



The Star's Refuge

The shadow of the Demon Lord lengthens. It deepens. Nowhere is this more true than the blighted lands east of the Troll Mountains, so very close to the Desolation itself. Swarming undead and savage trolls have humanity on the run. Worse still, ever-bolder cultists openly murder whole villages, sacrificing the innocent to honor their dark master.

There is, however, a glimmer of hope. Deep in the wilderness lies a doorway to a redoubt just outside the confines of the mortal world. Some legends say this refuge is ruled by a kindly faerie king, while others speak of a holy knight offering succor in an otherworldly fortress safe from the growing darkness.

Don't believe everything you hear.

The Star's Refuge is an adventure for expert characters, and will be best appreciated by players who love roleplaying and tough moral dilemmas. Whether on behalf of the people of the nearby villages or for reasons of their own, the characters seek the entrance to a fabled extradimensional refuge. Once they find it, they must gain entry and decide whether to pay the dark price required by the master of the refuge to enjoy the safety it promises.

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shadow of the demon lord

THE TROLL'S FIST

The Troll's Fist is a small area north of the Mistwood. East of the Troll Mountains, it lies outside the protection offered by the fastness of West Hold, which stands guard against the Desolation's many horrors. Once a land of magic and elves, full of mysteries and wonders, Troll's Fist has become a place of horror and death. Incursions of undead from the Desolation and trolls from the mountains threaten the existence of the villages and farms that dot the region.

The time for fighting in Troll's Fist is done. It is time to evacuate. Getting the locals to leave their homes and head to West Hold is the obvious solution, but the fortress's resources are already taxed. Pulling south to the Mistwood would simply expose the refugees to different dangers.

Altruistic characters might come to Troll's Fist to help, having heard of the people's plight. Others might do so for pay from the officers in West Hold, who cannot spare any troops and want the folk of Troll's Fist led anywhere but to the citadel. Alternatively, characters who have heard the legend of the Last Refuge might have come looking for it for their own reasons.

EXPLORING THE REGION

As the characters travel through the small villages and hamlets of the Troll's Fist, possibly in search of a safe place to evacuate the area's besieged people, they find numerous farmsteads burned to the ground. Small settlements stand eerily quiet, with strange and sinister symbols scratched into the walls of now-empty buildings. Scattered across the countryside, small groups of weary and broken people are in great need.

If they search for a defensible location for the refugees, the characters come up empty. The few places with such potential have already been used as such—and have clearly failed, filled now with dead bodies and burned goods.

THE LEGEND

Characters can learn the legend of the Last Refuge from any number of sources. The people of the Troll's Fist have all heard it, and they share the information freely. Magicians, sages, and priests outside the region have records of the legend, and characters with associated professions likely know of it.

Hundreds of years ago, a human priestess of the Old Gods prayed for a miracle. Her people needed refuge from a rampaging demon that would consume them all. As she

prayed, a star literally fell from the sky, obliterating the priestess and creating a huge crater in the ground. However, the star carried with it strange energies that interacted with the fading magic of the dead priestess. The result was a sort of dimensional pocket that bubbled up from the crater. The priestess' son led the people of the land into this bubble, where they found safety. Each month thereafter, under the full darkness of the new moon, a shimmering doorway opens to this extradimensional refuge.

The details of the legend change each time it is told, including:

- The beleaguered people were elves, not humans.
- The priestess didn't die but was transformed.
- The priestess was male, not female.
- The priestess was a wizard and summoned the star directly.
- The threat was not a demon but a horde of trolls, or a plague.
- The master of the place is not the priestess's son, but an aging knight looking to offer succor to all who ask for it.

Characters seeking the crater can talk to the locals, who direct them to a desolate area near the mountains. The new moon is a few days away, giving characters plenty of time to reach the area.

ONE-EYED TROLL

On the way to the crater, the characters attract the attention of a troll named Lugbeater. Lugbeater is a hunter who knows the area well, and who specializes in following prey by daylight while keeping to the safety of the shadows.

Any watchful character notices Lugbeater trailing the party by getting a success on a Perception challenge roll. The characters can attempt to confront her directly or lose her, but she makes no move herself until nightfall. Confronting her results in combat. Losing the troll requires that a character get a success on an Intellect challenge roll to find a path well away from anywhere she might hide from the sun. However, Lugbeater finds the characters again the next day—or in the middle of the night.

Lugbeater stands 11 feet tall and wears a patch over one eye made from the flesh of a human face. She carries a massive gnarled staff but uses her fists in combat, as she likes the feeling of blood on her hands.

THE CRATER

The crater is almost a thousand feet across and more than a hundred feet deep, although its sides slope gently enough that descent is possible without climbing gear. A character can descend the slope safely by rolling a success on a Strength challenge. Climbing gear or a rope grants 1 boon on the roll.

When the meteor struck, it leveled the surrounding areas with shock and fire. Now, nothing grows in the crater and animals avoid it, becoming frightened if forced down its slopes.

SHIMMERING DOORWAYS

As the sun sets and the darkness of the new moon blankets the crater, four sparkling ovals of wavering light appear. Each is located at a cardinal point within the crater, about 30 yards from its center.

Each oval is a doorway 10 feet high and 4 feet across. As soon as one creature enters a doorway, it winks out. No more than one creature can enter a doorway at a time. About 30 seconds after the last doorway disappears, all four doorways reappear, ready to admit four more creatures.

The doors endure for 2 hours, then vanish until the next new moon.

THE OTHER SIDE

Each character who passes through a doorway arrives alone in a corridor composed of velvety flesh, with a thin red mist playing along the floor. A character can choose to turn back, emerging in the crater through one of the other still-open doorways and causing that doorway to wink out. (If all four doorways have disappeared, a character can't leave until the doorways reappear 30 seconds later.) When the doorways close after 2 hours, characters cannot leave until the next new moon.

Each corridor is 30 yards long and ends at an alcove occupied by a stone statue. This **huge construct** resembles a stern but kindly father figure, 9 feet tall. A disembodied voice resonates throughout the dead-end corridor, asking the character the following questions:

- Who are you?
- Have you come here seeking refuge?
- How much value do you place on a single life?

Only the last question is of real importance, and the statue is keyed to answers on both ends of the spectrum. Those who value life highly and those who disregard it completely are both indicative of the sorts of people willing to pay the price to gain admittance to the refuge.

If the character says that life is the most valuable thing or that life has little value (or words to either effect), the

statue moves aside and a hidden door behind it opens to give access to the refuge. Any unsure, unclear, or hesitant answer causes the reddish mist along the floor to form talon-like hands that grab the character, who is shunted out into the crater.

THE REFUGE

Beyond the guarded doorways, characters who answered to the construct's liking can gather again. Regardless of when characters entered the doorways or how long they interacted with the statue, each character steps through into the refuge through a single door, one after the other.

The place the characters find themselves is a round room with many circular windows. The view through those windows suggests that the room is suspended above a glittering city of glass and silver, lit as if by bright moonlight. A small population of humans can be seen moving about in this strange city—the people of the refuge, who came here to find sanctuary and were willing to pay the terrible toll to enter.

Within the refuge, mortals do not age. Some of those who have found sanctuary here arrived hundreds of years earlier. Food, water, and other necessities are provided by mystical means. In short, the refuge truly is a sanctuary, offering safety from the evils and dangers of the world.

GLASANDRIL

Before the characters can make any effort at determining how to get down to the city, a door opens and a man enters. He is tall, thin to the point of gauntness, and has a hawkish nose, prominent brows, and a well-trimmed beard. He wears long robes of lavender and blue.

He introduces himself as Glasandril and claims the refuge is his to maintain. Time and grim horrors have driven Glasandril quite mad, but he hardly lets it show—at least at first. He speaks freely as he reveals that he is the son of Evanalla, the priestess of legend. She sacrificed herself to create the refuge, and Glasandril reveres and adores her. He says that all moral beings are welcome here and explains the benefits of the refuge. But before anyone can gain admittance to the refuge, a price must be paid. "For every soul I save," Glasandril tells the characters, "I must sacrifice one. I cannot save the world, but I can save half."

What Glasandril means is this: The refuge can be entered only by people with no Corruption, but that entry comes at a grim cost. For each suitable person admitted into the refuge, another person with no Corruption must be sacrificed to a being Glasandril calls "the Roiling Goddess." He does not explain why. He insists that this is simply the way the refuge must work. The sacrifice must be made immediately—thus, half the characters in any group entering the refuge must die, their souls utterly consumed.

DARK OPTIONS

If the characters flee immediately, they can escape the chamber before Glasandril has time to react, exiting through the single doorway. The construct beyond the door attacks anyone attempting to flee, but characters who defeat or slip past it can escape from the refuge. Glasandril does not pursue them.

If the characters argue with Glasandril or express their horror at his suggestion, he simply states that the rules of the refuge are sacrosanct. He doesn't reveal any more information, nor can he be swayed or coerced. A well-spoken character can convince Glasandril to allow the party to leave the refuge so as to return with more people. Doing so requires a success on a Will attack roll against Glasandril's Will if the character speaks the truth, or a success on an Intellect attack roll against his Intellect if the characters are bluffing and have no plans to return.

Characters of precarious morality—or with a fatalistic viewpoint—might well agree to Glasandril's terms. In the long run, saving half the innocent people in the surrounding region might seem a better option than letting them all die. Coldhearted characters could even decide to let others pay the price for their own safety, leaving and returning with an equal number of other people they convince to come with them. However, the qualification that only characters with no Corruption can enter the refuge precludes savvy players attempting to sacrifice evil characters or monsters to win entrance for themselves or the villagers of Troll's Fist (unless you decide otherwise).

If the characters refuse to pay the price or attack Glasandril, he uses the full power of his magic to strike back. During any battle, he tells the characters that defeating him gains them nothing. "The rules governing the refuge remain unchanged. The Roiling Goddess will take her sacrifices."

If a character with no Corruption dies at the hands of Glasandril, the red mist rolls into the chamber through small holes in the walls and utterly consumes the fallen character. Glasandril then says, "One of you that remains is now free to enter."

The red mist that pervades the refuge, moving as if alive, is the Roiling Goddess.



GLASANDRIL

DIFFICULTY 250

Size 1 human

Perception 15 (+5)
Defense 19; **Health** 80
Strength 10 (+0), **Agility** 13 (+3), **Intellect** 15 (+5), **Will** 15 (+5)
Speed 10
Warded Creatures make attack rolls against Glasandril with 1 bane, and Glasandril makes challenge rolls with 1 boon to resist attacks.

ATTACK OPTIONS

Eldritch Touch (melee) +5 with 2 boons (2d6 plus Bafflement)

Bafflement A living creature that takes damage from Glasandril's touch must roll a success on a Will challenge with 1 bane or become dazed for 1 round.

SPECIAL ACTIONS

Counterspell When a creature Glasandril can see attacks him with a spell, he can use a triggered action to counter it. The triggering creature makes the attack roll with 1 bane, and Glasandril makes the challenge roll to resist the spell with 1 boon.

Improved Spell Recovery Glasandril heals 20 damage and regains two expended castings. Once he uses this action, Glasandril cannot do so again until after he completes a rest.

MAGIC

Power 5

Arcana *arcane armor* (6), *magic dart* (6), *arcane shield* (3), *arcane sight* (3), *empowered magic* (2), *arcane lightning* (2), *destroy magic* (2)

Protection *secure site* (6), *evade* (3), *force field* (4), *globe of negation* (1)

Theurgy *denounce* (6), *divine aid* (2), *wrath of god* (2), *avatar* (1)

END OF THE ROUND

Epic Recovery Glasandril removes one affliction from himself.

Epic Adversary Roll 1d3 + 1 to determine how many actions Glasandril can use during the next round. He can use these actions during any turn and can do so before his enemies act. Each time Glasandril uses an action, he can move up to his Speed before or after the action.



DOWN INTO THE CITY

Beyond the doorway through which Glasandril entered the chamber, a spiral walkway leads down into the city. Many of the people of the city are fearful, untrusting, and self-centered. (Remember, they sacrificed someone else to get where they are.) They refuse to help if the characters want to do anything that might jeopardize the refuge or harm Glasandril or the Roiling Goddess.

The characters can freely explore the city, but the city and what secrets it holds are up to you to create. Given the nature of the peoples who have made the horrifying decision, the group is likely to find all sorts of individuals of dubious virtue and individuals with interesting knowledge or possessions. Although every need has been provided, the ambitious might seek to oust the wizard who forced the decision on them. Others might form factions along political or even religious lines. Characters who earn the refuge might find the paradise promised to them to be as perilous as the world outside.

THE ROILING GODDESS

Characters appalled by the situation in the refuge might want to confront Glasandril's goddess in an attempt to refuse the price and still make use of the refuge. Alternatively, they might just want to see the Roiling Goddess destroyed on principle.

The problem is, Glasandril is entirely correct. The Roiling Goddess sustains the pocket dimension that holds the refuge, and without her, the dimensional bubble collapses. The sacrifices made to her—which is to say, the deaths of those who pay for entrance—are what give her the power to maintain the refuge.

The Roiling Goddess is a **killing mist**—the remains of Glasandril's vaporized mother, Evanalla. Destroying the mist causes the dimensional bubble of the refuge to collapse over the course of 3 minutes. All within are ejected, and the refuge is gone forever.



DIFFICULT ENDING

The hard truth is that the Star's Refuge is very likely the best place to take the people of Troll's Fist. The region offers no other place of safe retreat. If the characters leave the refuge intact and tell people about it, some might choose to go there on the next new moon. These people include parents willing to sacrifice themselves for their children, the sick and infirm willing to give themselves up for the healthy, and others wishing to save those they love. The selfish and cruel might go as well, trying to trick others into being their sacrifices.

If the refuge is destroyed or the characters keep its existence to themselves, the characters are likely forced to watch as trolls, undead, and cultists sack more villages, kill more people, and eventually clear the region of humanity. The hope offered by the legend of a mystical, safe refuge might well prove to be their undoing.