rah, they can have **ONE** of the following two social interactions with her. These only occur under the specific circumstances listed.

In both circumstances, the character will have a choice to forego their long rest to gain a temporary effect. They must make this choice knowing that they will receive the benefit of a short rest, but not knowing the other benefit(s). **DO NOT SHOW THIS PAGE TO PLAYERS, USE PLAYER HANDOUT 1 INSTEAD.**

Social Interaction A. A Student of Swordplay

A character proficient with and actively using a one-handed sword throughout the adventure may attempt to convince S'sheneth'rah to train them in sword tactics while others rest. This requires a DC13 Charisma (Persuasion) check.

If successful, the character chooses to forego the benefits of a long rest and gains one level of exhaustion (as per regular rules, not in addition to), the character also gains the benefits of a short rest, plus the following temporary effect:

[Revealed to player] **Student of Swordplay** S'sheneth'rah has taught you how to strike more effectively with your sword. When you make a one-handed attack with a sword and that attack does not have advantage, the next one-handed sword attack that you make during the same round has advantage.

This effect is active only in the *Swords Below the Moonsea* set of adventures.

[NOT revealed to player] **Master of Swordplay:** Only a fool would use S'sheneth'rah's own tactics against her. If the Student of Swordplay ability is used against S'sheneth'rah, she uses one of her reactions to counter the attack – the attack against her automatically misses and she makes one melee attack versus the character, this attack automatically hits, crits and does maximum damage. (The player must declare that the source of their advantage is the Student of Swordplay ability for this to trigger.)

DM TIP: Have the player note **ONLY** the Student of Swordplay OR Tail to Tell temporary effect on their character sheet as it will be used again in the subsequent parts of *Swords Below the Moonsea*. Unless it is triggered, do **NOT** reveal the Master of Swordplay or the Crushing Disappointment part of the effect to the player or ask them to note it. Subsequent adventures will make DMs aware of it as needed.

Social Interaction B. A Tail to Tell

If any character demonstrates an unprovoked attraction to S'sheneth'rah, she responds with interest and curiosity (but not emotion). If the character pursues this, a DC13 Charisma (Persuasion) check results in the opportunity spend the evening in S'sheneth'rah's company.

By agreeing, the character will be choosing to forego the benefits of a long rest. As a result of the interaction, the character foregoes the benefits of a long rest and gains one level of exhaustion (as per regular rules, not in addition to), the character also gains the benefits of a short rest, plus the following temporary effect:

[Revealed to Player] **Tail to Tell:** Spending time in the company of a marilith has given you a certain appreciation of her. You gain inspiration. Additionally, whenever you see S'sheneth'rah in person and subsequently finish a short or long rest, you gain Inspiration at the end of that rest. If you already have inspiration, you instead gain inspiration at the end of the first turn after using it (once per rest). **This effect is active only in the *Swords Below the Moonsea* set of adventures.**

[NOT revealed to player] **Crushing Disappointment:** S'sheneth'rah seems to have gained a specific familiarity with your physique. Her tail attacks against you have advantage and the DC to escape her grapple for you is DC25 rather than the regular DC19.

After the characters rest, proceed to **Part 4A**.

Part 3b: Axcelia Intervenes

Story Beat: As per the notes in 3A, run this ONLY if the party completely fails to parlay with S'sheneth'rah and either the marilith or the party are about to lose the fight.

Unbeknownst to the party, Axcelia has caught up and is watching the confrontation from the safety of a Greater Invisibility spell and the advantage of higher ground (as appropriate). She interferes just in the nick of time – either stopping the marilith just as she's about to strike down a player OR by calling for the players to stop. This is a great opportunity for a dramatic moment – play it up in your description!

Roleplaying Axcelia:

Axcelia is far from mad. The most talented magic practitioner of her house, she had constantly been underestimated in her abilities.

While it would be considered madness for others to attempt such as powerful summoning as a Marilith, she had the power it takes. The summoning, however, was done spur-of-the-moment and in desperation after her house was attacked and wiped out. She remains desperate and alone. Her only hope of survival and vengeance is to complete the ritual.

She cares not at all for the surfacers, but – like everyone else – sees them as an opportunity to achieve her goals.

Axcelia is very forward and to the point. She speaks common but hates the sound of it. “this surface tongue is like a screeching fungus to my ears, but I suppose it will have to do.” If anyone speaks Undercommon, she will use that. She will even offer to cast Tongues on a member of the party so as not to be able to speak her own language.

As common for worshippers of Lolth, she has great disdain for males and will typically address females first. “It seems that I have no choice but to trust my safety to these males that accompany you”.

Being a victim of great betrayal and personal loss, Axcelia is the closest thing to being “the good guy” in this story, however, she is still a Lolth-worshipping Drow!

Fate: Axcelia is an important NPC throughout all 3 parts of Swords Beneath the Moonsea. If she is defeated, it should be by being forced to retreat and not death.

If the players were losing the fight. Axcelia offers to call off the Marilith and aid any fallen party members (including revivify!) in exchange for their protection while she completes her binding ritual - this means abandoning their commitment to Shintyrr.

If the players were winning. Axcelia thanks them for distracting the Marilith but asks them firmly to stop attacking now that the fiend is no longer a

threat (the Marilith visibly desists in any aggression towards the party immediately) OR ELSE.

Depending on the players' demeanor, Axcelia threatens to attack them if they do not stop. Axcelia would much rather gain the party's assistance than fight them, but if they are not interested, she will “rain fiery death upon them!”

If the party accepts Axcelia's offer, then the Marilith is subdued and Axcelia spends her time assisting the party – including resurrecting or healing party members. If the party wishes to fight Axcelia, go to **Part 4C**.

Reviving the Party. Should Axcelia need to revive the party, consider that she has the Revivify spell prepared. She knows that clan Vith'tyl deals in diamonds will search Shintyrr's body for them. She will then use those as spell components and keep the rest. She will use her own diamonds if more than 3 people need to be revived.

Learnings from Axcelia

The party learns the following from Axcelia – all of the below points are 100% true and she hides nothing. No checks are required for this information and it should be shared liberally. If you wish to incorporate checks, use low DCs (i.e. 10-12).

- She is part of House Axcelon.
- Her house was attacked unprovoked by an allied house - House Vith'tyl. This was a politically motivated move and while not unusual by Drow standards, it was particularly vicious as the two houses had long been allies, with house Axcelon not being anywhere near a threat to the greater house.
- She narrowly escaped the city and attempted the ritual. She had long been preparing to do something similar, but in desperation, she had channeled all her power into it and the result was “glorious!”
- The Marilith had taken out the first party of assassins, but a bigger party is on her trail – this one with a powerful spellcaster – Shintyrr's sister Lemethra.
- If shown or told about Shintyrr's note to his sister, Axcelia laughs at the party's gullibility. “Duranna – he dares invoke my mother's name when she was long dead by the time this was written. Probably at his very hand. You saw the “tools of peace” that Shintyrr and his assassins had brought to their “negotiation” with me. And this reward he

speaks of for your party? I'm quite sure it would be similarly... peaceful."

- In the close proximity of Axcelia, S'sheneth'rah is fully obedient to her and does not speak or act in any notable way.
- If players are concerned about S'sheneth'rah's freedom, Axcelia's response is: "Freedom? You are fools indeed if you wish to see her unbound. Have you no idea what she is? What she is capable of? She could wipe out a city full of your "men".
- Axcelia's intent is to escape and exact revenge upon the other drow. This option represents the least amount of risk for the party as well as the surface world in general, and should serve as sufficient motivation for them to aid her.

Axcelia insists on resting before attempting to complete the ritual. The Marilith will stand guard and everyone is able to get a long rest. If the party has made a deal with Axcelia, S'Sheneth'rah is unlikely to participate in either of the **Interactions with S'sheneth'rah** detailed in the previous section. However, if you feel that the situation warrants an interaction opportunity, offer it. After the long rest, proceed to **Part 4**.

In the event that the party chooses to attack Axcelia during her intervention, run her encounter as detailed in **Part 4C**.

Part 4: The Pact is Not Enough

Estimated Duration: 60-90 minutes

Story Beat: In this - final – part of the adventure, the adventurers must pick a side in the confrontation between the two drow houses. Their choice determines their adversary.

Tricks of the Trade

The players have sufficient information from previous parts of the adventure to know that they'll be dealing with Drow. If no one in the party speaks Undercommon, give the party a hint to cast Comprehend Languages, Tongues or similar spell prior to this part of the adventure.

Choices and Consequences

The climax of the adventure plays out one of several ways based on the choices made thus far. All events play out in the massive cavern described in **Part 3**. The cavern has a ceiling and sides, but stretches forward a long way. There is more than enough space for some events to happen at a distance from the party. The options are as follows:

Side with S'sheneth'rah without Axcelia intervening. If the adventurers parlayed with the Marilith demon and agreed to confront Axcelia, then proceed to **4a**. This option will feature a final opportunity to pick a side.

Side with Axcelia after her intervention. If Axcelia had to intervene and has convinced the adventurers to aid her, proceed to **4b**.

Attack Axcelia during the intervention. If the adventurers attacked Axcelia and intend to defeat her, proceed to **4c**.

Drow Racial Features

Several encounters in Part 4 of the adventure feature Drow. If Drow racial features are not already part of their stat block, all Drow in this adventure possess the following additional traits:

- **Fey Ancestry.** The drow has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put the drow to sleep.
- **Senses.** Darkvision 120ft
- **Innate Spellcasting.** The drow's spellcasting ability is Charisma (Spell save DC 15 for Axcelia and Lemethra, DC 11 for all others). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:
At will: *dancing lights*
1/day each: *darkness, faerie fire*
- **Sunlight Sensitivity.** While in sunlight, the drow has disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Roleplaying Lemethra Vith'tyl

Shintyrr's sister Lemethra is brash and cruel. Proud of her own divine prowess and worshipping the powers of the Nine Hells, she treats the worshippers of Lolth and other traditional pantheons with scorn and is always eager to show off her superiority.

A former ally of Axcelia, she relishes her own part in the betrayal and slaughter of House Axcelon. Lemethra cares little for the fate of the party, so long as they aid her ends. Upon seeing their prowess in combat if they fight Axcelia, she "lets them go" only to gain the upper hand against them later on (the assassins in the Epilogue are either her doing or that of her house).

Fate: Lemethra's fate is of no consequence.

Part 4a: Picking Sides

Story Beat: The adventurers have agreed to help the Marilith to defeat Axcelia. Their long rest passes without incident and the Marilith alerts them to Axcelia's approach.

"Sshe iss near... I can feel it. Do not underesstimate her. Ss-trike quickly and wisssthout mersscy."

She then teleports away and out of sight (she is actually hiding on one of the outcroppings in the cavern, but is out of the encounter.)

Before the adventurers have too much time to prepare, they are witness to Axcelia's arrival, but it is not quite what they had in mind! Axcelia's pursuers have tracked her down and are hot on her trail. She arrives while being stalked by a drow war party! The adventurers should have a good vantage point from their camp to witness this, but there isn't a lot of time to prepare any kind of ambush or switch spots.

Roleplaying Axcelia

For info on Axcelia, refer to sidebar with this title in part 3b.

Read or use the subsequent **Making it your own** sidebar to paraphrase the following:

The sound of distant voices in the darkness is drowned out by a massive explosion far off in the massive cavern!

A circle of fire briefly illuminates the cavern long enough for you to see one of the fallen stalactites tilt and come crashing to the ground where it had struck. A person-sized streak of white light is briefly visible moving away from the edge of where the fireball struck, zig-zagging in your general direction.

The cavern goes dark again and a cackling shout is heard across the cavern in Undercommon "You cannot escape this Axcelia! Your house is gone. Your ritual has failed. Your fiend has abandoned you. End this foolish chase and I will grant you a swift death!" The voice echoes and dissipates in the darkness.

After a few seconds, a second voice – this one somewhat closer to you – shouts a response (also in undercommon). "You are a fool Lemethra! A fool for betraying our alliance and a bigger one for following me. You will pay in blood for the senseless slaughter of my house. This place will be your tomb!"

This time you see the fireball launched and make a fiery arc toward the source of the second voice. As it approaches and illuminates its destination, you see a drow with long white hair and glinting armor stand facing the ball of fire. She makes a quick gesture with her fingers and blinks out of existence just as the fireball strikes and splashes the cavern with red light once again.

In another flash, she appears on top of a fallen stalactite not far from you. She braces herself behind a rock that conceals her from the pursuers and looks at you with equal parts surprise and apprehension. She speaks in accented common: "You have picked a strange place for your vacation, surfacers. It is not safe for you here. I suggest you flee if you wish to survive their assault! They will not leave anyone alive."

Meanwhile, in the distance you see large horned fiends, wreathed in flames and stalking toward your position. Their infernal flames illuminate numerous humanoid forms accompanying them. This is a Drow war party.

Making It Your Own

If paraphrasing, the key points to communicate are:

- A figure (actually Axcelia) appears in the distance and is traveling by some magical but ground-based means toward the party.
- Fireballs are landing in her wake as she is pursued by a Drow hunting party.
- Shouting (in Undercommon) between Axcelia and Lemethra identifies the two women.
- The shouting also hints at the fact that house Axcelon was wiped out by house Vith'Tyl and Lemethra is here to finish the job.
- Axcelia makes her way to the players and suggests they leave in order to protect themselves (from Lemethra).

Layout: Axcelia's teleport takes her to a fallen stalactite approx. 70ft away from the party. It's close enough to have a shouting conversation, but out of range of certain spells. At the time of Axcelia's teleport, the Drow War party is approx. 200-300ft away. Unless the War Party is attacked, they proceed slowly and methodically forward – they have the numbers advantage and magic.

If the party attacks Axcelia, the Drow War party stops 200ft away and Lemethra calls out to the party:

A stern female voice calls out to you from the main drow force: "Ah, unexpected allies! Know that House Vith'tyl approves of you slaying this fugitive. Kill her and you may leave with your lives."

The lone drow gives you a last look as she prepares to defend herself: “She lies. They can leave no witnesses to this atrocity,” she says, “do you truly wish to be her pawns?”

This is the party’s final chance to take Axcelia’s side, If the party attacks Axcelia, proceed to **4c**.

If the party talks with Axcelia, refer to the section **Learnings from Axcelia** in part **3b**. In addition to these, Axcelia points out that S’sheneth’Rah is hiding in the chamber, allowing for the completion of the ritual.

Axcelia implores the characters to aid her. She stresses that the characters would have no chance against the house Vith’tyl force otherwise. The marilith however, could take on the Horned Devils and make it a winnable fight.

Things are happening quickly, so there is no time for a lengthy negotiation. If the characters try to stall by calling back down to Lemethra, her response is that their only choices are to kill Axcelia or die with her.

This is the party’s final chance to take the House Vith’tyl side, if instead they agree to aid Axcelia, proceed to **4b**, if they choose to fight Axcelia, proceed to **4c**.

It should be very clear to the party that trying to take on BOTH sides is suicide. If they persist, allow one or both of Lemethra’s Horned Devils to engage the party and Axcelia to make another offer of assistance once this happens.

- Axcelia apparently has some control over the Marilith, so assisting her does not necessarily mean fighting the marilith (this is uncertain).
- Axcelia is obviously a very powerful mage.
- House Vith’tyl has several large fiends (Horned Devils) on their side.

Helping the Party Decide

Choices can be hard to make for parties. To help them, you may need to summarize the situation. Here are the key points (adjust as required if the party has not learned some of these):

The significant forces of house Vith’Tyl seem to be hunting this lone drow Axcelia – they are clearly the aggressors. They are led by Lemethra Vith’Tyl (Shintyrr’s sister).

- House Vith’tyl has promised to let you live if you kill Axcelia.
- Axcelia has told you that they are lying and would not let you go. She has been honest in all she has said.
- A noble of house Vith’tyl – Shintyrr – died under your protection.
- Shintyrr had lied and tried to mislead you.
- The marilith S’sheneth’Rah has also asked you to defeat Axcelia, thereby freeing her – but has now disappeared.

Part 4b: The Ritual

Story Beat: In this version of events, the adventurers take Axcelia's side and protect her from Lemethra's forces while she tries to complete the binding ritual.

There are two versions of the introduction text, use the appropriate one depending on how you arrived at this point. When the players make their choice to take Axcelia's side, she gives them her *potion of speed*.

If coming from *Axcelia Intervenes in Part 3b*, the drow forces arrive shortly after and begin 200ft away (keep in mind the darkvision limitations here):

In the distance you see large fiends, wreathed in flames and stalking toward your position. Their infernal flames illuminate numerous humanoid forms accompanying them. Ahead of them, a cackling shout is heard across the cavern in Undercommon "You cannot escape this Axcelia! Your house is gone. Your ritual has failed. Your fiend has abandoned you. End this foolish chase and I will grant you a swift death!"

Axcelia responds with "You are a fool Lemethra! A fool for betraying our alliance and a bigger one for following me. You will pay in blood for the slaughter of my family. This place will be your tomb!"

She turns to you and says with some concern: "those are Horned Devils - fierce and deadly. You would be wise to steer clear of them. S'sheneth'Rah will keep them occupied as I work on completing the ritual. Focus on the drow, be wary of Lemethra – her magic is almost on par with mine and I will be unable to assist you. Go and may the Mother of Dark guide your efforts."

With that said, Axcelia teleports to a nearby pillar that grants her some cover and begins chanting words in a language that you do not recognize. The sound of it makes your skin crawl.

With a telltale "whoosh" you also hear S'sheneth'rah teleport away and appear partway to the drow position. The horned devils recognize their sworn enemy, let out a blood-curdling roar and take off madly in her direction!"

If coming from *Part 4a*, use the following text instead:

Axcelia looks up and into the darkness and makes a quick gesture with her fingers. Almost instantaneously you hear the familiar "swoosh" sound and S'sheneth'rah appears near you. The fiend smiles mischievously.

Axcelia turns to you and says with some concern: "those are Horned Devils. Fierce and deadly. You would be wise steer clear of them. S'sheneth'rah will keep them occupied as I work on completing the ritual. Focus on the drow and be wary of Lemethra – her magic is almost on par with mine and I will be unable to assist you. Go and may the Mother of Dark guide your hand.

With that said, Axcelia takes cover behind a rock on a nearby pillar that grants her some cover and begins chanting words in a language that you do not recognize. The sound of it makes your skin crawl. With the familiar "swoosh" you also see S'sheneth'rah teleport away and appear partway to the Drow position. The horned devils recognize their sworn enemy, let out a blood-curdling roar and take off madly in her direction!"

The fight is now on. For all intents and purposes, the Marilith and the Horned Devils are out of the fight. Describe this to the players as them having teleported away (she teleports, they fly after her etc.!) Feel free to provide periodic updates on their battle to the players if you wish, but do not commit to either side having an advantage.

Axcelia is also out of the fight – she is consumed with casting her ritual, takes a while to complete. The ritual's power draws immediate attention from Lemethra, who commands part of her party to "stop her!" At this, a pair of Spined Devils take off for her position. Axcelia has a Guardian of Lolth (Shield Guardian) that she summons and that will protect her from these, but won't leave her side. Axcelia tells the party that her guardian will protect her and the party need take care of the remaining forces. The 2 spined devils will fight the guardian, but are also considered "out of the fight".

Adjusting the Encounter and Tactics

The Drow war party consists of **Lemethra (War Priest)**, a **Drow Mage**, **2 Spined Devils** and **5 Drow thugs**. Lemethra always begins the encounter under the effect of the *death ward* spell.

Instead of regular War Priest spells, Lemethra's spell list is as follows:

- Cantrips (at will): *toll the dead (XGE)*, *mending*, *sacred flame*, *spare the dying*

- 1st level (4 slots): *inflict wounds, guiding bolt, healing word, shield of faith*
- 2nd level (3 slots): *lesser restoration, magic weapon, hold person, silence, spiritual weapon*
- 3rd level (3 slots): *beacon of hope, crusader's mantle, dispel magic, revivify, spirit guardians, bestow curse*
- 4th level (3 slots): *banishment, freedom of movement, death ward, stonewall*
- 5th level (1 slot): *flame strike, insect plague, hold monster*

Adjusting the Encounter

- Weak or Very Weak party: Remove all **spined devils** and **thugs**, add 5 **Drow**.
- Strong Party: one **Horned Devil** joins the combat against the players after any 3 combatants are killed.
- Very Strong Party: one **Horned Devil** fights the party from the start.

Tactics: Lemethra is overconfident and brash, thinking that she can swipe these interlopers aside with ease. She has her Mage cast *cloudkill* on the Party's position and then sends forward her flying forces. Her Drow take up cover positions where possible and take advantage of their range and dark vision. Once any melee combatants approach, she engages them straight on and with no mercy. She attempts to use *banishment* or one of her AoEs on opponents as they approach, but once they close, she upcasts *inflict wounds* and use her Guided Strike to make it hit even the heaviest-armored enemies (When in melee combat, her Drow minions use an action to assist her in hitting heavily armored opponents).

Her forces are experienced enough to be somewhat spread out and to utilize their heavy crossbows from distance, Spined Devils can provide crossbowmen with pack tactics bonuses. All enemies take advantage of darkness/sight limitations.

When Lemethra is slain or knocked out, her Horned Devils lose some of their motivation, allowing the Marilith to slay them with ease (play this up as another cinematic moment!)

Lemethra's Defeat

If the players knock out Lemethra, her Deathward triggers, but she should be considered defeated and knocked out – be sure to give players appropriate credit for her defeat here and play up their victory (despite the fact that Axcelia eventually gets the actual killing blow). Eventually she regains consciousness and begs for her life, threatening that her house will wipe out entire bloodlines, cities, etc. She is full of vitriol. (If the characters' victory is still in question at this point, you can delay her regaining consciousness until a later moment and use the death scene below to make her forces flee in fear.)

When the time comes, Read or use the subsequent **Making it your own** sidebar to paraphrase the following:

As the Lemethra crawls, curses and spits blood, a familiar "swoosh" sound brings both S'sheneth'rah and Axcelia to her side. "You've done it! You've struck her down!" Axcelia gleefully exclaims. "How does it feel to be alone Lemethra? To be crawling? Did you think your ward would save you?" As Axcelia moves to Lemethra, the marilith smiles and interposes herself between the fallen priestess and the party, shaking her finger with a playful "nuh-uh".

Free to exact her revenge, Axcelia walks up to Lemethra and gives her a swift kick to the face. She then kneels beside her and in a shocking sight plunges her hand into the fallen woman's mouth to grab her by the tongue.

"Thirty-seven souls of my house have gone to meet Lolth prematurely at your hand. Thirty-seven souls that were loyal to our alliance. Thirty-seven souls betrayed by the foul twists of this tongue." Axcelia straddles Lemethra's twitching body and raises her hands and eyes in what you begin to recognize is a sort of prayer. "Dark Mother, who has received thirty-seven souls of my kin to serve you on the other side, grant them a final vengeance in your name!"

As she says this, she draws a black dagger from her side and raises it in her hand above Lemethra's open mouth. But instead of striking down, thirty-seven black spiders begin to emerge one by one from the tip of the dagger and into Lemethra's mouth until she falls silent.

Axcelia stands up and watches. Lemethra's thrashing intensifies until her entire body is convulsing at once. Her eyes turn black and begin to seep dark liquid as the slick black bodies of spiders emerge from them, then from her ears, then her nose and her stomach.

Finally the thrashing stops, Lemethra's lifeless body becomes still and the spiders all scurry away.

Making It Your Own

If paraphrasing, the key points to communicate are:

- As Lemethra lies dying, Axcelia moves to deliver the deathblow.
- The Marilith teleports down to discourage the players from interfering with her mistress.
- Axcelia utters a prayer to Lolth and brutally kills Lemethra.
- Axcelia then thanks the party for their assistance and gives them her helmet as reward.

If Lemethra's forces are not fully defeated by this point, add:

At the sight of their leader's gruesome death, her remaining forces disengage and flee into the darkness. You have won the day!

Axcelia turns to you and says: "You have held up your end of the bargain and have my gratitude. Your aid here will not be known to her house and you can live without fear of reprisal. It is a doomed house in any case. My ritual is complete, S'Sheneth'rah and I are bound.

Other than that, I am alone. The last pureblood of my line and with nothing but a path of vengeance before me. I have little to reward your loyalty, yet, I wish to do so, as loyalty is hard to come by. Take this – it was the reason I was able to escape and it should see you safely to the surface."

Treasure

Axcelia gives the party her *helm of teleportation*.

The full description can be found in the rewards section.

Tricks of the Trade

Remember that Axcelia is an Archmage, if she feels that the adventurers might interfere with her revenge, she may cast a *wall of force* dome around herself and Lemethra, preventing such interference – the dome might even have been cast before she begins – unbeknownst to the adventurers. She may not want to hurt them, but she doesn't fully trust them either.

Finally, if you feel that it would improve the player experience, provide hints that subsequent adventures may offer opportunities to deal with these characters in a more "permanent" way.

Part 4c: Axcelia's Stand

Story Beat: If Axcelia is cornered and has no choice but to fight the players, the Marilith resists her and does not assist. Instead, Axcelia summons her Guardian of Lolth (Use *Shield Guardian* stat block and Female Drider appearance. Note that Axcelia touches a particular tattoo on her arm to summon it and it is not available as treasure!)

Adjusting the Encounter and Tactics

In addition to the spells noted in her stat block (*mage armor*, *stoneskin*, *mind blank*) Axcelia also begins the fight under the effects of the *haste* and *deathward* spells, the Haste is a result of her drinking a Potion of Speed and does not use up one of her spell slots or concentration. If she was attacked during her intervention, she is under the effect of *greater invisibility* (using her own spell slot and concentration). If her *deathward* triggers, she is considered defeated. She has 120ft Darkvision.

Axcelia's AC with Mage Armor and Haste is 17. Her Guardian can use its reaction to add 2 more AC.

Instead of regular Archmage spells, Axcelia's spell list is as follows:

- Cantrips (at will): *chill touch*, *fire bolt*, *mage hand*, *prestidigitation*, *shocking grasp*
- 1st level (4 slots): *detect magic*, *shield*, *mage armor**, *magic missile*
- 2nd level (3 slots): *detect thoughts*, *mirror image*, *misty step*
- 3rd level (3 slots): *counterspell*, *fly*, *dispel magic*
- 4th level (3 slots): *banishment*, *vitriolic sphere*, *stoneskin**
- 5th level (3 slots): *cone of cold*, *synaptic static*, *cloudkill*
- 6th level (1 slot): *globe of invulnerability*
- 7th level (1 slot): *reverse gravity*
- 8th level (1 slot): *mind blank**
- 9th level (1 slot): *time stop*

Adjusting the Encounter

- Very Weak party: Guardian of Lolth has 75 HP. Axcelia does not start with *haste* and has no 9th level spell slot.
- Weak Party: Guardian of Lolth has 100hp, Axcelia does not have a 9th level spell slot.
- Average Party: Axcelia, Guardian of Lolth, **2 phase spiders**.
- Strong Party: Axcelia, Guardian of Lolth, **4 Phase Spiders**.
- Very Strong Party: Axcelia, Guardian of Lolth, **6 Phase Spiders**.

Tactics: With the marilith not obeying her, Axcelia has no choice but to defeat the adventurers and escape. Axcelia's Guardian has a 4th level *dispel magic* spell stored within it and uses it to dispel any effect that somehow disables Axcelia (it uses her casting ability if needed). The phase spiders appear after Axcelia's first turn and should go on at least two separate initiatives from each other.

Spell use suggestions: If invisible, Axcelia begins by casting *synaptic static* (XGE) on the party. If visible, she casts *time stop*, puts up a *globe of invulnerability* and then casts it. Against weaker parties, she will upcast *vitriolic sphere* (EE/XGE) at 7th level or use Reverse Gravity. These tactics can be altered, but she should generally start off with an area of effect spell aimed at the party's position. She starts out of range of *counterspell*.

Tricks of the Trade

Care should be taken in using Axcelia's full power, especially against weaker parties. Murdering the adventurers is not her goal. If she is winning, she leaves them and escapes.

In the event that Axcelia has a significant upper hand on the party and escapes, the disgusted Lemethra takes the bulk of her forces and follows (ending the party's interaction with them). She leaves behind a pair of drow ordered to finish off the party.

If the party is clearly no match for Axcelia, she may choose to escape earlier, allowing for a more meaningful encounter with (more of) Lemethra's forces instead. Adjust as required.

Axcelia's Defeat

If Axcelia is reduced below 20HP or her Deathward spell triggers, whatever blow reduces her beyond this amount has the following effect:

"The blow(/spell/etc.) catches Axcelia's head and only her helmet prevents it from being fatal. With a scream of pain, the drow mage falls to the ground, her helm cracking and tumbling off her head as she does. A large bloody gash can be seen across her dark face as she lies helpless.

In the distance, a second scream echoes this one. In the distance S'sheneth'rah can be seen recoiling in disbelief as an identical gash appears across her face. "No! Ssshe cannot!" howls the Marilith, then teleports down to Axcelia, drawing her swords as if to protect her.

Unbeknownst to S'sheneth'rah until now, the ritual had bonded her life-force to Axcelia's and she now realizes that she may die if Axcelia is killed. If the players persist, S'sheneth'rah does her best to shield Axcelia from death and on the next turn, teleports them both away.

Before the teleport, regardless of whether she is knocked out or not, Axcelia falls visibly to the ground, drained of strength and bleeding.

S'sheneth'rah takes her body and teleports away. It should be clear to players that they have defeated Axcelia, though whether she is actually dead should be left ambiguous (she's not!).

Lemethra approaches and examines the scene. She picks up Axcelia's broken helm and examines it with a mixture of recognition and disgust.

"Ah, so this is her little trick. Without this, she is as good as dead. And you, surfacers – speak as to why you should not be slain where you stand?"

Tricks of the Trade

Axcelia has a *contingency* spell prepared. In the event that a hostile action is about to be taken against her after her *deathward* has triggered, she uses *dimension door* (pre-cast as part of the *contingency* spell) to teleport as far as possible to safety. This can be as an alternate description of her escape if it works better with the battlefield narrative.

Finally, if you feel that it would improve the player experience, provide hints that subsequent adventures may offer opportunities to deal with these characters in a more "permanent" way.

Conclusion (4C only)

As long as the players make some mention of Shintyrr and fulfilling their mission, Lemethra will consider her continued pursuit of Axcelia to be more important than battling a bunch of insignificant interlopers. She lets the players walk away.

She refuses to honor Shintyrr's promise of reward – laughing at the note (if present). *"Dearest Sister – haha - that man had no more love for me than a fighting cock for its master. Are all surfacers so daft? Here, take this – a broken relic of a broken goddess, perhaps you can sell the metal for a few coins. I believe your mission here is at an end. You are dangerously close to our borders and if you are still here when we return, this will not be taken kindly."* (Lemethra and house Vith'tyl house do not worship Lolth and she fully believes that the magic helm is broken.) With this, she turns away, signals to her war band and they continue away.

Treasure

Lemethra leaves the party with the Axcelia's *helm of teleportation* which appears to be broken.

The full description can be found in the rewards section.

Epilogue (All Paths): Diamonds are for Payment

Estimated Duration: 5min (can be extended to 30min if time allows).

Story Beat: *The epilogue sets up future adventures related to this one and is intended to be somewhat mysterious.*

It is not expected that time will allow for the combat in the epilogue to be played out. However, in the event of there being spare time the encounter details are provided. There is no specific map for this encounter.

Several days after the adventurers return from their adventure in the Underdark and have had a chance to travel to the city, they are ambushed by 3 **assassins**, who are quickly dispatched.

The assassins die rather than say anything to the party. They are all human and natives of Phlan. They were hired inconspicuously and genuinely do not know the individual who paid them. On their bodies, characters find the assassins' advance payment. This payment consists of **two small diamonds worth 50g each**. The diamonds are held in a tiny pouch made of exquisite purple silk.

If you wish to play out the combat, adjust as follows:

Adjusting the Encounter

- Very Weak party: Remove 2 Assassins, add 2 Swashbucklers
- Weak Party: Remove 1 Assassin, add 1 Swashbuckler.
- Strong or Very Strong Party: add 1 Assassin.

Rewards

Make sure players note their rewards on their adventure log sheets. Give your name and DCI number (if applicable) so players can record who ran the session.

Experience (Min/Max XP: 4,500/6000 ea.)

Total up all combat experience earned for defeated foes, and divide by the number of characters present in the combat. For non-combat experience, the rewards are listed per character.

Combat Awards

| Name of Foe | XP Per Foe |
|-------------------------------------|------------|
| Assassin | 3,900 |
| Axcelia Axcelon (Archmage) | 8,400 |
| Drow | 50 |
| Drow Mage | 2,900 |
| Drow Thug | 100 |
| Ettin | 1,100 |
| Guardian of Lolth (Shield Guardian) | 2,900 |
| Horned Devil | 7,200 |
| Lemethra Vith`Tyl (War Priest) | 5,000 |
| Phase Spider | 700 |
| Roper | 1,800 |
| Spined Devil | 450 |
| S`sheneth`rah (Marilith) | 15,000 |
| Three Sisters (Swashbuckler) | 700 (each) |
| Troll | 1,800 |
| Umber Hulk | 1,800 |

XP Notes: The party does not get the XP for the 2 Horned Devils defeated by S`sheneth`Rah, nor for the 2 Spined Devils defeated by Axcelia's Guardian of Lolth. Nor does the party need to share the XP from their kills with those NPCs, unless they end up further assisting. Axcelia and Lemethra are both considered defeated and grant XP, even if the party does not land the killing blow.

Non-Combat Awards

| Task or Accomplishment | XP Per Character |
|---|------------------|
| Negotiating peacefully with the Three Sisters | 500 |
| Negotiating peacefully with the S`sheneth`Rah | 500 |
| Negotiating peacefully with Axcelia | 200 |

Treasure

The characters receive the following treasure, divided up amongst the party. Treasure is divided as evenly as possible. Gold piece values listed for sellable gear are calculated at their selling price, not their purchase price.

Treasure Awards

| Item Name | GP Value |
|-------------------------------|----------|
| Initial Payment from Shintyrr | 100 |
| Troll Hoard | 1000 |
| Shintyrr`s Diamond Stash | 900 |
| S`sheneth`rah`s Bracelet | 3000 |

Consumable magic items should be divided up however the group sees fit. If more than one character is interested in a specific consumable magic item, the DM can determine who gets it randomly should the group be unable to decide.

Permanent magic items are divided according to a system detailed in the *D&D Adventurers League Dungeon Master's Guide*.

Weave (Helm of Teleportation)

Wondrous Item, rare (requires attunement)

This helmet has been crafted out of mithril and fashioned into the shape of a spider. The back plate of the helm is the spider's body and head. When it is held to the back of the wearer's head, eight thin spidery legs extend and wrap around the head and face of the wearer to form the helmet. The feel of the legs over skin is soft and silken – a sensation that is both comfortable and extremely unsettling to the unaccustomed wearer.

A worshipper of Lolth would pause in envy and awe at the sight of such fine workmanship. When the helmet is used, all those being transported hear a whisper spoken in Undercommon. The words say "Across the weave". This item can be found in **Player Handout 2**.

Potion of Speed

Potion, very rare

This item can be found in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.

Story Awards

Players do not earn specific story awards for this adventure, however, for the purpose of referencing their progress in future *Swords Below the Moonsea* adventures, they should note a 3-letter story code on their log sheet for this adventure. This will make it easy for DMs of follow-up adventures to ensure consistency in NPC interactions with the characters. The code should consist of 3 letters assigned as follows:

First Letter – Fate of the Three Sisters:

- A – if the players treated peacefully with 3 sisters
- B – if the players fought, but did not kill the 3 sisters
- C – if the players killed any of the 3 sisters

Second Letter – Final Underdark Confrontation:

- A – if the players sided with Axcelia during the battle in Part 4.
- B – if the players sided with Lemethra (against Axcelia) during the battle in Part 4.
- C – if the players died, quit, or killed all the NPCs.

Third Letter – Interactions with S’sheneth’rah:

Note: this letter may be different for different members of the party.

- A – if the player did not participate in either interaction
- B – if the player gained the “Student of Swordplay” temporary effect.
- C – if the player gained the “Tail to Tell” temporary effect.

Example: if the party treated peacefully with the 3 Sisters, took Axcelia’s side in the confrontation and did not gain any interaction effects, everyone in the party would record their code as “AAA”.

Player Rewards

For completing this adventure, players earn downtime and renown as described in the *D&D Adventurers League Dungeon Master’s Guide (ALDMG)*.

DM Rewards

In exchange for running this adventure, you earn DM Rewards as described in the *D&D Adventurers League Dungeon Master’s Guide (ALDMG)*.

Appendix. Monster/NPC Statistics

Assassin

Medium humanoid (human), Neutral Evil

Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

Armor Class: 15 (studded leather)

Hit Points: 78 (12d8+24)

Speed: 30 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|--------|---------|---------|---------|--------|--------|
| 11 (0) | 16 (+3) | 14 (+2) | 13 (+1) | 11 (0) | 10 (0) |

Passive Perception: 13

Saving Throws: Dex +6, Int +4

Skills: Acrobatics +6, Deception +3, Perception +3, Stealth +9

Damage Resistances: poison

Languages: Thieves' cant plus any two languages

Assassinate. During its first turn, the assassin has advantage on attack rolls against any creature that hasn't taken a turn. Any hit the assassin scores against a surprised creature is a critical hit.

Evasion. If the assassin is subjected to an effect that allows it to make a Dexterity saving throw to take only half damage, the assassin instead takes no damage if it succeeds on the saving throw, and only half damage if it fails.

Sneak Attack (1/Turn). The assassin deals an extra 13 (4d6) damage when it hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 ft. of an ally of the assassin that isn't incapacitated and the assassin doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

Actions

Multiattack. The assassin makes two shortsword attacks.

Shortsword. Melee Weapon Attack: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage, and the target must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw, taking 24 (7d6) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Light Crossbow. Ranged Weapon Attack: +6 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. Hit: 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage, and the target must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw, taking 24 (7d6) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Source: *Monster Manual*

Axcelia Axcelon (Drow Archmage)

Medium humanoid (Elf), Lawful Evil

Challenge 12 (8,400 XP)

Armor Class: 12 (15 with mage armor)

Hit Points: 99 (18d8+18)

Speed: 30 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|--------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 10 (0) | 14 (+2) | 12 (+1) | 20 (+5) | 15 (+2) | 16 (+3) |

Passive Perception: 12

Saving Throws: Int +9, Wis +6

Skills: Arcana +13, History +13

Damage Resistances: damage from spells; non magical bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing (from stonewood)

Senses: darkvision 120 ft.

Languages: Undercommon, Common, Elvish, Abyssal, Infernal, Draconic

Magic Resistance. Axcelia has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Spellcasting. Axcelia is an 18th-level spellcaster.

Her spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 17, +9 to hit with spell attacks). She can cast **disguise self** and **invisibility** at will and has the following wizard spells prepared:

- Cantrips (at will): fire bolt, light, mage hand, prestidigitation, shocking grasp
- 1st level (4 slots): detect magic, identify, mage armor*, magic missile
- 2nd level (3 slots): detect thoughts, mirror image, misty step
- 3rd level (3 slots): counterspell, fly, lightning bolt
- 4th level (3 slots): banishment, fire shield, stonewood*
- 5th level (3 slots): cone of cold, scrying, wall of force
- 6th level (1 slot): globe of invulnerability
- 7th level (1 slot): teleport
- 8th level (1 slot): mind blank*
- 9th level (1 slot): time stop

* The archmage casts these spells on itself before combat

Actions

Dagger. Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. Hit: 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage.

Source: *Monster Manual*

See sidebar on page 30 for adjustments to this creature.

Drow Mage

Medium humanoid (elf), neutral evil

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Armor Class: 12 (15 with mage armor)

Hit Points: 45 (10d8)

Speed: 30 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|--------|---------|--------|---------|---------|---------|
| 9 (-1) | 14 (+2) | 10 (0) | 17 (+3) | 13 (+1) | 12 (+1) |

Passive Perception: 14

Skills: Arcana +6, Deception +5, Perception +4, Stealth +5

Senses: darkvision 120 ft.

Languages: Elvish, Undercommon

Fey Ancestry. The drow has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put the drow to sleep.

Innate Spellcasting. The drow's spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 12). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components: At will: dancing lights
1/day each: darkness, faerie fire, levitate (self only)

Spellcasting. The drow is a 10th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). The drow has the following wizard spells prepared:

- Cantrips (at will): mage hand, minor illusion, poison spray, ray of frost
- 1st level (4 slots): mage armor, magic missile, shield, witch bolt
- 2nd level (3 slots): alter self, misty step, web
- 3rd level (3 slots): fly, lightning bolt
- 4th level (3 slots): Evard's black tentacles, greater invisibility
- 5th level (2 slots): cloudkill

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, the drow has disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Actions

Staff. Melee Weapon Attack: +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 2 (1d6-1) bludgeoning damage, or 3 (1d8-1) bludgeoning damage if used with two hands, plus 3 (1d6) poison damage.

Source: *Monster Manual*

Drow

Medium humanoid (elf), neutral evil

Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Armor Class: 15 (chain shirt)

Hit Points: 13 (3d8)

Speed: 30 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|--------|---------|--------|--------|--------|---------|
| 10 (0) | 14 (+2) | 10 (0) | 11 (0) | 11 (0) | 12 (+1) |

Passive Perception: 12

Skills: Perception +2, Stealth +4

Senses: darkvision 120 ft.

Languages: Elvish, Undercommon

Fey Ancestry. The drow has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put the drow to sleep.

Innate Spellcasting. The drow's spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 11). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: dancing lights

1/day each: darkness, faerie fire

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, the drow has disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Actions

Shortsword. Melee Weapon Attack: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

Hand Crossbow. Ranged Weapon Attack: +4 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one target. Hit: 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1 hour. If the saving throw fails by 5 or more, the target is also unconscious while poisoned in this way. The target wakes up if it takes damage or if another creature takes an action to shake it awake.

Source: *Monster Manual*

Ettin

Large giant, chaotic evil

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Armor Class: 12 (natural armor)

Hit Points: 85 (10d10+30)

Speed: 40 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---------|--------|---------|--------|--------|--------|
| 21 (+5) | 8 (-1) | 17 (+3) | 6 (-2) | 10 (0) | 8 (-1) |

Passive Perception: 14

Skills: Perception +4

Senses: darkvision 60 ft.

Languages: Giant, Orc

Two Heads. The ettin has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks and on saving throws against being blinded, charmed, deafened, frightened, stunned, and knocked unconscious.

Wakeful. When one of the ettin's heads is asleep, its other head is awake.

Actions

Multiattack. The ettin makes two attacks: one with its battleaxe and one with its morningstar.

Battleaxe. Melee Weapon Attack: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 14 (2d8 + 5) slashing damage.

Morningstar. Melee Weapon Attack: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 14 (2d8 + 5) piercing damage.

Source: Monster Manual

Guardian of Lolth (Shield Guardian)

Large construct, unaligned

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Armor Class: 17 (natural armor)

Hit Points: 142 (15d10+60)

Speed: 30 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---------|--------|---------|--------|--------|--------|
| 18 (+4) | 8 (-1) | 18 (+4) | 7 (-2) | 10 (0) | 3 (-4) |

Passive Perception: 10

Damage Immunities: poison

Condition Immunities: charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned

Senses: blindsight 10 ft., darkvision 60 ft.

Languages: understands commands given in any language but can't speak

Bound. The shield guardian is magically bound to an amulet. As long as the guardian and its amulet are on the same plane of existence, the amulet's wearer can telepathically call the guardian to travel to it, and the guardian knows the distance and direction to the amulet. If the guardian is within 60 feet of the amulet's wearer, half of any damage the wearer takes (rounded up) is transferred to the guardian.

Regeneration. The shield guardian regains 10 hit points at the start of its turn if it has at least 1 hit point.

Spell Storing. A spellcaster who wears the shield guardian's amulet can cause the guardian to store one spell of 4th level or lower. To do so, the wearer must cast the spell on the guardian. The spell has no effect but is stored within the guardian. When commanded to do so by the wearer or when a situation arises that was predefined by the spellcaster, the guardian casts the stored spell with any parameters set by the original caster, requiring no components. When the spell is cast or a new spell is stored, any previously stored spell is lost.

Actions

Multiattack. The guardian makes two fist attacks.

Fist. Melee Weapon Attack: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 11 (2d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage.

Reactions

Shield. When a creature makes an attack against the wearer of the guardian's amulet, the guardian grants a +2 bonus to the wearer's AC if the guardian is within 5 feet of the wearer.

Source: Monster Manual

Axcelia's Guardian has *dispel magic* stored, see the encounter's tactics text for usage conditions.

Horned Devil

Large fiend (devil), lawful evil

Challenge 11 (7,200 XP)

Armor Class: 18 (natural armor)

Hit Points: 178 (17d10+85)

Speed: 20 ft., fly 60 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 22 (+6) | 17 (+3) | 21 (+5) | 12 (+1) | 16 (+3) | 17 (+3) |

Passive Perception: 13

Saving Throws: Str +10, Dex +7, Wis +7, Cha +7

Damage Resistances: cold, bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons that aren't silvered

Damage Immunities: fire, poison

Condition Immunities: poisoned

Senses: darkvision 120 ft.

Languages: Infernal, telepathy 120 ft.

Devil's Sight. Magical darkness doesn't impede the devil's darkvision.

Magical Resistance. The devil has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects

Actions

Multiattack. The devil makes three melee attacks: two with its fork and one with its tail. It can use Hurl Flame in place of any melee attack.

Fork. Melee Weapon Attack: +10 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. Hit: 15 (2d8 + 6) piercing damage.

Tail. Melee Weapon Attack: +10 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. Hit: 10 (1d8 + 6) piercing damage. If the target is a creature other than an undead or a construct, it must succeed on a DC 17 Constitution saving throw or lose 10 (3d6) hit points at the start of each of its turns due to an infernal wound. Each time the devil hits the wounded target with this attack, the damage dealt by the wound increases by 10 (3d6). Any creature can take an action to stanch the wound with a successful DC 12 Wisdom (Medicine) check. The wound also closes if the target receives magical healing.

Hurl Flame. Ranged Spell Attack: +7 to hit, range 150 ft., one target. Hit: 14 (4d6) fire damage. If the target is a flammable object that isn't being worn or carried, it also catches fire.

Source: *Monster Manual*

Lemethra Vith'tyl (War Priest)

Medium humanoid (Drow), Chaotic Evil

Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

Armor Class: 18 (plate)

Hit Points: 117 (18d8+36)

Speed: 30 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---------|--------|---------|--------|---------|---------|
| 16 (+3) | 10 (0) | 14 (+2) | 11 (0) | 17 (+3) | 13 (+1) |

Passive Perception: 13

Saving Throws: Con +6, Wis +7

Skills: Intimidation +5, Religion +4

Senses: darkvision 120 ft.

Languages: any two languages

Spellcasting. The priest is a 9th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks). It has the following cleric spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): light, mending, sacred flame, spare the dying

1st level (4 slots): divine favor, guiding bolt, healing word, shield of faith

2nd level (3 slots): lesser restoration, magic weapon, prayer of healing, silence, spiritual weapon

3rd level (3 slots): beacon of hope, crusader's mantle, dispel magic, revivify, spirit guardians, water wall

4th level (3 slots): banishment, freedom of movement, guardian of faith, stonewall

5th level (1 slot): flame strike, mass cure wounds, hold monster

Actions

Multiattack. The priest makes two melee attacks.

Maul. Melee Weapon Attack: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 10 (2d6 +3) bludgeoning damage.

Reactions

Guided Strike (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest). The priest grants a +10 bonus to an attack roll made by itself or another creature within 30 feet of it. The priest can make this choice after the roll is made but before it hits or misses.

Source: *Volo's Guide to Monsters*

See sidebar on pages 27-28 for adjustments to this creature.

Phase Spider

Large monstrosity, unaligned

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Armor Class: 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points: 32 (5d10+5)

Speed: 30 ft., climb 30 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---------|---------|---------|--------|--------|--------|
| 15 (+2) | 15 (+2) | 12 (+1) | 6 (-2) | 10 (0) | 6 (-2) |

Passive Perception: 10

Skills: Stealth +6

Senses: darkvision 60 ft.

Ethereal Jaunt. As a bonus action, the spider can magically shift from the Material Plane to the Ethereal Plane, or vice versa.

Spider Climb. The spider can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

Web Walker. The spider ignores movement restrictions caused by webbing.

Actions

Bite. Melee Weapon Attack: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. Hit: 7 (1d10 + 2) piercing damage, and the target must make a DC 11 Constitution saving throw, taking 18 (4d8) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. If the poison damage reduces the target to 0 hit points, the target is stable but poisoned for 1 hour, even after regaining hit points, and is paralyzed while poisoned in this way.

Source: *Monster Manual*

Roper

Large monstrosity, neutral evil

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Armor Class: 20 (natural armor)

Hit Points: 93 (11d10+33)

Speed: 10 ft., climb 10 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---------|--------|---------|--------|---------|--------|
| 18 (+4) | 8 (-1) | 17 (+3) | 7 (-2) | 16 (+3) | 6 (-2) |

Passive Perception: 16

Skills: Perception +6, Stealth +5

Senses: darkvision 60 ft.

False Appearance. While the roper remains motionless, it is indistinguishable from a normal cave formation, such as a stalagmite.

Grasping Tendrils. The roper can have up to six tendrils at a time. Each tendril can be attacked (AC 20; 10 hit points; immunity to poison and psychic damage). Destroying a tendril deals no damage to the roper, which can extrude a replacement tendril on its next turn. A tendril can also be broken if a creature takes an action and succeeds on a DC 15 Strength check against it.

Spider Climb. The roper can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

Actions

Multiattack. The roper makes four attacks with its tendrils, uses Reel, and makes one attack with its bite.

Bite. Melee Weapon Attack: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 22 (4d8 + 4) piercing damage.

Tendril. Melee Weapon Attack: +7 to hit, reach 50 ft., one creature. Hit: The target is grappled (escape DC 15). Until the grapple ends, the target is restrained and has disadvantage on Strength checks and Strength saving throws, and the roper can't use the same tendril on another target.

Reel. The roper pulls each creature grappled by it up to 25 ft. straight toward it.

Source: *Monster Manual*

S'sheneth'rah (Marilith)

Large fiend (demon), chaotic evil

Challenge 16 (15,000 XP)

Armor Class: 18 (natural armor)

Hit Points: 189 (18d10+90)

Speed: 40 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 18 (+4) | 20 (+5) | 20 (+5) | 18 (+4) | 16 (+3) | 20 (+5) |

Passive Perception: 13

Saving Throws: Str +9, Con +10, Wis +8, Cha +10

Damage Resistances: cold, fire, lightning, bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons

Damage Immunities: poison

Condition Immunities: poisoned

Senses: truesight 120 ft.

Languages: Abyssal, telepathy 120 ft.

Magic Resistance. The marilith has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Magic Weapons. The marilith's weapon attacks are magical.

Reactive. The marilith can take one reaction on every turn in combat.

Actions

Multiattack. The marilith can make seven attacks: six with its longswords and one with its tail.

Longsword. Melee Weapon Attack: +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 13 (2d8 + 4) slashing damage.

Tail. Melee Weapon Attack: +9 to hit, reach 10 ft., one creature. Hit: 15 (2d10 + 4) bludgeoning damage. If the target is Medium or smaller, it is grappled (escape DC 19). Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained, the marilith can automatically hit the target with its tail, and the marilith can't make tail attacks against other targets.

Teleport. The marilith magically teleports, along with any equipment it is wearing or carrying, up to 120 feet to an unoccupied space it can see.

Reactions

Parry. The marilith adds 5 to its AC against one melee attack that would hit it. To do so, the marilith must see the attacker and be wielding a melee weapon.

Source: *Monster Manual*

See sidebar on page 19 for adjustments to this creature.

Spined Devil

Small fiend (devil), lawful evil

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Armor Class: 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points: 22 (5d6+5)

Speed: 20 ft., fly 40 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|--------|---------|---------|--------|---------|--------|
| 10 (0) | 15 (+2) | 12 (+1) | 11 (0) | 14 (+2) | 8 (-1) |

Passive Perception: 12

Damage Resistances: cold, bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons that aren't silvered

Damage Immunities: fire, poison

Condition Immunities: poisoned

Senses: darkvision 120 ft.

Languages: Infernal, telepathy 120 ft.

Devil's Sight. Magical darkness doesn't impede the devil's darkvision.

Flyby. The devil doesn't provoke an opportunity attack when it flies out of an enemy's reach.

Limited Spines. The devil has twelve tail spines. Used spines regrow by the time the devil finishes a long rest.

Magic Resistance. The devil has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Actions

Multiattack. The devil makes two attacks: one with its bite and one with its fork or two with its tail spines.

Bite. Melee Weapon Attack: +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 5 (2d4) slashing damage.

Fork. Melee Weapon Attack: +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 3 (1d6) piercing damage.

Tail Spine. Ranged Weapon Attack: +4 to hit, range 20/80 ft., one target. Hit: 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage plus 3 (1d6) fire damage.

Source: *Monster Manual*

Three Sisters (Swashbuckler)

Medium humanoid (any race), any non-lawful alignment

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Armor Class: 17 (leather armor)

Hit Points: 66 (12d8+12)

Speed: 30 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|--------|---------|
| 12 (+1) | 18 (+4) | 12 (+1) | 14 (+2) | 11 (0) | 15 (+2) |

Passive Perception: 10

Skills: Acrobatics +8, Athletics +5, Persuasion +6

Languages: any one language (usually Common)

Lightfooted. The swashbuckler can take the Dash or Disengage action as a bonus action on each of its turns.

Suave Defense. While the swashbuckler is wearing light or no armor and wielding no shield, its AC includes its Charisma modifier.

Actions

Multiattack. The swashbuckler makes three attacks: one with a dagger and two with its rapier.

Dagger. Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. Hit: 6 (1d4+4) piercing damage.

Rapier. Melee Weapon Attack: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 8 (1d8+4) piercing damage.

Source: Volo's Guide to Monsters

Thug (Drow)

Medium humanoid, any non-good alignment

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Armor Class: 11 (leather armor)

Hit Points: 32 (5d8+10)

Speed: 30 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---------|--------|---------|--------|--------|--------|
| 15 (+2) | 11 (0) | 14 (+2) | 10 (0) | 10 (0) | 11 (0) |

Passive Perception: 10

Skills: Intimidation +2

Senses: darkvision 120 ft.

Languages: Undercommon

Pack Tactics. The thug has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of the thug's allies is within 5 ft. of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

Actions

Multiattack. The thug makes two melee attacks.

Mace. Melee Weapon Attack: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. Hit: 5 (1d6 + 2) bludgeoning damage.

Heavy Crossbow. Ranged Weapon Attack: +2 to hit, range 100/400 ft., one target. Hit: 5 (1d10) piercing damage.

Source: Monster Manual

See sidebar on page 24 for adjustments to this creature.

Troll

Large giant, chaotic evil

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Armor Class: 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points: 84 (8d10+40)

Speed: 30 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---------|---------|---------|--------|--------|--------|
| 18 (+4) | 13 (+1) | 20 (+5) | 7 (-2) | 9 (-1) | 7 (-2) |

Passive Perception: 12

Skills: Perception +2

Senses: darkvision 60 ft.

Languages: Giant

Keen Smell. The troll has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on smell.

Regeneration. The troll regains 10 hit points at the start of its turn. If the troll takes acid or fire damage, this trait doesn't function at the start of the troll's next turn. The troll dies only if it starts its turn with 0 hit points and doesn't regenerate.

Actions

Multiattack. The troll makes three attacks: one with its bite and two with its claws.

Bite. Melee Weapon Attack: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage.

Claw. Melee Weapon Attack: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 11 (2d6 + 4) slashing damage.

Source: Monster Manual

Umber Hulk

Large monstrosity, chaotic evil

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Armor Class: 18 (natural armor)

Hit Points: 93 (11d10+33)

Speed: 30 ft., burrow 20 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---------|---------|---------|--------|--------|--------|
| 20 (+5) | 13 (+1) | 16 (+3) | 9 (-1) | 10 (0) | 10 (0) |

Passive Perception: 10

Senses: darkvision 120 ft., tremorsense 60 ft.

Languages: Umber Hulk

Confusing Gaze. When a creature starts its turn within 30 feet of the umber hulk and is able to see the umber hulk's eyes, the umber hulk can magically force it to make a DC 15 Charisma saving throw, unless the umber hulk is incapacitated.

On a failed saving throw, the creature can't take reactions until the start of its next turn and rolls a d8 to determine what it does during that turn. On a 1 to 4, the creature does nothing. On a 5 or 6, the creature takes no action but uses all its movement to move in a random direction. On a 7 or 8, the creature makes one melee attack against a random creature, or it does nothing if no creature is within reach. Unless surprised, a creature can avert its eyes to avoid the saving throw at the start of its turn. If the creature does so, it can't see the umber hulk until the start of its next turn, when it can avert its eyes again. If the creature looks at the umber hulk in the meantime, it must immediately make the save.

Tunneler. The umber hulk can burrow through solid rock at half its burrowing speed and leaves a 5 foot-wide, 8-foot-high tunnel in its wake.

Actions

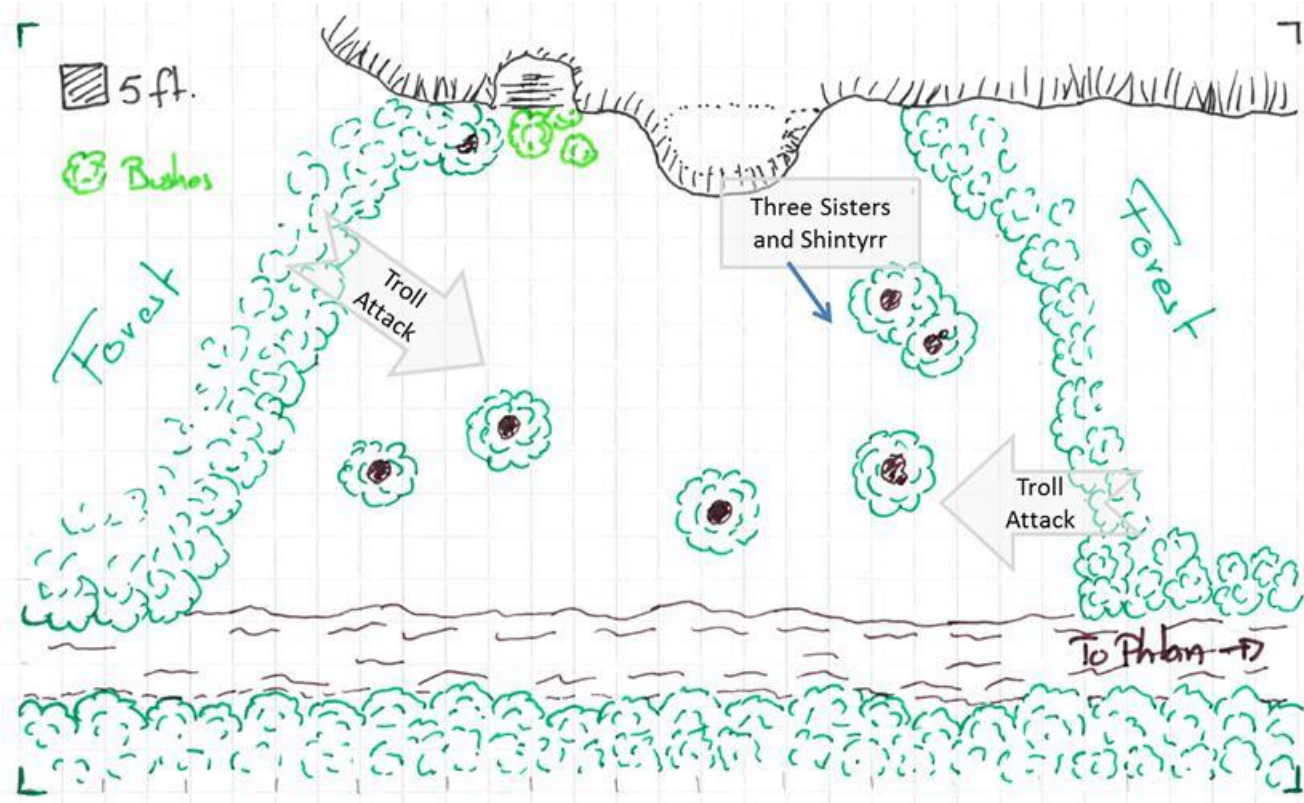
Multiattack. The umber hulk makes three attacks: two with its claws and one with its mandibles.

Claw. Melee Weapon Attack: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 9 (1d8 + 5) slashing damage.

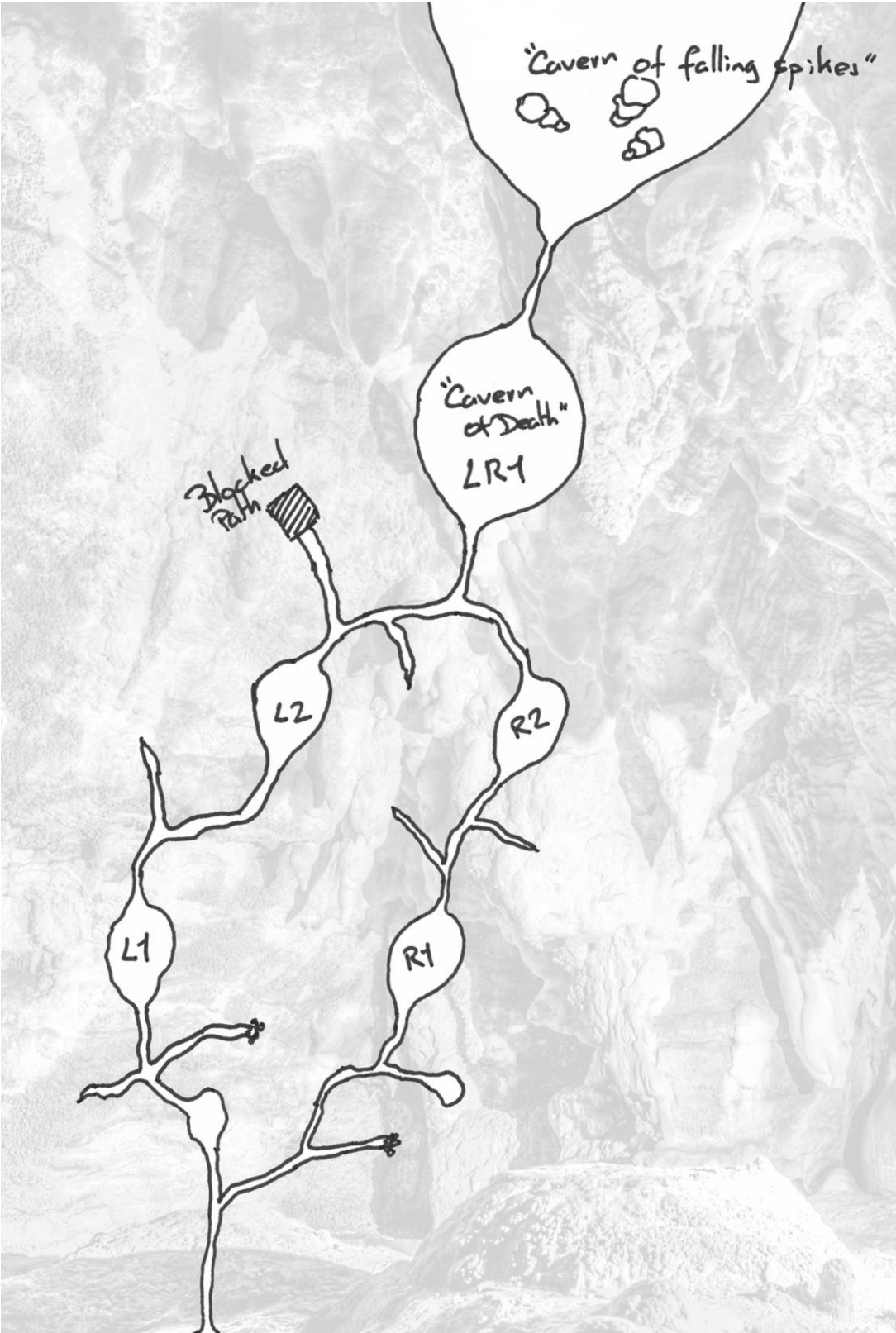
Mandibles. Melee Weapon Attack: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 14 (2d8 + 5) slashing damage.

Source: Monster Manual

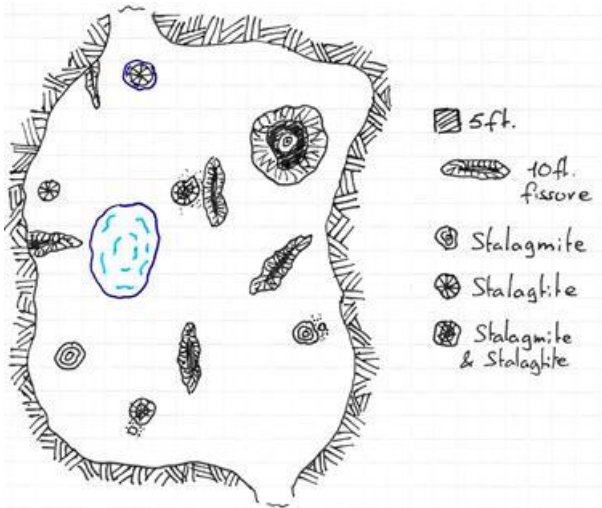
Map 1: Road to Phlan



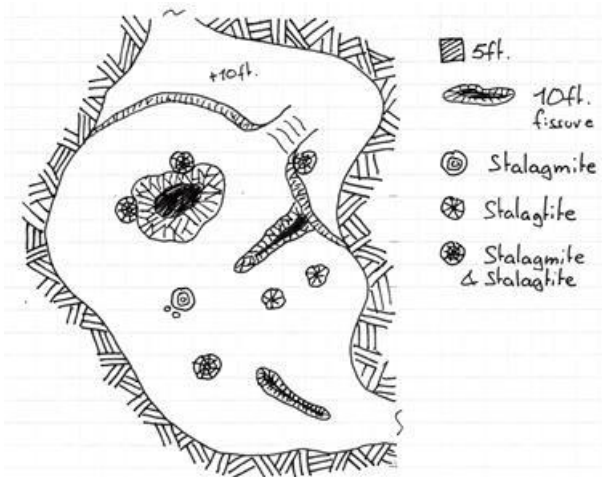
Map 2: Underdark Passages



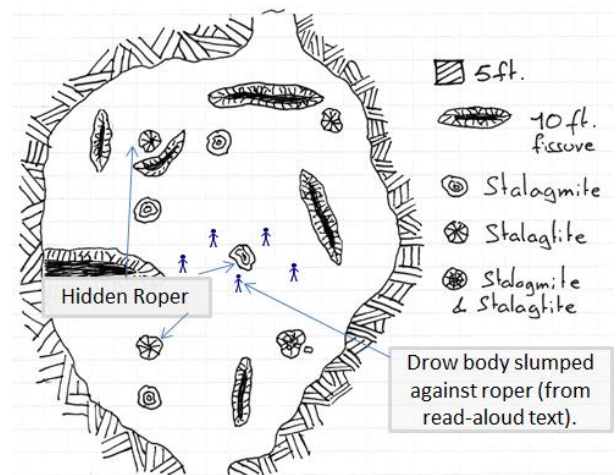
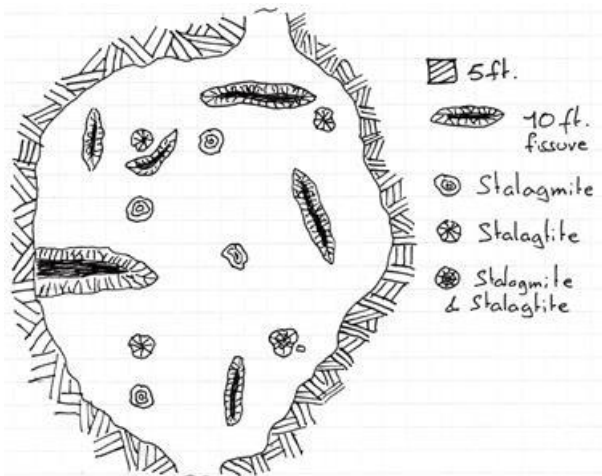
Map 3a: Cavern 1 (L1/R1)



Map 3b: Cavern 2 (L2/R2)

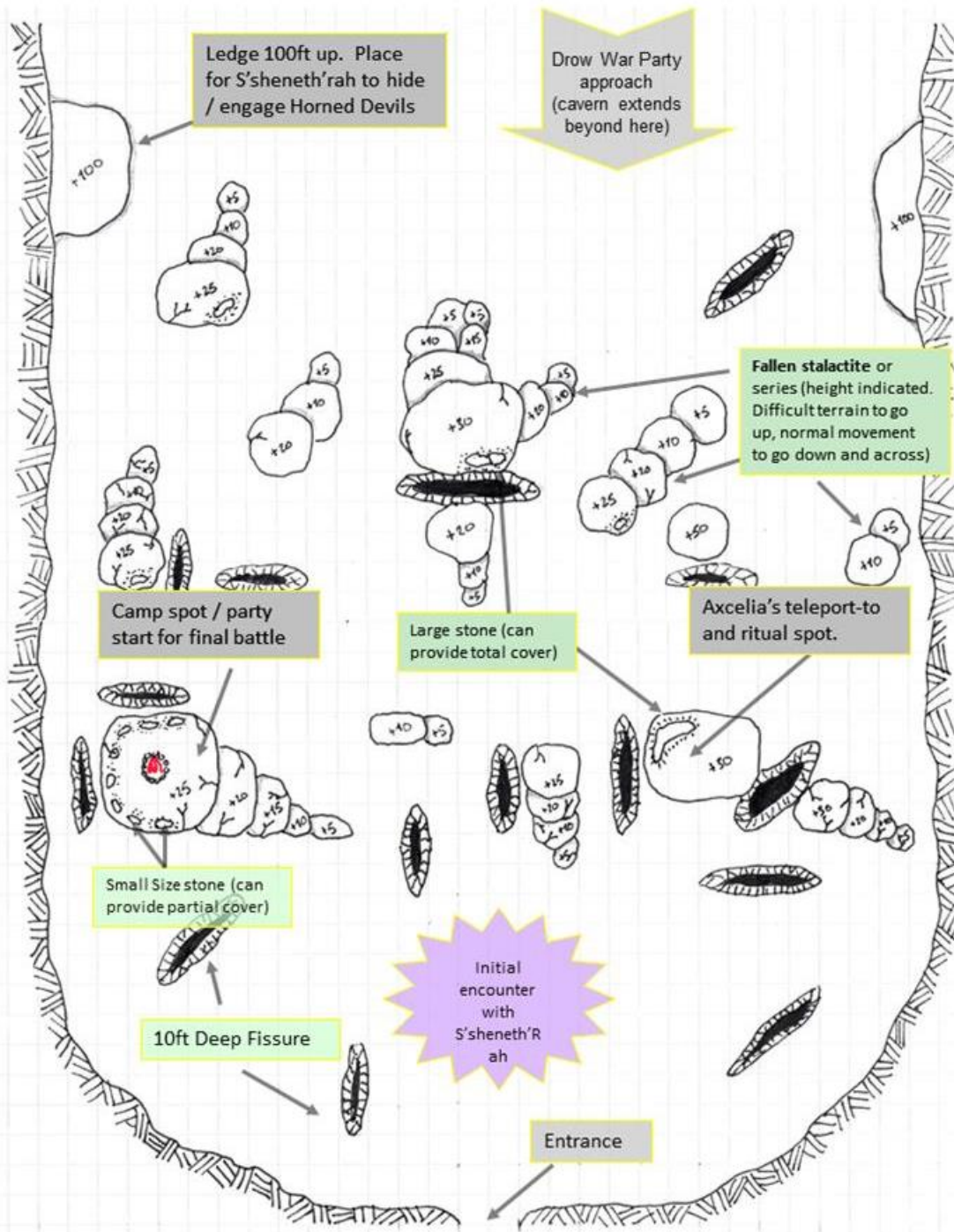


Map 3c: Cavern of Death



Map 4: Cavern of Fallen Spikes

Note: this map can be drawn out in 2 sections (or two grid mats) as detailed on the following page. If you have absolutely no choice but to reduce the map, the suggestion is drop 10 squares from the top and 10 from the bottom.



Appendix A. NPC Tent Cards

Roleplaying the Three Sisters

The bounty hunters are three females of different races – a Tabaxi, a Kenku and a Human. They are nicknamed “The Three Sisters” and their names are Misty, Donna and Bleak respectively. They do not have any mission relating to the draw and have just chanced upon him. They did have time to notice that he is a noble or some kind of important personage and were in the middle of deciding whether to rob him or simply to drag him back to Phlan in the hopes of a reward. They are not particularly attached to the draw, but don’t want to walk away empty-handed. The Three Sisters are old-timers in the bounty hunting business and members of the Zhen-tarim. They conduct themselves with self-assurance and skill. The Tabaxi – Misty – is in charge and does most of the talking for the party. When speaking, they inevitably address each other as “sister”, much to the puzzlement of others. Fate: The ultimate fate (life or death) of the Three Sisters is not important to the main storyline.



Three Sisters

Roleplaying Shintyrr

Shintyrr is above all a skilled operator. His skill with the blade is bested only by his skill at manipulating others. His mind hatches schemes and these schemes in turn hatch more. If one were to unravel his deception, one would only find another layer beyond. He is a smooth and charismatic talker, with a talent for being able to quickly evaluate his mark and alter plans accordingly. He also knows that sprinkling in just the right amount of truth helps sell the biggest lies. His main goal is to secure passage back home, without being killed en route by the friend that has slain his retinue. His secondary goal is complete his mission of tracking and slaying the last member of the house Axcelon. If he can accomplish both – even better. Shintyrr has decided that it is best to keep the adventurers in the dark regarding the true danger of the journey and that the genuine promise of reward should be enough. Even if subjected to a zone of truth or similar measures, he will be able to dance around the questions. If the players have acted with particular heroism during the battle, he will play to their vanity by praising their deeds and skill in saving him – this is done with taste and subtlety, not over-theatrical boasting. Fate: It is important to the storyline that Shintyrr survives until the start of Part 3 of this adventure.



Shintyrr Vith'tyl
(shin-teer veeth-till)

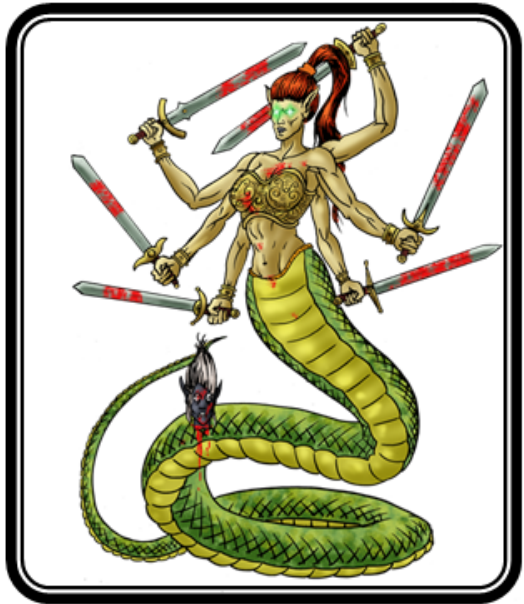
S'sheneth'rah is a Marilith. She was summoned into service by Axcelia, but the binding ritual was interrupted and she managed to get away. She is now in a conflicted "half-bound" state the result of which is similar to having dual personalities. The bound part of her tells her to serve Axcelia—to destroy Shinyrr and any others of his house. On the other hand, her true self wishes only to break free of the binding. You may want to accent the different sides of her by having her cock her head a certain way or by giving her additional mannerisms such as using her head to unsuccessfully shake-off "that other voice". She always hisses when she talks.

A Marilith is an evil creature by nature, but also one that is brilliantly intelligent and a master tactician. She is unable to directly attack Axcelia and sees the adventurers as an opportunity to break the bond for good. To this end, her intent is to parlay with the adventurers.

However, she is impatient and fully aware of her power – if the adventurers do anything to provoke her, she will knock out the specific offender (but not kill them) and then attempt to bargain again and so on until someone agrees to help her. As a master strategist, she knows exactly who is a threat to her and will focus her attacks accordingly. Her goal is not to kill the adventurers but to demonstrate her power and to silence those that are preventing the party from agreeing to aid her.

Fate: S'sheneth'rah is an important NPC throughout all 3 parts of Swords Below the Moonsea. If she is somehow defeated in this adventure, it should be by being forced to retreat and not death.

Roleplaying S'sheneth'rah



S'sheneth'rah
(shae-net-rah)

Axcelia is far from mad. The most talented magic practitioner of her house, she had constantly been underestimated in her abilities.

While it would be considered madness for others to attempt such as powerful summoning as a Marilith, she had the power it takes. The summoning, however, was done spur-of-the-moment and in desperation after her house was attacked and wiped out. She remains desperate and alone. Her only hope of survival and vengeance is to complete the ritual.

She cares not at all for the surfacers, but – like everyone else – sees them as an opportunity to achieve her goals.

Axcelia is very forward and to the point. She speaks common but hates the sound of it. "This surface tongue is like a screeching fungus to my ears, but I suppose it will have to do." If anyone speaks Undercommon, she will use that. She will even offer to cast Tongues on a member of the party so as not to be able to speak her own language.

As common for worshippers of Lolth, she has great disdain for males and will typically address females first. "It seems that I have no choice but to trust my safety to these males that accompany you".

Being a victim of great betrayal and personal loss, Axcelia is the closest thing to being "the good guy" in this story, however, she is still a Lolth-worshipping Dwarf!

Fate: Axcelia is an important NPC throughout all 3 parts of Swords Beneath the Moonsea. If she is defeated, it should be by being forced to retreat and not death.

Roleplaying Axcelia



Axcelia Axcelon
(axe-sell-ya)

Shintyrr's sister Lemethra is brash and cruel. Proud of her own divine prowess and worshipping the powers of the Nine Hells, she treats the worshippers of Lolth and other traditional pantheons with scorn and is always eager to show off her superiority. A former ally of Axcella, she relishes her part in the betrayal and slaughter of the lower house. Lemethra cares little for the fate of the party, so long as they aid her ends. Upon seeing their prowess in combat if they fight Axcella, she "lets them go" only to gain the upper hand against them later on.

Fate: Lemethra's fate is of no

consequence.

Roleplaying Lemethra



Lemethra Vith'tyl
 (le – meth – ra)

Appendix B. Location and NPC Summary

Location and NPC Summary

The following NPCs, locations and entities feature prominently in this adventure.

Axcelia Axcelon (*Axe-sell-ya*). Female drow mage, last surviving member of House Axcelon.

House Axcelon. A lower house of the Zethlentyn Protectorate. Worshippers of Lolth and until recently the purveyors of a large diamond mine, a joint-venture with House Vith'tyl.

House Vith'tyl. The 7th house of the Zethlentyn Protectorate. This house does not worship Lolth. Instead, they draw their power from summoning and/or enslaving devils.

Lemethra Vith'tyl (*Le-meth-ra*). Drow War Priest of House Vith'tyl of the Zethlentyn Protectorate.

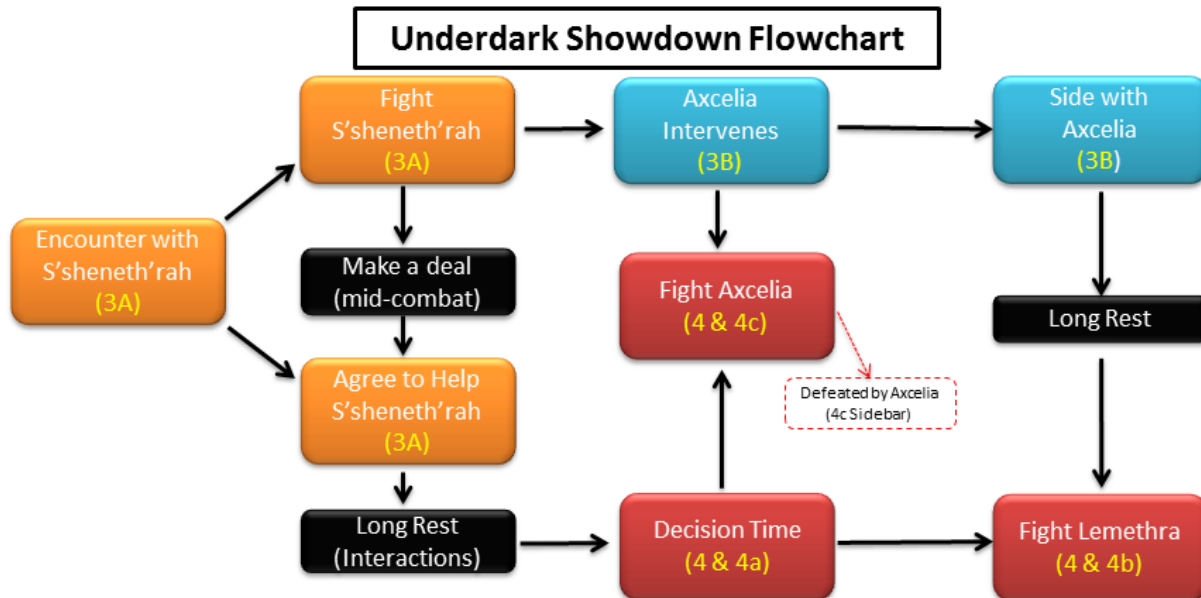
Shintyrr Vith'tyl (*Shin-teer*). Drow Assassin of House Vith'tyl

S'sheneth'rah (*Shae-net-RAH*). A fiend summoned by Axcelia.

Three Sisters. Zhentarim bounty hunters. The three sisters are females of different races: a tabaxi named Misty, a kenku named Donna and a dark-skinned human named Bleak.

Zethlentyn Protectorate. A geopolitical alliance of drow houses. The protectorate is religion-agnostic and allows houses of different faiths to co-operate in trade and mutual protection from external threats.

Appendix C. Flowchart



Helping the Party Decide

Choices can be hard to make for parties. To help them, you may need to summarize the situation. Here are the key points (adjust as required if the party has not learned some of these):

- The significant forces of house Vith'Tyl seem to be hunting this lone draw Axcelia—they are clearly the aggressors. They are led by Lemethra Vith'Tyl (Shintyrr's sister).
- House Vith'tyl has promised to let you live if you kill Axcelia.
- Axcelia has told you that they are lying and would not let you go. She has been honest in all she has said.
- A noble of house Vith'tyl – Shintyrr – died under your protection.
- Shintyrr had lied and tried to mislead you.
- The marilith S'sheneth'Rah has also asked you to defeat Axcelia, thereby freeing her – but has now disappeared.
- Axcelia apparently has some control over the Marilith, so assisting her does not necessarily mean fighting the marilith (this is uncertain).
- Axcelia is obviously a very powerful mage.
- House Vith'tyl has several large fiends (Horned Devils) on their side.

Appendix D. Play Tokens

Tentacle grapple and mushroom poisoning play tokens.



Player Handout 1.

During the course of this adventure, the characters may gain one of the following temporary effects:

Student of Swordplay

S'sheneth'rah has taught you how to strike more effectively with your sword. When you make a one-handed attack with a sword and that attack does not have advantage, the next one-handed sword attack that you make during the same round has advantage. **This effect is active only in the *Swords Below the Moonsea* set of adventures.**

Tail to Tell

Spending time in the company of a marilith has given you a certain appreciation of her. You gain inspiration. Additionally, whenever you see S'sheneth'rah in person and subsequently finish a short or long rest, you gain Inspiration at the end of that rest. If you already have inspiration, you instead gain inspiration at the end of the first turn after using it (once per rest). **This effect is active only in the *Swords Below the Moonsea* set of adventures.**

Player Handout 2. Magic Item

During the course of this adventure, the characters may find the following permanent magic item:

Weave (Helm of Teleportation)

Wondrous Item, rare (Requires Attunement)

The helm called "Weave" once belonged to the drow mage Axcelia Axcelon. It is crafted out of mithral and fashioned into the shape of a spider. When held to the back of the wearer's head, eight thin spidery legs extend and wrap around the head and face of the wearer to form the helmet. The feel of the legs over skin is soft and silken – a sensation that is both comfortable and extremely unsettling to the unaccustomed wearer.

A worshipper of Lolth would pause in envy and awe at the sight of such fine workmanship.

When the helmet is used, all those being transported hear the words "Across the weave" whispered softly in undercommon.

This item can be found in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.

