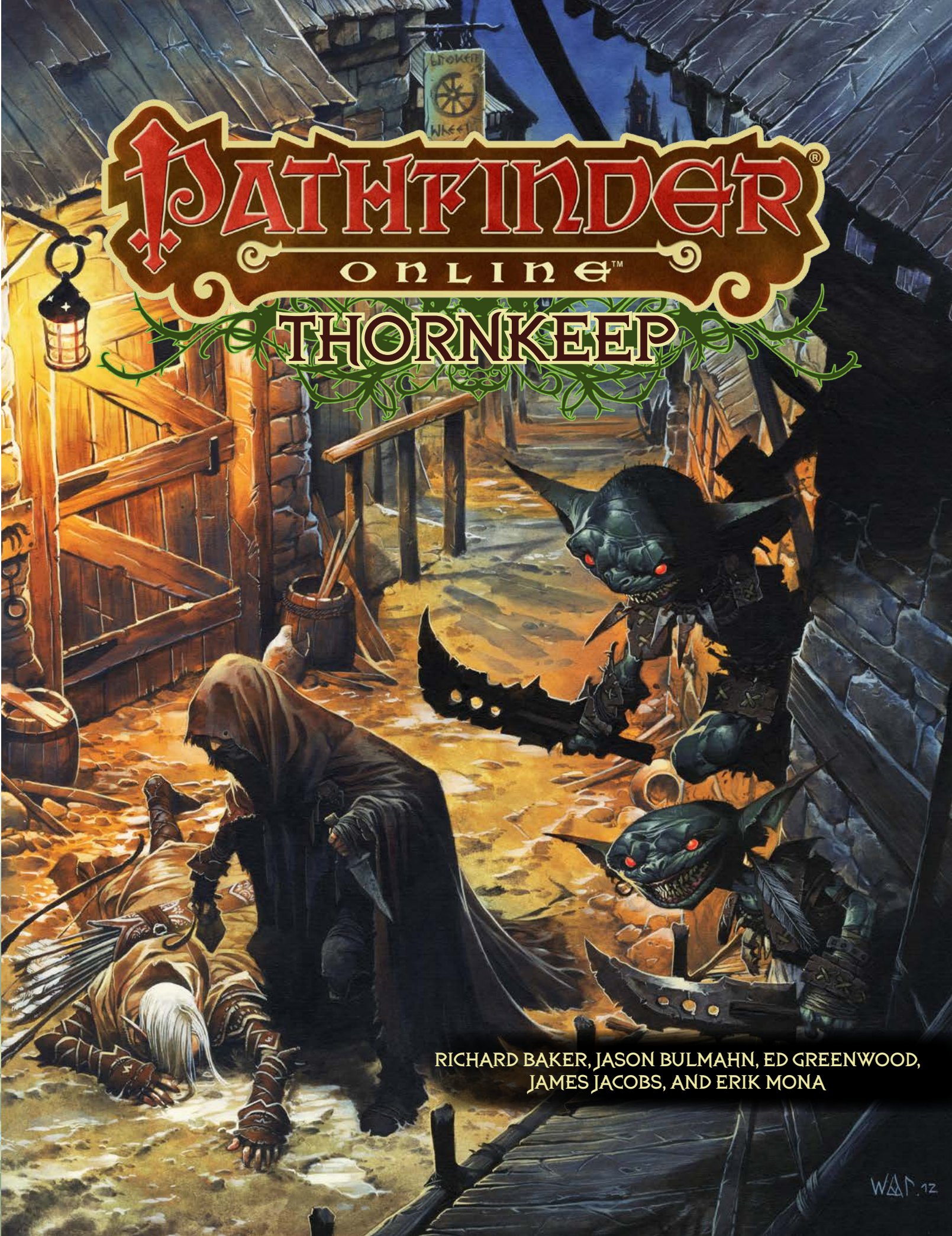




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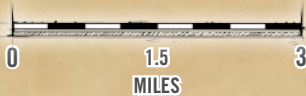
## THORNKEEP



RICHARD BAKER, JASON BULMAHN, ED GREENWOOD,  
JAMES JACOBS, AND ERIK MONA



# THE ECHO WOOD



- SETTLEMENT
- POINT OF INTEREST
- RUINS



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## REFERENCES

This book refers to several other Pathfinder Roleplaying Game products using the following abbreviations, yet these additional supplements are not required to make use of this book. Readers interested in references to Pathfinder RPG hardcovers can find the complete rules of these books available online for free at [paizo.com/prd](http://paizo.com/prd).

<i>Advanced Player's Guide</i>	APG	<i>GameMastery Guide</i>	GMG
<i>Bestiary</i>	B1	<i>The Inner Sea World Guide</i>	ISWG
<i>Bestiary 2</i>	B2	<i>Ultimate Combat</i>	UC
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# INTRODUCTION

**H**i there! Welcome to Thornkeep. You may have received this book as part of a Kickstarter project, or you may have seen it in your favorite hobby store and done a double take at the distinguished list of names on the cover. No matter how you found your way to Thornkeep, welcome—we're glad to have you along for the madness!

In order to understand how Thornkeep came into being, we need to set the wayback machine to January 2011. I was browsing Facebook when I noticed my friend Ryan Dancey had left CCP, where he had been working on a massively multiplayer online RPG (abbreviated to MMORPG or simply MMO) called *EVE Online*. I sent him a message that ended with, "So what are you going to do now?" His response was not what I expected: "Have you ever thought about doing a Pathfinder MMO?"

I actually had thought about what a Pathfinder video game might look like, but I'd always figured that someone like Electronic Arts or BioWare would eventually come along and ask for a license to make such a game. But what Ryan was suggesting was starting a new company to make the Pathfinder MMO ourselves. I was scared and intrigued all at the same time. So I asked Ryan to come up with a plan and pitch it to me.

A month later, Ryan came to Seattle with his plan, and he won me over. The fear subsided and the excitement kicked in—for Ryan wasn't asking for the usual huge bankroll that many MMOs have blown through trying to take a crack at supplanting *World of Warcraft* as the market leader. No, he was

being much craftier. He wanted to put together a tight team to build the Pathfinder MMO for a small, organically growing audience. No need for the enormous marketing budget that would attract millions of customers at launch, or the even bigger development budget used to generate tons of content for all those players to burn through; he was looking to launch for just a few thousand customers. Ryan was also talking about a making a sandbox MMO—a game where the story is controlled by the players and set in a digital world that they can help to build... or seek to destroy. It was a plan that learned from the failures of past MMOs and blazed new trails for the future. It was a plan I could get behind.

But one doesn't decide to do something as epic as an MMO without a lot of planning and a fair bit of money. Over the next several months, Ryan worked on a business plan and a design document for the MMO, now called *Pathfinder Online*. We wrestled back and forth over the numbers—I needed this project to be as lean as possible, and I trimmed out all the fat I could find. In the end, we had a compelling game that would cost little enough that I felt it would be feasible to find funding.

In November 2011, we announced Goblinworks, Inc. and *Pathfinder Online* to the world. We also launched a series of biweekly design blogs on [goblinworks.com](http://goblinworks.com), where we've been sharing our vision for *Pathfinder Online*, and we've been interacting with the growing *Pathfinder Online* community on the [paizo.com](http://paizo.com) messageboards, where customers like you have helped hone our ideas to make them better than they were at the start.

We also began to look for funding. While we had interest from a few small investors, we didn't have anyone who was willing to jump in and fund the whole thing. Large investors wanted to see a prototype—a technology demo. Around this time, a crowdfunding website called Kickstarter was starting to gain attention due to a number of high-profile video game projects raising a lot of money, and we knew that we'd found our answer—we'd ask future *Pathfinder Online* players to help us fund the tech demo.

On Kickstarter, rewards are offered in exchange for funding, so we decided to offer a Pathfinder RPG-compatible book to flesh out the settlement of Thornkeep, one of the three starting cities in *Pathfinder Online*. To craft this city, we tagged Richard Baker, a true RPG legend, and asked him to write a combination sourcebook and adventure. We'd complement that with a behind-the-scenes look at the making of the *Pathfinder Online* technology demo, and that would give us a compelling little reward to offer. Little did we know that our Kickstarter project would explode, causing us to introduce stretch goals that eventually added 32 pages to the book and brought a slew of RPG stars to the project, including Jason Bulmahn, Ed Greenwood, James Jacobs, and Erik Mona. By the time the Kickstarter was done, Thornkeep had gone from a neat little perk to a major RPG event.

As I write this, we are over a month into the process of making the technology demo. I have seen Wayne Reynolds's design for the Pathfinder goblin come to life in the digital realm, and I've seen Seoni, one of our iconic Pathfinder characters, transform into a playable character. And we're just getting started.

*Pathfinder Online* is a collaborative process between Goblinworks, Paizo, and our community. Together, we're going to create a revolutionary MMO experience that will last for years to come; Thornkeep and the tech demo are just the first steps along that path.

Thank you for your history-making support of *Pathfinder Online*. Without you, our "mission possible" would be impossible.



Lisa Stevens  
CEO, Paizo Publishing, LLC  
COO, Goblinworks, Inc.

## WHAT LURKS WITHIN

This book was a particularly interesting challenge to develop. The subterranean ruins beneath Thornkeep were originally intended to be but a single dungeon designed by Richard Baker, but by the end of the Kickstarter campaign that funded this book, we were able to add a whopping four levels designed by four different authors to the keep! We told our authors to go crazy with their levels, and because each contributor has a distinct flair for level design, we ended up with a fantastic variety of plots, puzzles, and encounters. As one reads through the various descriptions and challenges penned by these gaming legends, the stylistic and technical differences should become readily apparent—it was no accident that all five dungeons have vastly different aesthetics, inhabitants, and dangers.

The following is a summary of the various dungeon levels beneath Thornkeep, as well as the recommended starting level and the approximate number of experience points characters should earn if they thoroughly explore the level. These levels are detailed in full beginning on page 30. Further advice for making sure PCs are adequately prepared for Thornkeep's dungeons can be found on page 23.

**The Accursed Halls:** Richard Baker's introduction to the dread layers beneath Thornkeep is suitable for 1st-level characters, and if the PCs complete most of the challenges therein, the party should earn over 9,000 XP.

**The Forgotten Laboratory:** Alchemical experiments go awry in Jason Bulmahn's Forgotten Laboratory, which assumes 2nd- or 3rd-level characters to start with; facing its challenges can earn the PCs 11,000 XP.

**The Enigma Vaults:** James Jacobs's dungeon level features alien technology and otherworldly monsters, making for a challenging foray for 3rd- or 4th-level characters and granting a total of 14,000 XP to the party.

**Sanctum of a Lost Age:** In Erik Mona's stasis-warped Sanctum of a Lost Age, players should expect encounters suitable for 7th-level characters, and the adventuring party can earn as much as 48,000 XP if they survive its dangers.

**The Dark Menagerie:** In this zoo of strange monsters by Ed Greenwood, PCs of 5th level and above will find an array of challenges capable of awarding over 26,000 XP to the party throughout the course of the menagerie.



Baron Terwin Blackshield



## THE FOREST STRONGHOLD

Hidden within the twisting paths of the Echo Wood, the lawless settlement of Thornkeep gives shelter to folk both dangerous and desperate. Here, the hardest settlers and artisans ply their trades, ready to defend their own with blade or arrow; mercenaries and barbarians brawl in dismal taphouses, fueled by turbid moonshine and illicit backwater drugs; brigands and river pirates come to spend their bloody gold in unruly and dingy establishments; and monsters both benign and otherwise hide among the populace, eking out their debauched existences as they seek to inflict cruelties on their neighbors. Mercy, charity, trust—these virtues are in short supply in Thornkeep. This forest stronghold is a place where the bold and enterprising can make a fortune and perhaps even keep it—so long as they are strong enough to protect their wealth from the myriad dangers, both human and otherwise, that plague the town.

**T**hornkeep lies about 10 miles from the broad, sluggish West Sellen River and the ruins of the once-prosperous town of Mosswater. The settlement is a disorderly, ramshackle affair that huddles on a low hill beneath the bramble-covered walls of its namesake castle. The presence of the castle provides the people of Thornkeep with just enough protection to deter the pirates and brigands of the nearby River Kingdoms, while offering Thornkeep's own bandits and thieves a safe base from which they can prey on traffic along the West Sellen or the Crusader Road.

The current lord of Thornkeep is Baron Tervin Blackshield, who seized his lofty position by murdering his predecessor 2 years ago. Such has been the way of things in the forest town for 80 years or more: whoever is strong enough to depose the lord of the castle and make it his own claims the title of baron, and rules until the next would-be lord wrenches power from his grasp. The Druscors, the original noble family of Thornkeep, are long forgotten, having been replaced by a bloody succession of robber knights, bandit queens, mercenary lords, and the occasional bored adventurer. Baron Tervin rarely shows himself, and attends to the town's affairs only when his own coin purse or the security of his reign are at stake. Most say Tervin's reclusive nature is a byproduct of his justifiable paranoia, though some speculate that the baron hides a much darker secret.

Given the baron's lack of interest, the people who actually keep order in Thornkeep are a fractious collection of mercenary leaders and guild masters known as the Blades of Thornkeep. Numerous factions make Thornkeep their home—the Blades are simply the leaders of the biggest gangs or armed juntos. None of these freebooters are quite strong enough to overthrow Baron Tervin and his soldiers alone, but each is unwilling to support another Blade as ruler. Baron Tervin would like nothing more than to crush each of the Blades in turn and thus protect himself against his likely successor, but he rightfully worries that the effort of suppressing even just one of the gangs might leave him vulnerable to the attacks of another.

The membership of Thornkeep's Blades changes frequently. When a faction grows strong enough that other groups residing in Thornkeep have to take it into account, the leader of that faction generally becomes counted as a Blade, and when a faction weakens, that status can be lost. At the moment, the Blades of Thornkeep include Yunar Barask, the guildmaster of the Three Daggers thieves' guild; Ariane Redderfin, captain of the Blue Basilisks—a band of mercenaries; and Iliara Starcloak, the leader of the Goldenfire Order of wizards-for-hire. Chief Darioth Wolfmane, leader of the Kellid barbarians encamped in the Echo Wood, has no interest in the town's politics, but everyone knows that the barbarians would be powerful allies if they decided to take sides. Finally, Graalsk—chieftain of the Brambleclaw goblin tribe—often calls himself a Blade even if no one else does, and boldly claims to be a friend to the people of Thornkeep, even though few trust the goblin any farther than they could throw the little monster.

The citizens of Thornkeep are free to do virtually anything they can get away with. The Baron's soldiers enforce few laws, collecting "taxes" when the mood strikes them and occasionally making an example of an individual who disturbs the baron's relative peace. However, they are quick to respond to open challenges to their liege's position of power, such as bands of self-righteous adventurers who seek to take justice into their own hands. Short of this, the internal politics of Thornkeep largely goes unchecked by the town's "official" watch. Any who defy one of the Blades—or who trouble a person under the protection of a Blade—can expect little help from the Baron's guards if the offended faction retaliates.

In practice, the outlaws of Thornkeep usually exercise restraint and avoid picking fights within the town. Instead, they rob travelers passing through the area or pillage other communities. Nearby realms such as Daggermark, Lambreth, Tymon, and the county of Varno in Ustalav have all been harassed by Thornkeep's brigands over the years, but none has yet found it worthwhile to mount a serious effort to clean out the bandit stronghold.

Thornkeep might seem like a den of evil and villainy at first glance, but one would be shortsighted to accept this as the whole story. The town is also a place of great opportunities, where anyone with sharp wits and talent can flourish. Merchants and artisans who lack the combat prowess to defend their trade can simply buy protection from the thieves' guild, mercenaries, or even a powerful individual no one wants to rile. In fact, the protection racket in Thornkeep isn't as ruinously expensive as it is in other settlements, primarily because there is plenty of competition—if the thieves try to take too big a cut, a merchant might decide to simply hire mercenaries instead. As a result, while there are indeed many bandits and thieves in Thornkeep, there are plenty of more-or-less honest townsfolk too.

## THORNKEEP

CN small town

**Corruption** +2, **Crime** 0, **Economy** +1, **Law** +1, **Lore** +1, **Society** -2

**Qualities** notorious, strategic location

**Danger** +10

### DEMOGRAPHICS

**Government** overlord

**Population** 630 (484 humans, 42 half-elves, 27 halflings, 19 goblins, 12 elves, 11 half-orcs, 8 gnomes, 7 dwarves, 20 other)

### Notable NPCs

**Baron Tervin Blackshield** (CN male human werewolf ranger 8)

**Chieftain Darioth Wolfmane** (CN female human barbarian 7)

**Great Chief Graalsk** (NE male goblin rogue 6)

**Guildmaster Yunar Barask** (NE male human rogue 5)

**Huntmaster Jaervon Mardesal** (CG male half-elf ranger 6)

**Master Arcanist Iliara Starcloak** (NG female elf wizard 7)

**Mercenary Captain Ariane Redderfin** (N female human fighter 7)

### MARKETPLACE

**Base Value** 1,400 gp; **Purchase Limit** 7,500 gp; **Spellcasting** 4th

**Minor Items** 3d4; **Medium Items** 1d6; **Major Items** —

## HISTORY OF THORNKEEP

The village of Thornkeep is only a couple of hundred years old, but the story of this corner of the River Kingdoms began in vastly ancient times. The first people to build on this site were outcasts of the legendary Azlanti people who came to the Echo Wood over 10,000 years ago. An exiled noble and his followers built a secret stronghold here, but they were soon discovered by their enemies in Azlant and swiftly eradicated. All that remains of the settlement is a handful of hidden vaults and ruined towers throughout the western reaches of the Echo Wood, along with a legacy of lingering, mysterious magic.

For many millennia, few wandered the Echo Wood except barbarians and monsters. The next true power to rise in this remote realm was the goblin kingdom of Zog, a coalition led by seven canny barghests that had acquired a sizeable following of goblinoid scavengers and raiders. For over a century, they ravaged the lands around their heavily fortified base, going so far as to destroy the city-state of Alban in modern-day Lambreth. The goblin raiding parties threatened to overwhelm Tymon, Sevenarches, and even eastern Ustalav, but when a plague known as the Yellowtongue Sickness decimated their ranks, their undoing was quick and brutal. In 4217 AR, the half-elven heroine Tarwynna—a bold gladiator from the city of Tymon—organized an expedition against the goblin stronghold, and Zog was crushed.

The region remained depopulated until the year 4415, when the castle of Thornkeep was founded by an Ustalavic lordling named Antun Druscor. A bastard with no hope of inheriting his father's title, Druscor knew that he would have to make his fortune elsewhere if he were going to live the life of ease and decadence he so desired, and so the arrogant noble established his own private holding on the east bank of the Sellen. A great hunter, he was familiar with the Echo Wood and often roamed the forest paths in search of game. However, Druscor had other prey in mind when he established Thornkeep; he knew that a base along the western edge of the Echo Wood would be a perfect hold from which he could exact heavy tribute from passing merchants and travelers. Thus did he establish his crooked domain and himself as its avaricious overlord.

The Druscors of Thornkeep earned quite a reputation as dangerous, grasping robber barons, and troubled the region for generations. Over time, however, the family's fortunes waned, and the Druscors became lazy, sullen drunkards and bullies at best. Almost 90 years ago, Narman Druscor, the eleventh of his line, was deposed by Sir Jaroom Eliron, a rogue knight of the First Mendevian Crusade who saw an opportunity to win himself both a keep and a title with the edge of his sword. Baron Eliron was soon murdered by an ambitious underling, inaugurating the tradition of rule by might and bloody seizures of power that still prevails today.

By the middle of the last century, Thornkeep seemed fated to go the way of so many other tiny, bygone realms in the River Kingdoms and slowly crumble into obscurity. Only a few score

of villagers and foresters remained in the run-down buildings that huddled around the dilapidated castle. Then, a tragic misfortune in a nearby town reversed Thornkeep's long decline. In 4664, the prosperous settlement of Mosswater was attacked by hordes of mutated merrows, and many of its citizens were killed. Unable to repel the creatures stalking the streets, the survivors abandoned their homes. Thornkeep was only a few miles distant, and a number of Mosswater's refugees chose to resettle in the forest town.

Reinvigorated by this influx of new settlers (and the relative wealth they brought with them out of Mosswater), Thornkeep began to grow once again. The booming establishment became semi-famous for its lack of real law or authority, and attracted a large number of outlaws seeking refuge, thieves eager to prey on the weak, Kellid barbarians desiring a place to trade, and bold entrepreneurs hoping to make their fortunes. In the last few decades, brigand companies, thieves' guilds, and lawless freebooters have trickled through the town, entrenching themselves in the city's hierarchy of debased authorities and establishing the corrupt and increasingly complex power structure that stands to this day. Some ruled Thornkeep for years before fading away; others lasted only weeks or months before being shouldered aside by newer, more ruthless gangs.

Today, the largest and strongest of Thornkeep's gangs is the Three Daggers thieves' guild, established about 10 years ago. But even the Three Daggers have to be careful, since Thornkeep is full of mercenaries and adventurers who might fight back if pushed too hard. Thornkeep's dubious infrastructure sustains an uneasy truce between the town's various gangs and the baron's soldiers, manifesting from the half-hearted labors of hundreds of amoral thugs a precarious sense of harmony—and that's good enough for most citizens.

## INDUSTRY AND ECONOMY

Most of Thornkeep's inhabitants earn their livings from one of two sources: the surrounding Echo Wood and its plethora of natural resources, or the never-ending traffic of caravans, barges, and crusader bands traveling along the West Sellen. Thornkeep is not exactly a major crossroads, but it is a convenient stopping point for traders and travelers heading north and south along the Crusader Road, or east and west from Daggermark to Ustalav. Provisioning travelers is an important business for Thornkeep's honest merchants.

Thornkeep imports flour, salt, beef, leather, cloth, ironwork, and luxury items from nearby towns and tribal holdings. In return, the people of Thornkeep produce timber, furs, woodwork, and simple glassware. Traders carry Thornkeep's raw materials and finished goods to locales in Daggermark, Lambreth, Tymon, and the eastern counties of Ustalav. Those living in the craggy fields of Numeria have a tremendous appetite for Thornkeep's wood and wooden products. Kellid barbarians, feared as raiders in many lands, also come to Thornkeep to trade.



## BRIEF TIMELINE OF THORNKEEP AND NEARBY LANDS

Date (AR)	Event
4071	The goblins of the Kingdom of Zog wipe out the town of Alban in modern Lambreth.
4217	The Yellowtongue Sickness and Tarwynna of Tymon crush Zog.
4402	Rivermark is occupied by exiles from Casmaron and is later refounded as Daggermark.
4415	Antun Druscor founds Thornkeep.
4503	Hedren Druscor fends off dozens of orc marauders attempting to siege Thornkeep.
4620	The Outlaw Council is established in Daggermark, and codifies the six River Freedoms.
4625	Jaroom Eliron seizes Thornkeep from Narman Druscor.
4640	Artoor Geera of Ustalav founds Mosswater.
4659	The avaricious Baroness Trudor Baselkelt incites the rage of the fabled Council of Leaves in the Echo Wood, provoking an assault from eight treants that nearly destroys Thornkeep.
4664	Mosswater is destroyed by monsters; hundreds flee to Thornkeep.
4673	The famed Pathfinder Mamor Pulken travels into the Echo Wood to explore the Azlanti ruins, never to return.
4708	Tervin Blackshield unseats the mage-lord Welmar and becomes Baron of Thornkeep.
4712	The current year.

## FOREST RESOURCES

Thornkeep is naturally well situated to exploit the bounty of the Echo Wood. Woodcutting is the town's primary occupation, and companies of loggers roam deep into the forest in search of the best hardwoods. The town's sawmills turn felled trees into lumber to be sold in Lambreth, Tymon, and Daggermark, as well as closer settlements such as Fort Inevitable and Fort Riverwatch. The Wolfmane barbarians and related tribes in the forest oppose the wholesale clearing of the land, and Thornkeep's woodcutters have learned that it's not a good idea to take too many trees from the same area if these vengeful natives are to be appeased.

Trapping and hunting are also important industries in the Echo Wood. Beaver and sable, commonplace in the forest, provide valuable furs that trappers cure and ship to the larger city-states in the area. Likewise, deer, boar, bear, and duck are plentiful the farther one travels into the woods. Hunting provides a valuable food source for Thornkeep, and has helped the town to get through many a hard winter. Of course, dangerous monsters roam the wilder parts of the Echo Wood, and not all hunters make it home in time for dinner, if at all.

## MANUFACTURING

Woodworking of all kinds is a common trade in Thornkeep. The town's most prominent tradespeople include coopers, wainwrights, bowyers, cabinetmakers, and furniture makers. Many of the goods produced by these trades are exported elsewhere in the River Kingdoms and the eastern counties of Ustalav. The ready supply of firewood is also useful for smelting, smithing, and glassmaking, though few artisans in these industries have established workshops in Thornkeep so far, mostly because of the lawlessness of the area—not many bandits are interested in stealing lumber, barrels, or furniture, but higher-value metal and glass goods are a different story. Regardless of the inherent dangers in town, the opportunity to thrive in industry is clearly present in Thornkeep.

## AGRICULTURE AND LIVESTOCK

Thornkeep has little cleared land, and its people barely raise enough food to support themselves. The land isn't suitable for extensive fields of grain or corn, but many townsfolk maintain good-sized vegetable gardens where they grow potatoes, squash, carrots, and various greens. The only commercial agriculture consists of several large apple orchards on the outskirts of town. Consequently, foodstuffs such as flour and cornmeal are major imports.

The landscape is better suited for raising livestock than staple crops. Thornkeep's farmers include pig keepers and goatherds—there isn't enough open pastureland for large herds of cattle or sheep. The town constantly runs short on beef, mutton, leather, and wool, all of which are in high demand.

## BANDITRY

It's hard to dignify the business of robbing travelers and raiding other settlements as an industry, but Thornkeep profits greatly from the activities of its criminals. Most of Thornkeep's merchants don't ask questions about where "foragers of the road" acquire their goods, so they effectively serve as fences by buying up stolen items. Since much of Thornkeep serves as a base for bandits, it's naturally a good place to find men and women ready to stake their lives on their skill with blade or bow. Anyone who needs to hire muscle that won't ask questions can find it here, and this reputation draws no small number of mercenaries in search of work to Thornkeep.

## LAW AND ORDER

Justice and public order in Thornkeep are relative. The Baron's soldiers stop open brawling, arson, robbery, or murder in the streets—if they happen to catch someone in the act, that is. They generally ignore any crime that comes down to one person's word against another's, unless a public outcry erupts or someone makes it worth their while to take an interest.

Once someone has committed a crime, the injured party or anyone sympathetic to the injured party is free to seek any compensation she can—demanding repayment from the offender, administering a punitive beating, or simply driving out or killing the villain (although such brazen vengeance may attract the attention of the Baron’s guards, who tend to frown upon blatant lethal vigilanteism). If the wronged person is powerful enough or has powerful friends, justice can be swift and harsh. If not, the criminal most likely gets away with the crime.

Ordinary people can achieve something close to security by placing themselves under the protection of one of Thornkeep’s stronger factions. For example, many of Thornkeep’s merchants grudgingly pay protection money to the Three Daggers, but in return the Three Daggers severely punish anyone bothering one of their charges. Other townsfolk hire mercenaries such as the Blue Basilisks or the Goldenfire Order, or rely on the friendship of the Wolfmane barbarians to protect them from harm. Buying protection normally costs about 10 to 25 percent of a business’s revenues or an artisan’s sales each month. It’s a good idea to pay on time.

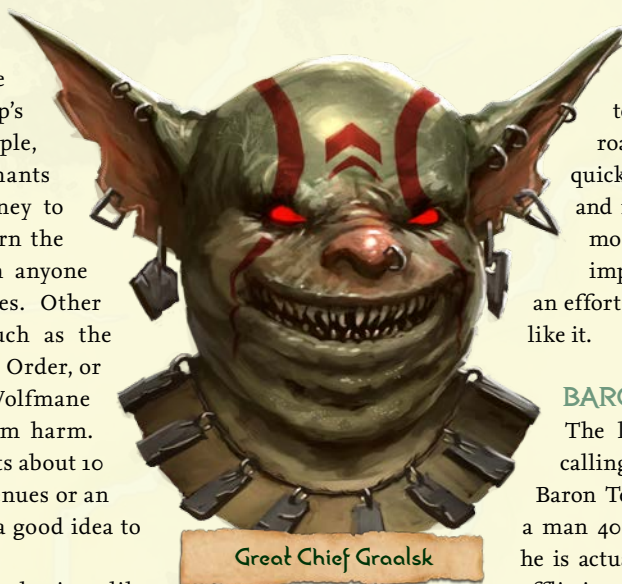
Outside of such more or less businesslike protection arrangements, a rough and bloody sort of street justice is commonplace in Thornkeep. Many of the outlaws and sellswords who call Thornkeep home enjoy having a comfortable and somewhat safe place to live. They often have a hands-off attitude toward the ordinary people who provide them with food, clothing, and shelter, and may suddenly intervene when someone else picks on townsfolk. Strangers bullying the citizens soon learn that even Thornkeep has some rules.

## DEFENSES

Baron Tervin holds Thornkeep with a force of 30 loutish, ill-kempt mercenaries who have a talent for knocking heads. Thornkeep itself is not in good repair, but a castle is still a castle—shut the gates, and it’s hard to get in. There are almost no provisions for defending the town outside the castle walls. The townsfolk have organized a small militia of ordinary citizens to protect the town from external threats, but they are poorly equipped and ill trained. The best hope against a dire threat would be the intervention of the Blue Basilisks or the Goldenfire Order. Though mercenaries are usually not inclined to fight without pay, Ariane Redderfin and Iliara Starcloak would reluctantly do so if the alternative was Thornkeep’s destruction.

## POWERS AND PERSONALITIES

Scores of notorious bandits, outlaws, and barbarians reside in Thornkeep, harrying the nearby villages and preying on unlucky travelers. Likewise, many adventurers make Thornkeep their base for exploring the Azlanti ruins of the Echo Wood or venturing into the barren lands of Numeria. However, only a portion of these outlaws and adventurers are present in or around Thornkeep at any given time, and few of these take more than a passing interest in the forest refuge’s affairs. On any given day, a powerful band of adventurers or a particularly ruthless gang of brigands might actually be the strongest force present in the town—but they are soon on the road again, and affairs in Thornkeep quickly return to normal. The factions and individuals described here are those most likely to be present and, more importantly, the most likely to make an effort to keep the stronghold the way they like it.



Great Chief Graalsk

### BARON TERVIN BLACKSHIELD

The latest in the line of petty despots calling themselves lords of Thornkeep, Baron Tervin is a brooding, sullen brute of a man 40 years of age with a terrible secret: he is actually a werewolf. Tervin conceals his affliction with an avid interest in hunting, frequently spending days at a time in the deep reaches of the Echo Wood. On several occasions Tervin has come across hapless townsfolk out in the forest while in his wolf or hybrid form, and mauled or killed them in his lycanthropic bloodthirst. However, no one has yet connected the baron’s hunting trips with reports of savage beasts stalking the woods.

The keep’s vaults are empty, since Tervin’s predecessors routinely enriched themselves at the town’s expense. Tervin retains a half-dozen servants and cooks, 30 soldiers, three sergeants, a castellan, and a couple of clerks who do their best to collect the rents and royalties owed by the woodcutters and trappers who use the baron’s forest. His wife is **Lady Ivis** (CN female human aristocrat 5), a stern woman descended from minor nobility in Ustalav; together they are raising their two young children. Ivis suspects her husband’s secret, but so far the only members of the household who know the truth about Baron Tervin are his loyal castellan **Cranstin** (N male human fighter 2/expert 4) and his spearbearer **Mathrad** (LN female human cavalier 5)—neither of whom feels any inclination to talk about it.

### BLUE BASILISKS

The Blue Basilisks, a band of swords-for-hire, have their base in Thornkeep. They are not a very large company, numbering

only a dozen veterans. They hire out to protect caravans, escort important travelers, drive off troublesome bands of monsters or outlaws, scout dangerous areas, or occasionally assist in dungeon exploration. The captain of the company is Ariane Redderfin, a bold Chelish swordswoman with proud features and striking scarlet hair. She believes that Thornkeep represents an interesting opportunity—a strong and decisive leader could clean up the place, put an end to the rule of one thug after another, and make herself a landed noble.

### BROTHER ELDRAST

**Eldrast Anvilmor** (N male dwarf cleric of Gorum 7) is the keeper of the Shrine of Battle, the larger of the two temples in Thornkeep. Fiery and enthusiastic, Brother Eldrast believes the best way to win followers for the Lord in Iron is to be generous in aiding those mercenaries and adventurers who choose honorable causes. Banditry is questionable, but if a robber gives her targets a chance to fight back and spares those who are unable to do so, then Gorum is pleased in Eldrast's eyes. The dwarf dislikes the Three Daggers, and holds Baron Tervin in contempt—in his eyes the baron is a coward and a weakling for allowing the town to carry on in such a dishonorable state. Brother Eldrast hopes that someday the bloodshed that runs rampant in Thornkeep might be better directed by a more competent ruler.

### GOLDENFIRE ORDER

The Goldenfire Order is a small guild of wizards-for-hire based in Thornkeep. Founded by the elven wizard Iliara Starcloak 6 years ago, the Order now numbers five full members (including Iliara) and three apprentice members. The Goldenfires rarely hire out more than one member at a time—the purpose of the guild is to make sure that arcanists in Thornkeep don't undercut each other in selling their services, and to see to it that anyone who tries to cheat a member wizard is punished. Meetings are infrequent, since the guild exists to protect its members, not to advance any common goals. Though the Order's ranks are few, the fact that they are competent spellcasters means that none of the other Blades wishes to make an enemy of Iliara Starcloak or her company.

Iliara herself is a beautiful, dark-haired sorcerer from Kyonin who is particularly talented with fire magic. No one knows for sure why she has chosen to make her home in Thornkeep, although some speculate that she is a loyal agent of Queen Telandia Edasseril, and others say she is secretly plotting against the arcanists of the Technic League in Numeria.

### GREAT CHIEF GRAALSK

Goblins generally aren't tolerated in civilized settlements, but Thornkeep barely deserves to be called civilized. Over the years, a number of the malicious little wretches have gathered in Thornkeep's worst slum, calling themselves the Brambleclaw Tribe. The leader of the Brambleclaws is the

### GOBLINS OF THORNKEEP

The town of Thornkeep is about as lawless as it gets, and its rugged citizens are often so self-serving and amoral that they'd sooner slay a neighbor where she stands than give up a single scrap of the meager property and valuable belongings they've clawed together. Still, Thornkeep is, at its essence, a settlement with its roots embedded in the strictures of civilized society, and as such, it is not an entirely inhospitable place. For every thief in town there is also a hardworking farmer, baker, or trader, and while many of its residents are debased scavengers or rampant thugs, Thornkeep is also home to a number of peaceful people and their families.

So what then to make of the town's goblin residents?

Goblins are notorious for being dog-hating, baby-eating, fire-mongering monsters that have little to do with the creature comforts of a civilized humanoid society (unless said society has a nearby junkyard good for looting). Still, many of their kind inhabit Thornkeep, and the people of this town tend to, at the very least, tolerate their presence. The reasons for this strange relationship are several, but below are some of the most commonly cited rationales for the goblins' permitted existence.

**There Aren't Very Many of Them:** A single goblin is more or less a funny-looking pest, and while it might try to gut your horse on occasion, it can easily be taken care of if need be. Because the entire Brambleclaw tribe can fit in a closet and they generally restrict themselves to the briars on the south side of town, the people of Thornkeep rarely feel threatened by the creatures, and even if they did, they have a lot more firepower than the little monsters.

**They're Useful:** Goblins are notoriously good at crafting crude items out of seemingly unsalvageable junk. Since they're already predisposed to picking up scraps, most of Thornkeep's residents see no harm in letting the little brats sweep up after them. Even better, goblins' ravenous hungers can be sated by the foulest food sources, and because of this, Thornkeep has been virtually rat-free for several years.

**They're in Good Company:** Even in a settlement of humans, it's possible for goblins to garner a few trustworthy allies, and Great Chief Graalsk is a remarkably good schmoozer when it comes to fawning the greater powers of Thornkeep. While the Brambleclaw tribe's "friends" probably wouldn't call the goblins the same, they probably would notice if they were gone, since the buggers do provide a semi-reliable means of cheap labor and buffoonish entertainment.

All this being said, goblins are still wicked-evil shorties who believe that they're great yodelers and that writing steals the words from your head. Given good reason and the opportunity, most of Thornkeep's normal folk wouldn't think twice before sticking a sword through each and every goblin in the Briarwarren. As GM, feel free to have these monsters play as big or as little a part in your game as you desire.

Great Chief Graalsk, a pompous blowhard with delusions of grandeur. Graalsk refers to himself in the third person and seems mad as a hatter, but the goblin chief is actually quite clever and cunning. Much of his public persona is an act designed to trick potential enemies into underestimating him and his followers.

The Brambleclaw goblins dwell in a warrenlike set of shallow tunnels beneath the briar patches on the south side of Thornkeep's hill. The goblins make themselves useful by gathering the refuse and garbage on Thornkeep's streets, and hiring themselves out for all sorts of drudgery and dirty work. They're terrible at it, of course, since they're lazy and shiftless—but they are cheap to hire, and the job eventually gets done. In addition, the goblins are actually quite well informed about events in town, since they paw through everyone's garbage and do a lot of eavesdropping as they skulk about the town.

### HUNTERS' GUILD

The foremost trackers, guides, trappers, and hunters of the Echo Wood belong to the Hunters' Guild of Thornkeep. The Echo Wood is difficult to navigate and confusing for casual travelers, so the services of skilled guides are highly sought after. Like the Goldenfire Order, the Hunters' Guild is an association of specialists who have joined together to make sure that no one would cheat them of their pay or coerce them through the threat of force.

Huntmaster Jaervon Mardesa, a half-elf archer who wears his hair in a long ponytail, currently leads the guild. Jaervon strongly dislikes the fact that bloody-handed murderers, reavers, and goblins find safe haven in Thornkeep. He would like to unite the good townsfolk of Thornkeep against the outlaws and drive them out, but he is not sure he can muster enough support.

### THE IRONJAWS

A new gang in Thornkeep, the Ironjaws are a band of human and half-orc hunters, thieves, brawlers, and thugs working for the fur trader Tardin. The Ironjaws are challenging the Three Daggers' protection racket by robbing businesses currently paying off the thieves, roughing up their customers, and assaulting the owners and their families. If there's a gang in Thornkeep that everybody wants to break up and scatter, it's the Ironjaws.

### OREENA HOLLYSONG

An old woman with brown, seamed skin, white hair, and a merry manner, **Oreena Hollysong** (N female human druid 8) lives in a small cottage in the Echo Wood, not far from Thornkeep. A number of the ordinary folk of the town revere the Green Faith as she does and hold Oreena in high regard, seeking her counsel about how best to keep their small patch of civilization in line with the teachings of nature. Oreena often cautions woodcutters away from the forest's most sacred and ancient

groves, but not all heed her warnings. When she feels she must act, Oreena rarely confronts greedy loggers directly. More often, she uses her druidic powers to alert the forest to the danger and uses the fierce beasts of the Echo Wood to discourage intruders, though she is always looking for allies who might aid her and her cause.

### THE THREE DAGGERS

The thieves' guild known as the Three Daggers is the single strongest faction in Thornkeep. Guildmaster Yunar Barask, a wiry gray-haired man with a large, bristly mustache, maintains the pose of a respectable merchant, but secretly commands 15 competent thieves as well as another 20 or more thugs, bandits, and ne'er-do-wells who regularly shake down the weaker citizens of Thornkeep. When the guildmaster decides to send a particularly violent message, the murder is always performed by a gang of masked, knife-wielding rogues who leave three bloody blades at the scene as the guild's calling card. So far none of the rogues have been caught, though whether or not this is because of the bandits' cunning or the fact that Barask has the baron's guards under his thumb is unknown.

Barask uses his store, Thornkeep Mercantile, as a front for his illicit operation. He stocks a variety of staples and provisions, catering to the caravan and river traffic in the area. In this guise, Barask is a reasonably honest businessman, cheerful and talkative, and deals fairly with his customers. However, the mercantile warehouse features a secret underground level where Barask stores stolen goods until he can sell them to unsuspecting customers as part of his "legitimate" business. Meeting rooms and hidden bunkrooms in this level provide Three Daggers thieves with places to plot their next crimes or lie low.

### WOLFMANE TRIBE

The Wolfmanes, one of the numerous Kellid tribes of southern Numeria, claimed the Echo Wood as their hunting ground centuries ago. Several small Wolfmane villages are scattered throughout the large forest, and most are nowhere near Thornkeep. However, a small number of Wolfmanes have made their encampment within a short distance of the town, and such proximity allows for a unique dynamic between the tribespeople and the townsfolk. Some of the barbarians come to trade with civilized folk, and others hire themselves out as guides, trackers, or mercenaries. Many of these visitors come only to satisfy their curiosity about so-called civilization before returning to their homes, but a few begin lifetimes of travel and adventure in the streets of Thornkeep.

The warrior Darioth is an honored chieftain of the Wolfmane tribe, and is recognized as the leader of the encampment near Thornkeep. The Wolfmanes fiercely protect "their" portions of the forest from logging and hunting by Thornkeep's folk, and Darioth is here to keep an eye on anyone who might forget that. She and Baron Tervin share a unique dynamic, frequently butting heads but still holding civil exchanges when one's

people are being treated unfairly. Darioth is a tall, athletic woman not yet past her third decade, with a remarkable set of scars from a dire bear she killed in her youth.

## ADVENTURING IN THORNKEEP

Thornkeep attracts adventurers and opportunists like honey draws flies. The lawless nature of the town means that there are few obstacles in the way of a clever, strong, brash, or lucky freebooter determined to make her fortune. Anybody with a desire to make a name for herself has every chance to do so here; it all simply depends on whether the individual has the determination to work hard and the strength to defend the wealth she amasses. Of course, Thornkeep's lawlessness also means that there is little help for fools who get in over their heads, and numerous are those whose brashness and high aspirations have spelled only misfortune and tragedy.

Honest hard work is foreign to the nature of most adventurers (especially those fickle vagabonds who typically seek out Thornkeep), but those who persevere can make great money as merchants, loggers, miners, trappers, or practitioners of any of a dozen other trades. The city of Thornkeep is in good need of professionals such as healers, scholars, and engineers, since those learned types who make their way to the forest stronghold typically last only a short time before fleeing the backwater town or being run out by its rowdy locals.

Numerous challenges await in the wilder regions surrounding the city as well. Settlers both seasoned and amateur might hope to spend their amassed wealth to create kingdoms of their own devising in the nearby Echo Wood to the east or the windswept plains of Numeria to the west.

In addition to the mercantile and expansionist environment that draws ordinary people to Thornkeep, numerous opportunities brimming with danger and risk appeal specifically to adventurers.

**Exploring Ruins:** Thornkeep is well situated to serve as a base for exploring the ruins of the Echo Wood. Some of these are ancient Azlanti structures, almost completely buried under ages of forest growth. Other ruins include the dismal strongholds and crumbling towers of the Kingdom of Zog. Though the goblins made few works of great value or magical power, they did steal such things from neighboring lands, and some of those purloined treasures still lie hidden in secret caches or ruined vaults. In addition, small settlements, manors, and adventurers' keeps lie desolate and abandoned in the lands south and east of the Echo Wood. Over the centuries many would-be lords and settlers have tried to build strongholds in the empty lands between the Dagger River and the West Sellen, only to have their holdings and legacies fade into obscurity a generation or two later.

**Mercenary Work:** Of course, there is more than one way to make a living with a sword, and those willing to sell their blades can easily hire on as mercenaries. The merchants of Thornkeep and nearby communities always need more

muscle to protect their commerce and storehouses against monsters and bandits. Merchants who've suffered particularly badly from brigands might hire mercenaries to hunt down and punish those who stole from them. Finally, some River Kingdoms merchants are not above hiring thugs to harry and plunder commercial rivals.

**The Outlaw's Life:** Particularly bold and ruthless adventurers might choose a different path. Turning outlaw is likely to get one killed quickly, but the strongest (and luckiest) outlaws can become rich by taking up banditry. Outlaws based in Thornkeep are in easy reach of river traffic on the Sellen, caravans traveling on foot, and small settlements such as Fort Inevitable or Fort Riverwatch. It's a dangerous and desperate life, but some flourish in it. Whether an outlaw is a gentleman of the road who sheds no more blood than he has to or a murderous reaver who carves a swath of terror with her dripping sword is a matter of individual preference.



Chieftain Darioth Wolfmane



**T**hornkeep lies in a small natural clearing in the Echo Wood, where Echo Stream winds around the foot of Brokenhelm Hill. Most of the town lies on the lower slopes of the hill, wherever builders found good places to raise houses and room for workshops, stores, and warehouses. Some people came to Thornkeep with substantial wealth or a talent for building, and put up homes and shops that are soundly made. Others, lacking skill or funds for building, did the best they could. As a result, much of the town has a distinctly ramshackle and improvised look to it.

Three roads meet at Thornkeep. The Dagger Road to the southeast leads toward Daggermark, about 100 miles away. The Mosswater Road to the west leads to the ruins of Mosswater and the banks of the West Sellen; 10 miles west of Thornkeep it intersects with the Crusader Road, which links the village to Fort Inevitable to the south and Fort Riverwatch to the north. Finally, the Forest Road strikes east from Thornkeep toward Deadbridge in the Protectorate of the Black Marquis. Many smaller tracks crisscross the woods near the town. Most well-informed travelers give Thornkeep a wide berth, but some local traders have deals in place with Thornkeep's various factions and enjoy safe passage through the area.

The village is dominated by the weathered battlements of Thornkeep itself, which is usually just called "the Keep" by locals. The castle is in poor repair, but is well sited on top of Brokenhelm Hill, with a commanding view of the surrounding area. Thickets of dense briars ring the Keep and its hill, especially on the southwestern side. Somewhere within these thickets, a crevice in the hillside leads to the oldest (and most dangerous) locale in Thornkeep: the Halls Under the Hill, the dungeon more widely known as the Accursed Halls.

### 1. TOWN GREEN

The center of Thornkeep is the town green, an open patch of ground at the foot of the road leading up Brokenhelm Hill to the baron's castle. Several of the oldest and most reputable businesses of the village can be found here, and those Thornkeep residents merry and well-connected enough occasionally organize festivals or celebrations on the oft-muddy field. From time to time, citizens who want to make a particularly pointed statement leave their enemies here at night, bound, beaten, unconscious, or dead, and in plain sight of the whole village. By morning, if these victims are lucky enough (and still alive, for that matter), some kindhearted local might agree to free them from their restraints, though more often they are left to their own devices, since few would seek to get caught up in any gang politics.

### 2. GREENFOREST INN

One of the oldest buildings in town, the Greenforest is a respectable inn and taphouse with fieldstone walls and finely carved woodwork adorning its posts and eaves. The proprietor is **Shandar Tulman** (N male human commoner 2),

a balding, middle-aged man with a mustache like a bristle brush. Innkeeper Tulman is a gossip and a busybody. He is an excellent source of rumors, and does what he can to foil and frustrate the Three Daggers (the worst threat to Thornkeep, in his eyes) by passing along what he hears to the right ears. The best of his rumors right now is that the adventurer Garhal Silvercrown found a goblin temple in the Accursed Halls, but has gone missing. The Blue Basilisk mercenaries have posted a reward for his return or confirmation of his death.

Shandar's wife **Jalia** (LN female human commoner 2), a lean and sharp-tongued woman, is widely regarded as the best cook in town. Their young niece Drusta is the Greenforest's stable hand; she can be hired to run errands or carry messages in town for a handful of coppers. Servers **Vess** (NG male human commoner 1) and **Edders** (CN male human commoner 1) work the inn's crowded taproom each night. Edders is a young and handsome man with a kind manner, but he is betrothed to a very jealous hunter named **Gwyn** (LN female human expert 2/warrior 1), who has started several fights with taproom patrons she feels pay too much attention to him. As a result, he's been second-guessing his engagement as of late, a secret known only to his trusted confidant Vess.

A private room at the Greenforest costs 1 gp per night, and includes breakfast and dinner. A bed and trunk in the common room costs 2 sp per night, and includes a loaf of bread or bit of porridge for breakfast.

### 3. THORNKEEP BINDERY

Thornkeep is hardly a center of learning, but the ready supply of wood means it's a good place to make paper. An elderly gnome by the name of **Farakin Thumbwhistle** (NG male gnome wizard 3) established himself as a papermaker and bookbinder here after abandoning his home and workshop in Mosswater 50 years ago. The Thornkeep Bindery sells paper, ink, blank spellbooks, and a small selection of books, maps, and scrolls. Farakin is a scholar and collector of old lore, and usually has one or more well-researched treasure maps for sale, though he is always looking for more, and will happily pay adventurers who bring him original maps of previously uncharted locations.

### 4. TARDIN'S TRADING POST

Fur trapping is an important industry in the Echo Wood, and many trappers sell their pelts at Tardin's Trading Post. **Tardin** (NE male half-orc fighter 2/rogue 4) is a loudmouthed bully and braggart whose orc heritage accounts for his short temper. He surrounds himself with a small band of thugs who found trapping and woodcutting to be too much work. Tardin is a difficult man to do business with, as he cheats any trapper who doesn't force him to deal fairly.

It's an open secret in Thornkeep that Tardin is behind the Ironjaws, a new "guild" (more properly a gang) with aspirations of extorting a hefty cut from anyone who isn't strong enough

to stand up to them. Such coercion is considered Three Daggers' territory, and many figure it's just a matter of time before Tardin's gang and Yunar Barask's guild settle the question with steel.

## 5. HAP THISTLEDOWN

A timid halfling originally from Druma, **Hap Thistledown** (LG male halfling commoner 2/expert 1) is a talented weaver and tailor who makes much of the clothing worn by Thornkeep's people. He is assisted by his wife **Lanni** (LG female halfling commoner 3)—an excellent seamstress in her own right—and their four children. The farmers and shepherds in the area produce a small amount of linen and wool, but it's not nearly enough to meet the town's needs, so the Thistledowns buy many of their textiles from merchants passing through or when the Thistledowns manage a short reprieve to a nearby town. Hap wistfully talks of the rolling hills of Druma if the subject is brought up, homesick as he is, but the skittish weaver quickly tightens his lips at the first mention of Kalistrade or its fierce prophets.

## 6. BLUE BASILISK HALL

This new fieldstone building is the headquarters and barracks of the Blue Basilisks, a small company of mercenaries under the command of Ariane Redderfin, aided by her favored lieutenant **Mirashi Verlon** (CN female human cavalier 5). A prominent handbill board by the door features a collection of job offers, bounties, and notices—Ariane is more than happy to collect a few gold pieces by helping potential employers find the muscle they need, even if the Blue Basilisks aren't interested themselves. The most interesting handbill offers a reward of 500 gp for the rescue of Garhal Silvercrown or the recovery of his signet ring as proof of his death. Garhal is the son of a minor lord in Mivon, and he came to Thornkeep with a small band of adventurers in recent months. They ventured into the Accursed Halls a couple of weeks ago and returned with stories of magnificent ancient chambers, but disappeared after going back to the dungeon to try their luck again.

The Blue Basilisks are always on the lookout for new recruits—anyone who can demonstrate at least some skill at fighting and the ability to take orders can enlist in the company. Recruits are generally hired for specific jobs such as guarding a caravan bound for Daggermark, escorting an explorer to a nearby ruin, or clearing the road to Fort Riverwatch of bandits, and are paid 2 gp per day for their troubles, plus any profits they manage to make while on their missions. Those who build up records for reliability and results might be invited to become standing members of the company and provided with permanent quarters in the Blue Basilisk Hall.

## 7. TORRA STONEFRAMER'S

Thornkeep's best builder is **Torra Stoneframer** (LN female dwarf fighter 2/expert 2), a dour dwarven woman who takes

personal offense when some newcomer to town raises a new building without seeking out her services. Torra came to Thornkeep 15 years ago as a mercenary for hire, but soon discovered that no one in town had the slightest idea how to build homes and workshops that would last more than a few seasons, and realized she could make a good living just by selling her expertise. Torra heads up a small company of a dozen human and goblin laborers (the latter are assigned only the most tedious and basic tasks, as they can't be trusted with anything more complex), and she can serve as an architect, engineer, mason, and woodcarver at need.

## 8. GREENFOOT PROVISIONS

The leading grocer and provisioner of Thornkeep is **Nessa Greenfoot** (N female halfling commoner 3). A clever young woman who bought out the previous provisioning business here, Mistress Nessa is a hardworking, no-nonsense sort and a sharp bargainer. She buys the produce, milk, cheese, eggs, and meat of local farms and pastures while importing flour and other staples from nearby towns. Nessa employs several clerks and warehouse workers, including a couple of her own cousins and her friend **Bosk** (CN male half-orc fighter 3), a simple-minded fellow who might just be the biggest and strongest person in town.

Unfortunately for Nessa, her humble business is a direct competitor of Yunar Barask and Thornkeep Mercantile. The Three Daggers are currently trying to drive her out of business, or better yet, force her to sell out, but if history is any indicator, the ruthless gang is not above even more underhanded—and violent—business tactics.

## 9. ECHO WOOD ARMS

**Iozef Nevski** (CG male human inquisitor 3/expert 2) is the resident swordsmith and weapon-maker in Thornkeep. An Ustalavic expatriate who set up shop 5 years ago, Iozef is renowned throughout the town for his excellent work, especially his lighter blades, and more than a few citizens of Thornkeep have wondered why a man of such obvious talent and pleasant disposition chose to practice his trade here. Few people know that Iozef is a wanted man who fled Barstoi after killing a noblewoman who had become a vampire. Bounty hunters and agents of the master vampire whose favored minion Iozef killed are still searching for him, and the swordsmith lives in grim fear of one day having to encounter these dread mercenaries.

## 10. IGMAR DUSTHELM'S

A boisterous and boastful veteran from the Five Kings Mountains, **Igmar Dusthelm** (N male dwarf expert 3) is a competent armorer who specializes in lighter wares such as brigandine, ring mail, and chain vests. For all his brashness, Igmar is strikingly shy in one respect: he is hopelessly smitten with Torra Stoneframer, but has no idea how to tell



her how he really feels. This leads him to concoct harebrained schemes to impress Torra, often involving luckless strangers as reluctant go-betweens.

### 11. HARIC'S SADDLERY

Tall, thin, and stoop-shouldered, **Jona Haric** (N female human expert 2) makes her living as a tanner and leatherworker. She and her younger brother **Jarmol** (CN male human commoner 1) sell saddles, tack and harness, saddlebags, packs, and pouches of all kinds. In addition, they manufacture leather armor, studded leather armor, and leather components of heavier armor. The Harics' grandparents fled from Mosswater when monsters attacked the town decades ago. The two siblings believe that a valuable family heirloom is still hidden in the ruins there, and have been looking for adventurers willing to retrieve it for a reasonable price.

### 12. SERIANNA'S LIVELY STABLE

A recent immigrant from Razmiran, **Serianna Naal** (LN female human fighter 3) founded her business with the profits of a successful dungeon expedition. She is a natural equestrian who likes horses more than most people, and her intimidating beauty does a good job of steering away unwanted suitors. She is happy to stable donkeys, mules, and riding horses at the rate of 3 sp per week, and has a small selection of mounts available for sale at any given time.

Serianna is a stickler for details, and known as a hard bargainer. In secret, she is a devoted follower of Razmir, and serves powerful priests back home as their spy in Thornkeep. She hopes that in addition to luring some of Thornkeep's more gullible citizens to her cultish faith she can expand her beloved living god's domain further into the lawless lands of the River Kingdoms.

### 13. GRAVEYARD

Thornkeep has had many problems with restless dead over the years, since it's unfortunately rather common for people to die violently and then be buried without the proper rites. Ghouls and wights arise in the graveyard from time to time, posing a deadly threat to nighttime travelers along the Dagger Road and to townsfolk whose homes are nearby. Brother Eldrast of the Shrine of Battle is looking for volunteers willing to seal the old vaults and perform proper funerary rituals, hoping to put an end to the undead problem.

### 14. FRASTON ORCHARD

Row after row of well-tended apple trees stand at the foot of Graveyard Hill. This is the farm of **Niles Fraston** (N male human commoner 4), a reclusive fellow who lives here with his wife **Berienn** (N female human commoner 3) and their two children. The Frastons are practitioners of the Green Faith, and are on good terms with the druid Oreena and the rangers of the Hunters' Guild. They have been in Thornkeep for many

generations, and make a point of keeping out of other people's business. Adelind, their oldest daughter, has been missing for 8 days now. The teenager went to gather mushrooms in the Echo Wood, and disappeared near Echo Cleft.

### 15. SHRINE OF BATTLE

Long abandoned, this small shrine was recently repaired and renovated by Brother Eldrast, a dwarven priest of Gorum. The cleric lives in a small set of rooms behind the shrine with his servant, a stooped old man named **Murfin** (LN male human commoner 2), and a young acolyte named **Taronnel** (CN female human cleric of Gorum 1) who is supposed to be learning the doctrines of the faith from the cleric. However, Eldrast is a poor mentor. He spends much of his time in the taprooms of the Greenforest Inn or the Thirsty Ogre, preaching the tenets of bold action and honorable combat to the mercenaries and bandits who gather there. The patrons of the taprooms tolerate him because he's a stout hand in a fight, and because he often buys drinks to get the patrons to pay attention while he makes his point.

Brother Eldrast is more than willing to heal injured characters who seek his assistance, for the customary donation to the temple. However, characters who convince the dwarf that they were injured in a heroic cause receive healing spells at half the normal cost.

### 16. THE THIRSTY OGRE

This disreputable tavern is much rougher than the Greenforest Inn, and so outlaws, goblins, barbarians, and the less savory sort of mercenaries make up most of the Thirsty Ogre's clientele. The evenings are filled with bawdy songs, boastful challenges, and drunken brawling, and it's not unusual for blades or spells to settle matters that get out of hand. Anyone who sets foot in the Thirsty Ogre is assumed to know what they're getting into, and those who aren't looking for a fight would do well to stay away from the notorious establishment.

The proprietor of the Thirsty Ogre is a retired adventurer named **Toomdar** (CN female half-orc fighter 5), who was a hard-drinking brawler of legendary proportions back in her day. Toomdar has a bad knee and a missing left eye, but she can still knock most opponents flat with a single punch. She claims that the Thirsty Ogre is just the sort of place she always liked best as a customer, and she wades onto the floor to break up fights only when someone's about to be killed. The barkeep is a fat, grumpy bear of a man named **Red** (CN male human barbarian 3), and the servers are **Gredlos** (LN male human commoner 3) and **Mariele** (CN female half-elf commoner 2), a flirtatious half-elf who seems to have the hearts of half the regulars in the place.

When Toomdar is deep in her cups, she sometimes mutters about "the skull-faced wizard"—a vile conjurer of undead named **Garnara** (NE female human necromancer 6) with whom she once adventured. Toomdar says they found a magical machine in an old Azlanti ruin in the forest, but

Garnara took a part of it and left Toomdar and the rest of their comrades to die in the trap-filled ruin. The half-orc fears that Garnara may one day learn that she survived and take steps to silence her permanently.

## 17. THE BRIARWARREN

The wide dell to the southwest of Brokenhelm Hill is filled with a particularly large and tough variety of briar known as “goblinbramble” that grows in the danker parts of the Echo Wood. According to legend, goblinbramble is the work of hobgoblin adepts from the old Kingdom of Zog. Whether the tale is true or not, goblinbramble is wicked stuff that grows quickly, choking natural trees and covering the ground in nearly impenetrable underbrush 10 or 15 feet in height. The area, known as the Briarwarren, is home to a small tribe of goblins known as the Brambleclaws, who have lurked at the edges of the human settlement of Thornkeep for generations. Small, twisting, tunnel-like paths wind through this tangled mess of thorns, concealing entrances to underground dens and goblin nests.

By scavenging other folks’ refuse and taking on jobs that others don’t want, the goblins of the Briarwarren are reasonably useful to Thornkeep. For the goblins’ part, regular trade with the humans of Thornkeep has made the Brambleclaws rich and comfortable—for goblins, anyway—and most of the tribe want to keep things the way they are. However, every now and then a drunk doesn’t come home, some livestock vanish, or a warehouse not properly locked up gets looted during the night—goblins will be goblins, after all. And sometimes the Brambleclaws organize large raids or ambushes when they learn of easy pickings, such as underprotected caravans or lonely mining camps in the woods.

The leader of the Brambleclaws is the Great Chief Graalsk, a fat, pompous, conniving schemer who toadies up to strong neighbors (such as the Blades or the baron) and lords over anyone weaker. Graalsk is very well informed about events in town, since goblin eyes are everywhere. He gladly sells information, especially information that might spell trouble for someone else. Graalsk is intensely interested in finding “the sword of Zog,” a goblin trophy thought to be hidden in the Accursed Halls. Just a few weeks ago, the adventurer Garhal Silvercrown was overheard talking about a gigantic goblin idol he’d found in the dungeon’s upper levels, and goblin sneaks brought the story to their chief. According to goblin legend, the *sword of Zog* is hidden somewhere in the idol’s chamber, so Graalsk sent his best warriors to comb the Accursed Halls and bring him the legendary sword.

## 18. GOBLIN BAZAAR

A small clearing just inside the edge of the Briarwarren serves as the goblins’ marketplace. Here the Brambleclaws peddle whatever small valuables they find (usually by looting corpses left in the streets, or committing petty thefts around town).

If a traveler has lost something in town, it’s a good bet that sooner or later it will turn up here.

A sly, fast-talking goblin named **Zarklezam** (CE male goblin rogue 2) is a regular here, selling “potions” and “ointments” that he claims have magical properties. Every now and then, Zarklezam’s brews turn out to have useful (or dangerous) magical properties for some unknown reason, but most are disgusting, mundane swill. The old goblin crone **Kastya** (CE female goblin sorcerer 3) deals in charms and “good luck” tokens, as well as all sorts of worthless beads and pretty stones. She hates all halflings because her daughter Kaskarma was killed in an attack on the Woodbristle homestead in the Echo Wood. Kastya intends to give the next halfling hero she meets a pair of *gauntlets of fumbling* while claiming that they are “lucky magic gloves,” and that she is merely repaying the kindness of a halfling who once saved her life.

## 19. FILERO DUNDABAN

A carpenter, cabinetmaker, and woodworker of some skill, **Filero Dundaban** (NG male human expert 2) lives and works here with his wife **Anyana** (NG female human commoner 2), their son Romaro, and a pair of hired workers. Filero is sorely pressed by Three Daggers protection rackets, goblin harassment, and now trouble with the Ironjaws. The woodworker is at his wits’ end, and is ready to send a message to the people extorting him if only he could find someone else willing to stand up to the thugs.

While playing in the thickets of Echo Stream behind Thornkeep Mercantile, Filero’s son Romaro recently observed a party of goblin warriors skulking around a crevice said to be the entrance to the Accursed Halls. Romaro overheard the goblins talking about “finding the chief’s sword” and “the temple of Zog,” then crept away before the goblins found him spying on them. He’s tried telling his father about what he saw, but Filero’s mind is elsewhere and he has little time for his son’s games.

## 20. ARNO’S SAWMILL

Established by an enterprising human lumberer a hundred years ago, Arno’s sawmill remains the center of Thornkeep’s lumber trade. The sawmill buys raw timber from Thornkeep’s woodcutters and loggers, and sells sawed planks in Daggermark, Fort Inevitable, and Fort Riverwatch.

The sawmill is still owned by the Arno family, and is currently under the management of **Warrick Arno** (N male human commoner 1). However, the Three Daggers are really the ones in charge here—Arno has been pressed again and again to “hire” Yunar Barask’s picked thugs, which means the sawmill now employs a half-dozen layabouts who don’t do anything they don’t feel like doing. Arno wants to fire the lot of them, but he doesn’t dare to out of fear for himself and his family. If some third party would take care of his gangster problem, however, he would be eternally grateful.

## THORNKEEP RUMORS

The townsfolk of Thornkeep are a gossipy bunch willing to spread a couple rumors or smear a fellow villager if it will abate their boredom. Each rumor on the following table is followed by “(True)” for a true rumor, “(False)” for a false rumor (though such misleading rumors might nonetheless point the PCs toward intriguing NPCs or sites of potential adventure), and “(Partly true)” for a partly true rumor.

d20	Result
1	“That ol’ weaver, Hap Thistledown—they say he come from Druma, where the sun don’t shine for the slaves workin’ the gem mines. Ain’t no one escapes from there, so he must be a retired slaver—or one o’ them so-called prophets of Kalistrade.” (Partly true)
2	“Have you heard that the Fraston girl’s gone missing? I can hear Berienn, her mother, crying about it all night long. Hell, I’ll bet her tears are getting mixed in with this year’s apple cider.” (True)
3	“Toomdar, over at the Thirsty Ogre—yeah, that’s the one—there’s some bad folk looking for her. Apparently, back in her adventuring days, she double-crossed the wrong wizard. She’s been watching her back ever since.” (Partly true)
4	“That Brodwyr Stonesplitter’s got a keen business going on. He’s offering top price for any ore you dig up, and he’ll even supply you with gear to go mining! Best deal in Thornkeep if you ask me.” (False)
5	“If I had to pinpoint the source of Thornkeep’s corruption, I’d say those Brambleclaw goblins are behind all the dastardliness around these parts. From their lair in the Briarwarren, they control an entire operation built on drugs, slaves, and murder!” (False)
6	“They say the Door of Seven Stars in the Accursed Halls hasn’t been opened in thousands of years. There’s a picture of it up in Goldenfire Tower, but I’d say those wizards aren’t any closer to cracking it than either you or I.” (True)
7	“Harley’s Mill used to be a nice, honest establishment—one of the few in Thornkeep, for that matter. Lately, though, the new owners have run it into the ground. When they’re not shooing away their own customers, they’re sneaking out at night and breaking into other peoples’ houses!” (True)
8	“Have you seen the late Edsall’s farm lately? It looks like a giant mole got to it, winding its way toward the dungeon beneath Thornkeep! The Widow Eliseera’s got nothing to say about it, and I’ve offered to help her with the pest problem, but I think she hardly wants anything to do with me.” (Partly true)
9	“Somebody keeps making a racket at the old Callanro Home at night these past few weeks. I know it’s just some pesky kids wrecking stuff in an abandoned old house, but the noises still keep me up at night and I wish they’d just cut it out.” (False)
10	“The baron’s been having more and more to do with that she-devil Chief Darioth Wolfmane. If I didn’t know any better, I’d say the brutish hussy’s trying to weasel her way into the politics of Thornkeep proper from her encampment to the north.” (False)
11	“Long ago, the Kingdom of Zog once held power around these parts. It’s true! You can still find relics from that time if you search the ruins enough. Some say that if the goblins ever got ahold of these powerful items once more, they’d be able to bring their dead empire back to life!” (Partly true—there are plenty of relics left over, but it would take more than a couple goblin trinkets to bring back the Kingdom of Zog)
12	“Undead attacked my caravan on my way up the Dagger Road! The ghouls nabbed one of my horses before I could even make it past Fraston Orchard, and I don’t see the priests around here doing a damn thing about it! Brother Eldrast says he’s on the case, but I’ve yet to see a lick of results.” (True)
13	“My buddy Herk said he saw some roguish types wearing Daggermark’s colors down by the creek in the Echo Wood! He doesn’t know what they were doing there, but he saw them go into a cave while following a strange-looking map.” (True)
14	“A dragon dwells in the Echo Wood; don’t ask me how I know. The Wolfmanes have a word for it that translates to something like ‘Jade Razor,’ but the thing’s real name is Thelsterex. If you go deep enough into the woods, you might just find its cave.” (True)
15	“Idara, so-called keeper of the House of the River Lord, may have the rest of Thornkeep fooled, but not me! She says the temple’s run out of money, but I know she’s just hoarding it all so that she might inflict the wrath of Hanspur on us all!” (False)
16	“Loskar’s back—that’s what everyone’s saying. I’ve feared it for years, but the rumors must be true, because I’ve seen him in the taverns, recruiting thugs for his next big heist. Whatever it is, I’m sure the haul will be great, but you can count me out.” (True)
17	“Have you met Rozimus of Tymon? I ran into him the other night at Greenfoot Provisions and he looked awful! No doubt due to his recent expedition to the Halls Under the Hill. But I wonder what happened to his adventuring companions...” (True)
18	“Uncle Bruston swears he saw a ghost near Echo Stream! Ma says he’s just pulling my leg, but if I know my Uncle Bruston, I know that his word’s as good as gold, and if he says there’s a ghost near the Mosswater Road, then there definitely is!” (False)
19	“Lord Silvercrown’s son is missing. He went treasure hunting in the Accursed Halls, but no one in Mivon has heard from him since, and the nobles are getting antsy for his return. No doubt there’s a reward if you can find out what happened to him.” (True)
20	“Just between you and me, I hear Mosswater’s demise wasn’t the result of some merrow attack—it was a result of the foul algae that pollutes Glow Water Lake! Sure, it’s pretty to look at, but it’s definitely poisonous as well.” (False)

## 21. HOUSE OF THE RIVER LORD

This small wooden shrine, dedicated to the god Hanspur, stands by the banks of the Echo Stream. The attendant of the shrine is an aged priestess named **Keeper Idara** (CG female human cleric 2), who has been here more than 30 years. Hanspur's tenets appeal to the common folk of Thornkeep more than Gorum's do, so Keeper Idara is well liked and respected among many of the ordinary people of the town. However, few of them have much coin to spare to maintain the old shrine, which is falling into disrepair. Many years ago, Idara learned from the previous keeper that the Temple of Hanspur in ruined Mosswater had a hidden vault concealing a good deal of treasure. She is thinking of commissioning a trustworthy band of adventurers to recover the gold for the greater glory of Hanspur.

Idara's clerical powers are limited, but she is willing to heal those in need for the customary donation, and she's also capable of brewing the occasional healing potion or restorative aid for adventurers who have the coin.

## 22. CALLANRO HOUSE

This roomy cabin was built about 10 years ago by an "adventurer" named Jasra Callanro. Her true trade was banditry, and she cut a bloody swath through the West Sellen's mercantile traffic for several years. She and her gang, the Dark Arrows, returned often to Thornkeep to spend their ill-gotten booty. However, a couple of years ago the Dark Arrows were caught by the Black Eagles of Lambreth and hounded to their deaths in a running battle that spanned weeks. None ever came back to the Callanro House, but some dark spirit has haunted the home ever since. On moonless nights, a terrifying spectre or ghost appears and attacks any living soul that dares sleep in Jasra's cabin. Shandar Tulman of the Greenforest Inn currently owns the house, and he tries to rent it out from time to time. Few guests stay in the house after the first new moon.

## 23. FIRLA PARR'S FARM

Hard luck follows **Firla Parr** (LG female human commoner 2) wherever she goes. Seven years ago, she left Daggermark with her husband **Durnan** (NG male human commoner 2) and their children in the hope of clearing a little land on the frontier. She found a small farm on the western edge of Thornkeep that had recently been abandoned, and was able to claim it for her own. Unfortunately, it seems a different disaster strikes every year. This season, it's an infestation of giant ants burrowing

under her fields. So far the monsters have eaten several of her remaining cattle and one unfortunate hired hand. Firla hardly dares to set foot in her own fields, and desperately seeks help with the ant problem.

## 24. THORNKEEP MERCANTILE

Built just last year, Thornkeep Mercantile is a general store and trading post, with a pair of spacious warehouses nearby. Easily the single largest business in the village, Thornkeep Mercantile takes the lion's share of the trade in provisions, clothing, tools, and supplies. More importantly, it is also a front for the Three Daggers thieves' guild. Yunar Barask, the store's proprietor, is also the master of the guild—and far and away the richest man in town. Three Daggers thugs lean on suppliers and customers both, ensuring that they do business with Thornkeep Mercantile instead of other, more reasonably priced establishments.

At the same time, Thornkeep Mercantile allows easy disposal and resale of stolen goods. Barask's wagons do a steady business with nearby towns, and of course never seem to be set on by the bandits and highwaymen who plague other traders in the area.

Beneath the main store and its warehouses lies an extensive network of tunnels, hidden storerooms, and meeting places where the Three Daggers gather to plan their crimes. There are even illicit slave pens where the Three Daggers keep captives who might be worth selling in other lands. Rumor has it that tamed monsters such as cloaklers and leucrottas safeguard the Three Daggers' most secret vaults.

## 25. KEVITH GLAZIERS

Glassmaking requires large amounts of ready firewood, so 6 years ago master glazier **Andreja Kevith** (N female human expert 3) relocated her workshop from Lambreth to Thornkeep. Master Kevith employs half a dozen glassblowers and stokers in her workshop, most of them younger members of the Kevith family living with their families in the small cottages nearby. The Keviths produce simple, rugged work such as beads, leaded panes, and thick bottles and jars—nothing like the fine crystal of more metropolitan locales. However, the Wolfmane barbarians greatly prize glass of any kind, and Andreja's handiwork is largely responsible for the barbarians' interest in trading with Thornkeep.

Darioth Wolfmane counts Andreja as a close friend, which keeps most of Thornkeep's thugs from troubling the glaziers and their business. Andreja's biggest problem at the moment is finding a reliable supply of good sand—marauding orcs



Widow Eliseera and Jaervon Mardesal

and ogres often drive off the work parties she sends to the best deposits, which are miles away in the Echo Wood.

## 26. BRODWYR'S SMELTER

Close by the glaziers is the second of Thornkeep's industrial enterprises—the smelter of **Brodwyr Stonesplitter** (LE male dwarf expert 6). Brodwyr buys ore from local miners and refines it here, pouring ingots (mostly iron and copper) to trade in nearby towns. A survivor of the ruin of Mosswater, Brodwyr started over again in Thornkeep 60 years ago. Gruff and quarrelsome, Brodwyr is a hard master to work for, and few apprentices last more than a couple of months in his shop before seeking easier work.

Brodwyr is a close ally of Yunar Barask, and collaborates with Thornkeep Mercantile to outfit and provision the miners who sell their ore to him. The cost of equipment and supplies soon outpaces the value Brodwyr offers for the miners' ore, leaving the hapless miners virtually enslaved by their debts to the smelter and the merchant.

## 27. ELISEERA'S FARM

A few months back, an old apple farmer named Edsall Barewater surprised the whole town by taking a young, beautiful woman from a distant village as his wife. Unfortunately, the decrepit farmer died not long afterward, leaving the young **Widow Eliseera** (CE female lamia witch 1) in possession of his apple orchards and the rest of his property. Half the unmarried men in town seem smitten by the beautiful and rich (by Thornkeep standards) widow, but no one yet suspects her fearsome secret: Eliseera is actually a lamia, using her powers of illusion and charm to masquerade as a human. The orchard is falling into neglect as one by one the old farmhands disappear, replaced by besotted suitors waiting on the lamia hand and foot. Some people of Thornkeep, especially Iliara of Goldenfire Tower, suspect that Eliseera is an enchantress, but they have no idea that she is literally devouring those overcome by her charms.

## 28. HUNTERS' LODGE

This rustic cabin is the headquarters of the Hunters' Guild of Thornkeep, and the home of the huntmaster, Jaervon Mardesal. The place is both roomy and surprisingly comfortable. The main room is filled with animal pelts, hide rugs, and spectacular trophies, including the mounted heads of a black-feathered owlbear and a dire wolverine. A number of Thornkeep's trackers, hunters, trappers, and guides belong to the Hunters' Lodge, although only a handful are within the Lodge at any given time—their work is out in the far reaches of the Echo Wood.

The hunters are rivals of the Wolfmane barbarians, since both groups provide fresh meat, hides, and guide services to the villagers. However, the rivalry is generally respectful; Jaervon Mardesal encourages his guild members not to hunt or guide outsiders in tribal lands, leaving those parts of the

forest to the barbarians. Tardin the fur trader's Ironjaws are a different matter. The gang has waylaid several hunters and trappers working alone in the forest, causing adversity between the factions. The underhanded trapper intends on framing the Hunters' Lodge at some point, but has thus far been unable to muster the elements necessary for such a despicable plan.

## 29. HARLEY'S MILL

Twenty years ago, an enterprising miller from Lambreth named Harley decided to build a new mill in Thornkeep, hoping to spur a new wave of settlement in the area. It was not a terribly well-thought-out idea, since the lands



Iliara Starcloak

produce very little grain. Harley went out of business and sold her mill, which then changed hands several times. The place is now in the hands of an indolent fellow named **Baunder** (CE male human wererat rogue 2) and a handful of his kin. Baunder and his family are secretly a wretched band of wererats, and they do just enough business here to avert suspicion. For the most part, they get by through pilfering the storehouses and root cellars of their neighbors.

### 30. LOSKAR'S HOUSE

This cabin is currently the hideout of **Loskar Redcape** (CE male half-elf ranger 8), a notorious bandit who has terrorized the roads in the area for months now, and before that was a menace to the law enforcers of both Loric Fells to the east and Lambreth to the south. Loskar typically gathers a small gang of thugs and bounders from the taprooms of the Greenforest Inn or the Thirsty Ogre and leads the band out for weeks of raids and ambushes before retreating back to Thornkeep. Somehow he always comes back with fewer raiders than he left with, which helps when dividing the loot. Regardless, Loskar's grand schemes—which typically involve hijacking, extortion, murder, or some combination of the three—and wealth promised from these dastardly plots never fail to lure in a couple greedy bandits and mercenaries. Loskar is wanted in both Fort Inevitable and Fort Riverwatch, and has a high price on his head; consequently, he doesn't trust strangers. He has killed two would-be bounty hunters already, and shows no signs of mending his ways.

### 31. HARLEY'S POND

Echo Stream always pooled under the bluffs of Brokenhelm Hill, but 20 years ago the miller Harley improved on the natural constriction in the streambed to create a large, permanent pond for her mill. Although Harley is long gone and her mill never turned a profit, she did good work damming the stream. The pond is home to a number of ducks and geese, as well as the occasional murder victim. Town folklore claims that a *suijin* protects the pond in Harley's stead, but few are willing to explain how a *kami* might have made its way all the way over from Tian Xia to Thornkeep—and why it would choose this particular pond of all things to protect.

### 32. WOLFMANE ENCAMPMENT

On a wooded hillside northeast of Thornkeep proper lies the encampment of the Wolfmane barbarians—a half-dozen hide tents with cookfires, skinning racks, smokehouses, and working areas. This is not the home of the entire tribe, of course; there are scores, perhaps hundreds, of Kellid natives living elsewhere in the forest. But at any given time, a dozen or so Wolfmanes are here, trading meat, pelts, and carvings for iron tools, blankets, glass, and other things that are hard to find in Kellid camps. In addition, young tribespeople come to Thornkeep to sample civilized life for a time, often hiring

themselves out as mercenaries or guards. Many of these youths travel widely for years before returning to their tribes.

Chief Darioth Wolfmane leads the local band, and she can often be found here, trading news with barbarians from distant corners of the Echo Wood. She decides which merchants the tribe deals with, and which parties of adventurers or explorers may enter Wolfmane hunting grounds. (Some inevitably enter Wolfmane territory without asking, of course, but the barbarians are likely to respond to trespassing outsiders with violence.) Darioth is a gruff warrior who saw much of the River Kingdoms and the lands around Lake Encarthan before returning to her people. She is quite familiar with civilized double-dealing and surprisingly difficult to deceive.

Darioth occasionally extends the friendship of the Wolfmanes to individuals who earn the trust of the tribe. The thugs and outlaws of Thornkeep have learned to be careful about insulting or injuring someone the Wolfmanes regard as their friend, since the barbarians punish those who hurt their allies.

### 33. BRISHTARGERA GREENBOTTLE

The resident apothecary, physician, and potion-brewer of Thornkeep is a self-absorbed gnome by the name of **Brishtagera Greenbottle** (CG female gnome alchemist 4), known as Brishta to her friends. Brishta is a highly intelligent woman who, unfortunately, is all too aware of her own cleverness. She can be imperious, condescending, vain, or pedantic as the mood takes her, which makes her a difficult person to like, even though she provides many services the townspeople desperately need. Brishta begrudgingly procures remedies both magical and mundane for the commonfolk of Thornkeep, but she greatly admires other highly intelligent people such as sages or wizards, and delights in “scholarly” discussions with academic travelers making their way through the town. Recently, she has discovered a way to create cheap, strong sedatives by using an extract of goblinbramble berries, and is eager to get her hands on more of the bitter, black fruit. However, goblinbramble berries are somewhat uncommon, and most in the vicinity of Thornkeep are hoarded by the Brambleclaw goblins.

### 34. GOLDENFIRE TOWER

The home of the elven wizard Iliara Starcloak, Goldenfire Tower is a small round tower four floors tall, adjacent to a comfortable and well-built stone house by the shore of the millpond. The tower also serves as the headquarters of the Goldenfire Order, the wizards' guild of Thornkeep. The guild holds formal meetings once a month, but other than that the Goldenfire wizards go their own way—the members maintain their own homes or rent rooms in or around Thornkeep, and generally work alone.

The Goldenfire Order is a professional association first and foremost, with no great mission other than to look out for the interests of wizards living in Thornkeep. However, Iliara is

now deeply concerned because two members of the Order—**Jharun** (CN male human conjurer 4) and **Tiawask** (LN female human transmuter 5)—are currently overdue to come back from an expedition to explore mysterious ruins in the Echo Wood. Jharun had returned from a previous visit to the site with a scrap of an ancient scroll showing a picture of the *Door of Seven Stars*, a sealed portal well known to adventurers who have explored the Accursed Halls. The scroll shows a ring of small circles in the center of the door, with a scribbled note next to the highest circle in Jharun's hand that reads "Red star?"

Iliara's apprentice **Timbor** (N male human wizard 3), a young and studious fellow, serves as her secretary and the chief record-keeper of the Goldenfire Order. He greets all visitors to the tower and determines whether their business is worth Iliara's time and personal attention. Newcomers are welcome to join the order at any time; the only obligation of membership is to refrain from physical or magical confrontations with other members.

### 35. GATEHOUSE

The main entrance to old Druscor Keep, this sturdy wooden gatehouse stands at the top of a winding causeway leading up from the town green. The stronghold is an improved motte-and-bailey castle with a stone tower in the center and a thick wooden wall ringing it. The gates themselves are wide enough to admit an oxcart or wagon, and are covered with badly weathered copper sheeting to resist damage by fire. Baron Tervin's guards typically shut the gates at sundown and refuse to admit anyone after dark (though he may be willing to turn a blind eye if offered a suitable bribe).

Four of the baron's soldiers normally guard the castle's gates, under the command of **Sergeant Zorda** (LE female human fighter 4). Zorda is a fat, crass, dominating bully, quick to abuse those weaker than her and just as quick to bow and scrape when confronted by a challenger who doesn't fear her. She is also quite corrupt, and is currently on the payrolls of both the Three Daggers and the Blue Basilisks, with orders to pass along the names, descriptions, and business of everyone who attempts to call on the baron or speak with the baron's clerks. In this way, the Three Daggers keep tabs on all the goings-on in Druscor Keep.

The gatehouse is not the only way in or out of the keep—there is a small postern gate on the northwest side of the wall. Though usually locked and barred from inside, this entrance isn't staffed nearly as often as the main entrance.

### 36. KEEP BARRACKS

The wooden wall encircling Druscor Keep encloses a bailey with a small stable, a storehouse, a smithy, a kitchen, a barracks building, and the Baron's Tower. A good-sized jail (currently empty) lies in the barrack's cellar. A wealthy noble could easily house 60 to 80 soldiers in the barracks, but Tervin Blackshield makes do with a garrison of 30 mercenaries. The

commander of the garrison is **Captain Tarth** (LE male human fighter 5), a shifty, gray-haired warrior who quietly sells the castle's provisions, furnishings, and physical assets, lining his own pockets with the proceeds and blaming "thievery" for the missing goods.

The barracks also serves as the administrative center of Thornkeep. The baron's two clerks maintain the town's records and tax assessments in a small, cluttered office on the first floor. The senior clerk is a wizened old man named **Garvin** (LN male human expert 1) who is hopelessly out of touch with the realities of Thornkeep's lawlessness, including the pure brazenness of Captain Tarth's corrupt scheming. However, the junior clerk, a hardworking halfling named **Jendra Rushkettle** (NG female halfling expert 1/rogue 1), has assembled ironclad proof of the garrison's corruption, including numerous duplicated reports, pilfered journal entries, and a collection of witnesses. While she hopes that one day her thorough investigation might prove fruitful, she doesn't dare present her case to anyone yet, since she knows Tarth would kill her before she managed to get him removed from his station.

### 37. THE BARON'S TOWER

Baron Tervin Blackshield and his family live in the old stone tower of Druscor Keep at the heart of Thornkeep. A short flight of stone steps on the side of the tower leads to a sturdy door of iron plate in the second floor. This floor is a good-sized hall where the baron entertains his guests on the rare occasion that he actually has guests. The kitchens and servant quarters are on the first floor, and the castellan Cranstin and other personal retainers live on the third floor. The baron and his family—his wife Ivis, and his children Neria and Halst—live on the fourth floor.

Usually four to six of the baron's soldiers stand guard in the tower's entrance hall, while a handful of servants and retainers go about the daily business of cleaning, cooking, laundry, and seeing to the business of the household.

### 38. THE ACCURSED HALLS

A narrow, overgrown trail across the road from Firla Parr's farm leads through a thick copse to a stepping-stone crossing of the Echo Stream. On the far side of the stream, under the beetling bluffs of Brokenhelm Hill, a wide crevice leads into the hillside and reveals a pair of enormous stone columns built into the rocky wall. This is the path to Thornkeep's notorious Halls Under the Hill, or the Accursed Halls as they are better known. Goblins, sensing the ancient magic of their lost kingdom of Zog within the ruins, cleared this main entryway, though rumors speak of other entrances to the dungeon, from hidden tunnels originating outside of town to secret entrances in the castle of Thornkeep itself. A dangerous dungeon full of traps and monsters, the Accursed Halls have claimed many adventurers over the years. The dungeon is described in detail starting on page 30.



## THE ECHO WOOD

Thornkeep lies in the depths of the Echo Wood, an ancient and mysterious forest that marks the northwestern boundary of the River Kingdoms. This great woodland divides the treeless steppes of vast Numeria from the rolling plains and farmlands of Lambreth and Daggermark, and separates the rich vales of the West Sellen and Dagger rivers. The forest is rarely more than 30 miles wide; there is no point in the forest that is more than a long day's march from its edges. Yet over the centuries countless travelers, explorers, work parties, and the occasional newly founded settlement have vanished into the Echo Wood's silent green depths, whether their intent was to uncover long-forgotten treasure, explore perilous ruins, bring back trophies from deadly monsters, or win their own personal glory in this eldritch forest.



The terrain of the Echo Wood is rugged and broken. The gentle Juliver Hills marching along the eastern edge of the West Sellen's valley grow steeper and less forgiving as one travels north toward the higher steppes of Numeria. The Echo Wood, one of the higher spots in the River Kingdoms, isn't boggy like the forests elsewhere in the meandering Sellen flatlands. Many small streams trickle through deep, narrow ravines, winding their way westward to the West Sellen or eastward to the Dagger River. In fact, foresters familiar with the Echo Wood know the surest way to get one's bearings is to find a stream and follow it.

The Echo Wood takes its name from the unusual clarity and confusing behavior of sounds trapped beneath the heavy canopy. Most locals suppose it has something to do with the hilly terrain or the types of trees and ground cover that prevail in the area, but there is a more fantastic explanation: Some small residual magic remains from the ancient spells of concealment and illusion created by the outlawed Azlanti who hid themselves here. Things are just a little harder to find and a little more confusing within the forest's shadows than they ought to be. Even the most wood-wise rangers sometimes find that a path they were seeking isn't where they thought it was, or mistake the direction and distance of a companion's cry for help.

## ECHOES OF ENCHANTMENT

The ancient magic lingering in the Echo Wood disorients and confuses creatures unused to the forest's ways. Travelers and inexperienced loggers often report hazy mirages, strange thrumming noises, and winding paths that change from one visit to the next. Those who learn the secrets of the Echo Wood soon become used to the strange, warped arcana permeating the region, however, and popular folklore tells that people who spend too long in the forest might even become a part of the haunted woods.

Characters and creatures new to the Echo Wood take a  $-2$  penalty on Survival checks to avoid becoming lost, and a  $-2$  penalty on Perception checks. After a month of acclimatization, creatures become used to the forest's treacherous influence, and these penalties no longer apply.

## FLORA AND FAUNA

The Echo Wood is a temperate mixed forest. Most of its trees are deciduous hardwoods of various types, including ash, beech, black oak, cherry, holly, maple, poplar, red oak, and yew. A number of conifers, such as firs, red pines, and white pines, can be found there as well, especially on the north-facing slopes and in the drier, higher ridges. Groves of mighty, silver-barked paeliels can be found scattered throughout the eastern reaches of the Echo Wood, which are generally wilder and less traveled than the western arm of the forest. The Wolfmane barbarians regard the paeliels as sacred trees and attack anyone they catch in the act of cutting one down,

## ADVENTURES IN THORNKEEP

Thornkeep is a vibrant town full of diverse plots, mysteries, and treasures. Player characters might encounter any number of adventures and potential quests before they even start their trek through the Accursed Halls and the other dungeons beneath Brokenhelm Hill. This is quite intentional, and such side quests should play a prominent part in your adventures throughout Thornkeep.

Before sending PCs headfirst into the dungeons beneath the city (see page 30), you should first note that the challenge levels of the various dungeons increase pretty quickly the farther one delves. The intended starting level for each dungeon, as well as a general outline of how many experience points the party should receive while braving its depths, can be found on page 3 of this book. The dungeons were all designed with a group of four PCs in mind, though even with that many, they'll want to be well equipped with both sturdy gear and a good backup plan. Simply put, this is a tough dungeon, and it might be fair to assume that not all who go into the perilous halls that lie beneath Thornkeep will return safely from their journey.

To mitigate the chances of the PCs dying while delving into the dungeons, consider interspersing various other non-dungeon-related encounters between the PCs' visits to the Thornkeep dungeons. This chapter and the ones previous provide a plethora of ideas and adventure hooks to help PCs gain levels as they explore Thornkeep and its nearby locations. The Thornkeep Rumors table on page 17 can be a great starting place for PCs to find new and exciting adventures that you can design to be closer to their level, as well as hooks that can push them back into the dungeons if you think they're ready. Almost every location detailed on pages 13–21 includes at least one or two ideas for possible diversions, and you should freely allow players to explore these various paths as they discover Thornkeep. The locations and regions detailed in this chapter can provide inspiration for a number of optional encounters, and can even help you expand your campaign beyond Thornkeep or even out of the River Kingdoms altogether.

If you'd rather your PCs head straight into the dungeon, however, adjusting the challenges of the dungeons is a relatively easy and viable means of making sure your PCs don't get in over their heads. The statistics for monsters can easily be replaced with those of lower-CR creatures from the Pathfinder RPG hardcover bestiaries, and in many cases you can simply include fewer of the same monsters in rooms or areas. Alternatively, since this book assumes you are using the medium XP track for your game, you can instead use the fast XP track to easily help push characters farther into the dungeon without having to go through auxiliary quests or adjust the encounters in the dungeons.

although they allow timber to be harvested from a naturally fallen pauelel.

Because of the hilly landscape, the forest understory is quite thick in places. Dense thickets of laurel, rhododendron, witch hazel, and various briars and berries choke the steeper hillsides and ravines. Patches of nettleweed are common, as are thickets of goblinbramble, a nasty and tough briar that grows only in the Echo Wood. The goblinbramble is another manifestation of the ancient spells that once guarded the forest, and sometimes seems actively malevolent, growing swiftly and strangling larger trees. More dangerous plants

such as assassin vines and quickwoods can also be found, but are thankfully rare.

The forest's wildlife is quite diverse as well. Ordinary animals such as deer, beavers, squirrels, hares, sables, otters, foxes, gray wolves, and black bears are all common; boars, elk, and panthers are somewhat rarer. Large birds such as owls, hawks, ravens, and woodpeckers are also found throughout the forest, but smaller songbirds seem to be scarce, lending an air of eerie silence to the entire place, interrupted only by the chittering of small critters or the sudden takeoff of a murder of crows. The Echo Wood is notorious for its population of spiders, ranging from miniscule bramble spiders (named for their thorny carapaces) to massive moon spiders, which are pallid, round-bellied horrors that can catch prey as big as elk—and the occasional woodcutter—in their sticky ground webs.

The more monstrous denizens of the forest include dire boars, dire wolves, ettercaps, owlbeats, and, of course, the giant spiders. Travelers sometimes encounter the occasional forest drake or lamia in the darker recesses of the woodland, or even the green dragon Thelsterex, but such formidable monsters are thankfully rare. Nevertheless, the Echo Wood can be a very dangerous place for the unprepared to visit.

## INHABITANTS

In addition to potentially dangerous game, the Echo Wood is home to numerous monsters, bandits, marauding barbarians, and tribes of evil humanoids. Kellid tribesfolk from the steppes of Numeria often pass through the Echo Wood on their way to raid the settlements of the River Kingdoms. Kobolds, ogres, and even a few trolls make their lairs in caves or ruins within the forest, and several prominent goblin tribes have attempted to restore their lost empire of Zog in the scattered temples and dilapidated forts throughout the woods. These goblin tribes are typically ruled by a powerful goblin cleric or warchief, but a few have fallen under the command of bugbears or barghests.

The Wolfmane tribespeople take steps to protect their villages and sacred grounds, driving off any dangerous monsters or aggressive raiders who venture too close. Likewise, the Hunters' Guild and the baron of Thornkeep's guards make an effort to watch the forest within a mile or two of the town. However, the great majority of the Echo Wood is not patrolled or protected. Travelers and explorers heading into the depths of the forest take their lives in their own hands.



Thelsterex

## ECHO WOOD ENCOUNTERS

A group of adventurers can find a lot of trouble in the Echo Wood if they go looking for it. Use the following random encounter table to challenge PCs with the occasional fight to break up travel time or inject a greater sense of danger into the forest. Check for random encounters at dawn, in the afternoon, and at midnight. The encounter chance is 20% if the characters are traveling, or 10% if they're remaining in one place; reduce the encounter chance by half if the party is stealthy or taking thorough steps to avoid encounters.

d%	Result	Avg. CR	Source
1–5	1d6 sprites	1	<i>Bestiary</i> 3 256
6–11	1d6 hobgoblins	2	<i>Bestiary</i> 175
12–16	1 assassin vine	3	<i>Bestiary</i> 22
17–20	1 moss troll	3	<i>Bestiary</i> 3 273
21–25	Hunters	3	See text
26–31	Bandit gang	3	See text
32–36	Goblin marauders	3	See text
37–40	1 forest drake	4	<i>Bestiary</i> 2 107
41–45	Woodcutters	4	See text
46–52	Barbarian scouts	4	See text
53–58	1d6 bugbears	5	<i>Bestiary</i> 38
59–63	1d4 dryads	5	<i>Bestiary</i> 116
64–69	1d4 giant stag beetles	6	<i>Bestiary</i> 33
70–73	1d4 vooniths	6	<i>Bestiary</i> 3 283
74–76	1 lamia	6	<i>Bestiary</i> 186
77–79	1 very young green dragon	6	<i>Bestiary</i> 96
80–83	Goblin worg riders	6	See text
84–87	2d4 boggards	7	<i>Bestiary</i> 37
88–91	Barbarian war party	7	See text
92–96	Goblin war party	7	See text
97–100	1d4 wood giants	8	<i>Bestiary</i> 2 132

## SPECIAL ENCOUNTERS

Bands of outlaws, barbarians, and goblins roam the Echo Wood. These group descriptions are suggestions for a typical encounter with some of the humanoids found in the forest.

**Bandit Gang:** A typical gang of human bandits includes 3–6 warriors of 1st–2nd level plus a leader of 2nd–5th level. The leader is a fighter (30%), ranger (30%), or rogue (40%).

**Barbarian Scouts:** A band of barbarian scouts includes 2–4 human barbarians of 1st–3rd level. The scouts might be Wolfmanes guarding a nearby campsite or sacred grove, or advance scouts for a larger raid on another tribe.

**Barbarian War Party:** A war party includes 7–10 barbarians of 1st–3rd level, a cleric or druid of 2nd–4th level, and a chieftain, who is also a barbarian, of 4th–6th level. A war party is normally an outside tribe passing through the Echo Wood.

**Goblin Marauders:** A band of goblin marauders consists of 3–6 goblin warriors of 1st level and a leader. The leader is either a bugbear (50%) or a goblin sergeant (50%); a goblin sergeant is a fighter (50%) or rogue (50%) of 2nd–4th level. The marauders

generally avoid combat with large, well-armed groups; they're looking for isolated homesteads or lone travelers to attack.

**Goblin War Party:** Goblins assemble war parties for major raids on human farms or settlements on the outskirts of the forest. The war party includes 11–20 goblin warriors of 1st level, 2–4 bugbears, and a leader. The leader is either a barghest (30%), bugbear chief (30%), or goblin chief (40%). A bugbear chief is a ranger of 2nd–4th level; a goblin chief is a fighter, cleric, rogue, or sorcerer of 4th–6th level.

**Goblin Worg Riders:** This group consists of 2–5 goblin warriors of 1st–4th level, each mounted on a worg. Worg riders are elite, aggressive warriors, and are more likely to press an attack than a typical band of goblin marauders.

**Hunters:** This is a small band of 3–6 human hunters from Thornkeep or one of the nearby towns. Each hunter is a warrior of 1st–4th level. These hunters are unlikely to attack unless they mistake a PC party for a group of outlaws.

**Woodcutters:** This is a large work party of human loggers. It consists of 5–10 human commoners of 1st–2nd level, plus an escort of 2–4 human warriors of 1st–3rd level.

## SITES OF INTEREST

The Echo Wood is a large forest crisscrossed by human cart tracks, game paths, and old goblin roads that date back to the Kingdom of Zog. Scores of small caves, dismal thickets, eerie groves, and overgrown ruins lie within an easy day's march from Thornkeep. A handful of these ruins or caves are quite extensive, and harbor long-forgotten treasure hoards rich enough to tempt any would-be adventurer. Of course, few hoards indeed are completely unguarded; dangerous monsters lurk in the most promising sites.

## ALEJIA'S CROSSING

Not far from the intersection of the Mosswater Road and the Valley Road stands a small inn and taproom known as Alejia's Crossing. **Alejia** (CN female human fighter 4/rogue 2) is a retired adventurer and former outlaw who settled on a long-abandoned farm. She expanded the old fieldstone farmhouse into a small and somewhat run-down inn, and hired on a couple of her former associates to help operate the place. Alejia and her cronies pass the days reminiscing about old times and exaggerating the stories of their exploits, while the poorly paid and much-abused staff does its best to keep the place running.

Alejia's inn ostensibly serves travelers and merchants detouring inland around the ruins of Mosswater. However, Alejia is allied with the Three Daggers thieves' guild of Thornkeep. Within her establishment, bandits and highwaymen spy on travelers on the nearby roads and make arrangements to waylay them later. On any given night, members of two or three different outlaw gangs can be found in the common room at Alejia's Crossing, listening in on the talk of travelers and caravan guards. Worse yet, it's not unusual for strangers to be robbed in their rooms by Alejia's regulars,

especially if they look like tempting targets. For most, it might be safer to avoid the inn altogether and sleep out in the open.

### CASTLE BASKRAAL

Five miles north of Thornkeep lie the remains of an old goblin citadel, Castle Baskraal. Located in the middle of a deep, shadowed forest vale, this was one of the strongholds of the Kingdom of Zog. It was largely destroyed by Lady Tarwynna's army almost 500 years ago. No goblin has dared to set foot here since, but other monsters frequently infest the place. The remains of the walls and crumbling towers shelter several dangerous predatory creatures, including a nest of wyverns. Extensive dungeons lie beneath the rubble of the surface level.

Castle Baskraal is currently under the dominion of a dusk kamadan calling herself the Ebon Fang. The creature controls a particularly degenerate tribe of troglodytes, who cover themselves in tattoos of red, unblinking eyes. The troglodytes creep forth every few weeks to abduct a woodcutter or traveler and bring the hapless victim back to the Ebon Fang.

### THE CRUSADER ROAD

Those zealous pilgrims who hope to aid Mendev's crusade against the monsters of the Worldwound typically travel north via one of two routes—the River Road, which follows the Sellen's centermost tributary, and the Crusader Road, which runs along the West Sellen. This latter road is the favored target of the highway bandits, con artists, phony toll keepers, and other underhanded thieves who populate Thornkeep, which is but a stone's throw away from the heavily traveled path. After passing through the roguish town of Thornkeep, virtuous crusaders making their way toward the demon-infested lands of the north tend to feel further assured of their righteous cause, while greedy mercenaries hoping to score some coin in Mendev sometimes linger near the bandit fortress, finding all the glory they ever desired among the ranks of the Three Daggers or another of the town's nefarious gangs.

### DISMAL CAVERNS

Easily one of the most extensive cavern systems in the Echo Wood is the Dismal Caverns, located beneath a wooded ridge a day's march from Thornkeep. Though the whole system stretches for many hundreds of yards, there are few grand chambers, and the delicate features that beautify other cave systems are noticeably lacking. Many of the tunnels and chambers are wet and muddy, with low ceilings and floors choked with forest debris and animal bones washed into the cavern system during each year's spring flooding. Most explorers who have visited the Dismal Caverns return to the surface world cold, tired, muddy, and generally dispirited.

The Dismal Caverns seem dank, constricted, and cheerless by human standards, but those drawbacks do not trouble goblins. A large, aggressive goblin tribe known as the Bonedancers makes its home in the cave system. The

Bonedancer priests have a knack for crude necromancy, and animate many of the bones in the cavern into animal or goblin skeletons.

### ECHO CLEFT

About a mile upstream (northeast) of Thornkeep, Echo Stream passes through a small gorge or draw known locally as Echo Cleft. The stream flows noisily through a steep-sided rock chute about 15 or 20 feet tall and only 10 to 15 feet wide. Boulders and old snags create a series of pools and tiny falls over a distance of a hundred yards or so. Most Thornkeep residents think of Echo Cleft as a picturesque little spot, and it's popular with the town's children in the summertime; they tell stories that a clumsy outlaw spilled a whole bag of gold coins in the stream here.

Unfortunately, Echo Cleft is becoming an increasingly dangerous place to visit. A colony of the Echo Wood's moon spiders moved into the area in the last few weeks. Adelind Fraston, the girl missing from the Fraston farm, became trapped in webs when she wandered over to Echo Cleft in search of mushrooms. The Fraston girl is unfortunately waiting to become a moon spider's next meal, thoroughly wrapped up in webbing and near death from spider poison.

### THE EMERALD SPIRE

This striking tower is made of a strange green glass harder than granite. It is an extremely ancient structure, built with Azlanti magic thousands of years ago. One of the Azlanti war-wizards in exile constructed it as a secluded, private home and workshop, well away from the stronghold on Brokenhelm Hill. The massive attack force that destroyed the exiles paused here just long enough to shatter the upper half of the spire, but the dungeons beneath the tower remain intact.

The tower is currently the abode of **Klarkosh** (NE male human evoker 7), a Technic League wizard from Numeria who came here to pore over the scraps of Azlanti technology and lore that remain. Klarkosh protects himself with dangerous automatons of his own devising, but mysterious extraplanar monsters keep appearing in chambers that otherwise seem perfectly secure. Some strange Azlanti enchantment or device still seeks to defend the Emerald Spire from Klarkosh's forces, as well as from any new intruders. The wizards Jharun and Tiawask—the missing members of the Goldenfire Order—are currently held captive by Klarkosh, who captured them when they came to explore the spire.

### FORT INEVITABLE

A small farming hamlet located in the rolling plains south of the Echo Wood, the village of Southwood had long been an "in between" place—not quite part of Lambreth, a little beyond the borders of Daggermark, and a little too far from Mosswater or Riverwatch to ever form any kind of larger realm with the other settlements between the river and the

wood. For generations, the people of Southwood suffered sorely at the hands of river pirates, monsters from the Echo Wood, barbarian raiders from the north, and, of course, the rampant banditry of Thornkeep's outlaws. Then, 30 years ago, a Hellknight named Varden rode through the area with his retinue and spent a month mercilessly pursuing any bandit or pirate he could catch, killing dozens and driving many more to flee for their lives.

The grateful people of Southwood begged Varden to remain and protect them—or so the Hellknights claim. Others say that Varden, seeing no one around who could gainsay him, decided to make himself lord over everything within reach. He founded a Hellknight stronghold in Southwood, renamed the town to suit his tastes, and set about putting the surrounding countryside under his authority. Varden died 5 years ago, the victim of a bold assassin, but the rest of the Hellknights remain and continue to rule over the village. Fortunately for Thornkeep, the Hellknights ruling Fort Inevitable are dedicated to the defeat of demons and chaotic outsiders, and thus have little interest in simple mortal banditry—but some say that it's only a matter of time before these Hellknights seek to expand the scope of their authority.

### FORT RIVERWATCH

Ten miles northwest of Thornkeep, on the banks of the West Sellen, stands the town of Riverwatch. Considered the last settlement of the River Kingdoms before one crosses into Numeria or Ustalav, Riverwatch is a bustling port for barge traffic along the West Sellen. Mosswater's destruction 50 years ago left Riverwatch as the only port along the river between Lockridge, more than 100 miles to the south, and the squalid village of Dravod Knock 250 miles farther north. As such, it's the last outpost of civilization along the West Sellen River for a long way.

Ninety years ago, the Knights of Iomedae established a chain of small keeps along the wild stretch of the West Sellen to protect pilgrims and crusaders bound for distant Mendev along the western route. The knights established a garrison at Riverwatch, and assumed

responsibility for maintaining law and order in the area. To this day, the knights are still the effective authorities in the town, governing the settlement and doing their best to keep the river and roads safe for travel.

The knights at Fort Riverwatch have no use at all for the bandits and outlaws sheltered at Thornkeep, but the Iomedae garrison is small and overmatched—the best of the knights are away in the north, manning the defenses of Mendev. As a consequence, they have never had the strength to clean out Thornkeep and put an end to its lawless ways, and seem unlikely to muster the necessary troops anytime soon.

### THE MISTED VAULT

An ancient ruin dating back to the days of the Azlanti exiles, the Misted Vault is a series of subterranean chambers with an entrance hidden in a hillside amid a jumble of boulders. A set of weathered stone steps descends steeply into a deep cleft between the rocks, and an ancient doorway surrounded by faded runes lies at the bottom. For some unknown reason, a cold, clinging white mist fills the cleft and the chambers hidden in the hill.

The Misted Vault is protected by a number of diabolical traps and monsters frozen in magical stasis, including savage gargoyles of unusual strength and cunning. Secret chambers within the Vault still contain powerful magical treasures and ancient relics—or so the stories go, anyway. Few who venture into the misty gloom beyond the rune-marked door ever return.

### MOSSWATER

The largest and most well known of the ruined towns in the western River Kingdoms, Mosswater was abandoned 50 years ago when a series of terrifying merrow attacks killed hundreds and sent the survivors fleeing for their lives. Empty warehouses and ivy-covered manors stand silently along weed-infested streets beside Glow Water Lake. Wherever one wanders in the ruins, the weathered bones of those who did not escape the town's doom crunch underfoot—a grim warning to anyone who dares tread the haunted avenues and alleys. Most travelers forgo the now-overgrown stretch of the Crusader Road near Mosswater in favor of the safer Valley Road to the east of Glow Water Lake.



Oreena Hollysong

The people of Mosswater fled or died in great haste and confusion. They left behind warehouses and homes full of valuable goods and the trappings of wealth. Some of those killed before they could make their escapes also left hidden caches of gold coins, gemstones, or magical treasures. Many of these abandoned (or forgotten) treasures still remain in the ruins of the town. Unfortunately, the ogres that laid waste to Mosswater still lurk in the depths of Glow Water Lake, and other dangerous monsters now live in the ruins. Worse yet, the restless spirits of Mosswater's slaughtered townsfolk sometimes roam the streets after the sun goes down.

### MURDOON HOMESTEAD

The Murdoons are a stubborn, pugnacious clan of freeholders who live in a fortlike palisade several miles north of Thornkeep. They get by with trapping, hunting, gathering nuts and mushrooms, raising pigs, and tending a small garden plot within their crude fortifications. The leader of the clan is **Tunk Murdoon** (CG male human warrior 4), a thick-waisted, broad-shouldered bulldog of a man who spits in the eye on anyone who tries to tell him what to do or how to live. Four of Tunk's grown children and their families live here, along with a couple of stray cousins and in-laws who all share the Murdoon determination to make a go of it with no help from anyone else.

The Murdoons are at odds with the Wolfmane barbarians, various goblin tribes, ogre bands, and most of Thornkeep's outlaws. However, they guard a secret that no one else suspects: a hidden trail leading to a forgotten keep. Like Thornkeep, the Murdoons' castle was founded by an Ustalavic lord seeking to tame the wild frontier east of the Sellen, but this keep was sacked by forest monsters and fell into ruin centuries ago. The Murdoons believe the place is full of gold, but they don't go there—it's also haunted by dangerous undead. However, if an adventurer were to find a way to befriend Tunk and his quarrelsome clan, the Murdoons might be willing to show the outsider the ruins of the old castle.

### OREENA'S COTTAGE

This is the home of Oreena the druid, a short, stooped, white-haired woman who has spent the better part of 60 years wandering the paths of the Echo Wood and watching over the forest. In her younger days, she battled endlessly against the work of the most greedy woodcutters and trappers, recklessly and self-righteously inflicting destruction upon entire logging camps, mining operations, and hunting parties. Eventually she forged alliances with the wise women of the Wolfmane tribe, forgoing her ways of vengeance and instead cultivating the barbarians' custom of respect for the forest spirits. Now she is working to instill a similar tradition among the common folk of Thornkeep by quietly spreading the Green Faith among the village's farmers and foresters. Few suspect that the grandmotherly Oreena is the same "Warden of the

Wood" who punished loggers and hunters with such ferocity a generation ago.

### PIT OF CHAINS

A steep-sided sinkhole surrounded by snarled thickets of goblinbramble and dead trees, the Pit of Chains is the entrance to a large set of subterranean caverns. A narrow flight of worn stone steps descends around the side of the pit; rusting old chains with hundreds of wicked hooks attached are anchored in the pit walls, and sag across the open space. Old, rotting corpses of goblins, humans, and folk of a handful of other races hang from the chains or lie where they've fallen on the pit floor. The smell of the place is ghastly.

The Pit of Chains is the home of a particularly savage and violent tribe of goblins, the Ripping Chains. The tribe is spurred on in their wickedness and bloodlust by their chieftain, a particularly vicious barghest called Skarmarg. This hateful creature harbors ideas of subduing the other goblin tribes of the Echo Wood and reforging the Kingdom of Zog. Many of the victims suspended from the pit's chains are goblins of other tribes, killed to demonstrate that their chiefs are too weak to protect their tribes. So far, Skarmarg has done a good job of starting a vicious blood feud between the Ripping Chains and the other major tribes of the Echo Wood, the Brambleclaws and the Bonedancers, but it's not clear whether the barghest is any closer to forcing the other tribes to submit.

### SILVERSHADE LAKE

Deep in the heart of the forest lies a beautiful, hidden lake surrounded by a magnificent grove of birches. This is Silvershade Lake, one of the few truly fey places within the Echo Wood. The dryads of the grove zealously guard the trees and forest creatures that shelter under them, aided by a small band of reclusive satyrs. The fey tolerate the Wolfmane barbarians, although they rarely show themselves to humans of any sort. They deeply resent the woodcutters and trappers of Thornkeep, and more than a few greedy loggers or furriers who unwisely plied their trades too close to the fey's demesne have simply vanished, never to be seen again.

### SKULL-BASHERS' DEN

The Skull-Bashers—a vicious band of ogres—plague the outlying farms and homesteads of Thornkeep. Like most ogres, they are lazy, sullen, violent brutes. The Skull-Bashers are notorious for their habit of taking captives back to their cave, bashing their heads in, and boiling the still-twitching bodies in a huge iron kettle. The ogres are so fond of their "bone boils" that they go to great lengths to avoid killing potential meals at the sites of their raids, using nets, bolas, and simple flails made of heavy rope to catch and subdue the hapless victims for later stewing.

The Skull-Bashers' cave is actually the entrance to a maze-like goblin warren dating back to the days of Zog. The ogres

block up the small tunnels with heaps of boulders when anything from below troubles them, little knowing that a forgotten goblin stronghold lies right under their feet.

### THELSTEREX'S CAVE

The most dangerous dragon residing in the western Echo Wood is Thelsterex, an adult green dragon. The fell energies that permeate the Echo Wood have seeped into and tainted Thelsterex, granting him a particularly nasty visage and causing hard, spiky growths to sprout from his scales. Because of his fearsome and unnatural appearance, the Wolfmanes of the forest have taken to calling Thelsterex by another name: *Eruktul-Nabuk*, or “Jaderazor.” His lair is a large cave at the end of a ravine choked with briars and boulders. Any creature lacking a dragon’s thick scales (or perhaps a suit of plate armor) who pushes through the thorns is painfully scratched again and again. Because of the terrain and the thick brush, the dragon’s lair is very well hidden.

Thelsterex is an arrogant and jealous dragon who spends much of his time searching for potential rivals and driving them out of “his” forest. A few smaller and weaker green dragons skulk about the Echo Wood (mostly Thelsterex’s younger siblings, their progenitors having left the forest years ago), and Thelsterex wants to make sure they don’t get the idea to try establishing themselves here. However, he is a coward at heart, and flees from anything resembling a fair fight.

### TOAD HOLLOW

One of the few truly swampy areas within the Echo Wood, Toad Hollow is a poorly drained dell surrounded by low, bramble-covered ridges. Cypressess festooned with hanging moss stand in the stagnant, knee-deep waters of Toad Lake. Toad Hollow is home to a reclusive tribe of boggards, who make their homes in crude huts built on platforms around the wading cypresses. The boggards are growing in number and aggressiveness, and bands of boggard marauders and scavengers are now a routine sight in the nearby woods. While they rarely attack humans unless they outnumber their quarry by a large margin, the Toad Hollow hunting parties are now numerous enough to overwhelm a company of woodcutters or a well-guarded caravan, and the boggard priest-kings are looking for opportunities to do exactly that.

### WOODBRISTLE HOMESTEAD

One mile outside of Thornkeep along the Daggermark Road lies the large, fortified homestead of **Divram Woodbristle** (LG male halfling fighter 5) and his extended family. The Woodbristles are a resourceful, tenacious clan of halflings known for their abundant fungus gardens and superior mushrooms—which possess an exquisite taste as well as unique restorative properties. To protect their home from the robbers who roam the area, Divram and his siblings excavated an extensive system of burrows beneath a hillside, and carefully cultivated the forest’s goblinbramble to protect their homestead with a thorny palisade. To this formidable defense the Woodbristles added a kennel full of the largest, meanest war dogs they could find. More than one gang of bandits has tried to plunder the halfling homestead, only to be driven away in abject defeat.

Most recently, the Woodbristles drove off an attack by the Brambleclaw goblins of Thornkeep. The Brambleclaws devised a plan to pin the halflings and their war dogs in the burrows by blocking the tunnel doors with bundles of burning sticks while they looted everything within the palisade. The plan didn’t work out, and a number of goblins were killed—including Kaskarma, the daughter of the goblin crone Kastya. Now Kastya is out for Woodbristle blood.



Divram Woodbristle



# THE ACCURSED HALLS

By Richard Baker

Beneath Brokenhelm Hill and the weathered walls of Thornkeep lies an ancient maze of magic and madness. Once the workrooms and summoning chamber of a rebel Azlanti lord, these subterranean chambers were forgotten thousands of years ago after the eradication of the evil lord and his followers. Over the centuries, adventurers have found their way into these twisting passages and magnificent chambers, only to discover that the fading magic of the ancient Azlanti still lingers here. The people of Thornkeep call this dungeon the Halls Under the Hill, but those heroes who have dared its depths know this place by a different name: the Accursed Halls.



Long ago, the evil Nhur Athemon—a powerful wizard and devotee of the demon lord Abraxas—fled Azlant with his household and slaves, making the distant Echo Wood his home in exile. He raised a tower atop the very hill where Thornkeep now stands. Ever fearful of discovery by his enemies in Azlant, the wizard-lord raised webs of illusion and magical wards to conceal his presence. Ultimately, however, Athemon's efforts were to no avail—in time, his enemies succeeded in divining his location. Azlanti wizards and soldiers broke into the hidden stronghold and destroyed Athemon and his followers, leaving little trace of the outcast's stronghold aboveground. However, the soldiers missed the workrooms and conjuring chambers under his palace.

Over thousands of years, Nhur Athemon's wards slowly failed, but enough magic remained to make the hidden vaults a place of darkness and horror. The humans of the nearby lands avoided Brokenhelm Hill, but the goblins of Zog delved eagerly, seeking the power they sensed sleeping here. Goblin miners cut tunnels to reach parts of the complex buried during the long-ago destruction of Nhur Athemon's palace, and goblin adepts eagerly experimented with the magical properties of the halls, often causing their own demise.

Over the last few centuries, adventurers explored the Accursed Halls numerous times. Old treasures stolen by the goblins of Zog and one or two ancient prizes from the days of Nhur Athemon still wait to be found in the Halls Under the Hill, but few suspect the truth of the place: Nhur Athemon's ancient spell-wards are living things with a dark, tangible awareness, and they still protect the place. The halls routinely conjure dangerous monsters or animate the remains of those who perish in this place, and traps dismantled centuries ago slowly reset themselves. Indeed, the Halls even hunger for treasures taken away years ago, and find ways to draw them back by influencing the minds of those who live nearby. These halls are truly accursed, and few dare their depths and return unmarked.

## DUNGEON FEATURES

Unless otherwise noted, the Accursed Halls possess the following features.

**Walls:** Masonry. The walls are made of dressed sandstone blocks, once magically fitted but now weathered and crumbling at the edges (hardness 8, Climb DC 20).

**Doors:** Stone. Doors either open easily to a light push, or are sealed by *arcane lock* effects (hardness 8, 30 hp, Disable Device DC 20, break DC 38).

**Floors:** Flagstone. The floors are made of hard slate slabs. A thin layer of sand weathered from the walls lies underfoot in many chambers, making newly formed tracks easy to spot (treat as soft ground for the purpose of Survival DCs to follow tracks).

**Illumination:** Braziers enchanted with *continual flame* spells light most chambers. Dispelled braziers relight themselves in a few days.

## A1. ENTRY CHAMBER

This large hall is held up by a number of carved columns. Directly ahead, a doorway is sealed with stone blocks. In the center of the floor, the flagstones have been pulled up, revealing a staircase leading downward. The stench of rotting meat hangs in the air.

The blocked doorway was the main entrance to the dungeon complex long ago. It was sealed by long-forgotten adventurers exploring the Halls after the defeat of the goblins of Zog, and uncovering the collapsed passage would take days. However, subsequent explorers discovered the formerly secret stairway in the center of floor, providing a new way into the dungeon.

## A2. GUARDPOST (CR 1)

This small antechamber sports a hallway to the south and a staircase to the north. Iron stakes driven into the flagstones pin the half-eaten carcass of a pig to the floor in the middle of the room.

The goblins now occupying the Halls brought a pair of watchdogs with them—or watch-vermin, to be more precise. They staked the rotting carcass in this small chamber to make sure their giant centipedes would stay close by, and to discourage any new explorers from wandering into the place.

**Creatures:** Two giant centipedes lurk in the shadows of the shoring timbers and rubble in this small chamber. They are not actively hiding, but noticing them is hard, requiring a successful DC 10 Perception check. Any PC who fails the check is surprised.

### GIANT CENTIPEDES (2)

CR 1/2

XP 200 each

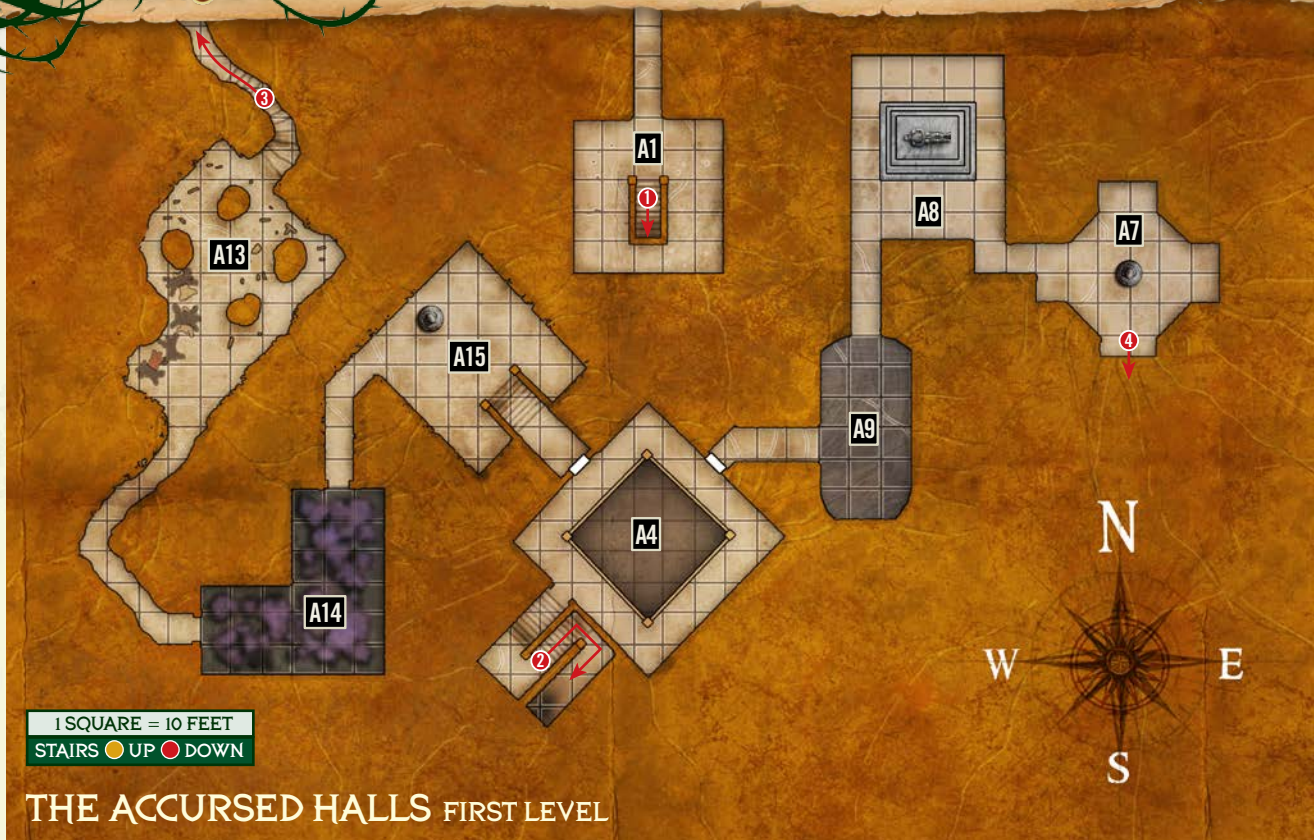
hp 6 each (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 43)

## A3. HALL OF DEMONS (CR 3)

Eight statues of demonic creatures anchored to great square columns guard an octagonal open space in the center of this large hall. Various bits of scaffolding and debris are piled up next to the columns, which support a large gallery fifteen feet above the room's floor. Open stone archways lead to the southeast and the north from the lower floor, and a large stone door stands at the south corner of the chamber.

The demonic statues are unsettling in appearance, but harmless. Each depicts a marilith with an array of different mundane weapons. A successful DC 27 Knowledge (planes) check allows a PC to identify the statues.

No stairs lead up to the balcony in this chamber, but the passage to the southeast connects to a series of chambers that bring explorers up to the balcony from area A9. It's only 15 feet to the balcony, and the demonic statues and scaffolding make it an easy climb (DC 10). The goblins here keep a couple of ropes coiled up on the balcony to scurry up and down.



THE ACCURSED HALLS FIRST LEVEL

**Creatures:** Six goblins stand guard in this room. Three archers stand guard on the balcony level (area A4), while the remaining three goblins guard the lower level. If the PCs engaged in a loud fight against the giant centipedes in area A2, then the goblins are prepared for trouble and hide about the room, ready to spring an ambush; otherwise, the distracted goblins can easily be caught off guard by stealthy PCs.

**GOBLINS (6)** **CR 1/3**  
**XP 135 each**  
**hp 6 each** (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary 156*)

**Development:** Defeated goblins here and elsewhere in the Accursed Halls can be questioned with little coercion, cowardly as they are. They claim to be in the Halls to find a “great goblin treasure,” a sword that Chief Graalsk of the Brambleclaws wants. They know the sword is supposed to be hidden in the western portion of the dungeon. Finally, if the PCs succeed at a DC 20 Diplomacy or Intimidation check against the goblins, they reveal that their commander is an oracle named Murgmo, who is also in the western portion of the dungeon.

**Treasure:** One of the goblin archers has a pouch containing 60 gp, a *potion of cure light wounds*, and a small gold ring with an emerald worth 100 gp.

### THE DOOR OF SEVEN STARS

At the southern end of the Hall of Demons stands a magically sealed doorway guarding the *Pool of Seeing* (area A16). This is the *Door of Seven Stars*.

At the south corner of this hall stands a large stone door. Seven thumb-sized sockets are embedded in the door, arranged in a ring around a starburst design.

This door is protected by a unique and powerful abjuration that makes it nearly impossible to open (hardness 12, 120 hp, break DC 38). The only way to open it is to either speak the password (now long forgotten) or solve its puzzle. Each of the seven stars represents a mystic energy of the sort created by a *prismatic spray* or *prismatic wall* spell. The sockets accommodate stones about 1 inch in diameter. Placing one stone in each socket and matching each socket’s color requirement (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, or violet) unseals the door; the door remains unlocked as long as the gemstones remain in the sockets.

Any gem or crystal of the proper color and size will do; for example, the red socket can be filled with a ruby, a garnet, a spinel, a red-colored rock crystal, or even a piece of red-tinted glass. Gems and crystals of the right colors are scattered through the Accursed Halls, or the PCs can bring their own. There’s a trick, however—the door has no indication as to what sort of stone functions in which socket. If the PCs have seen the scroll fragment in Goldenfire Tower, they know the red stone occupies the highest socket. Otherwise, it’s a matter of guesswork. The proper solution is to arrange the stones clockwise in rainbow order, beginning with red in the highest socket in the door, followed by orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet stones, with the violet stone positioned between indigo and red.



in places, although these defects aren't immediately obvious unless someone enters the water and examines the bottom. The stairs are quite steep, and count as difficult terrain.

**Creatures:** Four skeletons guard this chamber—two on the middle landing and two on the highest landing—and each is armed with a shortbow and broken scimitar. They attack any intruders entering the room.

**SKELETONS (4) CR 1/3**

**XP 135 each**

**hp** 4 each (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 250)

**Ranged** shortbow +2 (1d6)

**Treasure:** In 10 minutes a character can gather 1d10+10 shards of blue ceramic from the pool basin, which appears to exhaust the supply. The blue shards function in the corresponding socket of the *Door of Seven Stars*, and they're worth 1 sp each as curiosities.

**A7. SHRINE OF ABRAXAS**

A terrible stone idol stands on a small dais in the center of this cross-shaped chamber. The idol depicts a demonic being with a birdlike head and writhing serpents for legs; the eyes are fiery orange gems.

Ornamental pillars surround the chamber, and open archways lead from this chamber to the south and the west. An eerie soundlessness enwraps the entire chamber.

The idol is the focus of an *unhallow* effect with a *silence* spell anchored to it (caster level 9th). If the heroes are pursued into this chamber from areas **A6** or **A8**, the spell effects may come as an unwelcome surprise. With a successful DC 20 Knowledge (planes) check, a character can identify the idol as a depiction of Abraxas, demon lord of forbidden knowledge. Both the *unhallow* spell and the *silence* spell remain in place as long as the statue remains in the room. Successfully dispelling the effect quells its dark energies for 1d4 days before it automatically reactivates.

**Treasure:** The gemstones can be pried out of the idol's eye sockets with little effort. Each is an orange garnet worth 100 gp. All of them function in the orange socket in the *Door of Seven Stars*.

**A8. SARCOPHAGUS ROOM (CR 4)**

A large stone dais in this chamber supports a great sarcophagus. The lid, once carved in the image of a sleeping ancient warrior, is cracked into two pieces and lies askew.

The dead bodies of several adventurers lie crumpled on the floor: a man with a shaven head wearing battered scraps of leather, a dark-haired woman in scholarly robes, and a yellow-haired elf in hide trappings. These are the remains of Sir Garhal Silvercrown and his last two adventuring companions. The unfortunate adventurers were slain by a powerful curse when they broke the sarcophagus, and they are doomed to rise as undead.

**Creatures:** Garhal Silvercrown is now a wight, and his two companions are zombies. They stir and rise to their feet when any living creature comes within 20 feet of them. The monsters pursue retreating PCs into areas **A6**, **A7**, or **A9**, but no farther.

**GARHAL SILVERCROWN CR 3**

**XP 800**

Male wight (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 276)

**hp** 26

**ZOMBIES (2) CR 1/2**

**XP 200 each**

**hp** 12 each (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 288)

**Treasure:** Garhal wears a silver signet ring on his right hand worth 150 gp. This ring bears the emblem of his noble house, and can be presented as proof of his death.



Door of Seven Stars

**Story Award:** If the PCs retrieve Garhal Silvercrown's silver signet ring and give it to Ariane Redderfin at Blue Basilisk Hall in Thornkeep, award them 1,200 XP.

### A9. DARK HALL (CR 3)

A feeling of cold dread is palpable in this oval-shaped hall, which is finished in gleaming dark stone. The shadows in the upper portions of the chamber seem to seethe slowly with foul energy. Doorways exit the chamber to the north and the west.

Long ago this chamber was an instruction hall in which Nhur Athemon's pupils studied spells of darkness and shadow. All the trappings of their studies are gone, but the taint of their umbral magic lingers in the very stones of the chamber.

**Creatures:** If a PC is ever alone in this room, a shadow animates and attacks her. If the whole party passes through the chamber, the shadow animates and attempts to sneak up on the last person to leave the room. If the shadow is destroyed, the chamber creates a new one in 1d6 days.

**SHADOW** **CR 3**  
**XP 800**  
**hp 19** (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary 245*)

**Treasure:** When destroyed, the shadow shrinks and coalesces into a small lapis lazuli worth 50 gp. This gem functions in the indigo socket of the *Door of Seven Stars*.

### A10. CRUMBLING PASSAGE (CR 1)

A framework of old timbers shores up this hallway's cracked and uneven ceiling. From the west comes the sound of falling water. In the middle of the hall, a large stone block lies on top of the corpse of a crushed goblin.

**Hazard:** This long corridor is no longer stable. The vibrations of footsteps alone may cause a minor collapse in the ceiling. Each Small or larger creature walking through the hall has a 25% chance of triggering the hazard; creatures running or fighting in the area have a 50% of triggering the hazard.

Characters who succeed at a DC 20 Perception check notice the weakened ceiling before entering the danger area; characters trained in Knowledge (engineering) or Craft (stonemasonry) gain a +4 circumstance bonus on this check. Characters moving slowly and carefully who succeed at a DC 10 Acrobatics check can pass through without any chance of causing a minor collapse.

**FALLING STONE HAZARD** **CR 1**  
**Type** mechanical; **Perception** DC 20; **Disable Device** DC 20  
**EFFECTS**

**Trigger** location; **Reset** none (but area remains hazardous)  
**Effect** Atk +10 melee, 2d6 damage

**Ad Hoc Experience Award:** Although the trap in this room can be triggered a number of times (the exact number is left to GM discretion), the PCs should be awarded XP for triggering or bypassing the trap only once.

**Treasure:** The crushed goblin has been dead for about 2 days. It managed to steal Garhal Silvercrown's armor from area A8, but was crushed by a falling hunk of rock before it got very far. The +1 *chainmail* survived the impact, and can be easily pried from the corpse's grip.

### A11. BROKEN CONJURY (CR 2)

This large chamber appears to be a natural cavern with small yellow crystals glittering in the walls. A level flagstone path clings to the western wall, but most of the room is an open chasm. Uneven columns of rock jut from the chamber's depths, matching the height of the flagstone floor to the north and south. Water streams down from the roof of the cave and pools thirty feet below around the bases of the rock columns. A rickety ladder lies on the ledge of the cliff at the room's northern exit, along with torches and a barrel full of pitch.

The Azlanti created powerful magic to enhance spellcasting in this natural cavern. Zog's goblin adepts managed to blow the place to smithereens, which is why the floor is now 30 feet below the level of the room entrances. It's possible to cross the room by leaping from column to column, but the goblins built a 12-foot-long ladder so that they could cross slowly in safety.

The walls of the chamber are studded with natural crystals of a deep yellow hue. They aren't valuable, but it would take only a moment to chip a few off the wall. Any of the yellow crystals function in the corresponding socket in the *Door of Seven Stars*.

**Hazard:** The broken columns of rock are separated by 5-foot gaps and form a dangerous path across the chamber. The jump from either ledge to the first rock column is pretty easy, requiring only a successful DC 5 Acrobatics check, since the paths are dry and there is room for a running start. However, jumping from column to column is notably harder, requiring a successful DC 12 Acrobatics check to clear each gap. Characters attacked while they are on the columns are considered flat-footed.

A character who falls lands in the water and rubble at the bottom of the room takes 3d6 points of damage. The water averages 5 feet deep. The walls of the chasm are rough but wet (Climb DC 15 to scale). The sides of the columns are smoother, and thus harder to climb (DC 20).

**Creatures:** Three stirges have made their nest in a crevice in the ceiling. Naturally, they tend to swarm any character trying to jump across the columns. The goblins keep them at bay with the pitch and torches—the stirges won't attack anyone holding a brightly burning object.

**STIRGES (3)** **CR 1/2**  
**XP 200 each**  
**hp 5 each** (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary 260*)

## A12. POOL CHAMBER (CR 1)

The lower portion of this chamber is a pool of still, green water. Large rectangular columns support a series of shallow stone steps and landings, climbing from the southern part of the chamber toward a rough, recently excavated tunnel to the north.

This room was intended to be a foyer to a grand audience hall in area **A13**, and an aquarium where Nhur Athemon could keep his collection of exotic fish. The large pool is 20 feet deep. The stone landings are 5 feet above the water level at the lower end, 15 feet above it in the middle, and 25 feet above it at the highest end.

PCs entering from the southern door who succeed at a DC 10 Perception check hear the goblins clattering and squealing on the uppermost ledge to the north.

**Creatures:** Three goblin guards are posted in this chamber, guarding the northern (uppermost) landing. They make for a poor watch, since they are engaged in a heated game of dice.

**Treasure:** The “pot” for the dice game stands at a *potion of lesser restoration*, a pair of silver earrings worth 25 gp each, 60 gp, and 110 sp.

### GOBLINS (3)

CR 1/3

XP 135 each

hp 6 each (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 156)

#### TACTICS

**Morale** If two of the goblins are killed, the third flees to area **A13** to warn Murgmo and the other goblins there.

## A13. INCOMPLETE CHAMBER (CR 3)

Thick, square columns support the low ceiling of this natural cavern, but the walls remain uneven hewn stone and the floor is only partially paved. Rough tunnels and unfinished walls extend for some distance. Tattered furs, foul-looking bedrolls, sacks of food, and battered old crates and casks are scattered around in an improvised campsite.

Nhur Athemon’s followers intended to finish this room as a great audience hall or meeting chamber, but they were obliterated before they got very far. Later on, the goblins of Zog expanded on the older work, but they too were defeated before they could complete the room.

**Creatures:** Murgmo and her guards are currently camped here. They’ve been stymied for days by the trap in area **A14** and the monsters in area **A15**, and Murgmo is trying to determine how to proceed. If the goblins here are warned by a survivor fleeing from area **A12**, they hide behind columns and prepare to ambush any intruders.

### GOBLINS (3)

CR 1/3

XP 135 each

hp 6 each (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 156)

## MURGMO

CR 2

XP 600

Female goblin oracle 3 (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 156, *Pathfinder RPG Advanced Player’s Guide* 42)

NE Small humanoid (goblinoid)

**Init** +5; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +2

#### DEFENSE

**AC** 16, touch 12, flat-footed 15 (+4 armor, +1 Dex, +1 size)

**hp** 23 (3d8+6)

**Fort** +2, **Ref** +2, **Will** +5; +4 vs. disease

#### OFFENSE

**Speed** 30 ft.

**Melee** mwk longspear +3 (1d6–1/×3)

**Oracle Spells Known** (CL 3rd; concentration +4)

1st (6/day)—*bane* (DC 12), *burning hands* (DC 12), *cause fear* (DC 12), *doom* (DC 12), *inflict light wounds* (DC 12)

0 (at will)—*bleed* (DC 11), *create water*, *detect magic*, *light*, *resistance*

**Mystery** flame

#### TACTICS

**Before Combat** If she has time to prepare for an encounter against the PCs, Murgmo gets in a tactical position so she can use her *burning hands* spell and fire breath ability to damage the PCs and avoid her own allies.

**During Combat** Murgmo relies on her goblin warriors to do most of the heavy lifting in combat while she uses spells like *doom* to hinder the PCs and her fire breath ability to damage them. She drinks her *potion of cure light wounds* if her hit points drop to fewer than 10.

**Morale** Murgmo is determined to find the *sword of Zog*, and fights to the death.

#### STATISTICS

**Str** 8, **Dex** 12, **Con** 12, **Int** 13, **Wis** 14, **Cha** 13

**Base Atk** +2; **CMB** +0; **CMD** 11

**Feats** Combat Casting, Improved Initiative

**Skills** Acrobatics +6, Climb +4, Heal +8, Sense Motive +8, Spellcraft +7, Stealth +8; **Racial Modifiers** +4 Ride, +4 Stealth

**Languages** Common, Goblin

**SQ** oracle’s curse (wasting), revelations (burning magic, fire breath [3d4, 1/day, DC 12])

**Combat Gear** *potion of cure light wounds*, acid (2); **Other Gear** masterwork chain shirt, masterwork longspear

**Treasure:** A wooden chest with a crude lock (Disable Device DC 15) is half-buried among all the other supplies. The chest contains 200 gp, 400 sp, a *potion of cure light wounds*, and an *arrow of sleep*. In addition, Murgmo carries five green peridots in a pouch at her waist (worth 25 gp each). Any of the peridots would function in the corresponding socket in the *Door of Seven Stars*.

## A14. MISTY CHAMBER (CR 2)

This large, L-shaped chamber is filled with knee-deep, pale purple mist. Beneath the mist is a floor of small, glossy black blocks, noticeably different from the flagstone elsewhere in the dungeon. Stone archways exit to the north and the west.

This chamber was formerly a workroom for casting illusions of a particularly dreadful and deadly sort.

**Trap:** Any living creature that sets foot in this chamber is confronted by a misty image drawn from its own subconscious fears, much like a *phantasmal killer* effect. However, the weaker magic in this chamber is unlikely to kill someone outright.

### PHANTASMAL CHILL TRAP CR 2

**Type** magic; **Perception** DC 26; **Disable Device** DC 26

#### EFFECTS

**Trigger** location; **Reset** automatic

**Effect** phantasmal apparition appears (onset delay 1 round); 2d6 cold damage and target shaken for 1 hour (DC 11 Fort save halves damage and negates shaken effect); Will DC 11 to disbelieve; creatures that survive the trap are immune to its effect for 24 hours

**Treasure:** A pale purple garnet worth 50 gp lies on the floor, hidden by the mists. It is the source of the violet color of the mists in this room; when removed, the mists become white. The violet garnet functions in the corresponding socket of the *Door of Seven Stars*.

### A15. TEMPLE OF ZOG (CR 5)

A twenty-foot-tall statue of a man carrying a tome stands in a round niche at one end of this impressive chamber. The chest and head of the large statue have been badly damaged, and look like they melted and ran before congealing again, giving the statue a crude, blob-shaped face with eyes of red stone. A doorway leads to the southwest, and another to the southeast.

When the goblins of Zog held the Accursed Halls, they used fire magic to deface the Azlanti statue they found in this room and make it an image of “Zog,” a god or demon that supposedly protected their kingdom. Now, two goblin corpses lie sprawled on the ground near the foot of the statue.

**Creature:** A pair of fungal crawlers wandered into this room a few days before the goblins arrived. The crawlers scuttle around high on the wall above the southwest door, which puts them in a good position to drop down and surprise characters entering from area A14.

### FUNGAL CRAWLERS (2) CR 3

**XP 800 each**

**hp** 26 each (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 2 127)

**Treasure:** Hidden in the center of the statue’s chest, a good 15 feet above the ground, is a secret compartment. The compartment’s door was melted by the same fire that slagged the statue’s head, but it can still be broken open with brute force (hardness 8, 20 hp, break DC 22). Inside is the *sword of Zog*—a Small +1 cold iron short

*sword*. There is also a silk pouch containing three fiery red rubies worth 100 gp each. The red stones in the statue’s eyes are also rubies worth 100 gp each. Any of the rubies function in the red socket of the *Door of Seven Stars*.

### A16. THE POOL OF SEEING

A long hallway slopes down to a room housing a pool of glowing blue water. Shining gold leaf in exotic designs decorates the walls, ceiling, and pillars. A stone archway to the south leads downstairs.

Guarded by the powerful magic of the *Door of Seven Stars*, this room has likely remained inviolate since the days of Nhur Athemon. The stairs beyond the stone archway lead to area B1.

**Treasure:** The pool is a magical device that functions as a *crystal ball*. However, it cannot be removed from this spot without destroying its magic—anyone who wants to use it must come to the Accursed Halls and pass the *Door of Seven Stars*.

### CONCLUSION

The discovery of the *Pool of Seeing* most likely wraps up the PCs’ exploration of the Accursed Halls, but Nhur Athemon’s dungeon holds deeper secrets. The stone archway in the room with the *Pool of Seeing* leads to additional levels of the dungeon, where increasingly dangerous challenges await intrepid heroes. Perhaps the secret of the Accursed Halls’ malign awareness waits to be discovered somewhere below.



Murgmo



# THE FORGOTTEN LABORATORY

By Jason Bulmahn

Although much of the Accursed Halls was overrun by goblins and the undead remnants of recent explorers, the third level of the dungeon remains largely untouched. Back in the days of Nhur Athemon, the wizard used this layer of his underground complex as a laboratory for all manner of experiments both arcane and alchemical. Only his most trusted servants were allowed into this layer and beyond. Now, the sanctum known as the Forgotten Laboratory is home to new dangers. Vast rewards await those who can overcome the dungeon's hazards, but the cowardly or incompetent can look forward to only a swift death—or worse.



In the years since the Forgotten Laboratory's abandonment, many of Nhur Athemon's foul experiments have malfunctioned or simply broken down. When goblins began to infest the dungeon above, some ventured into these lower chambers, only to fall prey to the few remaining, functioning experiments. While most of the goblins fled, some were either trapped or corrupted by the strange magic that lingers in these forgotten halls. Those who left brought strange tools and treasures to the surface, including an odd device called the *arcanolembic*. This powerful item eventually found its way into the hands of a deranged alchemist by the name of Krenar Half-Face, who used the tool to transform himself and warp the minds and bodies of his unwilling victims. Ever seeking more power, Krenar set out for Thornkeep once he learned of the *arcanolembic's* origins, desperate to unlock its secrets. After solving the riddle of the *Door of Seven Stars* in the Accursed Halls, he found his way down into the Forgotten Laboratory, and has been hard at work ever since, restoring the labs and the devices within to working order.

## B1. WASTE POOL (CR 4)

The narrow staircase ends in a short corridor leading to a large chamber, the center of which is dominated by a pool of stagnant water. An oily sheen covers most of pool, causing it to reflect a multitude of colors onto the walls and ceiling. The only light in this room emanates from a faintly glowing orb attached to the ceiling, and an acrid stench wafts heavily in the air. There is a simple wooden door in the eastern wall, and a set of ornate stone double doors to the south flanked by a pair of sandstone statues.

What was once a simple reflecting pool is now used by Krenar as the dump for all of his failed alchemical experiments and other bits of junk (primarily glass and ceramic). A successful DC 15 Perception check reveals that the oily sheen atop the water seems to move a bit, despite the water being perfectly calm. Characters who succeed at this check can act in the surprise round if attacked by the gray ooze within the pool.

The sandstone statues to the south were once sculpted in the likeness of Nhur Athemon, but their features are now obscured and covered in cobwebs and dust. The light in the center of the room is a simple glass orb enchanted with a *continual flame* spell.

**Creature:** Unknown to Krenar, all of his alchemical waste has congealed into an ooze that now dwells in the pool, feeding off the trash thrown into the water. As soon as a character moves to within 5 feet of the pool, the ooze reaches out to attack.

**GRAY OOZE** **CR 4**  
**XP 1,200**  
**hp 50** (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 166)

**Treasure:** Once the ooze has been slain, the PCs can safely investigate the 3-foot-deep pool. It is filled with an oily sludge

## FORGOTTEN LAB FEATURES

Most of the rooms in the Forgotten Laboratory have 20-foot-high ceilings, and unless otherwise stated, all the entrances to chambers in this level are simple wooden doors. Lighting is virtually nonexistent except where otherwise noted.

that stains anything it touches, but otherwise does no lasting harm. A character that succeeds at a DC 15 Perception check uncovers a *pearl of power* (1st) set in a stone disk beneath the sludge.

## B2. PRISON CELLS (CR 5)

A wall of rusted iron bars dominates the northern half of this room, dividing the area up into three individual cells. In the southern half of the room is a grisly looking table bedecked with manacles and blood. On the wall behind the table hang gruesome, blood-stained tools and other implements. Wooden doors stand on the east and west sides of the room, and a hall to the southeast winds upstairs.

This chamber originally housed those who displeased Nhur Athemon, but now the alchemist Krenar uses it to experiment on some of his abducted goblins. Those who survive the experiments are tossed into one of the cells, and those who perish are tossed into the deadly pool of sludge in area B1.

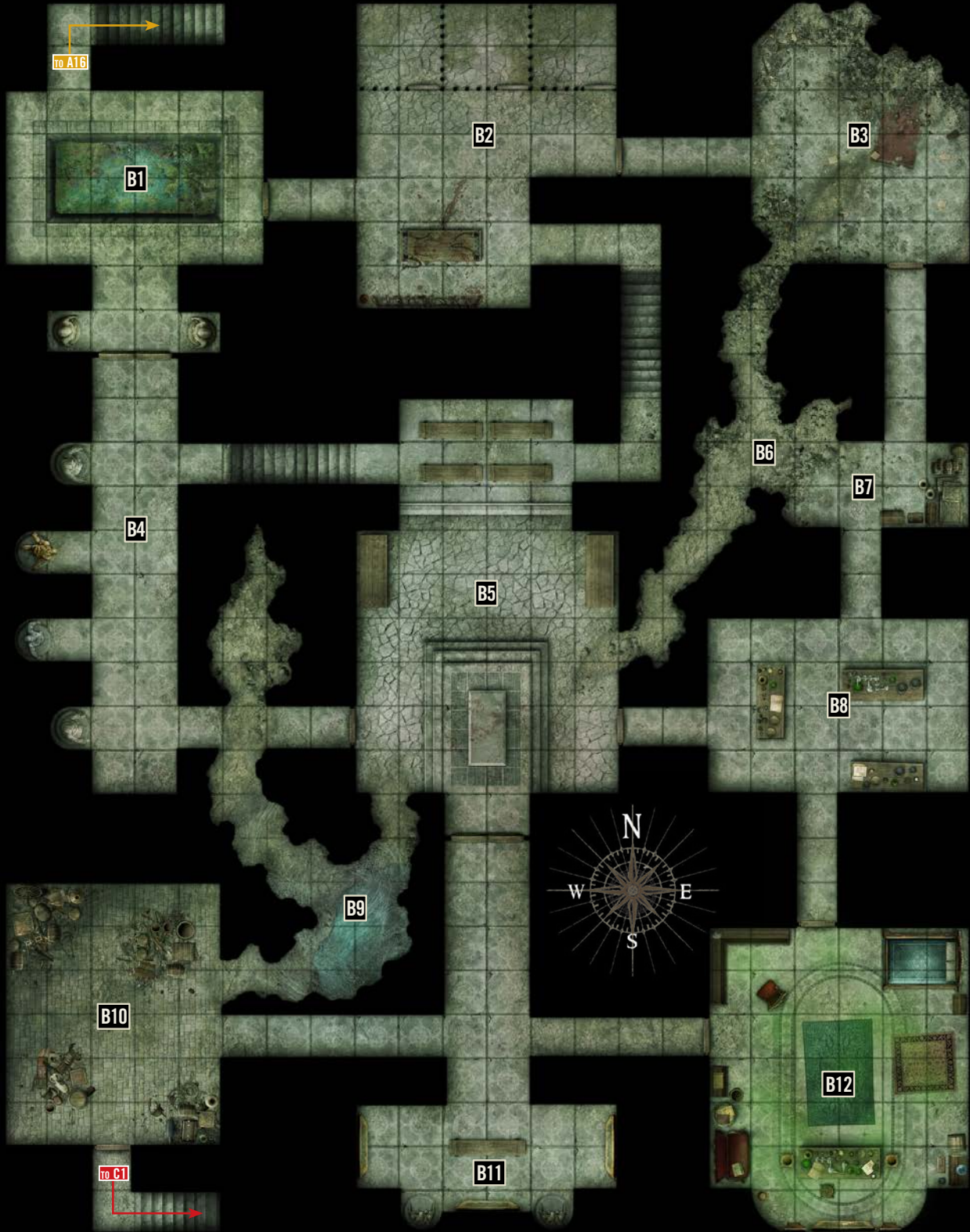
**Creatures:** When Krenar first explored this level of the dungeon, he uncovered the body of a homunculus in a glass jar in area B12. Realizing that it needed only his blood to become active and bound to him, he quickly set about bringing the thing to life. Now the creature serves as his assistant in this chamber, and has instructions to unleash the imprisoned goblins on anyone who dares to intrude into this room. When the PCs first enter the room, the homunculus telepathically alerts Krenar and throws a switch on the wall that unleashes the six mutated goblins trapped in the cells. It then tries to flee the chamber through the passageway that leads to area B5, eventually making its way back to Krenar.

**HOMUNCULUS** **CR 1**  
**XP 400**  
**hp 11** (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 176)

**MUTATED GOBLINS (6)** **CR 1/2**  
**XP 200 each**  
 Advanced goblins (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 156, 294)  
**hp 8 each**  
**Melee** 2 claws +3 (1d3+2)  
**SQ** mutation

The mutated goblins have the advanced simple template, as well as one random mutation each from the following table.

# THE FORGOTTEN LABORATORY



1 SQUARE = 5 FEET  
STAIRS ● UP ● DOWN

d8	Mutation
1	Bite attack (1d6)
2	Scales (+2 natural armor bonus)
3	Third arm (additional claw attack)
4	Tentacle legs (climb speed of 20 feet)
5	Sticky slime (claw attacks gain grab)
6	Reflective hide (resist 5 against all energy types)
7	Speedy (+4 initiative, +20 feet to base speed)
8	Rubbery (DR 5/slashing)

**Treasure:** One of the goblins still wears a belt pouch around its waist containing 14 gp, 8 sp, and a severed human finger still wearing an emerald-faceted ring worth 200 gp.

### B3. RUINED STUDY (CR 3)

This chamber might have once been some sort of study, but it has fallen into ruin. The entire northeast corner of the chamber has collapsed, apparently because of some sort of drilling machine that emerged from the southwest corner and is now half-buried under the rubble to the northeast. The debris-choked tunnel from which it emerged is plainly visible. Wooden doors lie to both the south and west.

One of Nhur Athemon's experiments was a magically enchanted drilling construct that he hoped to use to expand the dungeons beneath Thornkeep. After thousands of years of gathering dust, the animating spirit controlling the construct broke free and went on a rampage, fleeing area **B10** in a rage and drilling through the walls into area **B5** before finally emerging here. Unfortunately for the construct, when it began to drill through the northeastern wall, it destroyed a crystal coffer located in a bookcase on that wall. The coffer was guarded by a powerful magical ward, and when destroyed, it released an earth elemental that promptly smashed the drilling construct and caused the entire corner of the room to collapse.

The door leading out of this room to the south is stuck on its hinges and requires a successful DC 15 Strength check to open.

**Creature:** The earth elemental still dwells in this room, unable to leave because of the ward that summoned it. As a result, it has been driven mad with rage; as soon as the PCs approach the rubble, the earth elemental emerges and attacks. The elemental cannot leave the confines of this room, meaning the PCs can escape its wrath simply by leaving the chamber.

#### MEDIUM EARTH ELEMENTAL **CR 3** XP 800

hp 34 (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 122)

**Treasure:** Scattered among the debris in this chamber are a number of ancient tomes, but most of them have all but turned to dust. A PC who succeeds at a DC 20 Perception check uncovers a pair of intact tomes written in Draconic. The books concern alchemy and various bits of esoteric arcane lore. Anyone who

references the texts for an hour can attempt her next Knowledge (arcana) check with a +2 circumstance bonus. The tomes are worth 50 gp each. In addition, the remnants of the construct can be dug out of the rubble with a successful DC 15 Strength check and 1d6 minutes of work. Anyone making such a check must also succeed at a DC 10 Reflex save to avoid falling debris, with failure dealing 1d6 points of damage to the creature. Once the construct is removed, a PC who succeeds at a DC 15 Disable Device check can open up the machine, revealing a pulsing yellow crystal that radiates conjuration magic. The crystal is the power core for the broken construct. As a gem, it is worth 800 gp, but it can also be used to reactivate the inert constructs in area **B11**. Unfortunately, the crystal is damaged. Once placed into a construct, the crystal functions for only 1d4 days (regardless of the number of constructs it is placed into during that time), after which it burns out completely and crumbles to dust.

### B4. HALL OF STATUES (CR 5)

This long chamber has four alcoves along the western wall. The outer two contain visible statues, and the center two are recessed. Corridors stand opposite the northern and southern statues.

This chamber is simply a passageway, but Nhur Athemon designed it to prevent intruders from penetrating too deeply into his lair. The northernmost statue is of a figure in robes, with one arm outstretched as if welcoming those coming from the north to venture down the corridor opposite it. The statue in the southernmost alcove holds up its hands, as if to stop those coming from the opposite corridor.

**Traps:** The two center alcoves contain traps that activate the moment anyone passes in front of them. The northern center alcove contains a bronze statue of a human figure, leaning forward and looking as if it is blowing the winds from its lips. The southern center alcove contains a silver-colored statue of a human, leaning back as if deeply inhaling.

#### EXHALING FLAME STATUE **CR 3**

Type magic; Perception DC 27; Disable Device DC 27

##### EFFECTS

**Trigger** location; **Reset** automatic

**Effect** targets pushed by a blast of flame (treat as a combat maneuver with a +8 bonus; if the maneuver succeeds, the target is pushed against the far wall and takes 2d6 points of fire damage. This check is made each round, and the targets cannot move from the blast of the flame without first succeeding at a combat maneuver check against the flames [CMD 18])

#### INHALING FROST STATUE **CR 3**

Type magic; Perception DC 27; Disable Device DC 27

##### EFFECTS

**Trigger** location; **Reset** automatic

**Effect** targets pulled in by a freezing wind (treat as a combat maneuver with a +8 bonus; if the maneuver succeeds, the target is pulled into the

alcove and takes 2d6 points of cold damage. This check is made each round, and the targets cannot move from the freezing wind without first succeeding at a combat maneuver check against the wind [CMD 18]

## B5. GRAND GALLERY (CR 5)

This grand chamber appears to be some sort of observation laboratory. The northern section is raised, and contains rotten benches for watching the experiments below. The southern half of the chamber is dominated by a dais on which is set a heavily stained table. It appears that something has dug through the walls of this room, creating two tunnels out of the chamber. Staircases to the northwest and northeast lead out of the viewing area, and wooden doors flank the southwest and southeast sides of the dais. Large stone doors stand south of the dais.

This gallery was used by Nhur Athemon to perform some of his most important work within view of his respected colleagues. Not surprisingly, it has been thoroughly raided by Krenar. The tables are covered in dust, and a close examination reveals that they were once covered with numerous oddly shaped apparatuses.

Some time ago, one of Nhur Athemon's old experiments ran amok and drilled through the walls of this area, creating the pair of tunnels branching off this room.

**Creatures:** When Krenar took over this level of the dungeon, he also created Snarltongue, a twisted and warped goblin with a trio of crystal vials protruding from the top of his head. Unswervingly loyal, Snarltongue is tasked with guarding this chamber and preventing intruders from going any farther no matter the cost. He has trained several dire rats to aid him in this purpose.

### DIRE RAT (3) CR 1/3

XP 135 each

hp 5 each (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 232)

### SNARLTONGUE CR 4

XP 1,200

Male goblin barbarian 4 (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 156)

CE Small humanoid (goblinoid)

**Init** +3; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +1

#### DEFENSE

**AC** 16, touch 12, flat-footed 13 (+4 armor, +3 Dex, -2 rage, +1 size)

**hp** 55 (4d12+24); fast healing 2

**Fort** +8, **Ref** +4, **Will** +4

**Defensive Abilities** trap sense +1, uncanny dodge

#### OFFENSE

**Speed** 30 ft.

**Melee** +1 battleaxe +10 (1d6+6/x3)



Snarltongue

**Ranged** alchemist's fire +8 ranged touch (1d6 fire)

**Special Attacks** alchemical enhancements, rage (12 rounds/day), rage powers (powerful blow +2, renewed vigor [1d8+6 hp])

#### TACTICS

**Before Combat** If the PCs venture through the gallery up above, Snarltongue merely observes them from the shadows under the table, which grant him a +4 circumstance bonus on his Stealth check. If the PCs find their way down, he uses his ability to turn invisible and closes in to attack, using his dire rats to distract the rest of the party.

**During Combat** Snarltongue closes with his enemies before becoming visible and flying into a rage. He attacks with reckless abandon and, given the chance, tosses alchemist's fire at spellcasters to distract them from casting spells.

**Morale** The goblin fears only his master's wrath. As such, he fights to the death.

**Base Statistics** When not raging, Snarltongue's statistics are **AC** 18, touch 14,

flat-footed 15; **hp** 47; **Fort** +6, **Will** +2; +1 *battleaxe* +8 (1d6+3/x3); **Str** 14, **Con** 14;

**CMB** +5, **CMD** 18.

#### STATISTICS

**Str** 18, **Dex** 17, **Con** 18, **Int** 8, **Wis** 12, **Cha** 8

**Base Atk** +4; **CMB** +7; **CMD** 18

**Feats** Power Attack, Toughness

**Skills** Acrobatics +5, Handle Animal +6, Intimidate +6, Ride +4, Stealth +10; **Racial Modifiers** +4 Ride, +4 Stealth

**Languages** Goblin

**SQ** fast movement

**Combat Gear** alchemist's fire (3); **Other Gear** hide armor, +1 *battleaxe*

#### SPECIAL ABILITIES

**Alchemical Enhancements (Ex)** The tubes installed into Snarltongue's head grant him several exceptional powers. The purple tube contains a fluid that allows Snarltongue to become invisible as per the spell for up to 10 rounds per day. These rounds do not have to be consecutive. Using this ability is a move action. The green tube contains a liquid that gives Snarltongue fast healing 2. This ability is always active. When he uses rounds of rage, the fluid in the red tube begins to drain (this fluid does not grant him any additional rage powers or rounds of rage).

**Treasure:** Behind the table on the dais is a bucket filled with rotten viscera from Krenar's previous experiments. While dissecting one of the goblins, Krenar unwittingly discarded a *bird feather token* that the goblin had swallowed.

## B6. UNSTABLE CAVES

The footing in these debris-choked caverns is treacherous. Any creature moving through these caverns must succeed at a DC 10 Acrobatics check to move faster than 5 feet per round. Anyone who fails such a check cannot move that round, and anyone who fails the check by 5 or more falls prone.

## B7. RUINED STORAGE

Part of this chamber is in total ruin. The western half of this room appears to have mostly collapsed, though jagged openings peer to into a dark cavern. The east half of the chamber is filled with small chests and barrels. Most are covered in dust, but some appear to have been recently disturbed.

The drilling construct caused the western half of this room to collapse many years ago, leaving this chamber in ruin. When Krenar took over the Forgotten Laboratory, he thoroughly looted this room of the various reagents and ingredients stored within.

**Treasure:** While much of what remains in this room is worthless or broken, there are several items of note. One of the small chests has capacity for 20 vials of liquid, but now only 4 vials of alchemist's fire remain. A similar chest holds 6 vials of acid. Finally, inside a large chest lies a small coffer containing a bag filled with diamond dust worth 500 gp.

## B8. LAB ROOM (CR 4)

This chamber appears to still be in use. Its floors have recently been swept, and its three tables appear to be organized and well kept. Arranged across the tables are numerous strange alchemical devices, some of which are suspended over low-burning flames and emit pale ribbons of smoke. Others simply bubble and boil of their own volition.

This is the primary laboratory where Krenar performs his work. There are 3 vials of bottled lighting (*Pathfinder RPG Ultimate Equipment* 106) on one of the benches, along with 4 vials of alchemist's fire, 3 vials of acid, two tanglefoot bags, one thunderstone, and three smokesticks.

**Creatures:** Rather than fight against Krenar and end up as one of his experiments, some of the goblins that wandered down into these halls have decided to serve the alchemist willingly. Three such minions have been tasked with keeping the lab room in order. While they generally do so out of fear of Krenar's wrath, all such discipline flies from them if they are attacked, and they trash the laboratory in their attempts to harm the PCs.

Should any of the PCs approach the tables, the goblins tip them over and attack, frantically hurling alchemical items located about the room. Anyone adjacent to one of the tables when a goblin knocks it over takes 3d6 points of damage as the alchemical apparatuses shatter and spray volatile liquids around the area (whoever knocks the table over is safe from the chemicals sprayed forth); the damage is split between two different types, determined randomly (acid, cold, electricity, or fire). A successful DC 15 Reflex save halves damage taken in this way.

### GOBLIN ROGUES (3)

CR 1

XP 400 each

Goblin rogue 2 (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 156)

CE Small humanoid (goblinoid)

Init +8; Senses darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +5

#### DEFENSE

AC 18, touch 15, flat-footed 14 (+3 armor, +4 Dex, +1 size)

hp 16 each (2d8+4)

Fort +1, Ref +7, Will +0

Defensive Abilities evasion

#### OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.

Melee mwk short sword +7 (1d4+1/19-20)

Ranged alchemist's fire +6 (1d6 fire)

Special Attacks sneak attack +1d6

#### TACTICS

**During Combat** The goblin rogues work as a team to take down foes, but they gladly cause as much mayhem in the room as possible, using whatever alchemical items happen to be at hand.

#### STATISTICS

Str 12, Dex 19, Con 12, Int 8, Wis 10, Cha 11

Base Atk +1; CMB +1; CMD 15

Feats Improved Initiative, Weapon Finesse

Skills Acrobatics +9, Climb +6, Disable Device +9, Escape Artist +9, Perception +5, Ride +8, Sleight of Hand +9, Stealth +17; Racial

Modifiers +4 Ride, +4 Stealth

Languages Goblin

SQ rogue talents (finesse rogue), trapfinding +1

Combat Gear *potions of cure light wounds* (2), acid, alchemist's fire (2);

Other Gear mwk studded leather, mwk short sword

**Treasure:** In addition to all the items and gear carried by the goblins, there are also three potions in this room, one on each of the tables: a *potion of bull's strength*, a *potion of cure moderate wounds*, and a *potion of invisibility*. If a table is knocked over, the potion on top must make a successful DC 10 Reflex save or shatter (each potion has a +3 bonus on the saving throw).

## B9. SPIDER CAVERN (CR 4)

This crumbling cavern looks like it was made by some sort of drilling device that tore through the surrounding stone. A large pool of stagnant water fills part of the cavern, fed by a rivulet that runs from the ceiling. Thick sheets of webbing hang from the roof of the cave.

After the drilling construct made these caverns, a nest of spiders took up residence; their descendants still feed on anything that happens to wander through.

**Creatures:** A giant black widow spider lives in this cave with a swarm of its young. When the PCs approach the pool, it climbs down from above to attack, perching in the webbing above the pool while its young swarm down the wall to devour the victims.

### GIANT BLACK WIDOW SPIDER

CR 3

XP 800

hp 37 (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 2 256)

**SPIDER SWARM**

**CR 1**

**XP 400**

**hp** 9 (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 258)

**B10. OLD WORKSHOP (CR 3)**

It looks as if some years ago something broke loose and tore apart this ancient workshop before ripping a hole in the eastern wall. Broken tools and implements appear to have pulled from the ruined remnants of this chamber and sorted into various piles.

Nhur Athemon conducted many of his experiments in this ancient workshop, but after his departure, it remained empty for a good many years. This tranquility was shattered when the animating spirit in a drilling construct stored in this chamber broke free from the wards holding it and went tearing through this level of the dungeon before being destroyed in area **B3**.

The south wall of this chamber contains a large iron door with a particularly complicated lock. It is extremely difficult to pick the lock (Disable Device DC 40), but a particularly strong creature might be able to force the door open (hardness 10, hp 60, break DC 28). This door leads to area **C1** of the Enigma Vaults, and Krenar has the only key.

**Creature:** One of Nhur Athemon's constructs remained here after his drilling construct went rogue. In the years since, it attempted to clean up and repair the damage done to the room, but its skills proved far too limited to make much progress. When Krenar arrived, he took control of the construct and ordered it to guard this chamber. As soon as any PCs enter the room, it rises from a pile of broken tools and attacks. The construct looks like a series of stone gears locked together in a roughly humanoid shape. When dormant in a pile of tools, the construct is difficult to spot and can be detected only with a successful DC 20 Perception check.

**MEDIUM ANIMATED OBJECT**

**CR 3**

**XP 800**

**hp** 36 (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 14)

**SQ** construction points (additional attack, stone)

**Treasure:** Though there are no functioning items left in this room, there are raw materials and items suitable for repurposing. The various cogs, gears, and tools in this room are worth a total of 1,000 gp, though the whole lot weighs more than 500 pounds. The animated object has a crystal built into its chest that powers it, but when the animated object is destroyed, its crystal shatters.

**B11. GALLERY**

Opposite a bench in the center of this room are a pair of stone statues set into alcoves, each one looking like a vaguely humanoid collection of gears and blocks. Unlike the other statues in this place, these appear to be mostly intact.

These statues are nearly completed animated objects that need only a spark of life to be activated. Krenar has not been able to uncover how to accomplish this as of yet, but he continues to try. Each construct has a hole in its chest, roughly the size an apple (the same size as the crystal from area **B3**). If the PCs have encountered the construct in area **B10**, they should easily recognize these statues are of the same design.

The constructs can be identified with a successful DC 18 Knowledge (arcana) skill check. If any PC has the power crystal from area **B3**, it is readily apparent that the crystal would fit into the hole in the chest of each construct. If the crystal is placed within, the construct animates and unfailingly serves the one who placed the crystal. The construct understands only Draconic, and cannot speak. If that construct is destroyed, the crystal can be placed into the chest of another of the remaining animated objects, which also then serves the one who placed it.

**MEDIUM ANIMATED OBJECTS (2)**

**CR 3**

**XP 800 each**

**hp** 36 each (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 14)

**SQ** construction points (additional attack, stone)

**Story Award:** If the PCs fit the crystal into at least one of these two constructs during their adventure and take control of the construct, award them 800 XP.

**B12. KRENAR'S WORKSHOP (CR 5)**

This chamber appears to be equal parts study, laboratory, and personal quarters. A bed sits in one corner, and bookshelves line another. Before the recessed southern wall sits a table covered in a wide variety of alchemical devices. Thick green smoke pours from the devices, covering the chamber's floor in a foul-smelling vapor.

This chamber is the home of Krenar Half-Face, the alchemist who has taken up residence in this dungeon. Intent upon unlocking the secrets of Nhur Athemon and using them for his own foul ends, Krenar has taken to all forms of experimentation to learn his magic, regardless of the cost. Unsurprisingly, he is not pleased to see the PCs intrude upon his work.

**Creatures:** Krenar and an iron cobra of his own design are currently stationed in this room. Krenar prefers to perform his alchemical experiments in here, and quickly flies into a rage if he is intruded upon.

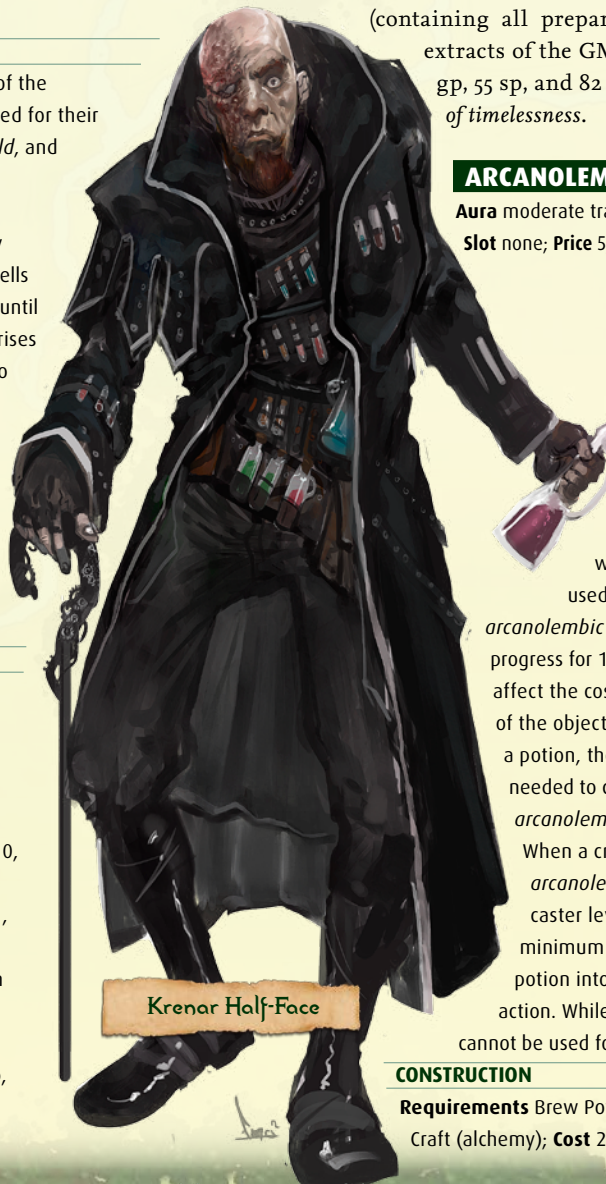
**Hazard:** There is another danger in this chamber—the green gas that flows along the floor. The volatile gas causes any flame in its square to burn a bit hotter. Any fire spell or effect that deals damage in a square containing gas deals an additional 1 point of fire damage per damage die, after which the gas in that square is consumed. The alchemical lab does not produce the gas fast enough to replenish its effect during combat.

**KRENAR HALF-FACE****CR 4****XP 1,200**Male human alchemist 5 (*Pathfinder RPG Advanced Player's Guide* 26)

CE Medium humanoid (human)

**Init** +7; **Senses** Perception +9**DEFENSE****AC** 21, touch 14, flat-footed 17 (+3 armor, +3 Dex, +1 dodge, +4 shield)**hp** 41 (5d8+15)**Fort** +5, **Ref** +7, **Will** +2; +4 vs. poison**OFFENSE****Speed** 30 ft.**Melee** mwk dagger +4 (1d4/19–20)**Ranged** bomb +8 (3d6+3 fire)**Special Attacks** bomb 10/day (3d6+3 fire and catch fire, DC 15, 10-ft. radius)**Alchemist Extracts Prepared** (CL 5th)2nd—*fire breath* (DC 11), *invisibility*, *levitate*1st—*bomber's eye*, *cure light wounds*, *expeditious retreat*, *shield*, *true strike***TACTICS****Before Combat** If Krenar has been warned of the intruders by his homunculus, he is prepared for their attack, and drinks his *bomber's eye*, *shield*, and *levitate* extracts.**During Combat** Krenar orders his iron cobra to attack the PCs, and opens up combat by throwing bombs at his foes and casting spells that aid him in this. He continues to do so until the PCs draw too close, at which point he rises up above them using *levitate*. If forced into melee, he uses his *fire breath* extract.**Morale** If dropped to fewer than 5 hit points, Krenar drinks his *invisibility* extract and attempts to escape.**Base Statistics** Without his extracts, Krenar's statistics are **AC** 17, flat-footed 13; **Ranged** bomb +7 (3d6+3 fire).**STATISTICS****Str** 10, **Dex** 16, **Con** 13, **Int** 16, **Wis** 12, **Cha** 8**Base Atk** +3; **CMB** +3; **CMD** 17**Feats** Brew Potion, Dodge, Extra Bombs, Improved Initiative, Throw Anything, Toughness**Skills** Craft (alchemy) +11, Disable Device +10, Escape Artist +7, Heal +9, Knowledge (arcana) +11, Perception +9, Spellcraft +11, Use Magic Device +7**Languages** Common, Draconic, Goblin, Ignan**SQ** alchemy (alchemy crafting +5, identify potions), mutagen (+4/-2, +2 natural, 50 minutes), discoveries (explosive bomb, precise bombs [3 squares]), poison use, swift alchemy**Combat Gear** *potions of cure moderate wounds* (2), *wand of acid arrow* (12 charges), acid (2), alchemist's fire (2), smokestick, tanglefoot bag; **Other Gear** studded leather, *arcanolembic* (see sidebar; contains one of the *potions of cure moderate wounds*), mwk dagger, iron key (to the door in area B10)**IRON COBRA****CR 2****XP 600****hp** 15 (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 182)**Poison (Ex)** Krenar's iron cobra is filled with 3 doses of acid, each of which deals an additional 1d4 points of acid damage on a successful hit.**Treasure:** In addition to the gear carried by Krenar, there are a few other valuables in this room. His alchemical setup is worth 500 gp if carefully transported out of the dungeon. Under the bed is a small chest containing his formula book (containing all prepared extracts plus two 1st-level extracts of the GM's choice), a bag filled with 154 gp, 55 sp, and 82 cp, and a single dose of *unguent of timelessness*.**ARCANOLEMBIC****Aura** moderate transmutation; **CL** 10th**Slot** none; **Price** 5,000 gp; **Weight** 2 lbs.**DESCRIPTION**

This glass flask looks similar to the alembics used by alchemists to distill various liquids, but this one is framed in a delicate silver brace and the glass is etched with various arcane runes. When used to create an alchemical object, the *arcanolembic* allows the creator to double her progress for 1 day's work (although this does not affect the cost or the price of the components of the object). In addition, when used to brew a potion, the *arcanolembic* reduces the time needed to create the potion by 25%. Finally, the *arcanolembic* can be used to hold one potion. When a creature consumes a potion from the *arcanolembic*, the potion is treated as if the caster level were 2 higher than the usual minimum for a potion of its level. Placing a potion into the *arcanolembic* is a full-round action. While holding a potion, the *arcanolembic* cannot be used for any other purpose.

**CONSTRUCTION****Requirements** Brew Potion, Craft Wondrous Item, 5 ranks in Craft (alchemy); **Cost** 2,500 gp

Krenar Half-Face



# THE ENIGMA VAULTS

By James Jacobs

When the mad wizard Nhur Athemon wasn't tinkering with his subjects on Golarion, he found his way to even stranger worlds, be they other planets, other planes, or even other dimensions. The myriad relics and strange mementos he returned with held great power, and in his hands they proved potent tools that he used to further explore the universe as well as solidify his earthly domain. The dread magician even managed to capture creatures from the impossibly distant locales he visited thanks in part to his stolen technology. His most prized findings inevitably found their way into his personal collection, a museum-like complex only recently unearthed and cryptically referred to by its strange denizens as the Enigma Vaults.



After Nhur Athemon's death, the Enigma Vaults lay quiet and undisturbed for thousands of years. It wasn't until relatively recently that visitors once again set foot in these halls—an enterprising team of tomb robbers utilizing earth elementals dug a winding tunnel from a dry creek to the Enigma Vaults. These tomb robbers didn't delve far, but they made a map of their route. Though they met an unfortunate end before they could return with their findings, their mysterious map occasionally resurfaces in distant markets or remote treasure hoards.

Most recently, the so-called Enigma Map showed up in the city of Daggermark, and an avaricious group of rogues led by a woman named Iklavni Korlesh has now come north to seek the Vaults' treasures. None in Thornkeep know of the presence of thieves from the so-called City of Assassins below their foundations. But after Iklavni and her group of hired tiefling mercenaries accidentally awakened a dangerous creature from stasis—a fungoid terror from beyond Golarion's stars—the alien quickly bent the rogues' wills to its own nefarious designs.

## C1. THE STAR MAP

A ten-foot-wide hallway curves north, where a flight of stairs descends to a corridor leading to an octagonal central chamber. Iron bars separate this room from the eastern and southern hallways, and the floor of the chamber is painted with what appears to be a night sky filled with stars.

The northern section of the hall surrounding the central chamber features a single shelf that runs along the north and west walls. Dozens of ancient books sit on these shelves, but time has caused the words to fade from their pages, and any attempt to handle the tomes causes them to crumble to dust. Simply scanning the spines reveals many intriguing titles written in Azlanti, such as *Dreams in Liavara's Womb*, *Whispers from the Red Star*, and *A Myriad Mirrored*.

The stars painted on the central floor constitute a map of the night sky—a star chart that places Golarion's solar system at the center and dozens of other smaller stars in the outlying reaches.

A phrase is carved in Azlanti over the western doors: "Behold and Wonder, for Beyond Lie Enigmas!"

## C2. THE PIVOTING BRIDGE (CR 5)

This thirty-foot-diameter room seems something like a silo—the domed ceiling rises twenty feet above, and the floor drops away into darkness below. A ten-foot-wide stone bridge with no railings crosses the shaft to a hall and door in the opposite side, yet a one-foot-wide gap separates the bridge from either hall. Below, two additional archways lie in the north and south walls of the shaft, thirty feet below the level of the upper entrances.

The floor of this room is 60 feet below the level of the hallways leading to areas C1 and C3. The walls of the room are relatively

## ENIGMA VAULTS FEATURES

The PCs can reach the dungeon after exploring the chambers above, in which case the staircase from area B10 spirals 60 feet down to area C1. Alternatively, they may hear rumors that a team of thieves from Daggermark has found a way into the dungeons under Thornkeep—what the thieves could be doing down there is anyone's guess, but it can't be good for the town! A few others know of the hidden tunnel entrance along the northern riverbank, so the PCs must act fast to be among the first to reach it. This entrance leads to area C14.

Lighting in the Enigma Vaults is nonexistent for the most part. Ceilings in the halls are generally 8 feet high; in larger rooms, ceilings rise to arched peaks 15 feet high or more at the center.

smooth, but can be scaled with a successful DC 20 Climb check. The ground below is hard and littered with numerous rotted and skeletal goblin bodies—unfortunates who wandered too far from their territory and were purged by the bridge's guardian.

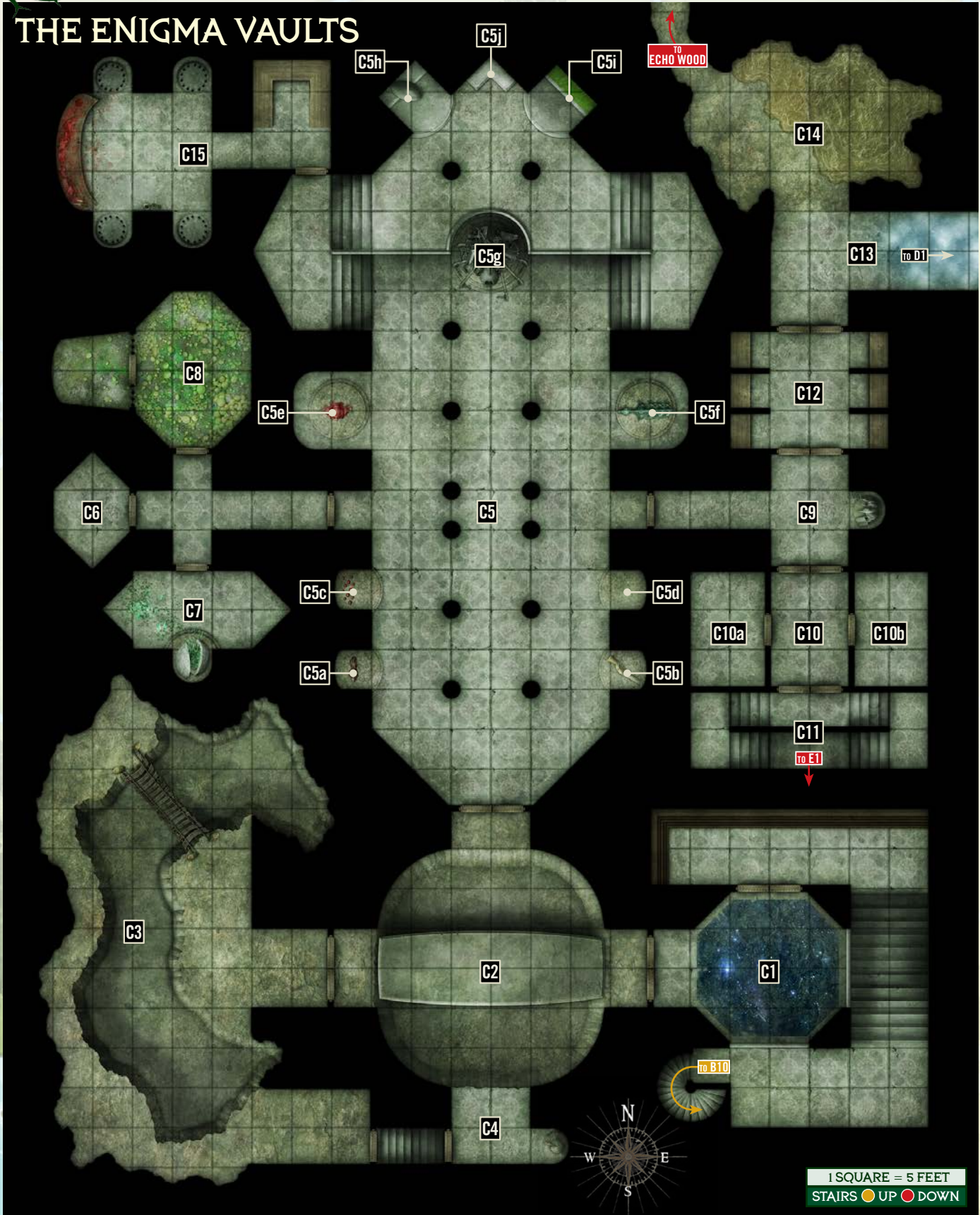
The bridge in the middle of the room is supported by a single 10-foot-wide pillar that extends down from its center to the floor below. The bridge is solid, and can support several tons of weight before it risks collapse. A lever in area C4 (once attended by an apprentice but now long abandoned) controls the bridge's orientation—if the lever is pulled, the bridge slowly rotates and lowers as the supporting pillar it's perched upon screws down into the ground. The rotation is gradual, and creatures standing on the pillar need not fear a fall. It takes the bridge a full minute of rumbling (which certainly alerts the denizens of both areas C3 and C5) before it comes to rest in a north-south alignment connecting, areas C4 and C5.

A carved message over the doors to area C5 reads (in Azlanti), "Enigma Vaults."

**Creature:** One of Nhur Athemon's original guardians still stands sentinel here—a flickering, ghostly image of Nhur Athemon's demonic patron, Abraxas (identifiable with a successful DC 20 Knowledge [religion] check). The figure appears as a vaguely humanoid monster with the deformed head of a fanged bird and two coiling serpents for legs. This figure observes the room via sight (including darkvision 60 feet) and hearing—as soon as it notices visitors, it immediately turns to face them from its position at the center of the bridge and demands the following in Azlanti: "By whose leave do you seek the Enigma Vaults?" If no one answers, it repeats the question 1 round later in Elven, then in Abyssal. It repeats that pattern until someone answers the figure or tries to move past it. Answering "Nhur Athemon" in Azlanti, Elven, or Abyssal causes the guardian to reply in that language, "Then you may pass, yet touch nothing, lest you be purged."

If the image is attacked or if someone attempts to cross the bridge or otherwise move deeper into the Enigma Vaults without

# THE ENIGMA VAULTS



correctly answering the question, the image's serpentine legs suddenly grow solid and slither forth, attacking at once. Each of the snakes can slither through the air as if under the effects of *air walk*. If they are defeated, the snakes vanish and the spectral image reforms in 1 hour, at which point it can reactivate its snakes if needed.

### ADVANCED CONSTRICTOR SNAKES (2) CR 3

XP 800 each

hp 25 each (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 255, 294)

## C3. ENIGMA OF AN ALIEN PAST (CR 5)

This large cavern is bisected by a 30-foot-deep chasm. A ratty-looking rope bridge crosses the eastern ledge to a western one, which winds down to a hallway 20 feet lower.

Although the ancient rope bridge looks dangerous, it's been preserved by powerful magic and remains stable and safe to cross. A successful DC 15 Climb check is needed to scale the walls of the chasm.

**Creatures:** Nhur Athemon was particularly intrigued by a nameless, wild planet he visited in a distant star system that was inhabited by creatures superficially similar to Golarion's dinosaurs and megafauna, save that these alien animals were all two-headed. He brought back several, intending to put some in his menagerie, but the animals died when they arrived on Golarion. Not willing to give up entirely, he animated several as undead and put them on display here. These skeletal two-headed deinonychuses' original orders faded in the millennia since their master's death, and now the strange undead race attack any intruders on sight. Note that these skeletons are slightly higher CR than 4-HD skeletons would normally be because of the amount of damage they can cause.

### ALIEN DEINONYCHUS SKELETONS (2) CR 3

XP 800 each

Advanced variant deinonychus skeleton (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 84, 250, 294)

NE Medium undead

**Init** +7; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +0

#### DEFENSE

**AC** 15, touch 13, flat-footed 12 (+3 Dex, +2 natural)

**hp** 18 each (4d8)

**Fort** +1, **Ref** +4, **Will** +4

**DR** 5/bludgeoning; **Immune** cold, undead traits

#### OFFENSE

**Speed** 60 ft.

**Melee** 2 bites +5 (1d6+2), foreclaws +0 (1d4+1), 2 talons +5 (1d8+2)

#### STATISTICS

**Str** 15, **Dex** 17, **Con** —, **Int** —, **Wis** 10, **Cha** 10

**Base Atk** +3; **CMB** +5; **CMD** 18

**Feats** Improved Initiative

## C4. BRIDGE CONTROLS

A metal lever protrudes from a stumpy stone pedestal in an alcove here. To the north, the hall opens into a large, silo-shaped chamber.

This lever controls the bridge in area C2—switching it from one position to the next is a standard action, and once it's been switched, it cannot be switched back for 1 minute, until the bridge in area C2 has lowered or risen to its new alignment.

## C5. THE GRAND VAULT (CR 5)

This vast, cathedral-like space seems even larger because of its emptiness. Two rows of stone pillars run down the center of the hall, supporting a vaulted ceiling sixty feet above. The east and west walls contain tall alcoves—some hold strange objects or displays, and others sport tall stone doors. To the north, twin stairwells ascend to a raised platform with more alcoves, and a circular stand just south of this platform supports an immense mechanical device.

This large chamber was the primary repository of the odd, even surreal things that Nhur Athemon collected over the years. The wizard preferred a minimalist approach to his displays, and placed them here amid this vast space to impart to them an additional sense of grandeur. While some of the displays have been looted by the denizen of the Inmost Vault (see area C15), others remain untouched (see Treasure, below).

**Creatures:** When Iklavni's rogues sneaked into the Enigma Vaults, they made it to this chamber (passing through areas C14, C12, and C9) with relative ease. Iklavni left her tiefling thugs to map and explore this chamber while she went west and found her way to area C8, where her arrival released the mi-go cleric from stasis. The mi-go quickly subdued the rogues, then inflicted several surgeries upon them to weaken their resolve (by dealing Wisdom damage) before it reclaimed its gear from area C5d and used its *wand of charm monster* to secure the obedience of the rogues. This was 2 weeks ago, and the mi-go has since turned its attention to other things in the Inmost Vault, leaving its charmed rogues here as guardians of the Grand Vault with strict orders to defend the chamber from all intruders.

The rogues bear numerous hideous scars from their operations, particularly along the scalps and brows. They have since healed of their Wisdom damage, but remain loyal to the mi-go, whom they know only as "the Visitant." All of the rogues have suffered permanent damage to their personalities under the mi-go's ministrations, and they speak now almost like automatons, using phrases like, "We welcome you to us, friends," or "You will join us as children of the Black Goat." This personality damage manifests as Charisma drain, and unless the PCs can arrange for this damage to be cured, the rogues have no access to their memories or personalities, and want only to help the Visitant prepare for the coming of the Black Goat's offspring. A successful DC 25 Knowledge

(religion) check is enough for a PC to recognize the term “the Black Goat” as referring to Shub-Niggurath, an alien deity of fertility and monsters worshiped by lunatics and worse.

**IKLAVNI KORLESH**

**CR 3**

**XP 800**

Female human rogue 4

CN Medium humanoid (human)

**Init** +8; **Senses** Perception +8

**DEFENSE**

**AC** 20, touch 15, flat-footed 15 (+4 armor, +4 Dex, +1 dodge, +1 shield)

**hp** 33 (4d8+12)

**Fort** +3, Ref +8, Will +2

**Defensive Abilities** evasion, trap sense +1, uncanny dodge

**OFFENSE**

**Speed** 30 ft.

**Melee** mwk punching dagger +6 (1d4/×3 plus poison),

mwk punching dagger +6 (1d4/×3 plus poison)

**Ranged** mwk hand crossbow +8 (1d4/19–20 plus poison)

**Special Attacks** sneak attack +2d6

**TACTICS**

**During Combat** Both of Iklavni’s blades as well as three of her bolts are poisoned with Medium spider venom; she uses these at the start of combat. She tries to flank foes with her thugs, but if denied an opportunity to do so, she prefers to fight at range with her crossbow.

**Morale** Iklavni retreats to **C15** to fight at the Visitant’s side if she’s reduced to fewer than 15 hit points. Once there, she fights to the death.

**STATISTICS**

**Str** 10, **Dex** 18, **Con** 14, **Int** 8, **Wis** 12, **Cha** 2 (normally 13)

**Base Atk** +3; **CMB** +3; **CMD** 18

**Feats** Dodge, Improved Initiative, Two-Weapon Defense, Two-Weapon Fighting, Weapon Finesse

**Skills** Acrobatics +10, Bluff +3, Climb +6, Disable Device +12, Knowledge (local) +4, Perception +8, Sense Motive +6, Sleight of Hand +11, Stealth +10

**Languages** Common

**SQ** rogue talents (combat trick, finesse rogue), trapfinding +2

**Combat Gear** Medium spider venom (2 doses), poisoned bolts (3); **Other Gear** mwk chain shirt, mwk hand crossbow with 10 bolts, mwk punching daggers (2), Enigma Map, everburning torch, mwk thieves’ tools



Iklavni Korlesh

her rogues were acting alone, and that her actions here under Thornkeep are not part of a greater plot by Daggermark to move against the town. Baron Tervin Blackshield will be put much at ease by this knowledge—if he sent the PCs into the Enigma Vaults to chase down the rogues, providing him with these documents earns the PCs a 2,000 gp reward.

Of great interest in the room are the various displays. The contents of the displays are listed below, with each display’s carved name listed at the start.

**C5a. “Talon of Borvadagen”:** This strange, spiked gauntlet is made of weirdly flexible red wood studded with what appear to be shark teeth made of glass. It has room for only three fingers—most humanoids who wield the gauntlet take a –2 penalty on attack rolls with it as a result, but it is otherwise a fully functional +1 *keen spiked gauntlet*.

**C5b. “Mithral Rifle”:** A damaged firearm made of mithral with four barrels sits on display here. Images of antlike humanoids wielding firearms are carved into the stock. This is a +1 *mithral pepperbox rifle* (see *Ultimate Combat* or *Ultimate Equipment*) that is currently destroyed—whether or not it can be repaired for use in your game is up to you.

**C5c. “Bloodstones of Gultariix”:** This is a collection of what look like solidified droplets and splatters of blood, 11 in all, arranged on a wooden rack. Each is a fine crystal worth 200 gp by itself, but if placed into a potion, the bloodstone dissolves and affects the potion as if it were enhanced by the Extend Spell metamagic feat. A successful DC 25 Spellcraft check is needed to identify this property.

**C5d. “Alien Fungoid Equipment”:** This display has recently been looted—this was where the strange wands, scrolls, and surgical tools carried by the Visitant were stored before the creature reclaimed them.

**C5e. “Dragonkin Saddle”:** This strangely shaped saddle is a masterwork saddle built for one of the dragonkin of Triaxis—it’s worth 600 gp for the novelty alone. Hidden within a disguised pocket in the saddle (and requiring a successful DC 30 Perception check to notice) is a pulsing black *amulet of natural armor* +1 that clutches to flesh like a tick when equipped.

**C5f. “Thystian Cat”:** This is a strange skeleton of a 12-foot-long, feline-like creature with eight legs and a long snout. The bones are partially translucent and despite the passage of time, are still slightly radioactive. Each day someone carries some or all of these bones on his person, he must succeed at a DC 15 Fortitude save or take 1d2 points of Constitution damage. As a whole, the 650-pound skeleton is worth 1,800 gp.

**C5g. “Deactivated Alien Construct”:** The huge mechanical object heaped on this platform is a blasted and destroyed robot similar to those that dwell in the nation of Numeria. This robot was destroyed long ago—its tangled features are

**MERCENARY THUGS (4)**

**CR 1/2**

**XP 200 each**

CN tieflings (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 264)

**hp** 10 each

**Treasure:** The Enigma Map, found among the other gear carried by the rogues, has with it a few pieces of paper on which Iklavni recorded her thoughts about the treasure she and her allies might find here. These notes also reveal that she and

vaguely insectoid in shape. At your discretion, tinkering with the robot could reactivate the ancient construct—see *Pathfinder Campaign Setting: Inner Sea Bestiary* for statistics for several possible robots these remains could belong to.

**C5h. “Dominion of the Black Pod”:** This 12-foot-tall pod of strange leathery material is warm to the touch and covered with sharp, spiny scales. Although flexible, the leather resists all attempts to damage it as if it had hardness 30. The pod weighs 2 tons, and now and then faint lights shimmer within. What may or may not live within the pod is left to you to decide.

**C5i. “The Hungry Eyes of Melos”:** An 8-foot-tall, frosty glass jar sits here. The jar is filled with brine, and swimming within are hundreds of strangely colored eyeballs that trail wriggling, finned tendrils. The eyes themselves open like tiny fanged maws, scratching their teeth against the glass if anyone approaches. If the glass is shattered, the eyes within prove to be hideously mobile on land—treat them as a leech swarm (*Bestiary* 187).

**C5j. “The Banes of Barad-Shull”:** This L-shaped glass case contains three cursed items: a *cursed backbiter spear* crafted from the leg of an immense insect, a *bag of devouring* that looks like a freshly excised stomach, and a *tan bag of tricks* that produces multi-legged insectoid versions of the animals such an item would normally produce—creatures that immediately attack the closest target and do not follow the user’s commands. There is no indication that any of the items are dangerous.

## C6. ENIGMA OF THE MIDNIGHT SUN

A carving over the door to this room, written in Azlanti, reads, “Enigma of the Midnight Sun.”

The curved western wall of this room depicts a vast field of stars with such realism that one feels perched at the edge of an infinite gulf.

The western wall radiates moderate illusion magic. Any PC who gazes upon the field of stars must succeed at a DC 14 Will save to avoid becoming fascinated by the surreal view and struck with a strange conviction that she could step out of the room and fall into the sky (in fact, the wall is merely a very realistic illusion of space). When the door to area C6 is opened, after 1d6 rounds a brilliant flash of light fills the center of the room as an impossibly distant and impossibly cataclysmic event results in a traumatic explosion. This event repeats every 1d6 rounds—each time it occurs, anyone in the room must succeed at a DC 14 Will save or take 1d4 points of Charisma damage as an overwhelming sense of loss fills her mind (this is a mind-affecting effect). This potent illusion depicts the destruction of the planets that formed the Diaspora many thousands of years ago. Nhur Athemon was particularly fascinated by this event, and made many trips to the fragmentary world remnants of the Diaspora.

## C7. ENIGMA OF THE SKY SEEDS (CR 5)

A carving over the door to this room, written in Azlanti, reads, “Enigma of the Sky Seeds.”

An upraised dais in an alcove to the south holds a four-foot-diameter geode that’s been cracked into two halves. The inside of the geode glitters with strange green crystals. A mound of green crystalline fragments and twisted strips of flaking green metal lies to the west.

This room once displayed a meteorite in which several strange alien creatures—vaguely canine blue monsters called akatas—dwelled in a long-term slumber. The akatas went into hibernation for thousands of years after the tower above these dungeons fell, but when the rogues arrived, they emerged from their cocoons and now prowl the area. They attack any who enter the room on sight, fighting to the death.

### ADVANCED AKATAS (3)

**CR 2**
**XP 600 each**
**hp** 19 each (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 2 23, 292)

**Treasure:** The green crystals in the geode are fragments of a skymetal called noqual, a substance valued for its resistance against magic. A half-hour’s work chipping the noqual from the geode yields noqual ore worth 1,200 gp. (See *Pathfinder Adventure Path* #61 for details on the qualities of this rare material.)

## C8. ENIGMA OF THE DARK TAPESTRY (CR 5)

A carving over the door to this room, written in Azlanti, reads, “Enigma of the Dark Tapestry.”

This large chamber is overgrown with foul-smelling mounds of strangely colored, shuddering fungi, many of which glow with a sickly green luminescence. A large alcove to the west seems less overgrown. Metal bars wall off this alcove, but a door in the bars hangs ajar.

**Creatures:** This room was where the Visitant was held in stasis using a system similar to that of the menagerie in the level below—Iklavni’s tampering with the room freed not only the mi-go but also a pair of strange alien fungoid creatures. These two bulbous creatures are cerebriic fungi, allies of the Visitant, and they attack intruders on sight.

### CEREBRIC FUNGI (2)

**CR 3**
**XP 800 each**
**hp** 30 each (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 3 52)

## C9. SHRINE TO ABRAXAS

A sinister statue looms in an alcove to the east. The thing is ten feet tall with a human body, but with the head of a deformed, fanged bird and two coiling serpents for legs. The statue clutches a flail in one hand, and holds a large, open book in the other.

This statue depicts the demon lord Abraxas, as a successful DC 20 Knowledge (religion) check confirms. Though the statue looks menacing, it is harmless.

## C10. MENAGERIE GUARDPOST (CR 5)

Doors sit in every wall of this short hall. Those to the north and south are double doors, and those to the east and west are barred doors beyond which empty rooms can be seen.

The iron doors to areas **C10a** and **C10b** are locked—the key is long gone, and a character trying to pick the locks must succeed at a DC 30 Disable Device check.

**Creatures:** This area was once guarded by Nhur Athemon's guards, but when doom fell upon his fortress, these poor souls perished. The magic that laid them low drove them insane and transformed their tormented spirits into allips. The allips stand guard here still, obsessed with their roles in life, and slide effortlessly through the bars in areas **C10a** and **C10b** to attack anyone they notice.

### ALLIPS (2) CR 3

**XP 800 each**

**hp** 12 each (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary 3 12*)

## C11. MENAGERIE ENTRANCE

Two flights of stairs curl around this room, descending downward into area **E1** of the Dark Menagerie (see page 62).

## C12. HALL OF LESSER ENIGMAS

A carving over the door to this room, written in Azlanti, reads, "Hall of Lesser Enigmas."

This short hall has three alcoves on either side, each of which contains a low shelf covered with nothing but recently disturbed dust.

The shelves of this room once held many small trinkets, but the rogues looted them as they moved through the dungeon. These items can now be found in area **C15**.

## C13. GLOWING HALLWAY

A ten-foot-wide hallway leads east from this point, but beyond the first fifteen feet, no details are visible through the glowing, swirling mass of pale mist that fills the entire hall.

The magical mist that fills this hallway demarcates a powerful magical effect put in place thousands of years ago. Creatures may enter area **D1** beyond with ease, but exiting the time-locked chambers and returning through the mist requires a creature to carry an *ioun stone* (see page 55 for more details).

## C14. MURKY POOL (CR 5)

This cavern is damp and moist. A wide pool of murky brown water fills the area to the east, and a narrow tunnel that looks like it was dug with picks leads off to the northwest.

The jagged northwestern tunnel travels for about 500 feet before emerging amid a tangle of brush onto a riverbank north of Thornkeep—spotting this cave entrance from the river requires a successful DC 25 Perception check. It is from this direction that the rogues from Daggermark infiltrated the Enigma Vaults. The pool itself is only 5 feet deep at its deepest point.

**Creature:** The rogues had the good fortune to arrive at a time when this chamber's denizen was out hunting, but the PCs are not so lucky. The pool is the home of an ochre jelly that attacks nearby creatures on sight.

### OCHRE JELLY CR 5

**XP 1,600**

**hp** 63 (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary 218*)

## C15. THE INMOST VAULT (CR 8)

This strangely shaped room consists of two wings. To the east, a low workbench wraps around the walls. To the west, a larger wing opens into what appears to be a strange laboratory. A curving workbench covered with gory heaps of flesh and bone sits against the laboratory's wall. In alcoves to the north and south are strange contraptions resembling iron cages fitted with human-sized openings.

This room once served Nhur Athemon as a workshop, and now the Visitant uses it for the same purpose. The mi-go has spent several weeks here, studying the magical tools and a few of the less fortunate rogues' bodies. By using its eerie alien science, the mi-go has developed a method of extracting and observing memories from the brains of the recently slain. It's using the memories of the rogues to determine what the world above is like in this age, a far-future date to the mi-go, but not one that frightens it. The Visitant plans on emerging into the world above to seek more information, hoping at some point to activate the portal cages in this room (see Development, below) to find a way to establish a link with its distant home planet and bring more of its kind to resource-rich Golarion. The Visitant does not cope well with interruptions, and attacks the PCs on sight.

### THE VISITANT CR 8

**XP 4,800**

Mi-go cleric of Shub-Niggurath 3 (*Pathfinder Adventure Path #46 86*)

**CE** Medium plant

**Init** +7; **Senses** blindsight 30 ft., low-light vision; Perception +17

#### DEFENSE

**AC** 22, touch 18, flat-footed 14 (+7 Dex, +1 dodge, +4 natural)

**hp** 107 (10d8+63)

**Fort** +14, **Ref** +10, **Will** +9

**DR** 5/slashing; **Immune** cold, plant traits; **Resist** electricity 10, fire 10

#### OFFENSE

**Speed** 30 ft., fly 50 ft. (good)

**Melee** 4 claws +14 (1d4+4 plus grab)

**Special Attacks** channel negative energy 5/day (DC 13, 2d6), evisceration, sneak attack +2d6, wooden fist (+1, 7 rounds/day)

**Spell-Like Ability** (CL 3rd; concentration +5)

7/day—touch of chaos

**Cleric Spells Prepared** (CL 3rd; concentration +7)

2nd—*barkskin*<sup>p</sup>, *cure moderate wounds* (DC 16), *hold person* (DC 16)

1st—*cure light wounds* (3), *protection from law*<sup>p</sup>

0 (at will)—*bleed* (DC 14), *create water*, *mending*, *stabilize*

**D** Domain spell; **Domains** Chaos, Plant

#### TACTICS

**During Combat** The Visitant starts combat by using its *wand of invisibility* (via Use Magic Device). It then proceeds to use its *summon monster* scrolls. Once it has summoned several allies, it casts *protection from law* and moves to a flanking position—PCs with healing capacities are its preferred targets.

**Morale** If reduced to fewer than 30 hit points, the Visitant attempts to flee, making for area **C14** so it can escape into the woods to the north. If it manages to do so, it can become a harrowing recurring villain.

#### STATISTICS

**Str** 18, **Dex** 24, **Con** 23, **Int** 23, **Wis** 18, **Cha** 15

**Base Atk** +7; **CMB** +11 (+15 grapple); **CMD** 29 (37 vs. trip)

**Feats** Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Selective Channeling, Skill Focus (Use Magic Device), Weapon Finesse

**Skills** Bluff +19, Disguise +19, Fly +24, Heal +17, Knowledge (religion) +19, Perception +17, Spellcraft +19, Use Magic Device +18

**Languages** Aklo, Azlanti, Mi-Go; cannot speak

**SQ** deceptive, item creation, no breath, starflight

**Gear** *scroll of summon monster III*, *scroll of summon monster IV*, *wand of charm monster* (10 charges), *wand of invisibility* (15 charges), *wand of sound burst* (15 charges)

#### SPECIAL ABILITIES

**Deceptive (Ex)** A mi-go is a master of deception, and gains a +4 racial bonus on Bluff and Disguise checks. Bluff and Disguise are always class skills for mi-go.

**Evisceration (Ex)** A mi-go's claws are capable of swiftly and painfully performing surgical operations upon helpless creatures or creatures it has grappled. When a mi-go succeeds at a grapple check (in addition to any other effects caused by a successful check), it deals its sneak attack damage to the victim. A creature that takes this damage must succeed at a DC 18 Fortitude save or take an additional 1d4 points of ability damage from the invasive surgery (the type of ability damage dealt is chosen by the mi-go at the time the evisceration occurs). The save DC is Dexterity-based.

**Item Creation (Ex)** All mi-go possess the ability to create strange items that blur the line between magic and technology, given time and resources. But this mi-go doesn't have time to take advantage of this ability during this adventure.

**Starflight (Su)** A mi-go can survive in the void of outer space, and flies through space at an incredible speed. Although exact travel times vary, a trip within a single solar system normally takes 3d20 months, while a trip beyond should take 3d20 years (or more, at the GM's discretion)—provided the mi-go knows the way to its destination.

**Treasure:** In the eastern wing of this room, several large sacks contain strange jewelry and unusual sculptures the rogues had already looted before they were captured by the Visitant, worth a total of 2,500 gp. In addition, among the treasures are a pair of *goggles of minute seeing* and a *fire elemental gem*. Finally, the mi-go's extensive notes strewn about the bloody workbench not only reveal its hopes and plans to establish a portal to its home world and bring the "glories of the Black Goat to this new world," but also mention its suspicion that the four cages in the alcoves of this room are deactivated portals to unknown locations.

**Development:** The four strange cages in this room's alcoves are the deactivated portals mentioned in the Visitant's notes—the methods by which they can be reactivated and the locations to which they lead are long lost, but at your option, the PCs may find clues on how to reactivate the portals. What they find on the other side is up to you!



The Visitant



# SANCTUM OF A LOST AGE

By Erik Mona

In the hour of Nhur Athemon's greatest defeat, his three proud apprentices sought to betray their master by constructing a powerful array of ioun stones meant to project the apprentices into the distant future, far from their mad master's grasp. The enraged archmage discovered their treachery too late to put an end to the plot, but early enough to bend and pervert the magic that fueled it. Instead of transporting the wizards to safety, the corrupted time vortex instead became a time lock, sequestering the three apprentices and their sprawling lair into a single moment of time that would itself stretch into eternity. The traitorous apprentices were forced to eke out their endless existences in these isolated halls for millennia before their chance discovery by explorers paved their way to freedom.



Some years ago, a band of adventurers aligned with the Pathfinder Society wandered into the Sanctum of a Lost Age while exploring Thornkeep's dungeons. All passed easily from the Enigma Vaults through a misty corridor and into the Sanctum, but only the rogue Rozimus of Tymon, whose Pathfinder Society *wayfinder* contained an *ioun stone*, had the ability to leave. In the hours that followed, Rozimus's band discovered lost treasures of Old Azlant, but they also ran afoul of Nhur Athemon's apprentices, mad with the frustration and ennui of thousands of years spent trapped in the eldritch amber of the time lock. One by one, the apprentices murdered Rozimus's allies, leaving the rogue with little choice but to flee the dungeon and abandon his friends and companions. But the apprentices had been planning for millennia, and they weren't going to let their one chance at escape slip through their fingers.

One of the apprentices, a powerful enchantress named Vuzhon, cornered Rozimus and used a *scroll of magic jar* to force her consciousness into his body. Once free of her time-trapped body, Vuzhon hefted Rozimus's *wayfinder* and made her way out of Thornkeep's dungeons and into the wider world, eager to dupe another group of adventurers into venturing back into the Sanctum, thus providing her two allies with fresh bodies to ride to safety. So long as Vuzhon's original body remains in the time-locked Sanctum, the duration of the *magic jar* will never expire, affording her an almost perfect escape.

Sometime prior to this adventure, perhaps in another chamber elsewhere in the dungeons or perhaps far from the ruin in some cozy tavern, the player characters encounter a bedraggled Rozimus of Tymon. This pathetic figure (controlled by the powerful psyche of Vuzhon) tells the PCs that his whole party was slain before they could liberate the Sanctum's priceless treasures. He eagerly provides directions to the misty corridor, and insists that the PCs take his *wayfinder* (complete with its *clear spindle ioun stone*), as it seemed to be the item that allowed him to get back out. Besides, he says ruefully, he has lost his passion for adventuring, and won't have any further need of it.

The bait hooked, Rozimus fades into the background, perhaps to return later as a major campaign antagonist. For now, Vuzhon's job is done, and her companions in the Sanctum of a Lost Age eagerly await the PCs' arrival—and their inevitable escape from the final curse of Nhur Athemon.

## D1. ENTRY HALL (CR 8)

A corridor of billowing yellow mist and strange, shifting lights opens in the middle of a large entry hall. Across the room, three demonic stone faces as tall as humans leer at visitors like a scornful greeting party. Each has an open mouth, extended tongue, and slightly different features from the others. From north to south they are blue, yellow, and red. Between the huge faces, two staircases lead up 10 feet to a balcony that overlooks the entire chamber. A set of ornate stone double doors stands closed along the south wall. Two shadowy alcoves flank the corridor of lights and mists along the west wall.

## SANCTUM FEATURES

The Sanctum's walls and floors are carved from sturdy bedrock, smoothed and embellished in the artistic style of Old Azlant. Torches with *continual flame* cast on them light every room in the complex. Unless otherwise noted, doors are unlocked and made of sturdy wood. Most rooms and corridors have 20-foot ceilings.

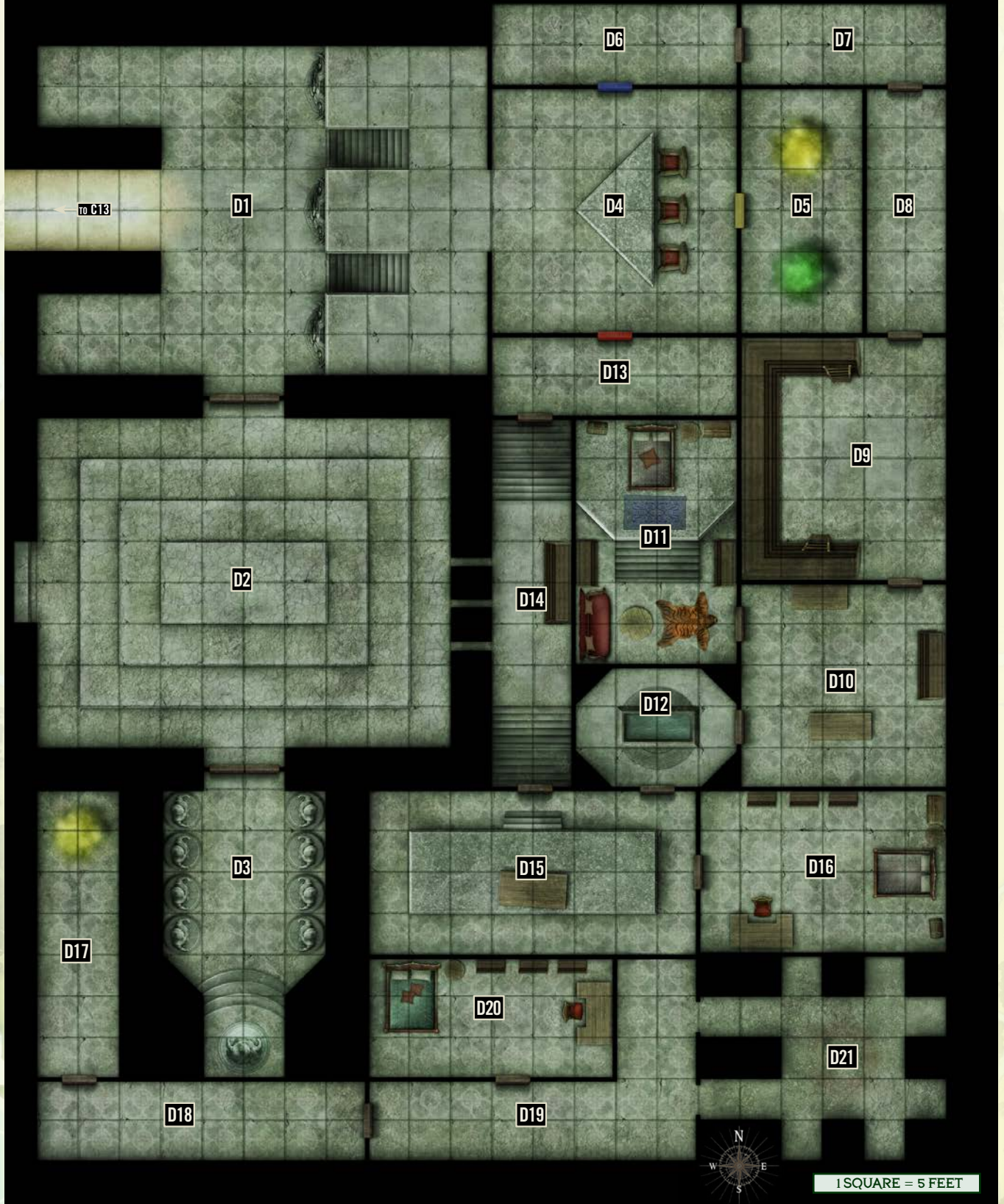
The lights and mists of the entry corridor mark the point where the present era abuts the time lock. All characters can enter area **D1** through the corridor, but only characters wielding an *ioun stone* can pass through the corridor and back to area **C13**. Creatures that enter area **D1** without an *ioun stone* cannot progress more than 5 feet back into the mist (nor can they throw items to creatures on the other side). Additionally, no creature present in the Sanctum at the moment the apprentices initiated the time lock can ever physically leave the Sanctum so long as the *ioun stone* array in area **D21** remains active.

Investigation of the stone demon faces reveals that the central yellow visage bears slightly feminine features, and that all three forked tongues contain an irregular depression that appears to be designed to fit a humanoid's hand. If a PC places a hand into this depression on the blue or red visage, the face animates in a flash, and clamps down hard on the offering unless the PC succeeds at a DC 16 Reflex save. A failed save results in a special glyph unique to each face being imprinted painfully on the character's hand. A successful DC 18 Knowledge (history or arcana) check reveals that runes imprinted by each face and carved into the walls near them are the personal arcane glyphs of the last known apprentices of Nhur Athemon: Togarin (blue), Vuzhon (yellow), and Daegros (red). Keep track of which characters bear which glyphs, as this controls who can open which doors in area **D4**, and could come into play when the PCs later encounter the wizards whose glyphs they bear. The symbols fade naturally in 1 week's time, or can be dispelled as a 9th-level effect by *dispel magic*.

If the PCs spend more than a few minutes in this room, or upon a subsequent return, they encounter a phantom vision of Rozimus and three of his fellow adventurers as they enter and explore the very same room. The explorers appear as faint blue outlines, and remain just enough out of chronological phase that the PCs cannot hear them or communicate with them in any way (but can smell their torches). In addition to the rogue Rozimus, the PCs observe a heavily bearded bald human wizard, an armored elf with the symbol of Sarenrae on her shield, and a bulky half-orc warrior with tribal markings and a nasty spear. Of the original party, only Rozimus can enter and exit, which seems to cause his allies (especially the wizard) considerable consternation. After a few minutes, the phantoms fade from view.

The doors to the south appear to contain a complex locking mechanism, but are not currently locked, offering easy access to area **D2**. The stairways to the east lead to a wide balcony

# SANCTUM OF A LOST AGE



overlooking the room, which in turn leads through an arch to the audience chamber in area D4.

**Creature:** The second time the PCs enter this room, an enraged behir freed from one of the magical portraits in area D15 emerges from the time vortex to savagely attack the PCs. It fights until it is near death, at which point it vanishes back into the time vortex. Even if the PCs manage to kill the behir before it escapes, the vortex sucks the creature's dying body away at the very last second.

**BEHIR****CR 8****XP 4,800**hp 105 (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 34)**D2. TRAINING GROUND (CR 8)**

Dozens of life-sized statues of noble warriors garbed in fluted ceremonial armor line the walls of this enormous chamber. A pattern of nested rectangles marks the smooth stone floor. Stone walls stretch up forty feet to wide slabs in the ceiling that bathe the whole chamber in bright light. Huge double doors mark the north and south walls. Along the west wall, twenty feet above the floor, a massive panel of clear glass holds back three columns of roiling yellow smoke in an alcove overlooking the room.

The room's doors slam shut once five characters enter the room or when anyone steps on the floor's central rectangle (PCs within 5 feet of either direction can leap through a closing door to their preferred side with a successful DC 16 Reflex save). Once closed, the doors seal with a mechanical lock (Disable Device DC 24), and each of the floor's rectangles shifts to a slightly different angle, making movement from one rectangle to another count as traversing difficult terrain. Each time the room enters lock-down mode, read the following.

The yellow smoke roils and seethes as it slowly begins to take on the image of a giant face. The smoky image seems to look forth from its vantage point behind the glass inset into the wall, scowling hatefully. It speaks in a raspy, disgusted voice. "Foolish apprentices," it spits, "how I should have predicted your betrayal at my most critical moment. Seek to escape into some unwritten time, eh? By now you must have realized your ioun stone array has failed. You now stand marooned in time, living a day, an hour, a single moment stretched into an infinity over countless centuries yet to dawn—one final lesson in obedience from your very, very disappointed master. It does my heart proud to know that your last, eternal moments will see you hunted like animals. Farewell, my faithless friends. Test all I have taught you against the blades of Azlant!"

**Creatures:** When the room enters lock-down mode, three caryatid columns appear to step out of three of the statues along the wall, and move to attack the PCs. The doors unlock only when these creatures have been destroyed.

Nhur Athemon's message replays each time the doors slam shut, and can theoretically spawn an infinite number of caryatid columns. The original statues remain, and destroying them has no bearing on the creation of new caryatid columns. These events occur again and again only so long as the yellow smoke (actually a bound belker) remains behind the glass on the west wall. If that creature is destroyed, the room loses all of its magical properties.

**CARYATID COLUMNS (3)****CR 3****XP 800 each**hp 36 each (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 3 46)**BELKER****CR 6****XP 2,400**hp 68 (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 2 45)**D3. DYNASTY TOMB**

Eight statues of regal figures garbed in ancient finery line each wall of this wide hallway, peering southward down the hallway. Each bears a brief transcription on its base written in an ancient script. The stairs to the south lead up to a ninth statue, taller than the others. This figure holds a mighty glass sword above its smooth, featureless face, and its other hand juts outward, palm upturned as if seeking alms.

The faceless statue's armor, sword, and pose suggest the old god Aroden, but a successful DC 15 Knowledge (history or religion) check reveals it to be that of a legendary pre-Earthfall figure from Azlanti myth known as the "Last Azlanti." This hero of prophecy would rescue the empire in its greatest time of need (a prediction Aroden later fulfilled or took advantage of, according to different sources). The other eight statues represent the final eight dynasties of ancient Azlant.

**Creature:** The room's only current inhabitant is familiar to the PCs—Rozimus of Tymon himself. Some trick of the time lock separated him from his friends, who he claims are lost elsewhere in the dungeon. He has come here to offer "Aroden" his prayers for forgiveness, for he plans to abandon the Sanctum and leave them to their fates. He begins the encounter unfriendly toward the PCs, but if made friendly with a successful DC 24 Diplomacy check, he agrees to accompany the PCs and help them as he can. This earlier version of Rozimus has never met the PCs, knows nothing about escaping the Sanctum, and zealously guards the safety of his *ioun stone*, coming to blows if necessary to protect it. Rozimus might slip back into the time vortex at some dramatically appropriate moment, allowing him to return again if necessary to add interest to the PCs' exploration. If he is killed, his death creates a paradox that destroys the time lock (see area D21).

**ROZIMUS OF TYMON****CR 5****XP 1,600**Tomb raider (*Pathfinder RPG GameMastery Guide* 257)

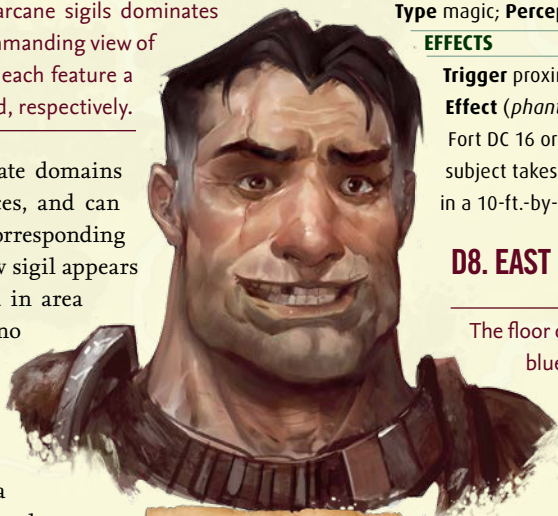
hp 45

**Gear** In addition to the tomb raider's regular gear, Rozimus has a *wayfinder*<sup>SWG</sup> fit with a *clear spindle ioun stone*.

## D4. AUDIENCE CHAMBER

A massive triangular table carved with arcane sigils dominates this room. Three ornate chairs offer a commanding view of visitors. The north, east, and south walls each feature a door brightly colored blue, yellow, and red, respectively.

The colored doors lead to the private domains of each of Nhur Athemon's apprentices, and can be opened only by those bearing the corresponding colored sigils from area **D1**. The yellow sigil appears only on the hand of the slain wizard in area **D10**, as the demon face that grants it no longer functions. All three doors have DC 20 locks, and all three feature *arcane locks* (caster level 12th) that raise the DC to 30. Characters entering the eastern half of the room feel a foreboding sense of uneasiness as a result of the *unhallow* effect emitting from the *darkskull* in chamber **D8**.



Rozimus of Tymon

## D5. TELEPORTATION PLUMES

This plainly adorned chamber contains two five-foot-wide pillars of billowing smoke, the north yellow and the south green.

Characters who step into the column of yellow smoke are immediately teleported to the similar column in area **D17**. The green pillar once led to an important location elsewhere in the dungeons below Thornkeep, but it is no longer active. The whole room is under the *unhallow* effect from area **D8**.

## D6. TOGARIN'S FOYER

Faded frescoes cover the walls of this cold, dank hallway. They show skeletal warriors garbed in the fluted ceramic plate armor of an ancient empire. The floor is decorated in mosaics of various blue stones.

The eastern half of the room is under the *unhallow* effect from area **D8**.

## D7. NORTH HALL (CR 7)

This hallway appears to be just a continuation of area **D6**, but once the lead PC reaches the center of the corridor, a powerful illusion trap triggers. Phantom images of the PCs themselves—aged dozens of years with torn clothes, ragged hair, and crazed eyes—manifest among them, begging for help and imploring them not to trust Togarin. Faces contorted in pitiful expressions and grasping with emaciated, ill-nourished hands, they plead,

“We helped him destroy the time lock, and were forever trapped! You still have a chance to save yourselves, to save us!”

This room is under the *unhallow* effect from area **D8**.

## PHANTOM FUTURE TRAP

**CR 7**

Type magic; Perception DC 29; Disable Device DC 29

### EFFECTS

**Trigger** proximity (*alarm*); **Reset** none

**Effect** (*phantasmal killer*, Will DC 16 to disbelieve, then Fort DC 16 or die [fear effect]; on successful Fort save, subject takes 3d6 damage); multiple targets (all targets in a 10-ft.-by-30-ft. area)

## D8. EAST HALL (CR 8)

The floor of this short corridor is specked with faded blue stone mosaics, but the walls remain completely bare save for five niches in the east wall: three at eye level and two more below and between them. Each niche in the top row contains what appears to be the skull of a long-dead human. The niches in the top row each bear small metal placards, but the niches in the lower row have no similar inscriptions. Simple wooden doors at the north and south ends of the hall lead elsewhere. A palpable sense of evil suffuses the room, making the distance from door to door seem even longer than it is.

The niches in the top row contain the skulls of Nhur Athemon's original, long-dead apprentices, collected by Togarin and placed here as a trophies of his superiority and a reminder not to get too proud of himself. If the severed heads of Daegros and Vuzhon are placed within the empty niches in the second tier, a sixth niche below the second rank opens, revealing Togarin's most prized possession: a *darkskull* that bathes the room in an *unhallow* effect.

The three skulls animate and attack interlopers. They appear as aged human skulls, but otherwise act in all ways as penanggalans. All obey Togarin.

## PENANGGALENS (3)

**CR 5**

XP 1,600 each

hp 35 each (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 3 216)

## D9. LIBRARY (CR 6)

Two stories of tightly packed bookshelves line the western half of this musty chamber, and a massive mural map of what must be the Inner Sea region from eons ago adorns the east wall. An enormous skeleton of a huge, twelve-legged reptile clutters the center of the room.

The skeleton is that of the behir encountered in area **D1**. Regardless of what occurred when the PCs battled it (or if they've

even done so yet), time dictates that the behir dies here in a mutually destructive battle with Rozimus's three companions.

This room is under the *unhallow* effect from area **D8**.

**Creatures:** Two of Rozimus's dead companions, the cleric and the bulky half-orc warrior, now lurk on the second floor of the bookshelf balcony, newly reanimated by Togarin as cairn wights. Both bear glowing blue sigils from area **D1** on their left hands, and the half-orc also bears a red glyph on his right.

### CAIRN WIGHTS (2)

CR 4

XP 1,200 each

hp 34 each (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 276)

**Treasure:** The library represents one of the best surviving storehouses of ancient Azlanti lore remaining to history. Unfortunately, the organic matter of the books rots instantly if removed from the Sanctum, so salvaging value out of the books involves a time-consuming transcription effort that harvests 1,000 gp of historical value from the documents for every week spent copying their secrets. In all, the library contains some 10,000 gp worth of accumulated lore.

## D10. OPERATING LABORATORY (CR 11)

Fresh blood splatters the white tile of this operating laboratory, which is lit by mirrored lamps hung from chains suspended in the shadows of the distant ceiling. A sturdy wooden table near the center of the room holds the lightning-charred corpse of a bald human man with a broom-bottom beard. Smaller tables and bookcases nearby hold the gore-spattered spoils of a recent battle.

The corpse is a former companion of Rozimus, slain by the behir. He bears the glowing yellow sigil of Vuzhon on his left hand, which can be used to open the door to area **D13**.

**Creatures:** Of more immediate concern to the PCs are the room's living inhabitants: the necromancer Togarin and his pet, a skinless dire tiger. The apprentice greets the PCs warmly (despite his dubious surroundings). He welcomes them in Azlanti, saying, "I assume you were sent here by Rozimus, yes?" Togarin explains that one of his fellow apprentices, a brilliant schemer named Vuzhon, escaped Nhur Athemon's time lock by riding Rozimus's body to safety, even helpfully sending the PCs back so that he and his companion Daegros might escape the same way.

"Vuzhon is clever," Togarin says, "but I know more about souls and immortality than she does. So long as her true body remains affected by the time lock and her mind is in normal time, the *magic jar* allowing her into Rozimus's form will never expire. But should the time lock fail, her body will age thousands of years in a moment, and will no longer be a suitable receptacle for her soul. I will not let that happen to me. The only real way out for any of us is to destroy the time lock, and the best way to do that is to create a paradox."

Togarin knows that destruction of the time lock will render him undead, but considers it a truer freedom than being enslaved to Nhur Athemon. He seems a little too pleased as he tells the PCs that the best way to create a paradox is to find Rozimus wandering the Sanctum during a time shift and murder him. Destroying Rozimus's *ioun stone* also works, but Togarin keeps this info to himself. At the first sign of skepticism or disobedience from the PCs, Togarin and his pet attack.

### TOGARIN

CR 10

XP 9,600

Undead creator (*Pathfinder RPG NPC Codex* 186)

hp 100

**Special** PCs bearing Togarin's sigil (blue) take a -4 penalty on saves against his spells.

### DIRE TIGER

CR 8

XP 4,800

hp 105 (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 265)

**Treasure:** In addition to the sigil on his hand, Rozimus's fallen ally wears a fine pair of *bracers of armor* +2. The tables nearby hold a +2 *breastplate* and a *belt of giant's strength* +2.

## D11. TOGARIN'S QUARTERS (CR 8)

This extravagant bedroom features a bed flanked by nightstands, two wardrobes against the walls near the center of the room, a couch and low table, and a large tiger-pelt rug.

**Creature:** If the PCs enter this room after slaying the dire tiger in area **D10**, the skin animates as a shroud upon a spectral form and attacks.

### SPECTRAL DIRE TIGER

CR 8

XP 4,800

Giant spectre (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 256, 295)

hp 64

**Treasure:** If the spectral dire tiger is defeated, the PCs can collect the tiger pelt, which is worth 1,200 gp.

## D12. REJUVENATION POOL

One hour spent soaking in the viscid fluid in this stone basin rejuvenates the subject as if she had rested for a full 8 hours, and accounts for 1 day's worth of dietary needs. The liquid loses all powers if removed from the basin, which cannot itself be removed from the room without destroying it.

## D13. DAEGROS'S FOYER (CR 6)

The door to this room is locked with an *arcane lock* effect that can be dispelled by a creature wearing Vuzhon's yellow sigil. This room's eastern half is under the *unhallow* effect from area **D8**. When the

PCs arrive, they interrupt a patrol of caryatid columns that hunt the apprentices (but are content to destroy the PCs instead).

**CARYATID COLUMNS (3)**

**CR 3**

**XP 800 each**

**hp 36 each** (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary 3 46*)

**D14. SUMMONING PLATFORM**

The west wall of this corridor features three narrow windows overlooking an enormous chamber below. An elaborate rack against the east wall contains several vertical slots stuffed with scroll tubes.

The scroll rack holds three scrolls of *summon monster IV*, two scrolls of *tongues* and *summon monster III*, and a scroll of *wall of stone*.

**D15. HALL OF GRAVEN IMAGES (CR VARIES)**

The sweeping ceiling of this spacious gallery allows for a huge display of framed paintings upon the south wall, each of which sports a different monster looking down on the raised platform at the center of the room. The platform supports a simple table covered with an open book and numerous burning candles of various colors and lengths.

Here Daegros imprisons his greatest summonings in framed paintings. One of these images—a rearing behir—lies broken and torn upon the ground. (This is the creature encountered in area **D1**, and its aged corpse rests in area **D9**.)

**Creatures:** Vuzhon’s abandoned quasit familiar lurks here, invisibly fuming at her perceived betrayal and taking its aggression out on the hated Daegros. When the PCs enter the room, the quasit flies from painting to painting, slashing each with a standard action and releasing the depicted creature into the room. Roll randomly on the table below to determine which painting is destroyed each round until the quasit is stopped. A successful DC 18 Perception check is sufficient for a PC to notice a high-pitched laugh each time a painting is torn. If captured and interrogated, the quasit is an excellent source of information about the Sanctum’s history and current situation, though it remains fixated on Vuzhon. “My mistress is here, but not here!” it chitters in a panic.

“Summoned” creatures appear on the room’s central platform, and attack the nearest creature. Attempting to remove a painting from the wall releases the image’s subject into the room as if the painting had been damaged. Painting subjects (and the source for their statistics) include the following.

d8	Creature	CR	Source
1	Ice troll	4	( <i>Bestiary 2 271</i> )
2	Manticore	5	( <i>Bestiary 199</i> )
3	Babau	6	( <i>Bestiary 57</i> )
4	Girallon	6	( <i>Bestiary 154</i> )
5	Allosaurus	7	( <i>Bestiary 2 90</i> )

6	Chimera	7	( <i>Bestiary 44</i> )
7	Efreeti	8	( <i>Bestiary 140</i> )
8	Frost giant	9	( <i>Bestiary 149</i> )

**QUASIT**

**CR 2**

**XP 600**

**hp 16** (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary 66*)

**D16. DAEGROS’S QUARTERS**

Belled glass jars clutter every available surface in this roomy bedchamber. These jars contain miniaturized creatures pinned by needles to cushions, like a twisted insect collection.

With a successful DC 18 Appraise, Knowledge (history), or Knowledge (nature) check, a PC can identify five cases containing what appear to be creatures that have gone extinct since Daegros’s day. Each is worth 1,500 gp if sold to the right collector.

**D17. VUZHON’S FOYER**

This chamber is similar to area **D6**, but with frescoes of zealous supplicants and yellow mosaic flooring. A plume of yellow smoke rises from the floor. Characters who step into the column of smoke are teleported to the similar column in area **D5**.

**D18. SOUTH HALL**

Bells and strands of beads hang thick in this corridor, and passing through without disturbing them requires a successful DC 18 Acrobatics check. Anyone who fails sets off the dangling alarms and must make an immediate DC 18 Reflex save. On a failure, the clinging becomes a clangor, alerting Daegros in area **D19** to their presence.

**D19. ANTECHAMBER (CR 7)**

This passageway runs west and east, with a door set in the north wall before the corridor turns to the north. Arches on the far east wall lead to a darkened chamber that periodically flashes with colorful bursts of light, casting the corridor in shifting shades of pink, scarlet, dusty rose, and incandescent blue.

After Vuzhon left, Daegros moved into her former quarters in an effort to protect the *ioun stone* array and figure out exactly how she managed to escape. After careful study of Vuzhon’s notes, Daegros learned that his true survival is tied to that of the time lock, which he must protect at all costs.

The wall at the north end of the corridor after the turn features an inset crystal hemisphere that allows remote viewing of any other room in the Sanctum. It cannot be removed.

**Creature:** If the PCs got the jump on Togarin in area **D10**, they can find Daegros in this room, intently studying the apparatus at the north end of the corridor. Otherwise, he wanders the halls between the antechamber and his quarters. He offers to trade his

considerable magical secrets if the PCs agree to serve as his agents in the outside world. He asks them to prove their loyalty by slaying his fellow apprentice Togarin, who seeks to destroy the time lock and damn them both to despicable undeath. Daegros responds to threats to the array in area **D21** with his deadliest spells.

**DAEGROS****CR 7****XP 3,200**

Advanced conjurist (*Pathfinder RPG GameMastery Guide* 279, *Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 294)

**hp** 59

**Special** PCs bearing Daegros's sigil (red) take a –4 penalty on saves against his spells.

**Development:** Vuzhon's body bursts through the door from area **D20** at the first sign of trouble.

**D20. VUZHON'S QUARTERS (CR 7)**

This posh bedroom looks like it was recently ransacked. Numerous ancient books litter the floor, and piles of papers with arcane markings are spread haphazardly across the chamber.

The papers and books come from area **D9**, and largely concern consciousness transference and the *magic jar* spell.

**Creature:** Daegros used the knowledge from the tomes in this room to warp Vuzhon's body into a bloated shell under his command. The wretch bursts through the door to area **D19** at the first sign of trouble to protect its master.

**VUZHON'S BODY****CR 7****XP 3,200**

Flesh golem (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 160)

**hp** 79**D21. THE TIME LOCK**

At the center of a darkened chamber, five floating crystalline shapes weave and rotate in eldritch patterns, casting blasts of colorful light into the deep shadows of the room's many narrow niches.

Powerful Azlanti magic bound these *ioun stones* into a complex geometric array that keeps the Sanctum sequestered from the regular flow of time. Destroying the time lock requires the creation of a temporal paradox (such as the murder of Rozimus, the destruction of his *ioun stone*, or some more ingenious method) or simple brute force. The array is immune to all forms of magic.

The array has 100 hit points. Anyone who physically attacks the array must succeed at a Will save with a DC equal to the number of hit points remaining after the attack. Failure displaces the PC in time. Victims age 1d20 years in a single moment. While their conscious minds experience only a few

seconds of strangeness, their subconscious reels with half-remembered scenes of wandering the empty halls of the Sanctum for the number of years aged.

If the time lock is destroyed, the *ioun stones* fall to the ground and can be claimed. They are a *dusty rose prism*, an *incandescent blue sphere*, a *pink rhomboid*, a *scarlet and blue sphere*, and a *dark blue rhomboid*. When the time lock fails, organic materials from Old Azlant (such as the canvases in area **D15**, the books in area **D9**, and the liquid in area **D12**) rot and mold into dust immediately. All native creatures age thousands of years in seconds. This kills Vuzhon's weakened body and her quasit familiar, and grants the ghost template to Daegros and Togarin (assuming they are still alive). It may or may not destroy Vuzhon's mind in the body of Rozimus—that villain's ultimate fate is yours to decide.



Togarin



# THE DARK MENAGERIE

By Ed Greenwood

In the deepest level of the Halls Under the Hill, the dread wizard Nhur Athemon kept an entire zoo of powerful and strange creatures imprisoned in cages of his own design—chambers enchanted to mirror the natural environs from which he had stolen his pets. When the wizard died thousands of years ago, his enchanted menagerie entered a state of deep, magical stasis that protected both the rooms and the creatures therein from aging and the elements. Now that adventurers have once more penetrated the Dark Menagerie, however, the spell has finally collapsed, and the monsters that have been caged in these halls for thousands of years yet again hunger for freedom... and for blood.



The Dark Menagerie was Nhur Athemon's personal playground beneath his twisted halls, a zoo in which he caged his most prized living possessions. He frequently entertained himself in these rooms by constructing elaborate illusory environments for his pets, and as such, most of the chambers on this level resemble anything but a dank, subterranean warren. Yet his powerful magic required foci from which the arcana could emanate—"hearts" that would continue to pump the illusory spells into the chambers for years to come. He scattered these hearts throughout the chambers and continued to expand his realm to include ever more diverse creatures. When he died, his prized menagerie was thrown into stasis, the result of a spell he devised in case of a prolonged absence on his part. As the centuries passed, the magic that kept creatures contained within their environments has faded, and with the arrival of the PCs, the newly awakened creatures are now free to wander throughout the menagerie.

## E1. FORECHAMBER

As soon as the PCs enter this room, a large unseen bell emits a single, deep toll, signaling the end of the dungeon's longstanding stasis effect and bringing its denizens and illusions back to life.

A series of stairs winds west and east down to the floor of this bare stone room. A short railing permits a view of the room from the staircase's landing. A scuffed circle of blue-white chalk marked on the floor of the northern section of the room is filled with various sigils and runes. Four-foot-tall torch holders adorn the corners of the room, and a wide, closed stone doors take up half of the western walls.

This 20-foot-square room was once host to a *teleport* effect for bringing beasts and guests into and out of the Dark Menagerie. The chalk summoning circle on the floor is the only remnant of this feature, and has long deteriorated beyond use in the years since this dungeon's abandonment. A character who succeeds at a DC 25 Knowledge (arcana) check can determine the circle's original use, and with a successful DC 30 Spellcraft check, she can reconstruct the circle. Reconstructing it allows creatures teleporting to the area to treat it as "very familiar" and those teleporting from the circle to treat their destination as one step closer to "very familiar" (see the *teleport* spell description).

**Creature:** Floating silently in the center of this chamber is the flickering gray image of a metal helmet. Obviously a single part of an entire suit of armor, this helmet was enchanted by Nhur Athemon to be an animated object all on its own, and its ghostly state was meant to ensure no one would tamper with it. The helmet is harmless, and it says and does nothing except turn and tilt to examine its surroundings. The helmet is effectively incorporeal, and is affected by attacks and effects as an incorporeal creature. As soon as a creature moves further into this level of the dungeon, the helmet moves to float alongside the shoulder of the strongest arcane

spellcaster in the party, accompanying that character as the PCs move through the Dark Menagerie. The helmet was once a steward for Nhur Athemon when he was away and couldn't show his menagerie to guests, but since the evil wizard's death thousands of years ago, the helmet has only served as a mild curiosity at best, following guests through the dungeon but reporting to no one. If attacked, the helmet does everything it can to fight back, but proves a poor match for most opponents.

### TINY ANIMATED OBJECT

CR 1/2

XP 200

hp 5 (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 14)

SQ construction points (additional movement [fly])

## E2. JUNGLE (CR 5)

Vibrant foliage creates impenetrable walls of shrubbery that encase the chamber and sprawl across its center, but ends sharply at the hallway as though cut away with a knife. Trees and shrubbery create a thick maze of jungle brush and undergrowth, and their canopy blocks out most of the bright light pouring from the open sky above. To the north, a gap in the foliage leads into a dank, unlit stone cavern. To the west, an enormous kapok tree towers above the rest of the jungle terrain.

Nhur Athemon used this room to house his favored jungle pets and whichever other creatures he found most pleasing to place in such a verdant landscape.

**Creatures:** An amphisbaena lurks in the jungle foliage of this room; it hid in the trees thousands of years ago and only awakened from its stasis when the PCs entered this level of the dungeon. In addition, some of the jungle undergrowth isn't what it seems—a long-dormant garden ooze lies in wait among the jungle's illusory understory, reawakened and eager to feast upon creatures that come too close to it.

### AMPHISBAENA

CR 4

XP 1,200

hp 45 (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 2 25)

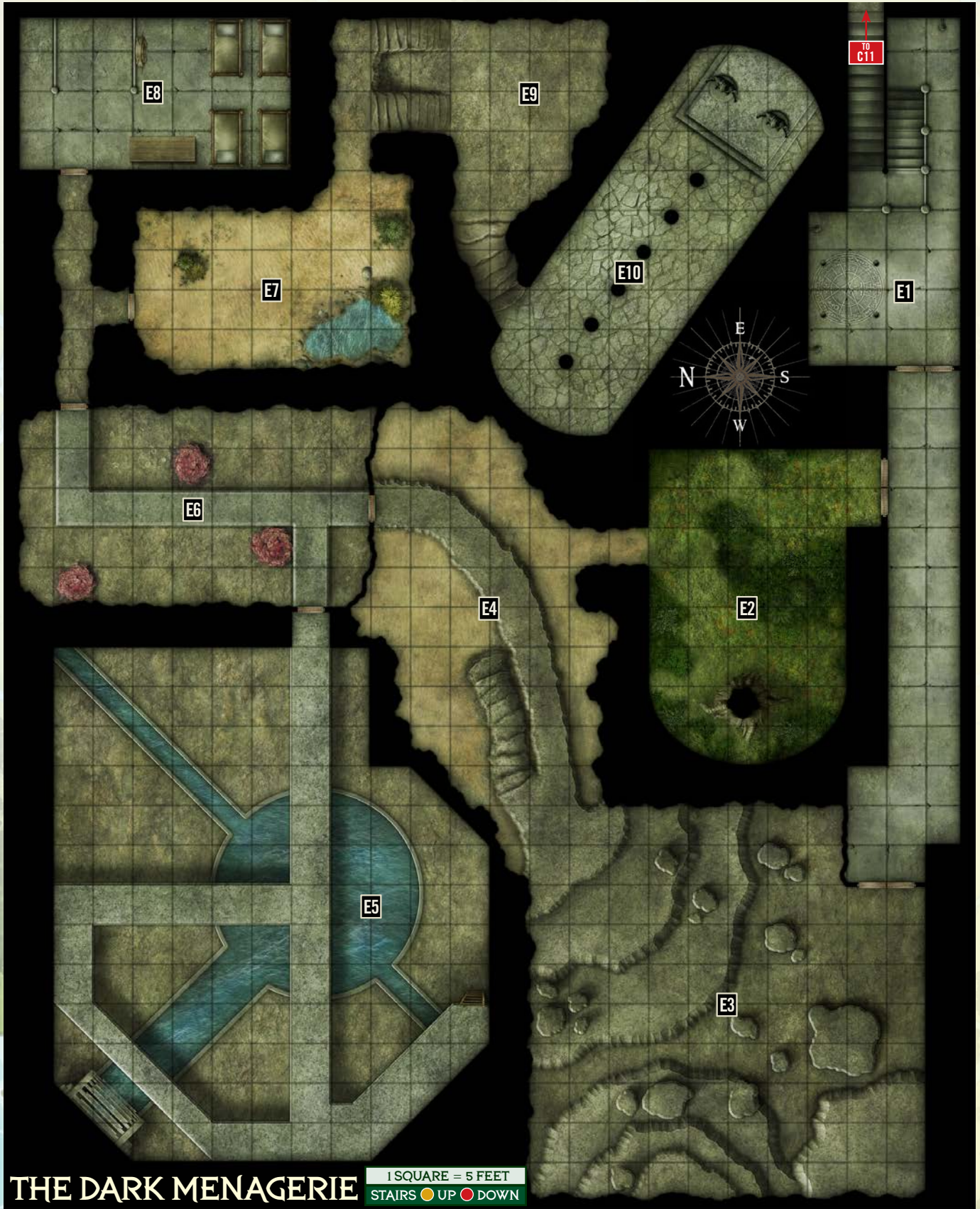
### GARDEN OOZE

CR 2

XP 600

hp 19 (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 3 122)

**Heart of the Jungle:** The gigantic kapok tree planted in the west side of the room is the heart of this chamber's magic. Penetrating the tree's bark unleashes an unusual amount of glittering, amber sap from its wood, which can easily be identified as magical with Spellcraft or effects like *detect magic*. If bottled and consumed, the magical sap acts as a *potion of barkskin*. The tree produces enough sap for three potions before drying up. Once the sap is drained, the tree's death is swift and dramatic, and the illusory magic shrouding



THE DARK MENAGERIE

1 SQUARE = 5 FEET  
STAIRS ● UP ● DOWN

the room quickly dissipates, revealing the stark stone walls and unassuming flagstone tiles for what they truly are.

### E3. MASQUE OF THE MANY (CR 5)

The archway of this chamber's entrance is curtained with black chains and metal rings, from which hang the hands of many species—animal paws, humanoid hands, and skeletal fists. Within this room stretches a sun-drenched, dusty canyon. Layers of reddish rock create small plateaus that rise up in graduated ledges against the walls of the room, which appear to be impossibly high canyon walls. Tall pillars of orange stone rise up from the parched earth, all seemingly randomly dispersed throughout the barren landscape. One of these hoodoos soars well above the rest, easily rising thirty feet into the sky above. A fissure in the walls opens up to the northeast, revealing a night sky full of stars in the distance.

The dismembered hands that adorn the chains of the curtain here have been noticeably savaged by the elements, and are covered in dust and weathered to the bone.

The small plateaus in this room average 10 feet tall, with the highest point in the room reaching 30 feet, and they rise in 10-foot-tall steps. Climbing each stone step requires a successful DC 10 Climb check, since the ropes that once aided Nhur Athemon and his guests up the steep slopes long ago deteriorated into dust. The room's sky is an illusion, and creatures that attempt to rise more than 45 feet from the floor risk striking their heads on the stone ceiling beneath the illusion.

The stone pillars in this room are illusions of geographical features known as hoodoos. While actual hoodoos would be difficult to collapse by any means short of industrial strength, the smaller pillars in this room are easy for strong characters to push over and destroy. The only exception to this is the 10-foot-diameter hoodoo in the southern section of the room (see Heart of the Masque of the Many, below). As a full-round action, a creature adjacent to a hoodoo can attempt to push it over with either a DC 20 Strength check or a DC 25 Disable Device check. Upon falling over, a collapsed hoodoo deals 3d6 points of damage to any creature in a 15-foot line opposite the creature who knocked the hoodoo over (Reflex DC 17 negates). By exceeding the Strength or Disable Device check DC by 5 or more, a creature that knocks over a hoodoo can designate the direction it wants the hoodoo to fall.

Although the hoodoos are part of the illusion constructed by Nhur Athemon, the images of the rocks are positioned over actual stone pillars in the mostly barren chamber; thus, even creatures who have successfully disbelieved the room's illusions feel the full force of the hoodoos should they find themselves beneath one of the tumbling structures.

**Creatures:** Nhur Athemon used this room to house exotic creatures native to dry hills or warm mountain climes. By the time of his death, he had placed six gremlins in this

### THE DARK MENAGERIE FEATURES

Many of the chambers in the Dark Menagerie are affected by powerful magic that dramatically alters the appearance of their terrain, sometimes to the point of making the room seem to be outside, underwater, or contrary to the fundamental properties of the Material Plane. Every room in the Dark Menagerie appears to be a self-contained biome, though in actuality the chambers are merely subject to a constant *mirage arcana* spell (caster level 15th). This magic does not alter the appearances of creatures dwelling in the room; it simply gives each chamber the appearance of a completely different environment. When Nhur Athemon constructed his menagerie, he designed it so he could view his pets in their natural domain, even if the habitats were completely artificial.

Successfully dispelling the *mirage arcana* effect halts its illusory magic for a number of rounds equal to the number by which the result exceeds the dispel check's DC (minimum 1 round). In order to permanently defuse the magic in each chamber of the menagerie, a character must locate and destroy the "heart" of the chamber—typically an object or a creature intimately linked to the environment being emulated in the room, and occasionally the only thing in the room that actually appears as it truly is. The heart of a chamber emits strong illusion magic, but any attempts to dispel the heart yield the same results as dispelling the *mirage arcana* effect affecting the room. The exact details for the heart of each room (for those that have one) are located in a section near the bottom of the room description.

chamber—four pugwampis and two vexgits. Upon being released from their thousand-year stasis, the gremlins immediately began patrolling their grounds in search of something to destroy. If encountered by the PCs, the gremlins do everything in their power to maim and kill the visitors, reveling especially in the destruction caused by knocking over hoodoos.

#### PUGWAMPIS (4)

CR 1/2

200 XP each

hp 6 each (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary 2* 144)

#### VEXGITS (2)

CR 1

400 XP each

hp 8 each (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary 2* 145)

**Heart of the Masque of the Many:** One of the hoodoos in this chamber is not illusory, but was actually transported from the Zho Mountains in Qadira to the Dark Menagerie. The unusually large hoodoo in the southwestern quadrant of this chamber is notable not only for its size, but also for its clearly unusual mineral composition. A character that makes a successful DC 20

Knowledge (nature) or Profession (mining) check can tell with a brief inspection that some of the layers of the large hoodoo contain mithral ore. Extraction of the mithral ore takes 1d6 hours of strenuous labor and yields 4 pounds of the ore (worth 2,000 gp). Once the ore is extracted, the room's illusion collapses, revealing the hoodoos to be unassuming stone pillars and the plateaus to be composed of large stone blocks.

## E4. THE GAUNTLET (CR 6)

A dark night sky full of twinkling stars appears above. Running southwest to northeast is a jagged bridge of land leading over a huge ravine. Obsidian cliffs descend from the land bridge on both the left and right sides, plummeting downward to the hard dirt forty feet below, which is intermittently dotted with dead trees whose roots appear to claw at the soil. A set of natural stairs rises from the chasm's floor in the southwestern portion of this room. To the south is a small tunnel dug out of the chasm wall at the base of the valley, and to the north a wooden door is set into the black rock where the bridge meets the chasm's edges.

The starry sky shows no constellations the PCs can recognize, and is merely a part of Nhur Athemon's elaborate illusion. The cliff and narrow bridge leading from room to room, however, are only slightly enhanced by the dead wizard's spells, and a fall from the 40-foot ledge does very real damage indeed.

**Creatures:** In his last years, Nhur Athemon kept some of his most prized creatures in this room—elementals he captured from across the multiverse and bound to the Material Plane with fell magic. Currently, three elementals remain: a lightning elemental soars low through the false night sky, and two mud elementals drag themselves across the dirt and clamber on the dead trees. Their years of imprisonment long ago drove them insane, and when they spot any creatures not recognizable as their captor, they fly into a rage and attack relentlessly, attempting to knock their foes from the tall ledge and onto the ground below.

In addition to the elementals, one other creature makes its home here: a lone owl with white plumage and red eyes. It perches on one of the dead trees on the ground below. The owl does not attack intruders unless it itself is attacked first, and merely watches curiously from its tree branch.

### MEDIUM LIGHTNING ELEMENTAL CR 3

XP 800

hp 26 (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 2 116)

### MEDIUM MUD ELEMENTALS (2) CR 3

XP 800 each

hp 30 each (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 2 120)

### OWL CR 1/3

XP 135

hp 4 (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 132)

**Heart of the Gauntlet:** The albino owl perched in one of the dead trees on the ground level of this room holds the key to the Gauntlet's illusion. Though the owl attempts to elude capture if pursued, it doesn't leave the confines of this room. Once the owl is captured, a cursory inspection reveals a hard, foreign object buried in its gullet. A successful DC 19 Heal check is sufficient for a PC to dislodge the object without harming the owl, revealing an amulet set with a large, beetle-shaped ruby. This amulet acts as a *golembane scarab* when worn around the neck. Once the amulet is removed from the owl, the room's illusions fade, revealing the plain stone ceiling above and rough stalagmites in place of the dead trees below.

## E5. WATERWORKS (CR 6)

The heavy wooden door to this room is locked shut, but can be picked with a successful DC 25 Disable Device check or broken down (hardness 5, hp 20, break DC 23). The key is located in room E8.

This room is full of massive rusty cogs and enormous, toothed clockwork wheels that move in rhythmic, clanking "ticks" like a gigantic clock. The huge mechanism is powered by water streaming down into the buckets of a mill wheel. It pours from a chute near the ceiling in the northwest corner of the room. The wheel turns an axle along which most of the cogs turn. These cogs then turn other, smaller cogs and cams that seem to mark out time. At intervals, they trigger rods that direct water into channels in the floor, which run in various directions out from under the room through narrow gratings in the floors.

The groaning, squeaking din of this mechanism is deafening and constant, and a fishy carrion reek emanates from the water. The axle with all the cogs turns in two huge sockets, above a dark pool of water. Only the two largest cogs are big enough to be reach down into the water. A series of stone catwalks spans the room thirty feet above the churning waterways.

Unlike most of the other rooms in the Dark Menagerie, this one is not steeped in illusion, but rather is a small engine room built to supply both water and fresh air to the monstrous inhabitants of Nhur Athemon's personal zoo. The complex device uses series of rods and water channels to open and close water gates into the other chambers in this level, providing water for the creatures therein and sluicing away their wastes.

**Creature:** In the time since Nhur Athemon's death, several creatures have made their way into the Dark Menagerie via the stream of water flowing from the ceiling (which originates in a creek not far south of Thornkeep). Most recently, a gibbering moulder has filtered through the water system and survived the gears. It has thus far fed off the refuse cycled through this room, though its food supply is anything but abundant. If it sights any living creatures in the room, it quickly attacks.

### GIBBERING Moulder CR 5

1,600 XP

hp 46 (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 153)

**Trap:** The numerous cogs that make up the machinery in this room pose a serious danger to any who accidentally stray too close to the enormous contraption. Though walking across either the ground floor or the stone catwalk is relatively safe and ensures protection from the spinning gears, any creature that falls from the catwalk either into the water or onto the floor below risks getting caught up in the deadly machinery.

### WATERWORKS GEARS

CR 4

**Type** mechanical; **Perception** DC 20; **Disable Device** DC 25

#### EFFECTS

**Trigger** location; **Reset** automatic

**Effect** Atk +15 melee (4d6+4/×3)

**Treasure:** A successful DC 15 Perception check is all that's needed for a PC to notice that the large pool in the center of the room is faintly glowing from somewhere in the center. Closer inspection reveals that the glow comes from an unsheathed longsword lying on the bottom (the pool appears to be about 6 feet deep). The glowing sword in the pool is a +1 *ghost touch longsword*, dropped by someone who fell into the water long ago. Anyone who succeeds at a DC 25 Perception or Appraise check while inspecting the longsword can spot the detachable pommel, which reveals a small hollow in the hilt. Inside the hollow is a badly weathered but still functional *scroll of hold monster*.

## E6. DEEPSEA (CR 6)

A tunnel of salty air is the only dry space in this room. Surrounding the tunnel on both sides and above is a massive body of clear blue water, magically suspended and prevented from collapsing upon the passage by some invisible force. Hills of coral cover the sea floor, bristling with all manner of plants, tiny darting fish, and anemones. The tunnel leading through this watery chamber bends and forks throughout the room, leading to wooden doorways positioned on the east, west, and south.

Nhur Athemon kept his aquatic sea creatures in this 40-foot-tall chamber, and used powerful magic to create a tunnel he and his guests could walk through while gazing into the water all around them. No tangible barrier

holds back the water—creatures inside the tunnel can walk into the brine as easily as jumping into a lake, and creatures in the water can likewise reach out into the tunnel. As he did in the other parts of the menagerie, Nhur Athemon violently punished those creatures that assailed him or his guests here, but now, without fear of their captor's punishment, the monsters here feel less inclined to let visitors walk through unscathed.

**Creatures:** Three adaros dwell among the illusory coral reefs in this chamber. Bored and angry at their imprisonment, they go to great lengths to abate their frustration, attacking any creatures that dare to enter the tunnel of air at the base of the room. They pull air-breathers into the water so they can fight on their own terms, and try to drown their opponents.

Also lurking on the lee slopes of the coral hills in this room is a giant sea anemone. It doesn't go out of its way to attack creatures in the dry area of the room, but it happily consumes any weakened or struggling creatures that happen its way.

### ADAROS (3)

CR 3

XP 800 each

hp 30 each (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary 3 7*)

### GIANT SEA ANEMONE

CR 2

XP 600

hp 34 (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary 3 238*)

**Heart of the Deepsea:** The giant sea anemone holds the key to the chamber's illusions. Upon the anemone's death, the illusory coral hills and other underwater features disappear. The rest of the room—including the suspended water and tunnel of air—are very much real, though without the powerful illusions, the clear blue water quickly reveals itself to be black and grimy.

## E7. RED SKY DESERT (CR 7)

Purple desert shrubs and a small oasis adorn this sandy valley, which is bordered on all sides by impossibly tall barriers of solid sand. The crimson sky above shows the sun at its highest point, and the valley's intense heat creates a rippling haze in the distance. Running from north to south, a large dune makes up the floor of the valley, sloping gradually downward toward a narrow passage through the eastern wall.

Nhur Athemon housed desert-dwelling creatures in this room, especially those giant vermin he found particularly charming, such as solifugids, scorpions, and desert worms. The decline



in the chamber's elevation is gradual, with the highest point of the dune rising 20 feet above the desert floor.

**Creatures:** Four giant scorpions dwell in this room, meandering about and examining the illusory shrubbery decorating the chamber. They haven't been fed since their stasis ended, and attack any intruders they see in hopes of obtaining their next meal.

### GIANT SCORPIONS (4)

CR 3

XP 800 each

hp 37 each (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 242)

**Heart of the Red Sky Desert:** The oasis in this room was drawn from an actual oasis in the heart of the Thuvian desert. The water is unnaturally cold and crystal clear. If sufficiently contaminated—such as by pouring in several buckets of the brackish water in area E6 or by dumping a number of corpses into the water—the oasis's crisp water turns murky and foul, and the illusions of the Red Sky Desert fall away to reveal a ceiling and walls hewn from stone and a series of shallow stone steps where the decline in the sand dune was.

**Treasure:** Wedged in the sandy floor of the oasis in this room is a *wand of calm emotions* (23 charges remaining), noticeable with a successful DC 15 Perception check while examining the oasis.

## E8. STAMPING MILL (CR 8)

This bare stone room contains four beds, a work table, and a small shelf of ancient books. Dominating the north side of the room is a massive mechanical apparatus. Its main feature, a single stone block the size of a horse, hangs fifteen feet above a carpet of shattered bones, rock dust, and other debris. A chain as thick as a human thigh runs up from the block into a small, dark cavity in the ceiling. Two short stone ledges situated on either side of the stone block form a shallow container for whatever happens to get crushed beneath the smashing device. Flush against the device is a large wooden wheel with numerous pegs. The wheel is attached to a crank fitted to a chain that runs parallel to the one attached to the stone block.

This room served two purposes in Nhur Athemon's time. The crushing mechanism in the northeastern corner of the room worked as a stamping mill for pulverizing soft stone to use in mortar, grain for menagerie feed, and bones into bone meal. The room also served as a sleeping quarters for Nhur Athemon's favored beast keepers, who were often required to work long hours with no rest in order to ensure the care of the cruel wizard's pets.

Though the stamping mill has been dormant for thousands of years, it too was affected by the stasis that kept much of the Dark Menagerie intact for the past millennia, and can still be operated by turning the large wheel at the side of the device,

which requires a DC 25 Strength check. The wheel must be turned for 1 minute before the block is raised to its maximum height about 15 feet off the ground.

**Creature:** Not long ago, a deathtrap ooze managed to find its way into Nhur Athemon's menagerie, and when it encountered the stamping mill in this room, it melded its form to the block and chain to take control of the huge stone block. It currently waits, suspended in the air, for a creature foolish enough to step beneath the block, at which point it drops the stone and crushes the victim beneath (emulating a falling block trap; see page 420 of the *Core Rulebook*). The deathtrap ooze can reset itself if need be, but reverts to its true form if discovered or forced to defend itself.

### DEATHTRAP OOZE

CR 8

4,800 XP

hp 126 (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 3 64)

**Treasure:** The worktable in this room is covered in various tools and devices that Nhur Athemon's assistants used when they worked in the menagerie. Though most of these are worn with use and not particularly valuable, anyone searching the table finds a set of masterwork thieves' tools, a masterwork dagger, and an ornate hourglass the size of a fist. The hourglass is filled with particles of sapphire dust instead of sand, and its golden stand is etched with Azlanti runes, making the item worth 500 gp if sold to the right buyer.

In addition, hidden beneath one of the beds in this room is a pair of *boots of friendly terrain* (underground) (*Advanced Player's Guide* 301). Hidden in one of these boots is a study iron key that opens the door to area E5.

## E9. MASQUE OF DARKNESS (CR 6)

Dozens of stalactites hang from this dark chamber's ceiling, which has been sculpted into the semblance of countless overlapping carapaces, as if many crabs were clinging to it in a mass. Two sets of stone stairs built into the northern portion of the room descend 10 feet to the ground floor of the chamber. A set of carved stone stairs to the west leads further downward.

In this chamber, Nhur Athemon housed his darkest findings, monsters ripped from Golarion's warm underbelly and injected into this subterranean lair.

**Creatures:** Nhur Athemon originally kept a single decapus in this room, a creature that went completely mad shortly after its capture and imprisonment. A slicer beetle later managed to burrow its way into this level of the dungeon, and the decapus took twisted pleasure in commandeering the oversized vermin as its steed. The decapus rides the creature to pass the time, but if confronted by enemies or potential food, it quickly abandons the insect to defend itself. The confused beetle, for its part, hungrily attacks appetizing intruders.

**DECAPUS****CR 4****XP 1,200**hp 45 (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary 2 77*)**SLICER BEETLE****CR 4****XP 1,200**hp 39 (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary 2 44*)

**Heart of the Masque of Darkness:** The slicer beetle accidentally consumed the heart of this room when it barreled into the chamber years ago. Wedged deep in the bug's belly is a black pearl the size of a human eyeball, which acts as a *bead of force* when thrown and dispels the Masque of Darkness's illusory ceiling when destroyed.

**E10. LAIR OF THE SPHINX (CR 9)**

A curtain similar to the one in front of area **E3**, though in better condition, denotes the entrance to this room.

Black chains and metal rings—eerily bedecked in animal paws, humanoid hands, and skeletal fists—hang from the archway of this chamber's entrance. Inside, a single row of stone columns files down the center of this long, soaring chamber. A short ledge at the south end of the room leads up to a pronounced dais, which is decorated with two mighty statues carved from black stone. The statues depict a scholarly man bedecked in robes from the waist up, but with thick, writhing snakes for legs. Cobwebs hang from the ceiling and pillars like dozens of sagging tapestries.

Unlike most other chambers in the Dark Menagerie, Nhur Athemon did not use this room to house treasured pets or create a grandiose display for his guests. Instead, he imprisoned only the currently most prized and most powerful creature in this chamber, using the captured beast to cow apprentices and business partners into submission. He would eventually free each such mighty beast or ravenous creature into the wild when he found a new prize.

**Creature:** Nhur Athemon's final captured victim was an ancient sphinx named Melabdara, whom he secured from the Sahure Wastes in Osirion several years before his death. When Nhur Athemon used his dark magic to influence, transport, and bind the beast, Melabdara's fate was sealed before she even knew it. Her release from the stasis magic that kept the Dark Menagerie intact all these years has also led to her freedom from Nhur Athemon's arcane grip, and now the sphinx seeks nothing more than to escape this dark dungeon, a feat made difficult thanks to the thick adamantine chains that secure her to the wall (hardness 20, 30 hp, break DC 30).

**MELABDARA****CR 9****XP 6,400**Advanced sphinx (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary 257, 294*)

hp 126

Languages Ancient Osiriani, Draconic, Sphinx

**Development:** Melabdara won't immediately attack the PCs. She sees the potential that they might help her escape from the Dark Menagerie. If simply pleading with the PCs doesn't work, the sphinx offers them wealth beyond their wildest dreams should they help her get free. What exactly her promised treasures might be is left to you as the GM. The process of freeing the sphinx from Thornkeep is no trifling matter, and could make for an entire adventure by itself!

**Treasure:** Among the treasures offered to the PCs by the sphinx if they agree to help her is a treasured pendant, consisting of a leather cord attached to a *clear spindle ioun stone*. This *ioun stone* might help the PCs as they further explore Thornkeep, particularly the Sanctum of a Lost Age in the dungeon level above.



Lair of the Sphinx



# Behind the Scenes at Goblinworks

*Building a massively multiplayer online roleplaying game (abbreviated as MMORPG or MMO) is a time-consuming task that involves many people from different disciplines working as a team to create a highly accessible game enjoyable to as many people as possible. In this section, we take you behind the scenes at Goblinworks to show you the process of making Pathfinder Online through the eyes of the people creating the game.*

## CLASSES VS. SKILLS

### *Inverting the RPG Paradigm with Pathfinder Rules*

Goblinworks CEO Ryan S. Dancey believes that one of the reasons the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game is now the world's best-selling tabletop RPG is that so many players embrace its rules as the best representation of fantasy gaming. These rules have a history more than 30 years long and millions of players wide, and many of the rules have long been a hallmark of classic roleplaying games. However, rules that work well for a tabletop game aren't always the best for an MMO, for at least two reasons.

First, a tabletop RPG depends upon a Game Master (GM)—a living, breathing adjudicator who can make on-the-fly rulings regarding unexpected events. In contrast, an MMO depends entirely on its programming to account for any number of fully realized roleplaying and combative situations.

Second, a tabletop game doesn't usually function in real time; players take minutes to decide actions that happen in seconds, and they take turns making their choices in a sequential order. In an MMO like *Pathfinder Online*, actions happen simultaneously and with little time to pause.

Because of these two big differences, a strict translation of the Pathfinder RPG rules just doesn't work for *Pathfinder Online*. Still, the staff at Goblinworks wanted to preserve the essence of the classic RPG experience in taking it from the table to the screen. For months they debated which tabletop



*Pathfinder Online inverts the usual RPG practice of gaining a level to earn more skills. Instead, characters will gain skills in order to go up a level.*

rules were essential to conveying the feeling of playing Pathfinder and which ones could slide into the background.

Two of the core rules from Pathfinder RPG in particular made the cut, and will be an integral part of *Pathfinder Online*: alignment and ability scores.

"We knew that we wanted to use the alignment system," says Dancey, "giving players an ethical background composed of their attitudes toward law and chaos, good and evil. We also wanted to quantify characters using core attributes immediately







## THE DUNGEON ENTRANCE SEEN IN THE IN-GAME EDITOR



recognizable to everyone who has played the tabletop game.”

To make the rules clearer for newcomers and to represent some of the other changes going into the MMO, the *Pathfinder Online* designers have tweaked the names of the ability scores slightly, but they have otherwise stuck to the classic sextet of Strength, Dexterity, Constitution, Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma.

Other rules from the tabletop gaming experience just don't work in an electronic game. The turn-based combat system was among the first to go. “The idea that a couple of hundred people might be left waiting while one person dithers over an action that takes 6 seconds to resolve just didn't make sense,” says Dancy.

In most cases, however, Pathfinder RPG rules weren't preserved or cut in their entirety. Instead, the designers made calculated choices, altering rules to varying degrees “to capture the feel of the tabletop rules, if not the actual mechanics.”

According to Dancy, the biggest challenge of converting the Pathfinder RPG to an MMO came with one of the most essential paradigms of fantasy gaming. “Characters in the Pathfinder RPG are very much defined by their classes and by the levels they earn in those classes,” says Dancy.



CONCEPT ART BY  
KIERAN YANNER

This paradigm comes with its own significant limitations; skills help diversify the basic character roles, but they too come with their own design obstacles.

## CLASSES

Many MMOs sport a class-based character system similar to that of tabletop roleplaying games like the Pathfinder RPG. The downside to this is that classes tend to produce cookie-cutter characters in online games. People crunch the numbers obsessively and determine the absolute best selection of options for any class. Players who don't want to follow that formula can face a lot of opposition from adventuring companions who expect their allies to “optimize” their builds—they want their peers to be “the best” according to



some quantifiable standard, which can severely hinder the fun for players who are less focused on damage output and more interested in world immersion.

## SKILLS

Instead of forcing players into predefined classes, some MMOs use a skill-based system of character development, where players are free to select a subset of a large number of skills; as those skills improve, players unlock other skills, forming a fractal-like structure of potential character careers.

Skill-based games have some inherent problems as well. Because new players are unfamiliar with how all the skills interact and what game features may require particular skills, it can be frustrating to start a character, play it for a while, and only then realize that because of earlier choices, the character is difficult to adjust to conform to the player's ideal career.

## THE GOBLINWORKS SOLUTION

In order to bring the Pathfinder world to life in *Pathfinder Online* while still preserving the feel of the game system that made the Pathfinder RPG what it is today, the Goblinworks team had to make several key decisions regarding both classes and skills and how they would be presented in the MMO. Since most current MMOs use either a class- or skill-based rules system for character advancement, the developers at Goblinworks initially looked at both of these options when determining which system *Pathfinder Online* would adopt. Whichever system *Pathfinder Online* ultimately settled into would need to be simple enough that new users wouldn't feel lost while gaining their initial skills and powers, while ensuring the

system remained as rich as that found in the Pathfinder RPG.

Ultimately, Goblinworks wanted the flexibility of a skill-based system with the self-direction and clear goals of a class-based system; the solution was to turn the tabletop RPG class system on its head.

In the tabletop game, a character earns experience points (XP) by overcoming challenges and advancing the story. After accumulating enough XP, the character gains a new class level. The character can take a new level in an existing class or take the first level of an additional class. Each class level provides a package of character improvements.

In *Pathfinder Online*, players can opt to have their characters develop along a predefined path called a "role." Instead of gaining a preset group of improvements once an experience level is reached, characters receive guidance about what skills to train in and what objectives to overcome. When characters have met a prerequisite, they earn an achievement that commemorates that advancement in the role. So while in the tabletop game, you gain a level and then earn a batch of new abilities, in the online game, you earn a batch of new abilities and then gain a level.

## CAPSTONES

Games that encourage multiclassing—taking levels in more than one class—tend to create generalist rather than specialist characters. These same games tempt players to take a level in a new class just to gain a specific ability without offering any in-world incentive to incorporate the nature of that class into play.

The Pathfinder RPG gives players an incentive to focus on the same class by adding a special ability, informally called a capstone, that a player can earn only by taking 20 levels in the same class. Since the tabletop game is designed for characters of up to 20th level, only single-classed characters can earn the capstone ability.

	LAWFUL	NEUTRAL	CHAOTIC
GOOD	Lawful Good	Neutral Good	Chaotic Good
NEUTRAL	Lawful Neutral	Neutral	Chaotic Neutral
EVIL	Lawful Evil	Neutral Evil	Chaotic Evil



To capture that flavor, *Pathfinder Online* offers capstone abilities for characters that earn 20 levels in a single role. However, herein lies another key difference between the Pathfinder RPG and *Pathfinder Online*: characters in the online game can earn more than 20 levels, and can eventually earn multiple capstone abilities. While the Goblinworks designers expect it to take years for anyone to earn 40 levels, the current thinking is that anyone with that level of commitment to a character's development deserves to play a truly epic character.

## ALIGNMENT

The alignment system in the Pathfinder RPG is a relatively simple means of quickly and accurately portraying a character's ethical and moral dispositions. Alignment has two axes: lawful versus chaotic, and good versus evil, with neutral at the center of each axis. This creates a 3x3 grid of options (see page 72).

Rather than restricting character actions, alignment serves as a storytelling tool to provide guidelines for the actions characters are likely to take. The RPG nevertheless has a few mechanical effects associated with the alignment system: Alignments can be detected using magic, some spells have different effects on differently aligned characters, and characters of differing alignments may be restricted as to which magic items they can effectively use. A few classes in the tabletop game, such as the paladin, have strong alignment limitations, and players who choose those classes for their characters are expected to abide by those limitations.

Alignment will be an even more important aspect of a character's life in *Pathfinder Online*. Alignment guides not only player characters in their choices, but also many other elements of the *Pathfinder Online* setting, including the following.

**Communities:** Alignment serves as the primary guide to social structures in *Pathfinder Online*. Factions, guilds, and other groups have specific alignments, and their members must all be within one step of the group's alignment in order to participate. Members who drift too far from the ethos of their group lose their membership—a potentially catastrophic situation for characters deeply invested in their guild or faction.

**Deities:** The gods of the Pathfinder campaign setting are sometimes content to merely observe worldly events, but more often take an active hand in the lives of their followers as well as throughout the rest of Golarion via their mortal intermediaries. Their churches, worshipers, priests, and cults are all strongly aligned, and characters' alignments affect how the gods relate to them. For example, lawful characters might not be able to receive healing from the cleric of a chaotic god.

**NPCs:** Nonplayer characters in *Pathfinder Online* are also strongly aligned. Player interactions with some NPCs vary based on the similarities and differences in alignment between the two characters. Some NPCs refuse to interact with characters that have drastically different alignments, and some

NPCs refuse to interact with characters that have even slightly different alignments.

Because NPCs can provide access to quests, buy and sell goods and services, provide information, and act as gatekeepers to areas or other NPCs, a character's alignment can have a profound effect on her experience while exploring the world of *Pathfinder Online*.

## SPELLS, GEAR, MAGIC ITEMS, AND MONSTERS

The Pathfinder RPG has thousands of individual components—equipment, magic, creatures, and more—that define the way it plays and create a certain feel within the game world. *Pathfinder Online* will capture as much of this experience as possible.



A 3D RENDER OF THE  
CROSSROADS TOWER USING  
THE ACTUAL IN-GAME MODEL



ORIGINAL VALEROS ART BY WAYNE REYNOLDS



GOBLINWORKS RENDER OF IN-GAME VALEROS MODEL

*There is always a challenge in creating muscular armored characters that can move in dynamic ways. So we take a few liberties and adjust where problems may arise with armor or scale.*



Some game elements will translate with a fairly high degree of mechanical fidelity. Others will retain the same results or effects despite mechanical changes, and some of the adapted rules will simply capture the flavor of the tabletop rule. In the beginning, most of *Pathfinder Online's* components will be closely tied to options available in the Pathfinder RPG. As development of *Pathfinder Online* continues both leading up to its release and afterward, new components will continually be added to the game, including options from published Pathfinder RPG sources and completely new options.

### THE PATHFINDER BIBLE

While they are free to use material from other Pathfinder game products, the members of the Goblinworks team have thus far focused primarily on drawing inspiration from the *Pathfinder*

*RPG Core Rulebook*. "So much of what Pathfinder is comes from the selection and presentation of the material in that book," says Ryan Dancey. "Even if we were limited to just the *Core Rulebook*, we'd still have to make choices about which content to develop and in what order."

In making those decisions, Dancey and the developers take their cues from both the past and the present, from the early days of tabletop gaming all the way to the current state of the MMO market. "Looking backward to the 1970s gives us a good idea of what needs to go into the game as our absolute first priorities, and looking into the recent past shows us the kinds of features that people are interested in today."

At the same time, Goblinworks intends to make its own innovations in MMO design. As Dancey puts it, "We'll be striving to make a careful mix of the past, the present, and the future."

## BUILDING CHARACTER

### Ryan Dancey on Characters in Pathfinder Online

MMOs generally use one of two common design plans for character development.

The first design plan mimics the tabletop experience of gaining experience points and leveling up, with the same idea that each level brings with it a package of improvements. This is the system in use in most fantasy “theme park” MMOs, including *World of Warcraft*. In this type of game, most characters are adventuring heroes, so the classic tabletop system is a good fit. One downside is that characters do eventually reach the “level cap”—the maximum level available in the game—and they can’t progress further until the developers add more levels to the system. While players are waiting for that to happen, their characters usually engage in some kind of “end game” experience, such as guild raids, where the path of character development shifts to the acquisition of powerful magical items instead of enhancing characters directly.

The second common MMO design tries to capture a more “realistic” development process where characters become better at doing things by doing them repeatedly: When you swing a

sword enough, you get better at sword-swinging. This system was used in the first successful mass market MMO, *Ultima Online*, and it’s the system you’ll find in games like *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*. One problem is that this design often encourages strange behavior as characters do the thing needed to improve a skill even if doing it makes no sense, like jumping constantly while moving anywhere, or continuously firing spells off into the sky. At the most



### RYAN DANCEY

Goblinworks CEO  
Ryan S. Dancey is the former CMO of CCP, which from 2007 to 2010 increased the number of paid subscribers to the science-fiction sandbox MMO *EVE Online* by 50

percent—an unequalled achievement for an MMO more than 5 years old.

He won the Silver Anvil Award of the Public Relations Society of America for his marketing campaign for the 3rd Edition of the *Dungeons & Dragons* roleplaying game, and has won several Origins Awards for excellence in game design and publication. He was given a special ENnie Award in recognition of his contributions to the field of tabletop roleplaying games.

His published game design credits include the *Legend of the Five Rings* collectible card game and several products for *Dungeons & Dragons*.



GOBLINWORKS RENDER OF  
IN-GAME GOBLIN MODEL

## THE EVE ONLINE MODEL

*EVE Online* has a nonstandard model for character development that solves many of the problems with both the classic leveling system and the “earn by doing” skill systems, and *Goblinworks* is going to encapsulate some of those ideas into the design for *Pathfinder Online*.

A character that focuses all her skill-training time on one aspect of the game will be as good at that one thing as an older character trained in a wider variety of skills.

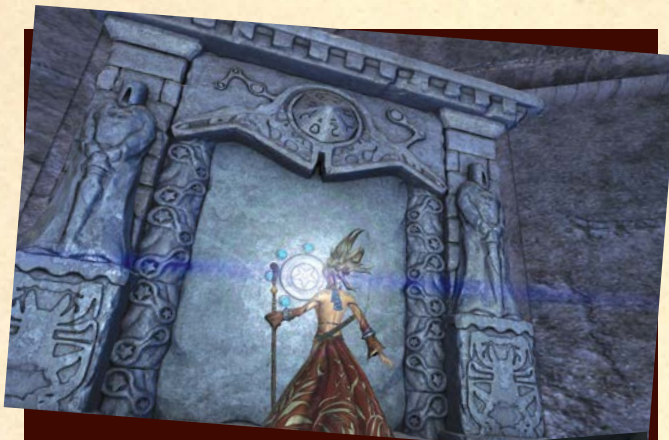
Skills in *EVE Online* often add bonuses to various activities, and are prerequisites for using a variety of in-game gear, so a character with skill points in various skills is usually very flexible, able to do a lot of different things, and able to use a lot of different gear. Yet a character that instead put all her skill points into a single skill can be just as successful as the more skilled character, albeit in one specific area of focus. This means that newer players can compete effectively with older players even though newer characters will never catch up in terms of the total number of skills they are trained in.

There are a couple of downsides to the *EVE Online* system. First, it’s pretty confusing, especially for new players. Figuring out how all the skills, bonuses, gear, and benefits interact is daunting. The system has been under constant development for more than a decade, and it is rich, deep, and complex. It rewards those who take the time to master its intricacies, but that complexity can be a barrier to entry for players who want a more casual experience. Second, even if you do understand the system, it can be a challenge to figure out “how to get from here to there”—that is, in what order you need to train in skills to both maximize the value of the training and to engage with the game in a fun way while training in those skills.

*Pathfinder Online* will use a system that integrates the best of the *EVE Online* system as well as numerous other facets, all while minimizing potential pitfalls and ensuring the feel of the game remains true to the *Pathfinder* name.

extreme end of this behavior are macros and bots—software programs that take control of characters and have them do boring, repetitive actions on behalf of human players who are off doing something else with their lives. This tends to break the immersive experience for players who are trying to engage with the game normally.

A major problem with both of these designs is that people who play more often have characters that are fundamentally better than those of people who play less. There’s nothing less fun than finding out that the buddies you introduced to a cool MMO have out-leveled your character, and you can’t adventure with them anymore unless they choose to join you in content that is boring for them, or you play with them in content where your character is unlikely to be effective and is likely to die a lot.





## CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

Four primary types of information will describe your *Pathfinder Online* character.

**Attributes:** These correspond to the classic six ability scores of the Pathfinder RPG, though in the MMO one or two of the attribute names might change. In *Pathfinder Online*, attributes have two aspects. The first is that they determine how long it takes to train in a skill that uses that attribute as a base. The higher the attribute score, the faster your character can train in related skills. Secondly, attributes determine how effective your character is at resisting certain types of effects. Instead of the tabletop game's three saving throws, *Pathfinder Online* presents resistance bonuses or penalties associated with each of the six attributes.

**Skills:** As in *EVE Online*, your character in *Pathfinder Online* can train in a wide variety of skills. However, unlike in *EVE Online*, skills in *Pathfinder Online* have no direct effects. Each is simply a prerequisite for another area of character development. Skills qualify your character to access all sorts of things ranging from the kind of equipment the character can use, to the types of items that can be crafted, to how the character can access special powers and magical spells. However, simply training in a skill does not award those benefits directly.

**Merit Badges:** Merit badges are a combination of measuring the progression of your character (like first-person shooters in *Battlefield 3*) and recognizing that the character has done something notable (like the achievements in *World of Warcraft*). Most merit badges require that you first finish training in a specific skill or set of skills, or that you achieve some extraordinary feat while performing these skills. Some also require you to do something in-game, such as harvesting a certain amount of resources, slaying a certain monster, or exploring a certain portion of the map. When you've completed the requirements, you receive the merit badge, and will sometimes also receive a new ability associated with that badge.



**Abilities:** Abilities represent the class features and feats from the Pathfinder RPG, as well as a variety of development opportunities to support a wide range of character types for the MMO. As a character gains abilities, that character becomes more capable. Abilities give characters more variety in the types of armor they can wear, weapons they can use, items they can make, mounts they can ride, and spells they can cast. They also link to things like being sneaky, healing, finding traps, detecting tracks, finding resources that can be harvested, and buying and selling items at the in-game markets.

Taken together, attributes, skills, merit badges, and abilities describe your character's development. Add in the character's race, alignment, wealth, gear, and social connections, and you have a very complex matrix of potential character types.



IN-GAME RENDER OF  
THE MISTY CHAMBER



## CREATING VS. TELLING STORIES

### *The Design Challenges of Taking Pathfinder from the Table to the Screen*

Lee Hammock, lead designer for *Pathfinder Online*, began his career in 1996 writing for Holistic Design's *Fading Suns* roleplaying game. Since then he has worked on MMOs like *Fallen Earth* and *The Elder Scrolls Online*, and has thus developed a strong sense of both tabletop games and electronic games, as well as what makes each type of game fun, accessible, and different from the other. To him, translating a roleplaying game into an online game is "a task of choosing your battles."

Some of those choices are easy to make. For example, the River Kingdoms, which Hammock describes as "a rollicking place of loose laws and adventure," seemed the perfect entry point for both new players and veterans of Golarion, the world of the Pathfinder campaign setting. Fortunately, choices like the setting are expandable over time, so when *Pathfinder Online* grows beyond its current borders, there's a vast world for the game to grow out into (if Hammock has his choice, Andoran and the Mana Wastes will be high on the list).

"If we were making a game based on a movie, comic, or novel," says Hammock, "the setting would be the main thing we would have to worry about being faithful to." The existing legion of Pathfinder fans love the game as much for its rules as for its setting, however, so Hammock and the rest of the design team must focus as much on capturing the game mechanics as on the setting itself.

Without the benefit of a living, breathing GM, Hammock and company must devise mechanics that duplicate the look and feel of actions in the game, even when the tabletop rules don't translate easily into a video-game environment.

### THE NUMBERS GAME

Since characters' actions occur simultaneously in a MMO, the flow of combat is the first thing the designers must change when translating a game driven by the rolling of dice to one controlled by mathematical formulas built into the programming. One thing remains the same in either medium: it's important that players have meaningful choices to make.

Thus, one of the first challenges Hammock wants to address is giving all players a wide selection of choices for their characters. That means making sure that melee characters like rangers and cavaliers have as many good options as spellcasters like wizards and oracles.

Another challenge is to make the numbers more granular. As Hammock explains, "Having 6 hit points at first level can work in a tabletop game since you (hopefully) have a benevolent GM. In an online game, characters need more of a buffer between 'okay' and 'killed in one shot.'"

*"Seoni had elements that required some adjustment, like long pony tails that we shortened for functional purposes for the game as well as lots of ribbons and things that we also needed to limit."*

—Michael Wallin, *Goblinworks Lead Animator*



ORIGINAL SEONI ART BY WAYNE REYNOLDS

For this reason, the pace of play is also a challenge. In a tabletop game, players have plenty of time to consider their next actions while other players are describing theirs. According to Hammock, in the simultaneous-action environment of *Pathfinder Online*, "If your wizard doesn't even have time to realize he made a bad decision when he moved 5 feet closer to an orc before he's dead, that's not a fun experience. Players need time to realize they made a bad call and work to rectify their choice, even if that time is just a few seconds."

Hammock wants to avoid situations in which players spend 10 minutes traveling to a battle and preparing themselves with spells and potions, only to die in 18 seconds. "That's not much fun," says Hammock.

Thus, *Pathfinder Online* players can expect a wide array of choices, including where to position their characters in combat. And while numerical values like hit points won't directly reflect the numbers tabletop players are used to seeing on the dice, not everything will change.





“The main classes and races you know and love will be there, as will many of the feats, magic items, and other familiar elements,” Hammock says. The rules might differ, but Hammock insists that rules like a barbarian’s rage attack, while mechanically different, will feel the same. “The soul of the class will remain intact.”

## CREATING VS. TELLING STORIES

Far more than translating the tabletop rules to computer code, Hammock feels that the key to capturing the feeling of *Pathfinder* and *Golarion* is to create great stories.

“Not to tell great stories,” he explains, “but to create them.

“A good GM creates the story of the game along with his players, incorporating their choices into the narrative and not railroading them down one path that they can never deviate from.” Forcing players down a predetermined plot is a mistake many MMOs make, in Hammock’s opinion. “There is a quest line; you follow it through and get the same ending as everyone else. Maybe there is a choice involved so you get to choose from a handful of pre-scripted endings, but still, it’s not a story you as a player help much in creating.

“We want to go for more of a shared creative process,” he says. In the world of *Pathfinder Online*, the players will have



## LEE HAMMOCK

*Pathfinder Online* Lead Designer  
Lee Hammock began working in gaming in 1996, writing for Holistic Design’s *Fading Suns* game. Since then he’s worked as a freelance writer and designer on dozens of projects and was nominated for multiple ENnie Awards for his work on the d20 *Future Setting Dawning Star*.

He started in advertising before working in Creative Services at DC Comics. In 2005, he joined Icarus Studios in Cary, North Carolina to work on the *Fallen Earth* MMO, eventually as the lead game designer. In 2010, he became a zone lead for ZeniMax Online on *The Elder Scrolls Online*. He lives with his wife Lindsay, two children, and his dog Bennett.

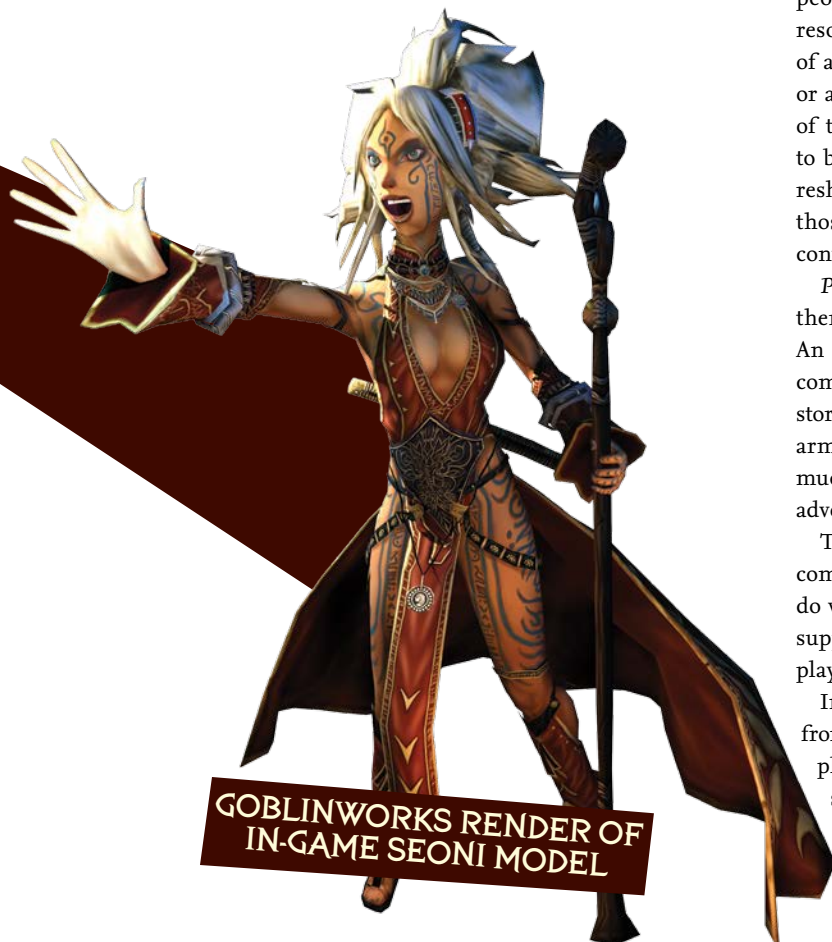
more freedom to do what they want and to create stories among themselves.

Hammock goes on, “Which is more touching: an NPC who was coded to give you the same resources he gave the last five people to do his quest, or the help of a friend who gives you resources he worked for? Which is more biting: the betrayal of an NPC who turns on everyone at a given point in a story, or a guild member who joins a rival guild? The latter in each of these examples is the type of player experience we want to build. We want to make a game world that the players can reshape according to their own desires, creating stories from those successes and failures rather than through some quest content we hope people might like.”

*Pathfinder Online* will still feature traditional quests—in fact, there is an entire team devoted to creating such quests (see *An Elite Force of Goblins* on page 90)—but Hammock and company prefer to offer players the tools to make their own stories. That also means offering players tools to create weapons, armor, buildings—even towns and governments. Every bit as much as slaying goblins and collecting bounties, these non-adventuring activities will shape the River Kingdoms.

That said, adventuring goes hand in hand with building communities. No matter what pursuits players follow, they’ll do well to enlist help from others. “Any town is going to need supplies, and if the iron mine is filled with goblins, then the players who run the town may hire someone to deal with that.”

In this way, the *Pathfinder Online* team hopes to enlist help from the players themselves. “The more we can do to empower players to make content, the better off we are, as no MMO staff, no matter the size, can create content faster than their player base consumes it.” Offering a sandbox, rather than a theme park, is the key to empowering players to create much of their own fun—much as a good GM presents the players with opportunities to make surprising choices.



GOBLINWORKS RENDER OF  
IN-GAME SEONI MODEL



## A DIFFERENT TACK

### *Lee Hammock on the Unorthodox Approach of Pathfinder Online*

For a while now, the trend in Western MMORPGs has been to create games that play more and more like single-player games until you get to the end of the level curve, at which point you have a totally different, more socially focused game to learn. Over time, with the increased use of instances, layering, conditional visibility, and other design mechanics that individualize the play experience, it has become easier and easier for players to play MMOs without ever talking to anyone.

That experience is fun for some players some of the time—there are the days when I want to butcher monsters in peace and not be bothered by rivals, but those are never the times I remember in the long term. Due to the limitations of the MMO space, you can't equal the type of gameplay you get in a single-player RPG. Of the dozens of MMOs I've played, I'd be hard pressed to really tell you the story of a given town, area, or quest chain that I played more than 6 months ago. They just don't stick in memory, because they usually don't have meaningful choices; they mainly consist of some combination of basic "kill/collect/talk to someone" quests strung together.

On the other hand, I can tell you about awesome tactics my friends and I pulled off fighting bosses, about making new friends online, and about both the kindness and villainy of strangers, all experienced through interactions with other real players.

On a basic level, I believe the core of Western MMO design is currently moving the wrong way: toward more single-player-styled games that focus less on the social interactions that make MMOs really unique. Sure, you get somewhat social end-game raids in many games, but only after you've played the rest of the game. Before that, social interaction is something that happens by accident, or if you want a really good piece of gear in some particularly dangerous dungeon. You enjoy social interaction in some guilds, but the level of interaction is limited by level, gear, and other factors that divide players from participating in the same activities. All these barriers between players make it harder just to have fun together, or to have any social interaction greater than communicating over guild chat.

### WHOSE SIDE ARE YOU ON?

Some of the ways we can address this problem are basic: move away from instances and layers, stop focusing on quests, and award high-end items through something other than just raids. Instead of putting energy and resources into making forgettable quests that players will grind through with little lasting memory, and which can never be produced at sufficient

speed to outpace consumption, that energy should be directed to creating long-term game systems that the players have some capacity to control. Systems like housing, creation and governing of settlements, exploration, and a player-focused economy allow players to create the bases, communities, quests, and items they need instead of repeatedly running the same content until a random number generator comes up with the right numbers. If you put the ability to shape the world in the hands of the players, they will shape it, and then they will fight over the rights and resources to do so.

At the same time, to create the most interesting stories among players, those stories can't be bound by the strict player-versus-player (PvP) limitations found in many Western MMOs. I should say here that I am what would classically be called a "carebear"; I'm not a big PvP participant, mostly because I'm not that good at it, but there is one type of PvP I love: random encounter PvP. I mean the sort of situation where you run into some random players in the wilderness and you don't know their allegiance or intentions; all you know is that they present the possibility of violence.

Unfortunately, most MMOs don't provide such exciting situations; you're either on my side, in which case we don't fight, or you're on the other side, which means we may or may not fight, but in both cases it's clear which side you're on. It takes all the mystery, all the paranoia out of the situation. Instead, I want to create an environment where PvP action can break out at almost any time to create tension in any social interaction.

Does this mean that *Pathfinder Online* will have PvP everywhere? No, some towns and lower-level areas will remain relatively safe. But in dungeons or other areas where the possibility of great reward is present, there will also be great danger, both from computer-generated enemies and from other player-controlled characters.

### CONSEQUENCES

Beyond establishing safe zones for players who aren't looking for a fight with other players, I want to create mechanics that reward and punish PvP activities outside of certain situations. When you are at war with another guild or settlement or declare a duel, it's no problem when your characters kill each other. On the other hand, murdering another character in cold blood moves your alignment a few degrees toward evil, probably earns you a foul reputation, and might even put a bounty on your head.

Mitigating circumstances like self-defense have an effect on the response to a PvP killing, but the murderous player bandit will quickly find himself in a much lonelier world than the highwayman who demands, "Stand and deliver!"



## THE ENTRY CHAMBER IN-GAME



Will repercussions for killing stop everyone? Of course not; there are always people willing to commit acts of virtual violence regardless of consequences, but I'd prefer to allow for punishments for PvP actions through the natural social fabric of the game world rather than hard-and-fast punishments through game mechanics.

*Pathfinder Online* will offer a few hard limits, such as starting areas to protect new players, but otherwise I want to give the players the ability to solve their problems with violence while encouraging other avenues at the same time.

## COMMUNITY BUILDING

I don't want a game focused solely on violence. If you can only solve your problems with a sword, everyone starts to look like an enemy. I want to give players the tools to form their own guilds, settlements, and governments, but also to make nonviolent interaction as interesting and definitive as combat.

The *Pathfinder* RPG has a tradition of courses of action like diplomacy and coercion, and we mean to honor those mechanics by allowing players to negotiate with tools other than those that draw blood. It sometimes takes words, not swords, to increase the efficiency of an organization. While we are going to put a lot of effort into developing means for players to kill each other, I want to ensure that a player who never picks up a weapon or casts a spell can be just as useful as a warrior.

So really, I want to create a living world—not a series of areas players visit to complete the quests and move on, but a persistent, changing world where players trade, fight, or negotiate to create their own stories. It'll be a world in which the advancement may be slower than in other games, but in the

end we want to build for players who can appreciate the long game.

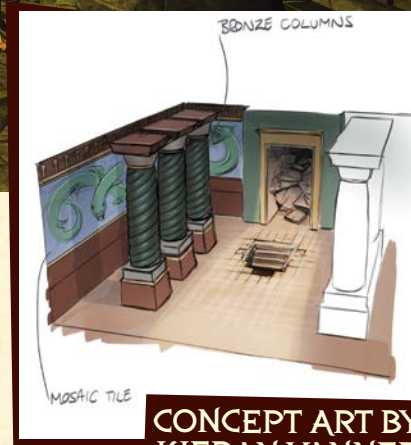
I want to create a community of players who are really a part of the world—perhaps a community likely smaller than many other MMOs,

but I would happily trade a large, short-term community for a smaller, long-term one. And if we build toward the long term, we can build a world without the super-steep level curve you see in many games today, making it easier for players of varying experience to work together.

## REBEL WITH A CAUSE

Some might look at all the ways I want to break with the common wisdom of Western MMO design and ask, "If all the big guys with millions of customers are going another way, why are you doing this?" That's a reasonable question, and "because I want to do something different" is not a good answer, even if it were true.

The real answer has less to do with breaking from tradition and more to do with creating a business advantage. Multiple huge-budget, quest-focused, theme-park-style MMOs have launched in the past few years and will continue to launch. We could try to compete with them using their tactics, but the field is crowded with well-funded competitors producing similar games. At *Goblinworks*, we'd rather field a smaller team to produce the kind of game no one else is making and aim to please a smaller but ultimately more passionate audience.



CONCEPT ART BY  
KIERAN YANNER



## THINKING BIG BUT STARTING SMALL

### Ryan Dancey on the Crusader Road Campaign

The world of Golarion is vast, and even the Inner Sea region, the focus of the tabletop RPG, is enormous.

Some MMOs create “worlds” that mix a variety of terrain types to create the sense that the players inhabit a planet-sized environment, but in actuality those environments are quite small. For example, the “world” of *World of Warcraft* is only about 80 square miles, yet within that space you’ll find deserts, arctic tundra, swamps, boreal forests, jungles, and oceans.

We could try to do this with *Pathfinder Online*, creating compact “zones” to represent the various countries and geography of the Inner Sea region. However, we think that approach compromises the depth and detail that Paizo has built for Golarion. There’s no way we could ever capture the wealth of content available in an area that size.

So instead, we decided to take a different path. We are going to build a world that is roughly scaled to a 1:1 ratio. A mile in *Pathfinder Online* will roughly represent a mile of distance in the real world.

*Pathfinder Online* is set in region known as the River Kingdoms. It was the site of Paizo’s Kingmaker Adventure Path, and was designed to be a place where players could establish kingdoms and carve out their own realms from the surrounding wilderness.



The River Kingdoms are about 1,000 miles from north to south and 750 miles from east to west—equating to roughly 750,000 square miles. They surround and encompass the Sellen River and its many tributaries, and within this region there are forests, swamps, lakes, rivers, low mountains, plains, and rocky barrens.

Even this is too much area for us to build with the launch of the game. We’ve narrowed our focus for the initial development to a small region in the northwest corner of the River Kingdoms. Bordered on the west by the West Fork of the Sellen River and on the east by the mysterious Echo Wood, this stretch of territory is particularly well suited to the needs of an MMO. We call this region the Crusader Road, and it is the home of the *Pathfinder Online* game.

### THE CRUSADER ROAD

Far to the north of the River Kingdoms is a terrifying area known as the Worldwound. Ripped open at the time of the god Aroden’s death, the Worldwound is a portal literally into the Abyss. The forces of chaos and evil that emerge from the Worldwound are bent on dominating Golarion. The Worldwound is a beachhead for an invasion of demons.

An endless stream of adventurers travels the Sellen River to confront the demonic menace at the Worldwound. And just as with Earth’s historic crusades, a large number of other folks travel with them: camp followers, traders, thieves, merchants, leaders and followers of religions and cults, armorers and blacksmiths, gamblers, healers, and those who bury the dead.

As these people gather from across the Inner Sea region, they head toward the Worldwound on a wide variety of watercraft using the Sellen River and its many forks and tributaries as a floating highway to transport themselves, their goods and gear, their livestock, and their supplies to the fight.





However, there's a problem: an unknown factor has increased the monstrous activity in Mosswater such that it now threatens safety along the Sellen, and the river is nigh impassable near the former town.

Crusaders and their fellow travelers making their way up the rivers of the Crusader Road often must make an overland detour into the River Kingdoms, a portage around the danger zone, creating a constantly shifting population of transients along with more permanent residents who establish services to support the northward migration. Thus, this area has become a rich source of both trade and conflict.

## THE LOCALS

The righteous and lawful Knights of Iomedae oversee the northern portion of the area, operating from a stronghold known as Fort Riverwatch. The ruthless Hellknights guard the southern approach, enforcing their rule from Fort Inevitable.

## HEX APPEAL

For design purposes, we've divided the Crusader Road area into a large number of logical "hexes," harkening back to the earliest days of fantasy RPGs when adventurous players loved nothing



better than the mystery of a blank hex on an overland map. The hex forms the center of the territorial control mechanisms in the game, and each hex will develop its own unique flavor based on what the player characters do there, whether that means building structures, harvesting resources, fighting monsters, or warring with other players.

*"The River Kingdoms are a sort of microcosm of the Inner Sea region. Here, we have a large area that—just like the Inner Sea itself—is split into many different sub-regions, each with its own flavor and theme."*

—James Jacobs, Paizo Publishing Creative Director

And from within the depths of the Echo Wood, the lawless den of villainy called Thornkeep exerts control over much of the forest.

Between these three settlements are vast expanses of wilderness claimed by no power, areas ripe for development by those capable of taking and holding the land against the forces arrayed in opposition to them.

A variety of creatures live in this area. The wilderness is home to tribes of monstrous humanoids, and all manner of magical beasts make lairs in the forest. Undead infest ruins and graveyards. Below the surface lie unending caverns guarded by aberrations, and a few dragons are known to live in seclusion throughout the Echo Wood and beyond, sleeping on huge mounds of treasure.

To master these lands, players will need to harvest and make use of a wide variety of resources: cutting timber, mining ore, skinning hides, and gathering crops. These resources will need to be processed into materials that in turn can be crafted to create the weapons, vehicles, structures, and consumables that form the heart of the economic system. Combined with rare and exotic materials recovered by explorers who dare to confront the monsters and opposing players in the wilderness, all manner of gear both magical and mundane will circulate within the economy.

Can the forces of Iomedae and the Hellknights sustain their uneasy peace with Thornkeep? What schemes will be hatched

in the dark gathering places in the forest stronghold? And how will new settlements spread through the wilderness as the land is developed?

These are the questions only you can answer by playing *Pathfinder Online*.



**GOBLINWORKS RENDER OF  
IN-GAME GOBLIN MODEL**



## FROM THE TABLE TO THE SCREEN

### *Lee Hammock on Adapting Thornkeep for Pathfinder Online*

I come from a tabletop background originally, having started out as a freelance writer and game designer in 1996. When I entered the field of computer game design in 2005, I based a lot of my work on what I'd learned in the tabletop industry. This strategy served me well in some ways, but not so well in others. Good writing and design are useful no matter the medium, but a lot of the specifics and limitations are vastly different. In many ways, a roleplaying video game aspires to be as open, responsive, and engaging as a tabletop game, but it has the limits of being a prebuilt system with only a limited number of responses, avenues of story, and so on. No computer can be as responsive and creative on the fly as a good flesh-and-blood Game Master. The trick is to hide those limitations as much as possible so players don't pay much attention to them.

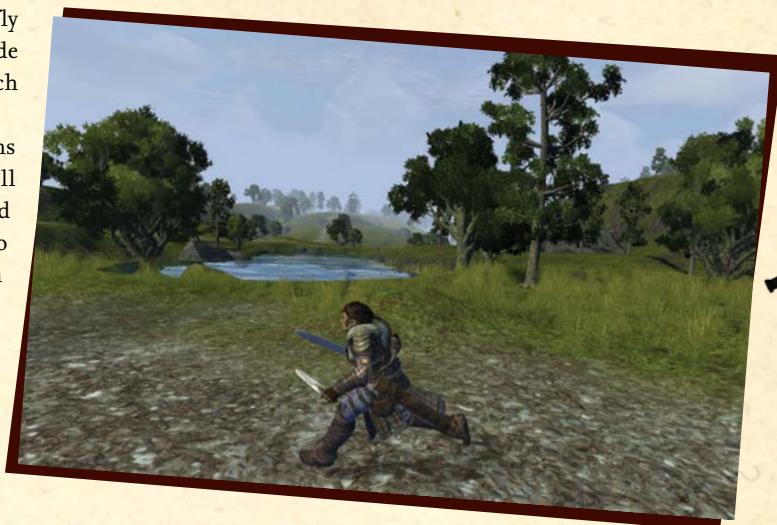
Because of these differences, working on the text descriptions of Thornkeep was an interesting challenge. Pretty much all the work was done by Rich Baker, and, as you've seen, it's good work all the way around. I offered help at various stages to steer the end result to something we can feasibly make in an MMO space with the available resources.

### SCALE AND THE DANGER ZONE

One of the easiest changes that we ended up making was shrinking the overall size of the town and condensing many of the story elements into single locations. If a farmhouse only had one minor story in it, we tried to combine that with some



other location. This is because the number one limitation most MMOs run into is art resources; we don't have time to custom-build every house in the town, and having too



many of the same house looks bad. To get the maximum bang for our buck in each location, we want to spend our time making a smaller number of locations look great rather than have a lot of things that look uninspired. Here we see one of the main differences between tabletop and video games: tabletop games are limited only by the imagination of the GM and the players, while everything you encounter in a video game has to be designed—and budgeted!

Because Thornkeep is a location that players will start in, we also have to make sure there are clear delineations between safe areas of the town and places where players may encounter hostile NPCs. While the occasional ambush is fine, players whose characters are killed without warning, or who don't understand why they died, tend to get very frustrated.



Frustration in the earliest stages of the game results in people quitting before they grow attached to their characters and the stories they are creating. Thus, death needs to be something players see coming until they learn their way around the game, so we examined the town to make sure that areas where there will be open combat are separated by geography, or are unique structures such as the caves beneath Thornkeep or the graveyard. Those locations are on the edge of town and can be surrounded with easily constructed visual warnings like goblin totems near the caves, or a worn fence for the graveyard. We're not so concerned about places where players themselves might want to start fights, such as choosing to attack some bandits hiding out in a farmhouse. In those situations, it's up to players not to bite off more than they can chew.

### LAW AND ORDER

The biggest conversation we've had so far was about law and order in Thornkeep. The River Kingdoms as a whole make up a pretty lawless place, and while this nigh-anarchic state will exist throughout most of the game, your standard starter towns need to be a bit more peaceful. Once players get the hang of the game and know how to fight, how to avoid trouble, when to run, and so on, a lack of law and order is completely acceptable and in many cases desirable. Before they have learned all that, though, new players need some shelter from the abuses that more powerful characters can heap

**A 3D RENDER OF MERISIEL USING THE ACTUAL IN-GAME MODEL**

### CAUSE-AND-EFFECT QUESTS

MMOs have certain design constraints that other video games generally don't, such as long-term player investment and supporting multiple players in all situations. Many a designer has lamented, "If only I were working on a single-player game!" when some complex quest or encounter falls apart because of the problems introduced by a second player. To avoid that sad fate, we worked to ensure that Thornkeep's stories work with multiple people playing through the town, each enjoying the feeling of having unique experiences that change the world. So while Thornkeep does offer some old MMO standbys, like getting giant ants out of the farmer's field, it also provides more reactive quests. An example of this is one group will hire some characters to achieve a goal to the detriment of a second group; once that goal is achieved, the second group might hire other characters to put things back. Players get frustrated if the world doesn't react to their efforts, but if it reacts and then reverts because of the actions of another group of players, that's a very different story. Then it's time to go find that other group of players.

upon them, and these need to be hard-and-fast forms of defense, not just punishment after the fact. We all know players who will gladly sacrifice a character they have spent hundreds of hours advancing just to completely ruin someone else's day.

But in the lawless lands of the River Kingdoms, there is no massive police force to stop acts of violence between players. In Thornkeep, at best there are a handful of guards of moderate skill who may keep completely new players in line but will have little to no effect on high-level characters. We discussed various other options ranging from religious agents binding extraplanar creatures to having some newly arrived political faction in the town, but we decided that including any group that could mount the overwhelming force needed to stop a high-level character from killing a starting character would radically change the face of Thornkeep.

So we looked for other options. One partial solution involves our plans for various faction and reputation systems that will discourage players from rampant murder in the streets—players who partake in such will soon find themselves unwelcome in many establishments and shops, even in Thornkeep. Another solution is letting starting players choose their own risk level: Thornkeep will be the starter town for characters wanting a more chaotic, dangerous experience; other starter towns will have more guards and stricter laws. So if players want the full River Kingdoms experience from the start, they can begin the game in Thornkeep. (Offering multiple starting locations also avoids cramming thousands of characters into a single starting location, which could bring servers and computers to their knees.)



## OBJECTS IN MOTION

### *Bringing the Art of Pathfinder to Life*

Among tabletop fantasy games, Pathfinder has distinguished itself with a unique visual style established by many talented artists. Foremost among them is Wayne Reynolds, whose depiction of the game's iconic characters and some of its most notorious creatures—notably goblins—have made the world of

Golarion one of the most instantly recognizable settings in the RPG industry.

While many of the famous and infamous characters from Golarion have already taken three-dimensional form through metal and pre-painted plastic miniatures, and recently also as plushy pyromaniacs—those goblins again!—none had yet sprung to life via animation, until now.

*“Their big heads and faces and large ears have lots of room for expression, emotion and movement that can be seen in a game environment. The rack of teeth when they grin will make you take notice. We are very fond of this design here at Goblinworks and proud for it to be our namesake.”*

—Michael Wallin, Goblinworks Lead Animator



ORIGINAL GOBLIN ART BY  
WAYNE REYNOLDS



GOBLINWORKS RENDER OF  
IN-GAME GOBLIN MODEL





When asked how the Goblinworks team plans to translate the Pathfinder look to an MMO, Lead Animator Michael Wallin considers that a big question, and a tricky one. “MMO worlds by their very nature have many vast requirements,” he says. “The best work in games goes unnoticed because the player is in the moment.”

To Wallin, an animator’s job is much more than modeling characters, objects, and locations. “When done right,” he says, “it’s not just a bunch of stuff in some place. It’s a transcendent experience.”

## MEASURE TWICE, CUT ONCE

Wallin believes the key to achieving his animation goals for *Pathfinder Online* is first to prioritize the needs of the game. Take, for example, the seemingly trivial action of making a character walk or run. These functions are among the first built into the code of a game, but they are also among the most basic.

Pathfinder characters won’t be content to walk for long, however, so the animators must also create mounts such as horses, which present challenges not just for the steed but

*“Figuring out why you can’t see your character anymore, or why the sky keeps blinking, is better done before deadlines start arriving.”*

—Michael Wallin, Goblinworks Lead Animator

also for designing the position and motion of the rider. Naturally, if you give an adventurer a horse, he’ll want a griffon next, or even a dragon, and for flying mounts the animators must address the issues that come along with three-dimensional travel.

Fortunately, Wallin points out, no one’s going to start the game with a dragon mount. “In an MMO, we have the luxury of being able to continue to build systems even as the player enjoys the game.” Thus, in the earliest stages of preproduction, Wallin and company are preparing first for horses, knowing the time for dragons will come later. Still, Wallin knows the preproduction stage is the most critical for later success.

“There is an old saying in the print biz,” he says. “The first page off the press is the most expensive.” Despite the radical differences between print and electronic mediums, the concept applies just as much to MMOs as to newspapers. That’s because the *Pathfinder Online* team is focused on making the rules and formulas for the rest of the models to come even as they work on the basics.

Wallin likes to focus on characters first. “Bringing to life a cool animated character makes everyone happy.”

## WAYNE REYNOLDS



As a freelance illustrator for almost 20 years, Wayne Reynolds has contributed illustrations for the gaming and publishing industries for such companies as Paizo Publishing, Wizards of the Coast, Blizzard Entertainment, Green Ronin, Games Workshop, Osprey Publishing, Fleetway Publications, and many more. Wayne is probably best known for his paintings that adorn the book covers of the Pathfinder and Dungeons & Dragons fantasy roleplaying games. His work has also appeared in a number of military history and comic book publications. A keen gamer, Wayne resides with his family and keeps a studio in Leeds, United Kingdom.

As with so many elements of computer game design, creating a character and putting it in motion are much more easily said than done. Characters are among the most complex graphical elements in a game, with components such as mesh, texture, animation, programming, and special development tools.

To make sure that all the characters are of equal quality, the animation team must set up file structures and design approaches for all the game world’s assets. They must also consider animation approaches and implementation of video and audio effects.

This early stage of design is a combination of employing proven techniques and making educated guesses about what will work best for the particular project. It’s full of testing and trials followed by decisions on whether the existing tools meet the game’s needs or need to be supplemented with other tools.

“This can be the hardest time for production teams,” says Wallin. And it’s full of important but potentially distracting duties like hiring new employees and setting up a brand-new office environment.

The important thing is to create effective processes that make the work to come in the following months easier. “Every experienced game developer has a horror story of the project that went haywire with goals set before the answers to basic questions were known,” Wallin says. “This is the creative person’s mountain and not for the faint of heart.” Thus, he says the first goal is to solve problems before they occur, avoiding lost time spent repairing bad processes instead of focusing on the creative work.

## FAITHFUL ADAPTATIONS

That creative work begins by examining some of the most basic elements of the source material. Wallin approached



the art of the Pathfinder RPG by looking first at some of the details of style that give the game its unique look. Among other details, Wallin asked himself such basic questions as, “How do Pathfinder artists use color and shape? What’s the line work like?”

Working with the Paizo art team to maintain “the Pathfinder look,” Wallin also has to make choices to balance form and function. “Sometimes a character may have a feature that looks great in illustrations but in 3D might be read differently. For example, a character might have a cute rouge-tinted nose that looks great in an illustration, but in 3D, from a distance, the rouge might just look dark. Your pretty princess suddenly transforms into Fido the friendly dog lady.”

Sometimes the most difficult elements of character animation aren’t expressions but accessories. Extremely long cloth extensions, like ribbons, capes, or dresses, present a challenge to animators. Without fairly advanced systems to take into account changes in direction and motion, they don’t always blend well with other animations. To avoid spending too much time and money on small details, Goblinworks



**MICHAEL WALLIN**

A traditionally trained artist and designer, Lead Animator Michael Wallin began his career as a designer and artist. He started working on computer games in 1989 for well-known brands including MTV.

In 1996, he joined 3D Realms as character designer, artist, and animator. He has worked on well over a dozen games in senior or lead capacity, and worked with Electronic Arts, 3DO, THQ, Turbine, F9, and other companies. Before *Pathfinder Online*, Michael worked on five other MMOs, starting with *D&D Online*. He currently resides in Seattle with his companion Maria and his Chihuahua Gator.

*“Since Merisiel is so lean, the bold colors and extra details really help to give her presence.”*

—Michael Wallin, *Goblinworks Lead Animator*



**ORIGINAL MERISIEL ART BY WAYNE REYNOLDS**



**GOBLINWORKS RENDER OF IN-GAME MERISIEL MODEL**

*“Things that look simple in animation need lots of behavioral understanding—how people and things behave—as well as technical understanding, like how all teams interact with the animation.”*

—Michael Wallin, *Goblinworks* Lead Animator

has worked with Paizo to adjust graphical details such as ponytails and ribbons in favor of concentrating on more essential animations.

This balancing act isn't always hard to achieve. Many of the existing design elements from the *Pathfinder* tabletop game work perfectly in the 3D environment of *Pathfinder Online*. The visual design goal for *Pathfinder Online* is not to achieve hyperrealism but to retain the established bigger-than-life style from the tabletop game.

## HUMAN BEHAVIOR

Wallin estimates that an MMO requires between 5,000 and 8,000 different animations, and a single character might demonstrate several layers of animations at the same time. While any of those animations might appear simple, designing each one actually requires a keen understanding of human behavior and the intricacies of expressions and movements both subtle and prominent. The end result should be that a character's friendly smile shouldn't appear creepy, and a belly laugh shouldn't be mistaken for convulsions.

Designing animations for instant recognition becomes even more difficult when combining combat and noncombat animations. The designers require function maps to convey complex behaviors that players can still instantly recognize as humanlike behavior.

“Let's say you wanted a character to take some poison, walk and act increasingly drunk until he falls down and passes out. In a game, this action requires many animations working and blending together on the fly. Some—but not all—of the animations required for this action include: ‘idle with person breathing,’ ‘pick up the drink, blended with existing animation,’ ‘hold drink while breathing,’ ‘drink,’ ‘walk all locomotion in all directions,’ ‘jumping,’ ‘turning,’ and ‘walking extremely drunk in all directions,’ which we gradually exaggerate as the poison's effect increases, then a ‘pass out’ animation.”

## LIGHT AND MAGIC

The best animation in the world is no use if it impairs the gaming experience. Nobody enjoys a game if the visuals become sluggish and choppy. Thus, another key design consideration is deciding how much stress to put on the game's engine for a desired graphical effect.

Deciding an object's or area's level of detail (LOD) is important both for realism—objects in the distance require less detail than those nearby—and for avoiding

undue stress on the game engine. Invisible objects obviously don't need a high LOD, so simplifying them is another way to reduce the potential for game lag.

The animators must also place trigger points or flags at various locations in the game. These react to a character's line of sight, to sounds, or to a creature's proximity, to cause doors to open or to cause a character to glance down a hall as a player character passes.

While lighting effects can be simultaneously realistic and beautiful, complex lighting options are not always the best course of action. To preserve game resources, sometimes animators will “bake in” the lighting in an area, offering the illusion of light through a static texture. Particle effects provide the most realistic lighting, but they are actually translucent animated objects. Used too much, they provide beautiful effects that also turn a smoothly animated game into a juddering slide show.

Paizo Publisher Erik Mona hopes for exactly the same transcendent experience that Michael Wallin strives to achieve. When asked about his hopes for *Pathfinder Online*, he said, “The rules of the tabletop game allow you to create just about any kind of hero you can imagine. I'm eager to see that philosophy applied to the way characters look as well as what they can do. In a tabletop game, all the action takes place in your imagination, but the poor programmers at *Goblinworks* don't have that luxury. They actually have to show us what all this stuff looks like, how it sounds, and how it moves. I can't wait to see what it looks like.”

But really, no pressure, Michael!





## AN ELITE FORCE OF GOBLINS

Mark Kalmes on the Five Special Teams



### HOW DO YOU CREATE A MODERN MMO ON A TIGHT SCHEDULE AND BUDGET?

At Goblinworks, we plan to accomplish our development goals with highly focused teams, giving every “goblin” we hire a clear responsibility and the purview to get the job done. Each goblin must be smart and motivated, because there is no backup for any who aren’t pulling their weight, so only the best of the best qualify for work on this expansive project.

This is the best way to keep everyone on the team motivated and excited about the project, as well as ensuring we have a consistent level of quality for every aspect of the game.

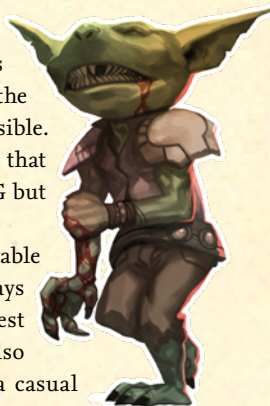
By starting with an existing MMO engine, we get to ignore a lot of the general setup responsibilities that can sap huge amounts of energy from a team. Instead, we can focus on the fun stuff—fun both for us and for the players. We’re immediately putting our goblins on cross-functional teams focused on five key game features: combat, economy, the environment, characters, and quests.

Of course, we will also have a few folks working on general-purpose tools outside the scope of these areas. For instance, we’ll have programmers dedicated to tools and server stability. But keeping as many people as possible focused on features means we can react to our players much faster. No matter what area of the game interests you, there will be a whole team here at Goblinworks that is paying attention to what you like or don’t like about that system and constantly implementing features that will further enrich your *Pathfinder Online* experience.

### THE COMBAT TEAM

Combat is by far not the only activity to enjoy in *Pathfinder Online*, but it’s nonetheless a critical aspect to ensure the game is as fun and engaging as possible. With combat, we want to create a system that evokes the flavor of the Pathfinder RPG but translates that feeling to an MMO.

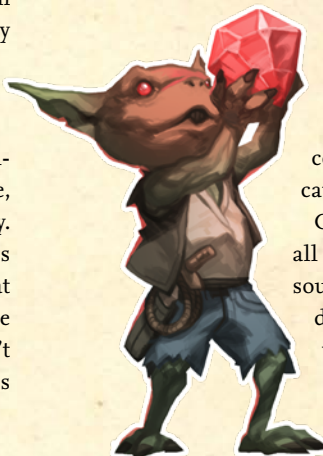
Making a combat system that is enjoyable and engaging for a PvP player is always challenging, and that’s one of our biggest focuses with *Pathfinder Online*. But we also want a combat system that is fun for a casual player just running around killing monsters.



We would like to include some sort of formation system. This is a big challenge and may not ship at launch, though it is nonetheless an aspect we are very excited about. We are all tired of seeing the mad melee that typifies PvP combat in most MMOs today; it’s desperately confusing, and results in a battlefield that looks nothing like real-world warfare or what we’d expect magical fantasy combat to actually look like.

Our initial ideas for this system focus on bonuses for staying in formation and making battle lines that function more like real formations. However, we don’t want formations to make battle boring, and we have plenty of ideas for how to keep things engaging, fast-paced, and challenging for all player levels, whether you’re a historical warfare expert or simply a casual gamer.

The combat team’s job includes design and programming elements, as well as animators and visual effects artists who will make the abilities of *Pathfinder Online* feel as visceral as they are in our imaginations when we play the Pathfinder RPG across the table.



### THE ECONOMY TEAM

An important part of making player kingdoms function is having a vibrant and healthy crafting community. We’ll build systems that cater to this play style as well.

Crafting in *Pathfinder Online* should be all about player interaction. It sometimes sounds boring to craft hundreds of daggers for other players to kill rats with, but helping your friend get the tools he needs to get past that troll is a different matter entirely. We need to make sure that connection with your results stays apparent throughout your crafting career.

Careful balance is needed to make an economy that feels worthwhile to participate in. Otherwise, it’s too easy for rapid inflation or deflation to wipe out the careful work players have put into their crafting careers. At the same time, you don’t want things to be so balanced that crafting is a chore. Where’s the fun in that?

It’s important to have someone dedicated to making sure this part of the sandbox feels great to play in, so the core of the economy team is a single designer. He or she will pull resources from other teams as needed, but this is mostly spreadsheet work, with a lot of careful attention to what players are doing with the system.



## THE ENVIRONMENT TEAM

This team is going to focus on making Golarion come alive in a way that few other games have accomplished with their settings: we want the environment to respond to players.

Elements of the environs of each city will respond to how players conduct their affairs. Is the countryside an idyllic, peaceful atmosphere, where the peasants feel safe keeping their homes unlocked? Or do they cower at the sound of every passing boot

on the paths around their homes, because they're raided daily by scavengers?

The city itself is built by the players. Building by building, players will create fully realized settlements that feel alive and have their own unique places in the world. These bases of influence can bring you wealth, power, and glory—as long as you are able to protect them.

Enabling these dynamic environments will be the job of the environment team. It will include artists doing all the work of detailing out thousands of objects for the world, and programmers working to make that world as dynamic as possible.

## THE CHARACTER TEAM

No MMO world inspired by the work of artists such as Wayne Reynolds would be complete without outstanding character work. More so than the biggest castle or smallest shack, the characters make the Pathfinder setting what it is today.

It's up to the character team to detail the hideous creatures that might be lurking beside the road at night. They must also help you create the character you have been dreaming about bringing online since you rolled her up years ago. This team requires a wide variety of skills, but mostly it comes down to good artistic ability.

The character team will be made up exclusively of artists. Concept artists do 2D sketches of every bit of armor and buckle. Then 3D artists take the concept drawings and sculpt everything digitally. Finally, lighting and animation specialists work to make the models come alive on screen.

## THE QUEST TEAM

*Pathfinder Online* has its PvP elements, but there is also a rich world out there to explore. The quest team is tasked with filling up that world with interesting things to see and do.

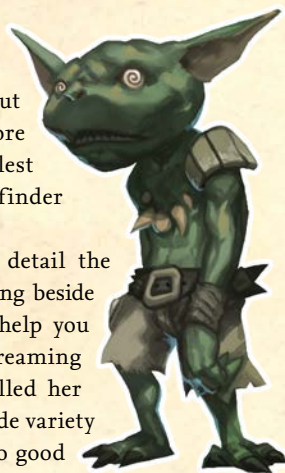
There is a huge amount of great content to be drawn from the Pathfinder campaign setting. There are multiple bestiaries full of monsters like goblins, ogres, and trolls to populate

the River Kingdoms, as well as entire books written about the region and its surroundings. We have lots of big ideas for content we'd like to show off in our little corner of Golarion.

But more so than in other games, we want the players to take control of the stories here. If you choose to allow the goblin chieftain to win control of the forest, that will have implications for the entire region; if you foil his plans instead, maybe this will give an advantage to the troll clan. Your dealings with the nearby barbarian tribes might grant you favor with their chieftains, but it might also put you at odds with the expansionistic rulers of nearby settlements.

How this system shakes out will be up to the quest team. Because we want players to be able to make important decisions about the world, a lot of this content will be program-generated rather than hand-scripted. Quests will likely be more succinct than some of those in other MMOs, forgoing the mundanity that plagues many games, and quests will allow players to make a real, persistent impact on the River Kingdoms, all while taking part in exciting adventures, encountering fantastic beasts, and traversing breathtaking landscapes.

The quest team's job includes both design and programming elements. They will have to work in concert to make this system feel as dynamic and alive as we want it to be.



## MARK KALMES

Goblinworks CTO Mark Kalmes joined Cryptic Studios in 2002, helping to launch the successful *City of Heroes* super-powered hero MMO. *City of Heroes* was launched with minimal investment, with only 21 people in the company. It quickly gathered a large audience and became highly profitable. Mark became a lead programmer on *City of Villains* and was named as the software director for the successor project, *Champions Online*.

In 2007, Mark left Cryptic for CCP to start *World of Darkness*, an MMO built on White Wolf's successful *Vampire: The Masquerade* property. He staffed the North American office of CCP with new programming hires and produced the first playable internal test version of the game. At CCP, he worked closely with the core technology group in Iceland to create a common platform for both *World of Darkness* and *EVE Online*.

Since exiting CCP in 2009, he has spent much of this time pursuing his self-directed research in robotics.

## THE TECH DEMO

### *Bringing a Slice of Golarion to Life*

This book is what it is because 4,212 backers wanted so much to see *Pathfinder Online* become a reality that they surpassed Goblinworks' \$50,000 Kickstarter goal and several stretch goals, ultimately pledging \$307,843 for us to create our technology demo. That demo will show potential investors that Goblinworks can deliver an innovative and exciting MMO in a short period of time with a small staff, and it's all possible because our community has supported the project from the beginning.

At PaizoCon 2012, Goblinworks CEO Ryan Dancey revealed the first glimpse of *Pathfinder Online* to hundreds of fans, showing off preliminary designs for a goblin and Paizo's iconic sorcerer, Seoni, but that was only a tiny fraction of the completed tech demo. The full demo has three key goals.

First is demonstrating that Goblinworks can adapt the visual style of the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game to the kinetic, three-dimensional realm of an online game. The art and animation teams have focused on a few iconic characters and creatures that exemplify the Pathfinder look and show how they've



adapted the two-dimensional images. If you've been following the Goblinworks blog at [goblinworks.com/blog](http://goblinworks.com/blog), you've already seen some of that proof, and more is on the way.

Second, the tech demo has to prove that the game functions within a real, fully functioning MMO engine. "There's no smoke and mirrors," says Mark Kalmes. With the completed tech demo, he says, "everyone in the office can log in and do battle."

Third, and perhaps most important to investors, the tech demo must show that Goblinworks can follow through on a challenging production schedule. It's not enough to produce a great game; Goblinworks also plans to show that its team can produce it on time and on budget.

With access to the finished demo, potential investors will take on the roles of iconic characters complete with their initial attack powers, experience a fantastic player-versus-player battle over an outpost tower, and delve into a dungeon to face the most infamous of all Pathfinder monsters: the voracious goblins!

### THE ICONIC CHARACTERS: CHARACTER SELECTION

From the very first discussion about what sort of player characters to feature in the tech demo, the design team recognized that one thing that makes reading Pathfinder RPG products so fun is the familiar cast of iconic characters. For the first visit to the world of *Pathfinder Online*, explains Kalmes, "what we really want to see is Seoni and Valeros."

The team didn't stop at the iconic sorcerer and fighter. "We needed a few more options, so we added the iconic rogue, Merisiel, and the Pathfinder goblin, complete with dogslicer, as player options," he explains. For the purposes of the demo, the team decided to "put our best foot forward—even if it gets chopped off by Merisiel."

Rather than feature more characters, the Goblinworks team chose quality over quantity to give their interpretations of Wayne Reynolds's original illustrations the attention to detail they deserve. Valeros, the iconic fighter, comes equipped with great-looking weapons and armor as well as an array of fighting maneuvers. Seoni has a couple of spells to cast, as well as the ability to bash things with her staff. Merisiel is all about her daggers, which she can throw lightning fast, before she switches to two-weapon fighting with a dagger and rapier. And the goblin looks absolutely evil skulking around with his bloody dogslicer.

### THE SIEGE OF CROSSROADS TOWER: PLAYER VS. PLAYER

Because the *Pathfinder Online* design makes the players the center of the story, player-versus-player conflict is a key component of the game experience. A major element of the tech demo is to show how players can raid and lay siege to the communities and strongholds of other players.

Players of the tech demo can choose between red and blue teams and enter the fray for control of a tower, which includes


**IN-GAME RENDER OF THE  
SHRINE OF ABRAXAS**

**ABRAXAS, BY  
EVA WIDERMANN**

animations for two catapults throwing rocks at the tower, eventually bringing it tumbling to the ground if the forces running the catapults aren't stopped. Seeing this sort of combat in action will prove that the *Pathfinder Online* code provides a real MMO engine.

The siege demonstration should take place over enough time for the better players to show off successful tactics and either destroy the tower or drive off the attackers, depending on which side you are on. While the full array of character powers won't yet be in place, enough combat abilities for the purposes of this battle will demonstrate the basic action elements of the game and how they interact with one another. The objective of the demo is to show the basic elements of a combat system that forms the foundation of a much wider array of powers and abilities to be added later during development.

## THE AZLANTI RUINS: DUNGEON CRAWLING

Another exciting aspect of the tech demo is the classic dungeon crawl. Players can explore an ancient ruin buried beneath the town of Thornkeep to root out the goblins infesting the place.

Mark Kalmes is especially excited about this part of the demo because it features the inimitable Pathfinder goblins. "The ruins give us a chance to show off the goblin model and animations," he says. "We'll be able to create some variation in coloring and equipment for different goblins and give the feel of an entire tribe that has moved into the caverns."

Kalmes is eager to show off goblins in their natural state. "We will get to see them doing different activities in the tunnels, like digging or poking things with sharp sticks. Then we can stop all that nonsense and kill them."

Though the scripts that determine the goblins' behavior will still be at a very early stage of development, and some of the actions will be staged, they'll show off some of the behavior the programmers expect to achieve in the finished game.

Like the goblins inhabiting the area, the Azlanti ruins have plenty of personality. The ancient empire of Azlant fell long ago and far away, but the mystery of this far-flung outpost will form an integral part of the story players can discover during this dungeon delve. It also presents an opportunity for the artists to show off the diversity of the Pathfinder setting in a dungeon crawl.

"There are polished Azlanti temple chambers, epic multistory rooms with vast stairs, and dark magic chambers with columns made out of skulls," says Kalmes. "There's a great variety of environment here, and it'll be a great way to show off what we can accomplish with our tools."

After concluding the tech demo, the Goblinworks team will move on to the next phase of production, but Kalmes won't soon forget those whose support made the entire project possible. "I want to personally thank the community for making our Kickstarter a success and turning the tech demo into a reality," he says. "Game on!"



## THE ROAD TO RELEASE

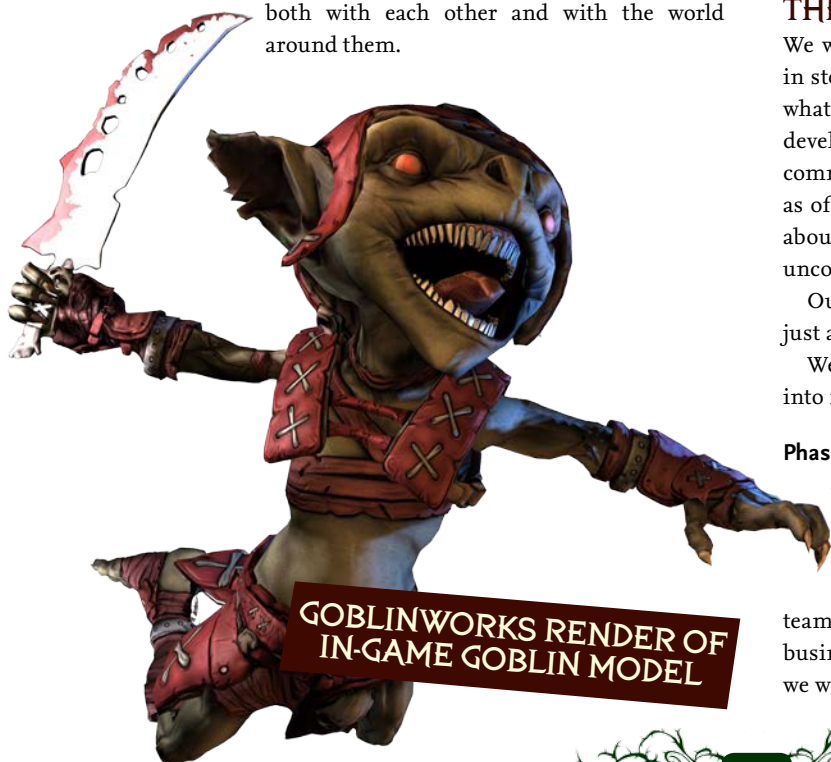
### Ryan Dancey on the Development Process

Developing *Pathfinder Online* is a huge challenge, as all MMO projects are. One of our key objectives is to reduce the risk that the development will fail by reducing the time we spend working on the game before we launch it. To reduce the design time, we have to reduce the size and scope of the project to fit within the schedule we've set for ourselves.

A small game on a short timeline means that we will be able to support only a limited population of players at the launch of the game. And we need to control the pace at which the game grows so that the player population doesn't outstrip the amount of content we can produce as we develop the game after release.

A traditional theme-park-style game probably couldn't work with these constraints. The players would quickly burn through the content provided and with nothing left to do that was new or interesting, they'd be quitting the game almost as fast as we could recruit new players. This is in fact why most theme-park MMOs take so long to develop: the project objectives must be scoped large enough to attract and retain an audience big enough to pay the cost for all that development and keep the players engaged for a long period of time to earn repeat subscription fees or microtransaction revenue from those players.

Sandbox-style games are different. Since the players generate a lot of the game's content through their interactions, the game design need not provide a lot of static content, instead focusing on systems that players can use to structure their interactions, both with each other and with the world around them.



Supporting a fairly small player population also means the degree of specialization that must be built into the game is greatly reduced. A smaller population of players will place less immediate demand for variation in things like races, roles, and skills. This in turn helps to reduce the amount of material that must be developed before the game can be released.

## ITERATIVE DEVELOPMENT AND RELEASES

The biggest difference from a design perspective between an MMO and a classic single-player video game is that MMO design continues far after the game has shipped. Shipping an MMO to the customers isn't the end of the development process—it's the beginning.

We plan to put ourselves on a fairly rigorous schedule of new content updates once we open the game to players. Our model for this process is Jagex, the developers and publishers of *Runescape*, who have been working on a 2-week release pace since their game was first released in 2004. Sometimes the new content is very minor, like a tweak to a certain game system or the addition of a new monster or item. Other times the updates are substantial, like adding whole new regions to the game world, implementing entirely new game systems, or making overhauls to preexisting systems.

We can't commit to a specific pace yet, and in the first year or so, the pace of releases will likely be irregular and dictated by player feedback as much as by the plans we create during initial development. This flexibility will allow us to most effectively meet the demands of our customers and build a strong foundation for a strong game.

## THE ROAD MAP

We will have a road map for development, but it won't be set in stone. The road map will represent our best estimates as to what features we'll be working on and in what order they'll be developed, but we're not going to bind ourselves to a formal commitment to the community. We'll change the road map as often as necessary to reflect our constantly changing ideas about the best path forward and as we react to issues and bugs uncovered during play.

Our bold goal is to open our MMO to paying players after just a year of full production. Crazy, right?

We have divided the development plan for *Pathfinder Online* into five distinct phases.

### Phase I: Preproduction

This phase is complete. During preproduction, we created the business plan and a detailed design document to guide the game's development. We researched middleware options. We interviewed potential leads for the design teams. We researched the competition and examined various business models. The objective of this period was to ensure that we would be executing a solid plan with good fundamentals.





## Phase II: Technology Demo

The tech demo demonstrates our ability to integrate all the components of the game into a working prototype. As I write this, we're working on the tech demo; by the time you read this, it will be done. We've hired our first full-time staff members. We're building art assets that will be used in the finished game. We're gaining experience with the middleware we've selected. During Phase II, we expect to have 13 people working on the tech demo: Mark and myself, plus eight artists, programmers, and game designers, and three interns.

Thanks to our successful Kickstarter funding, we began full-time work on the tech demo on July 1, 2012—coincidentally, the very date of Paizo's tenth anniversary—with a goal of completing the demo in approximately 90 days.

## Phase III: Full Production

This phase will begin after the technology demo is complete, and after we have secured the additional funding necessary to begin work. During the time between the end of Phase II and the start of Phase III, the team we assembled in Phase II will continue to work on the game, but the scope of that work will be constrained by the size of the staff.

Full production will involve expanding the staff. We'll expand to about 18 people as soon as we can, and grow throughout the next year to about 22 full-time employees.

The goal of this period of work is to get to a stage where we can open the game to paying players. A big part of our strategy is to begin collecting revenue from players as early as possible to have the players participate in the funding of ongoing development. All MMOs do this; we're just going to do it much sooner than most.

The output of this period will be fleshing out the Crusader Road and basic game systems: harvesting, processing, crafting, player-versus-environment combat (PvE), player-versus-player combat (PvP), social organizations (parties and chartered companies), and some structures. The game will begin with a limited selection of races, classes, skills, merit badges, and abilities. It will have a small number of PvE challenges—monsters, environmental effects, traps, and so on. Character customization will be limited, but there will be enough options to ensure that everyone doesn't look the same. The territory of the Crusader Road will be developed in general, but not every hex will necessarily be fully detailed.

This phase will take approximately 12 months. Of course, it may take longer as we encounter and solve problems we did not expect to encounter. We've made commitments to each other to hold fast to that 12-month schedule, and it's the plan we intend to follow.

## Phase IV: Initial Development

Once players are turned loose in the game, we'll enter a whole new mode of development. The initial players in the game will help us decide what features need to be implemented, and in

what order. They'll help us determine where there are problems with the game mechanics and how to fix them. They'll help us balance the various character roles and ensure that there's a good amount of content usable by most players.

We'll also be introducing new game systems, implementing things like quests and story arcs, and constantly expanding the core components: abilities, gear, magic items, monsters, skills, spells, and so on.

Our goal during this phase is to "true up" our initial plan with the way the game is actually being played. We'll be looking for places where the players' behavior challenges our assumptions, and we'll be addressing those issues. This will be a unique period of time for an MMO, and we're going to make the feedback loop between the players and the development team extremely tight and effective. *Pathfinder Online* will literally be customized to fit the needs of its community.

This phase is expected to last about 7 months, but it will continue as long as necessary to ensure that the game is on the trajectory we all desire and that the community is developing in a healthy manner.

## Phase V: The Long Term

This is the phase we expect to sustain *Pathfinder Online* into the future. Phase V will be about hitting a sustained rhythm of new releases of content and updates. We will also develop and deploy entirely new game systems, and work on expanding the footprint of the game to include ways to interact with *Pathfinder Online* outside the standard game client.

We'll remain committed to the idea that the community should be deeply involved in setting the direction and priority of the development. In this phase, we'll be formalizing those relationships, creating player councils to provide structure to the feedback and to empower the community to have some authority in guiding the work on the game and policing itself.

This phase will be ongoing.

## BUILDING A WHOLE NEW WORLD

Achieving these objectives will require us to do a lot of nontraditional things. We're going to raise capital in unexpected ways. We're going to leverage a lot of middleware so we can focus on adding content rather than building core system software. We're going to carefully guide expectations so that we can deliver what people are expecting. We want to underpromise and overdeliver.

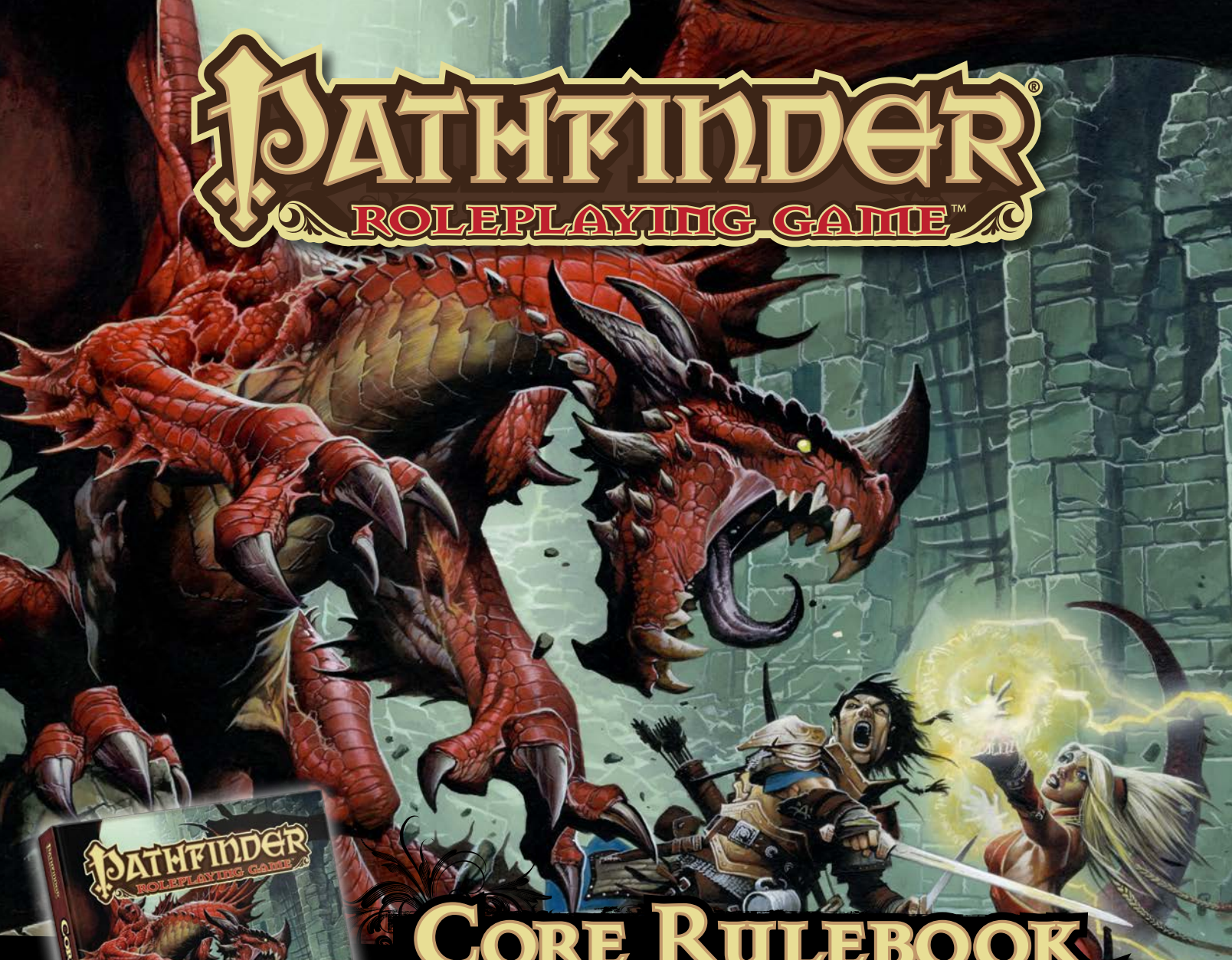
The classic MMO development model is broken. It takes too long and costs too much. Too many projects fail to release, or they release in an unstable and unsustainable state.

Goblinworks is going to pioneer a new model: a model with a faster tempo—a plan that starts small and grows incrementally over a long period of time, creating a community that nurtures the game and grows with it rather than spiking and collapsing.

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