

WHO PULLS THE STRINGS

Rob Eddins

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CCC-SKULL01-03



WHO PULLS THE STRINGS

Pursuing the murderers of the nephew of a prominent noble house has revealed more than a simple random crime. A new group or faction has risen from the ashes and dust from destruction of Mulmaster, and its nature and intent still unknown. The leader of the Silver Skulls is a mystery, and perhaps a threat to what little stability Mulmaster has found since disaster struck.

Part 3 of the Silver Skulls Legacy

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



Robby Eddin

Author

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CREDITS

Lead Designer: Robby Eddins

Designer: Ginny Loveday

Editing: Ginny Loveday, David Morris

D&D Adventurers League Guildmaster: Chris Lindsay

Art: Jay Africa, Raven+Moon Co., Wizards of the Coast used with permission

Cartography: Max Wilband

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

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

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ADVENTURE PRIMER

"We have to distrust each other. It is our only defense against betrayal."

-Tennessee Williams

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Many factions vie for control of Mulmaster after the Cult of Elemental Evil tore the city and those who controlled it asunder.

The Blades of Mulmaster were the ruling noble families prior to the devastation with the support of the Lord's Alliances and the Church of Bane.

The Brotherhood of the Cloak watches for arcane threats to the rule of the High Blade. Formed as part of the Edict of Arcane Banishment, the Cloaks monitor all practitioners of magic in the city and those that use their magic, punishing those who have not sworn their loyalty to them and vow to protect the High Blade from all threats.

Location and NPC Summary

The following NPCs and locations feature prominently in this adventure. See *Dramatis Personae* for more information.

Arturo Scrivani (*Ahr-two-row Skree-vahn-ee*). A master thief who has enlisted the party and/or their predecessors in his activities.

Doran Hightower (*Door-un Hie-tau-wuhr*). A Blade of Mulmaster and uncle to the victim whose murder began the events of the trilogy.

Silver Skulls (*Sill-vur Skulls*). A new factor in the criminal underworld of Mulmaster. The group's intentions are unclear but are not benevolent.

Nelacor (*Nell-ah-core*). The Boss of the Silver Skulls and a Death Tyrant.

Torbitha (*Tore-bith-ah*). One of the few Skulls who knows Nelacor's true nature. She is the spymaster and quartermaster for the gang. Moreover, desperate to be out from under Nelacor's thumb.

Lars (*Lahrs*). Also aware of Nelacor's true nature, he is the chief of muscle operations for the gang.

ADVENTURE OVERVIEW

The adventure is broken down into 6 parts:

Introduction. *What Has Gone on Before... (15 Minutes)* The adventure begins with a brief meeting with Doran Hightower. The party updates him on the events of their endeavors to this point, and he charges them with seeing the investigation to its end. They receive faction instructions just after.

Part 1. *An Audience with Himself (15 – 60 Minutes)* The party meets with members of the Silver Skulls as arranged in *SKULL01-02 Not All Who Are Lost Should Be Found*. During the meeting the characters receive a strange mental request from an unsuspecting source.

Part 2. *An Enemy of My Enemy (15 – 60 Minutes)* The party meets with Torbitha, hear her plot to take down the Boss, and provides them instructions to a safe house where they can discuss matters further.

Part 3. *The Safe House (30 – 90 Minutes)* Lars is discovered interrogating Torbitha at the safe house and she reveals to them her identity as a cleric of Waukeen. Torbitha provides entrance to the sewers and directions to His lair.

Part 4. *Passages (15 – 45 Minutes)* The party makes their way through the sewers to reach the Boss' lair.

Part 5. *His Lair (90 Minutes)* The characters face off with the Boss in a final showdown.

Part 6. *Good News, Bad News (15 Minutes)* Wrap-up and rewards.

An Issue of Time

If the players are keen to start a fight in each part of this adventure, it will easily take far longer than the allotted time. In this case, remove encounters or lower the HP of enemies as needed to stay within your time budget.

Or, if you have all the time in the world, let it play out normally.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

Continuing the story. Characters played in SKULL01-01 and 01-02 previously.

I AM the law. Characters may seek to restore order to Mulmaster or prevent the further suffering of its people.

Additionally, all the factions are looking at Mulmaster with concern. Some fear Thayvian influence, others instability in the city and region. Regardless, they are interested in any new power center in the city.

Lord's Alliance: Prevent any further disruptions to Mulmaster's power structure by removing the Boss if he is not a force for stability.

Order of the Gauntlet: Remove the Boss from Mulmaster to prevent further harm to the citizens of Mulmaster.

Zhentarim: Convince the Silver Skulls to join the Network or put them out of business.

Harpers: Prevent the Boss from robbing Mulmaster of its liberty.

INTRODUCTION. WHAT HAS GONE ON BEFORE

Estimated Duration: 15 minutes

Characters continuing from the previous adventure us **A. Continuing the Story**. New parties should start with **B. New to the Scene**.

If any characters are members of Factions, representatives will approach them in the Wave and Wink.

A. CONTINUING THE STORY

The party meets with Zor Hightower to report on their mission so far and get further instruction.

The Wave and Wink is less crowded in the early afternoon than later in the day. A sense of being watched has followed you for days, without respite. A message from Blade Hightower asking for a status report arrived just this morning, and the time was set for just after noon. As you eat a bit of lunch with your ale, Zor Prince Doran Hightower comes in and, once he sees you, makes his way to your table. "What progress have you made?" he says with no preamble.

The party reported to Hightower at the end of **Not All Who Are Lost Should Be Found** and received recompense for their efforts. Zor Hightower relates the following information.

- The trail to my nephew's murder leads to the Silver Skulls
- I need you to meet with this Boss to discover who is responsible.
- I will pay 500 gp for the identity of the murder. I will pay 1000 gp if you bring my justice to them.



B. NEW TO THE SCENE

If the players/characters are new to the trilogy, Hightower will use this meeting to bring his new hired investigators up to speed.

The Wave and Wink is less crowded in the early afternoon than later in the day. A sense of being watched has followed you for days, without respite. The message from Blade Hightower asking for a status report arrived just this morning, and the time was set for just after noon. As you eat a bit of lunch with your ale, Zor Prince Doran Hightower comes in and, once he sees you, makes his way to your table. "There is much to discuss before you begin..."

- My nephew was murdered and I hired adventurers like yourselves to investigate.
- The adventurers contacted a member of the Silver Skulls who offered to setup a meeting with their Boss in return for doing a job for him.
- Pleased with the successful completion of his mission the informant has followed through with his promise.
- The trail to my nephew's murder leads to the Silver Skulls
- I need you to meet with this Boss to discover who is responsible.
- I will pay 500 gp for the identity of the murder. I will pay 1000 gp if you bring my justice to them.

Roleplaying Zor Hightower

As a Blade of Mulmaster, Doran Hightower is used to being obeyed when he speaks. And this is apparent in his negotiating style – he assumes you will do what he wants. Not a bad man per se, but he isn't usually friendly or diplomatic. The death of his nephew has shaken him, however, revealing cracks in his emotional armor. He needs the party's help and knows it and will be as persuasive as he can manage if they seem to balk at his offer.

He is dressed in fine but sturdy clothing with leather armor over it. Tall, fit, and greying, he looks like the noble he is, but isn't flaunting his wealth.

Quote: "Is it ill-fortune or design that plagues my house? I need answers!"

PART 1. AN AUDIENCE WITH HIMSELF

The party meets with the Boss as promised. In doing so, they uncover clues to his nature and find a possible ally.

Estimated Duration: 15 minutes, or 45-60 minutes

A WALK THROUGH THE PARK

General Features

The general features of Mulmaster are as follows:

Weather. It is around mid-afternoon, overcast, wet, and dreadfully cold.

Location. Sections of Mulmaster are perpetually ablaze in elemental fire while other sections of the city have collapsed into huge sinkholes. The agreed meeting place is an alley, quiet and dark.

The party meets a crew of Skulls - accompanied by Arturo Scrivani - in an alley, who will escort them to the meeting after covering their heads. If the party seeks to detect the meeting place or remember the path, a **DC 25 Wisdom (Perception)** check will provide those details. **This could come in very handy later!**

As the sun passes its mid-afternoon point, a group of Skulls meets you in an alley a few blocks from the Wave and Wink. Arturo Scrivani, the master thief and your contact, is the apparent leader of the group. He steps forward. "The Godfather will abide by the terms set for your service to him. You are afforded an honor awarded to few: an opportunity to converse with Himself. Hoods are required to proceed."

The escort group is made up of the ambushers from Part 2 and Arturo Scrivani. **If the party refuses to have their heads covered, they aren't escorted to the audience. See "Getting back on track" later in this section for help.**

You are led through Mulmaster for some time. The path is long and you are sure you have gone in circles some number of times. As you come to a stop the sound of a creaking door and a descent of a set of stairs could only mark your entry into a cellar.

"Don't do anything foolish. We won't waste any time in putting you down" said a gruff voice and your hoods are removed.



MEETING WITH THE BOSS

General Features

The general features of the meeting room are as follows:

Terrain. The walls of the room are made of stone except for the false wall to the east that has only a narrow gap to a hall into the area beyond. A tall mirror sits in the gap, angled to allow someone to see the party's reflection while remaining unseen. The room is 15 x 25 feet.

Light. The room is brightly lit with lanterns and candles.

- The mirror reflects only a dark room beyond
- Nelacor is attended by a goblin servant
- The false wall is sturdy and not easily torn down
- The hall is protected by three *Glyphs of Warding* set along the floor of the slim passage at 10', 15', and 20'.

Glyphs of Warding

The hall is set with three *Glyph of Warding* Traps.

Detection and Disabling. Each Glyph can be detected by a successful **Intelligence (Investigation)** check with a DC of 15. They can be disabled using *Dispel Magic*.

Trigger. Anything passing within 3' of a glyph will trigger it unless the password is spoken.

Effect. The first *Glyph* is an explosive acid effect: 22 (5d8) damage in a 20' radius, half damage if the character succeeds on a DC 15 Dexterity save. The second *Glyph* explodes causing 22 (5d8) lightning damage, with a DC 15 Dexterity save for half damage. The last is a spell *Glyph*, which casts *Slow* centered on the character triggering it. All within a 40' cube of the triggering character must succeed on DC 15 Wisdom save or be affected. Saves can be attempted at the end of each character's turn.

If threatened, the Boss and his attendant will retreat out an exit behind the false wall, dropping a makeshift portcullis to prevent pursuit. The portcullis can't be cranked up, it must be lifted or destroyed. The passage beyond descends and connects to the sewers below. In the several rounds, it would take to break thru, he would be well on his way back to his sanctum.

NELACOR

The Boss is very curious about the party, their motivations, and capabilities. If they can be co-opted into the Skulls, he will pursue it. Otherwise, their elimination is preferred.

Roleplaying Nelacor

The Boss' motives are beyond any who serve him. Devious, cruel, sinister, manipulative, but subtle. And greatly paranoid.

Quote: "*Such petty concerns mortals have. No matter. All their concerns will be for naught soon.*"

As they speak with Nelacor, the party will have an opportunity to learn things from his voice and speech patterns. Using Perception or Passive Perception they may find the following **(the DM should give this information only to those discovering it – by index cards or other notes perhaps. Anything said between players at the table after the conversation with Nelacor begins should be treated as having been heard by him!)**:

- The unease they have felt since arriving in Mulmaster – the sense of being watched – emanates from the Boss.
- DC 12 Wisdom (Perception): He isn't human or humanoid.
- DC 14 Wisdom (Perception): He is a large creature.
- DC 19 Wisdom (Perception): There are no breath sounds. The voice isn't derived from air passing over vocal cords.

He will try to elicit information from the party:

- What they know about the murder and those that carried it out.
- How much they know about the Skulls.
- What is the party's desired end game?
- Whether the party can be co-opted into his organization.
- The party will want a straight answer to the murderer's identity, of course. He is confident he knows the murderer's identity (Lars!) but will want something in return for that information. In Mulmaster, information comes at a cost. If the party agrees to participate in the Skulls next job – providing protection to a sensitive shipment – he will agree to put them in the same room as the murderer.

Please note: during the conversation between the party and Nelacor, Torbitha will make her play! See *Betrayal*!

If the party is threatening and uncooperative, he will have them followed as they leave, and ultimately try to have them killed via ambush – see Part 2.

If they attack during the meeting, he will retreat to his lair, while his Skulls try to take the party down. If the party survives fighting the Skulls, they will find an entrance to the sewers – either in the basement or in the back of the audience room – to proceed to **Part 4**.

During the meeting, the Skulls themselves are poised to rush in from the next room and dispatch the party if given the order. This includes **Arturo Scrivani**, three **veterans**, three **spies**, and five **thugs**, an **assassin**, and a **mage**. Further, the other two chief lieutenants of the Skulls, **Torbitha**, and **Lars**, are behind a false portion of the north wall observing and listening.

Roleplaying Lars

A capable fighter and leader, in his state of mind he has no patience with the perceived failings of underlings. Studded leather armor and his weapons show him for what he is: a man of action. Refer to Dramatis Personae for more on Lars and his story.

Quote: “*When in doubt, kill them. He will sort it out later.*”

BETRAYAL!

Audiences are very rare. On the occasions, they have taken place – when Arturo was recruited, for instance - on His orders Torbitha and Lars place themselves behind the false wall to observe. Torbitha, as a Knowledge domain cleric of Waukeen, uses her divination skills to learn about the subject. See her stat block in the Appendices.

Roleplaying Torbitha

Crafty and subtle, Torbitha was once considered funny and good company. The consummate merchant, she continues to build the Skulls’ wealth. Refer to Dramatis Personae for more on Torbitha and her story.

Quote: “*He corrupts everything. I can’t run a business in this environment.*”

Nelacor is mad by any standard other than a beholder’s, and chaos and anarchy are his true endgame. His ultimate plan is to create an undead hellscape of Mulmaster. Torbitha is a practical woman, Zhent to the core: seizing wealth and power may be possible in chaotic times, but when civilization is in ashes, with whom will one trade?

Therefore, her goal is to betray and destroy Nelacor, and seize the remnants of the organization for herself and the Network. But she fears that if she were to face him personally, she would freeze up in the moment due to the psychic scars she bears (see Dramatis Personae for more). When the party arrives, she takes their measure with an experienced eye, measuring them against Nelacor.

Torbitha’s statistics and abilities

Torbitha uses the War Priest for the purposes of her stats and abilities. There is one important modification: she is a cleric of Waukeen, of the Knowledge Domain. Please replace the spells *Prayer of Healing* for *Suggestion* and *Water Walk* for *Sending*. Further, she has the channel divinity ability of a knowledge cleric as described in the text below.

As a cleric of Waukeen, she has chosen Knowledge as her domain. She will be aware of any Zhents and will have a sense of which characters are more susceptible to mind-control magic (i.e., with poor Wisdom saves). **After the audience has begun – allow some back and forth to occur - she will use her channel divinity ability to Read Thoughts on a party member.** Who she chooses depends:

- She will prefer to try party member from a background more likely to fail a Wisdom save against her ability (barbarian, bard, fighter, rogue, sorcerer)
- Or a character she perceives to be a leader.

If they fail a **DC 16 Wisdom save** (make this roll without alerting the PC), she will read their thoughts and confirm what she already believes to be true – that they are trying to uncover the identity of the murderer, the nature of Nelacor and likely seek to defeat him. Then she will send a *Suggestion*, per her domain ability, to that PC – “Remain calm (fellow Zhent – if appropriate), do not attack. Bring your colleagues to the Oxpit Tavern this evening at eleven bells to meet one who has common interests.” **Communicate this to the character without sharing with the others during the audience!** The PC will be compelled to do so per the Suggestion spell.

If they make the save, she will try a second time on another party member with her last channel ability available to her. If that succeeds, proceed as above. If it fails, she falls back on her backup plan. She will use the *Sending* spell to deliver the message, to a Zhent preferably, or the PC she perceives to be the most persuasive and/or likely to be a leader. She hopes they will respond favorably and meet her.

END OF THE AUDIENCE

Barring starting a fight, the party will be allowed to leave, with hoods over their heads, and returned to the alley. If they start a fight, defeat the Skulls, and make their way into the sewers, proceed to Part 4. Otherwise, upon release in the alley, the party is free to compare notes about the audience, and perhaps make their way to the meeting place proposed by Torbitha. **The character under the influence of her *Suggestion* will have no choice and will certainly try to persuade the rest to seek out the mystery ally with them.** They must be restrained for the duration of the spell if the party doesn't agree to the meeting. A party member receiving the *Sending* has free will in the matter.

They will be followed no matter what they choose – a **DC 17 Wisdom (Perception)** will alert them to their tails. The Skulls have orders: if the party was threatening in the audience, they are to wait for late evening to spring their ambush. If discovered and confronted, they will temporarily retreat and wait for a more opportune moment to strike. If the party was more diplomatic, the Skulls will follow and observe, but will not allow themselves to be drawn into a fight.

GETTING BACK ON TRACK

If the party refuses to have their heads covered, they will not be escorted to the Skulls HQ and the audience room.

The ambushers from Part 2 will be given orders to try and take the party out that evening. In the few hours before the ambush will occur, role-playing an investigation by the party to uncover the location of the Skulls HQ, the nature of the Skulls, and/or the nature of the Boss will not yield concrete results, only rumors. Divination spells would be more helpful.

Prior to the ambush, the DM may have Torbitha approach the party, using her skills or not, at any likely spot and make the offer described in Part 2. If they refuse, taking an ambusher alive and putting them to the question may uncover the location of the skulls' HQ.

If the ambush fails, Lars and other Skulls (Lars and two **veterans**, two **spies**, and two **thugs**) will be sent to deal with them the next day, presenting another opportunity to capture a Skull and interrogate them.

Lastly, after two ambushes, the Skulls will have shown themselves in two very public incidents. Encourage the party to roleplay seeking information again and have them find a rumor of their hideout connected to the silversmith's shop. Perhaps the contact of a character with the criminal background finally came through. At that time, a successful assault on the HQ will gain the party access to the entrance to the sewers and ultimately Nelacor's inner sanctum.

PART 2. AN ENEMY OF MY ENEMY...

If they are compelled or choose to meet their mysterious potential ally, Torbitha reveals herself.

Expected Duration: 15 minutes, or 45-60 minutes

MEETING TORBITHA IN THE OXPIT TAVERN

After meeting with Nelacor, a drink is in order. Fortunately, they have an appointment at just such a place – the Oxpit Tavern. Torbitha, concealed using her hat of disguise, will approach the party at the appointed hour.

General Features

The general features of Mulmaster are as follows:

Weather. It is late evening, overcast, wet, and dreadfully cold.

Location. Sections of Mulmaster are perpetually ablaze in elemental fire while other sections of the city have collapsed into huge sinkholes. The Oxpit Tavern is lively, well light and warm.

The Oxpit is northwest of the Wave and Wink, and roughly north of the alley in which the party was released by the Skulls

Upon entering the Oxpit Tavern, the party is greeted by a warm fire in the central firepit. They hear music and a single voice from the stage, as a bard displays her skills. Conversations abound as well, as the tavern is well attended tonight, but not over full. Less bawdy than the Wave and Wink, but boisterous in its own right, the Oxpit is a seemingly friendly, middle class, and safe place in an otherwise tense city. A busy barmaid, smiling in her element, greets them. “Not enough room at the bar for all of you I’m afraid, but there is a table, just there, where you can rest yourselves. Will you be eating or are you just here to have a few?!”

The party can settle into their table and wait for their unknown contact. The bard on the stage is good, and the music enjoyable. Roasted ox is the specialty of the house and worth the cost. Local ales are the majority of the bar selection, as wines and other choices from afar are limited still after the disaster. Standard PHB pricing plus 50%.

A few minutes after the appointed hour, a shopkeeper – seemingly – approaches the table.

A middle-aged man, dressed in the simple clothing of a merchant or shopkeeper, approaches your table. “I thought the audience with Himself went rather swimmingly, didn’t you? You displayed such self-control and cunning!

Characters with a **Passive Perception of 12** or higher or who succeed on an active check identify the voice as female, and thus can conclude that whomever is speaking is not actually a middle-aged man.

Torbitha slides a chair over and sits with the party. She introduces herself by name. Any Zhents at the table she makes sure to note and even attempt to draw their eye to her signet ring that displays the faction’s symbol. As DM you may alert any Zhents in the party to this. She tells the party she was the sender of the mysterious message. The party is free to ask questions. As the conversation continues, Torbitha will share the following:

- She informs the party they were followed to the Oxpit, having heard the order given.
- She is willing to share somewhat of her past, confirming for the Zhents in the party she is one of them, of substance in the Network, and is one with whom they could achieve their secret mission. If questioned directly, she will truthfully claim the rank of Viper (3) in the Zhentarim.
- She will persuasively make the case Nelacor is a festering sore on the healing body of Mulmaster, one that could kill the body in time.
- She has personal knowledge that Nelacor wants to rule over of a city infected with madness, where the living compete with the undead, all under his control. If questioned further about this, she becomes almost twitchy, and unable to elaborate.
- She points out the “feeling” of being watched. She makes the point nothing benevolent creates such effects on a community.
- Nelacor came to the city from the Underdark, after the elemental devastation allowed him access to the city’s sewer system.
- When asked directly about Nelacor, she will not use His name or titles, and will certainly stop short of revealing His true nature. Something makes her unwilling or unable to say the words.

- She makes no apologies about the potential benefit to herself from Nelacor's death. He is bad for business, for everyone. That she and Zhent faction patrons want to reestablish a Zhent center of influence in the city is only natural, and Nelacor stands in the way.
- If confronted about her disguise, she makes no apologies about it either. Only the paranoid survives in the new Mulmaster.

If Torbitha and the party agree to cooperate:

Torbitha tells them to meet her at the basement entrance to a structure southeast of the Wave and Wink and provides detailed directions. The Skulls headquarters is in a building attached to a silver-smith, which serves as a front and is where they occasionally mint a skull coin to send a message.

She promises to be there to let them in and usher them to the entrance of a section of the sewers isolated from the rest of the sewer network by the sinkholes. Due to the sinkholes, it now connects to natural caverns and eventually Nelacor's lair.

Further, she gives them a bit of advice. As the Skulls are likely to ambush them at the next opportunity, she advises the party to make a show of exiting the tavern main room into the kitchen, seemingly rushing away. They should pause a moment there to let the ambushers move to the rear of the tavern to begin the chase. Then, run back into the main room, out the side door, and then flee to northeast.

The Temple of Loviatar lies just ahead; her instructions are to slip into the temple and wait several moments. After five minutes, the party can exit the Temple, and make their way to the Skulls' house by heading north by the sinkhole, then east along the city wall, continuing past the Tower of Mysteries and the Cloaks' Tower. The party will then head south southeast and hook westward around the end of another sinkhole. The Skulls' house is a few streets away from the Wave and Wink.

If the party does not agree to work with Torbitha: she slips away, shaking her head in disgust. The party will be unable to avoid the ambush by the Skulls crew planned for later in the evening, if they were threatening during the audience. If they were diplomatic, the Skulls continue to observe and report.

GETTING BACK ON TRACK

If they aren't working with Torbitha, the party will need to be steered back on course. They don't know about the entrance to the sewers in the basement of the Skulls' safe house at this point. How can they uncover its existence, so they can go after Nelacor? They could:

- Defeat the ambushers, and force one to reveal how to find their way to Nelacor.
- Use divination magic of some kind.
- Old-fashioned investigative work – be creative.

If the party spends any time publicly working the streets for information, or other clearly investigative activity, the Skulls will spring an ambush at the next opportunity.

THE SILVER SKULLS CREW

An **assassin**, a **veteran**, three **thugs**, a **mage** and a **spy**. The **mage** is 7th level rather than 9th, so has no 5th level spells, fewer spell slots (4/3/3/1), no *ice storm* spell prepared, and 31 hp. See the Appendix for their stat blocks.

Tactics: The mage casts *greater invisibility* on the assassin just before the ambush is sprung. The veteran and the thugs fire ranged weapons if they have surprise, then charge and will hold the line on the party while the assassin seeks out spellcasters. The spy range attacks spellcasters as well, and the mage tries to control the field with *counterspell* and does damage with *fireball* and *magic missile*.

Adjusting the Encounter

Here are recommendations for adjusting this combat encounter. These are not cumulative.

Very weak: Remove the **assassin**.

Weak: Remove the **veteran**.

Strong: Add a **thug**.

Very strong: Add a **thug** and a **veteran**.

PART 3. THE SAFE HOUSE

The party takes the first step on the path to the Boss.

Expected Duration: 30 minutes, or 60-90 minutes

A MURDERER CONFESSES

Torbitha will come thru with her end of the bargain – the entrance to an isolated section of the sewers that connects to natural cavern and ultimately Nelacor’s lair. Unless someone intervenes...

General Features

The general features of Mulmaster and the Skulls HQ are as follows:

Weather. It is in the dark hours of morning, overcast, wet, and dreadfully cold.

Location. Sections of Mulmaster are perpetually ablaze in elemental fire while other sections of the city have collapsed into huge sinkholes. The basement entrance to the Skulls house is at the back of a silver smith’s shop – an obvious front.

As you descend a short flight of steps approaching the doorway into the basement of Skulls HQ, you hear someone yelling inside. Another voice seems to try to reason with the first. The solid door is closed.

On a **DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check**, a character can make out a male humanoid’s voice, raised in anger. The character also makes out the word, “BETRAYAL!” A **16 on the check** reveals Torbitha’s as the second voice.

Lars (see Appendix for his stats), like Torbitha, has suffered psychic trauma at the hands of Nelacor. See *Dramatis Personae* for more. His paranoia has led him to distrust Torbitha. Unbeknownst to her, he had her followed as she left the house earlier in the evening.

The spy tailing her saw her shift her appearance and witnessed her meeting with the party. She returned to the house expecting to order any Skulls in the basement into the streets to look for the PC party, directing them to a section of the city in which she knows the party not to be. But Lars, the **spy**, and two **thugs**, a **veteran**, and an **assassin** jumped her when she entered, and tied her to a chair. They have been interrogating her since – verbally to this point - and violence seems imminent.



Assuming the party intervenes, they may charge in or sneak. Describe the basement using the box text and when Lars becomes aware of them, read the monologue:

As you enter the basement, you see a female tied to a chair, and a hulking human threatening her. Three other Skulls lurk close by. Looking up, he sees the party, and sneers at Torbitha.

“You have brought about your own end Torbitha! And have dragged this rabble down with you!”

Looking at the you, “Is it a murderer you seek? Perhaps I will do! The little noble swine was worthless in life, and it was almost a mercy to kill him. But he will rise when Nelacor unleashes his horde!”

He kicks the chair with Torbitha tied to it, tipping it over, and leaps to the attack.

Lars and the two thugs charge in, while the spy uses range attacks against any obvious spellcasters. Lars is a stout opponent, but the party should make short work of them.

After the fight, and releasing Torbitha, its clear she struggled when they ambushed her, and suffered somewhat being subdued. She speaks, and the party recognizes her voice.

“Lars wasn’t always crazy. Greedy and unpredictable, sure, but not this mad creature you saw. He has been damaged too. And while his scars were different than mine, he was scarred nonetheless. I never really liked him, but he had my respect once. Now there is only pity. As for Hightower, the correct answer is that Lars is the killer. But a better answer is he was put on the path by another.”

Torbitha explains that Lars had convinced himself he could further Nelacor's plans by killing High-tower's nephew. She suspects what Lars' warped logic might have been – he has seen Nelacor raise the dead as zombies - but cannot share the all the details due to her own issues.

After the fight, if Torbitha still lives, cleanup will be necessary so her fellow Skulls won't be suspicious when they return. When that is complete, she descends to a locked door at the bottom of the stairs and unlocks it. Stairs descend into a break in the sewer wall. She describes the path ahead as follows:

- The sewer will continue for around 100', where a collapse has opened a passage into a natural cavern.
- The cavern passage will continue northeast, opening into a larger cavern that is touched by the Elemental Earth damage from the disaster.
- Beyond that is a honeycomb of passages – keeping to the central passage will bring the party to anteroom of His sanctum.
- A short passage from the anteroom leads to Nelacor's primarily dwelling.

Torbitha explains the Boss has other minions the party may encounter. A clan of sycophantic goblins are his personal servants. They worship the Boss as a god and do his bidding without question.

Do the right thing: Before the party enters the sewers, Torbitha selects one character she feels might be most likely to “do the right thing”. She approaches them and explains she is designating them with the power to release a slave from shackles when the time is right. She explains there is a prisoner Nelacor keeps chained in the passages ahead. She isn't a crusader personally, and understands slavery is a reality across Faerun. But its time this slave was unbound.

PART 4. PASSAGES

The adventurers begin to peel back the layers of deception in Nelacor's world.

Expected Duration: 15 minutes, or 30-45 minutes

DESCENT INTO THE SEWERS LEADS TO THE BOSS' SANCTUM

After Torbitha unlocks the entrance to the underground passage to the sewer, the party makes their play to confront Nelacor. They discover oddities along the way...

General Features

The general features of sewers and natural caverns are as follows:

Conditions. The sewer below the Skulls HQ has been cut off from the rest of Mulmaster's sewer system. As such it is drier and less fragrant than a typical sewer. The section the party will travel is a main artery and as such is 10' wide and high along its length. The natural caverns that follow are generally dry and cool, and their dimensions will vary, but never less than 10' wide and high. The route thru the caverns generally follows the easiest path over and around obstacles, but in some instances, there is shoring up of the ceiling or removal of stone and dirt to ease passage. Lighting is sparse, with the occasional hung lantern giving low light. Treat the entire route as having dim light until the anteroom of His sanctum which is just lit well enough to be fully lit.

Location. The northeast section of Mulmaster has numerous sinkholes. And the Skulls' HQ is located among a dense collection of them. The sewer below the HQ is their private underground highway in this portion Mulmaster. The natural caverns under the sewer were unknown to the natives of Mulmaster prior to the disaster events recently.

Following Torbitha's directions, the party exits the staircase and proceeds northwest in the sewer. The other direction, southeast, is blocked by a roughly built, but sturdy, metal gate with a substantial padlock. **The passages before the honeycomb area are an opportunity for a rest. A short rest creates no complications, but a long rest may. DM discretion.**

After you have traveled about 100' northwest along the sewer, you see a collapse in the sewer floor ahead. Light can be seen coming up from the hole created by the collapse.

A narrow ledge along the left side of the opening allows one to continue travel in the sewer to the northeast. The collapsed rock and dirt has been piled up and fashioned into a rough ramp into the cavern below. This is the entrance into the natural caverns that Torbitha described.

The natural cavern below continues generally north and west, winding along. Wider and higher in spots, it remains roughly 10' in both dimensions. Characters who check will perceive no hidden or concealed doors and passages. After a few hundred feet of travel, the passage opens into a larger cavern with a unique feature and a curious inhabitant.

The cavern ahead is roughly 40' across and 60' long. An opening to the northwest is the only other natural exit. There are several natural rock pillars supporting the roof of the cavern. The northeast wall and the cavern's lone inhabitant near it are what immediately catches your attention.

The wall appears to be moving, flowing even. It does not appear to be lava; the room is cool and there is no glow in the flowing rock. Chained to the pillar closest to the northeast wall is a bizarre creature. Medium in size, with a barrel shaped body and three stout legs ending in taloned feet.

It has three strong arms emerge from its body, high on its torso, and are taloned as well. Three eyes are set in its body in between each arm. But most bizarre is the large powerful mouth in the top of its head.

ELEMENTAL EARTH

The wall is an interface with the elemental earth rift effect seen from above as sinkholes. The material of the wall slowly flows in a seemingly random manner. Different kinds of rock and dirt can be identified as veins of earth appear on the wall as if moving forward, and then recede. Or a vein might move across the entire length of wall. The entrances to small tunnels or crevasses iris open and close in slow motion. As the characters watch, the creature reaches out and plucks an uncut gem from a vein of rock flowing by on the wall, then pops it in its mouth.

The creature in question is a **xorn**, and the chains are *dimensional shackles* (per the DMG). This unfortunate native of the Elemental plane of Earth entered these caverns thru the wall due to its natural curiosity. Not long after, it was subdued by Nelacor's goblin minions. Completely cowed by Nelacor, he allowed himself to be restrained in this spot. He has enough chain to move along the wall, but no further. His task is to do what he naturally does, swallows gems and precious metals. Anyone that can speak Terran or Primordial can talk with the xorn and elicit its story. *Comprehend Languages* or *Tongues* would be helpful. An **Intelligence (Arcana)** check could be useful as well. Additionally, if there are no shared languages between the xorn and the party, he will communicate in simple gestures that he wants the party to release the *shackles*, and that he wants to return to his home plane.



If the party has no means to speak with him, they must rely on checks to uncover his story. Any successful **DC 13 Wisdom (Perception)** check, or a Passive Perception of 13, will reveal several piles of refuse within the length of the xorn's chain. **Intelligence (Investigation) checks beating a DC of 13** will allow the investigator to identify what they are: regurgitated bits of rock and dirt – xorn puke. Examining the xorn reveals burn marks on its hide. Periodically, the goblins shock and burn the xorn until it throws up, so they can harvest the gems and metals he has recovered. ***It is at this point that the character Torbitha appointed as having the power to release the shackles might step up and do so for the xorn.***

If released, the xorn will look over the party slowly, noting valuables they might carry, but not acting on that knowledge. Looking at the character that released him, motions them to follow and takes a few steps. It then tips up on two feet and two hands and throws up the contents of its stomach (the raw material equivalent to 212 gp, 140 sp, and 3 uncut gems worth 250 gp each). The only way to thank or pay the party, well, sits in its gut. With a brief pause to look around, the xorn walks over to the wall of Elemental Earth and melds itself into the wall, returning to its home plane.

What the characters don't know at this point is the xorn's curiosity about the party and desire to observe them. He will follow thru the rock and earthen material along their route ahead, and ultimately try to help and enact some revenge of his own. If the party are murder hobos, they miss out on a timely ally. Oh well. Too bad.

The room contains no other items of interest, other than the exit to the northwest.

HONEYCOMB

Exiting the xorn's chamber via the northwest passage, the party continues 50' in a cave tunnel much like the ones previously. From this point forward, the openings of small crevices and tunnels dot the walls, ceilings and floors. Largely natural, there are some signs that openings have been expanded or modified. Some are large enough to fit a small creature, few could accommodate a medium sized creature crawling. None are large enough to enter upright for any medium sized creature. The main passage narrows and widens periodically as before, but more severely in this stage of the route.

The party isn't attacked as they pass thru the honeycomb part of the cavern complex – about 300' along the main passage. No trap is sprung. With a **DC 14 Wisdom (Perception)** or better, a character will know they are being paced along their route by some entities. Watched. Light footsteps, scurrying sounds, etc. Despite the evidence of something following, nothing emerges to threaten them.

The party can explore the side passages if they insist. They will find no one to confront, no evidence of traps or ambush, and no hidden or concealed doors. In three locations in this honeycomb of tunnels are living spaces. There are dozens of sleeping pallets and evidence of cook fires and numerous clay pots in which food is stored. The only way for the party to proceed is down the main, central tunnel.

The main passage ceases to have small tunnels branching off it for about 50' before the passage opens up into a cavern. Roughly 60' across with a ceiling 30' and higher, two exits are obvious at a glance.

PART 5. HIS LAIR

The party confronts Nelacor in his lair.

Expected Duration: 90 minutes

Having navigated the path from the safe house to the entrance to His lair, the final fight is here. Whether the Boss and his Skulls are a threat is no longer in doubt. But even in conflict, there is still much to learn...

General Features

The general features of His private caverns are as follows:

Conditions. His residence in these chambers predates the destruction of Mulmaster. He and his goblin followers had dwelled in these caves for several years. There are layers of refuse and detritus of his sojourn here. Dry and funereal, dusty and parched. These chambers rise to a height of 30' soon after the entrance. There are lit candles along the floor for 20' past the entrance. No other light sources further in.

Location. His lair is 200' feet below the city streets. He was aware of the city above, but there were no outlets from his caverns that led upward to the sewers and beyond until the destruction.

THE ANTECHAMBER

The tunnel opens into a large cavern, 60' across with an irregular ceiling 30' at its lowest. You see a ledge across from and above you on the far wall, 15 feet above the level of the rest of the cavern. There are a series of steps carved out of the natural irregular rock formation just in front of the ledge. They cross back and forth across the face of the ledge once before reaching the ledge height. At the rear of the ledge is the mouth of a 10-foot-wide, 30-foot-high tunnel, perfectly carved from the rock. To your left on the southwest wall is a small tunnel mouth, much like you saw in the areas just to the south. Spread across the west side of the chamber is a small clan of goblins. The young sit quietly, many playing calmly with small round figurines. Their mothers sit near the children, legs crossed underneath them. The male goblins kneel on one knee between their families and the party, each with a short quarterstaff with a crossbar attached to the end. The children have little clothing, and the adults are clothed in simple wraps around their waist. They have necklaces of seemingly random pieces of bone strung on leather cords. Their faces are painted with grey and black pigment to resemble skulls. All the adults are looking at the party.

Lastly, there is a wide opening into a side chamber to your right. Adding an aural component to this strange tableau, you hear sounds of movement and low moaning coming from the side chamber.

All the adult goblins are aware of their presence and are calmly looking at them. They make no threatening gestures.

The tunnel in the back of the ledge is the pathway to his inner sanctum.

When the party makes their way to the makeshift steps up to the landing, they are in the path of a trap devised by Nelacor's goblin sycophants. Above the 10' square area at the base of the steps, held up by a canvas tarp and a system of ropes and pulleys is a **gelatinous cube**. But not a typical one (see below). It takes an actively taken **DC 22 Wisdom (Perception)** check to see the cube in the tarp as it is in a recess in ceiling and appears to be a natural feature. The goblins have tunnels which give them access to the roof and the cube as it rests – a ready-made garbage disposal system.

The gelatinous cube was wandering thru passages in the Elemental plane of Earth, in truth a visitor to that plane from the Plane of Ooze if not an uncommon one. It happened upon the same interface between the Prime Material and the Plane of Earth that the xorn did. And when found by Nelacor, he killed it; but it did not dissolve as usual when a cube dies. It revived as an undead form of its former self. While mindless it obeys simple commands from him.

This gelatinous cube deals necrotic damage instead of acid and has the undead type.

When the characters are in the best position, the goblins in the tunnels above spring the trap. Any player in the 10 feet area under the cube must make a **DC 16 Dexterity** saving throw to dodge out of the way. Success will land them in a 5-foot square next to the cube after it has landed. Failure results in the character taking 10 (3d6) bludgeoning damage from the force of the falling Large creature, and 10 (3d6) necrotic damage from cube itself and is engulfed. *The cube has 72 hit points remaining as a result of the fall.* The goblins in the chamber do not move to attack and will only fight if attacked.

The second exit is to the northeast and is a wide opening into a side chamber. If the party moves to investigate, read the following:

As you peer through the 30-foot-wide opening, you see a chamber that is 30' wide and 80' long. You see the floor level you are currently on ends abruptly in a short cliff, a 10' drop onto the floor of the chamber proper. At your feet, in the middle of the floor of the upper ledge you are on, a 10' wide descending ramp has been cut into the floor, sloping away from you into the room, dividing the ledge in two halves. It slopes downward until reaching the same depth as the chamber itself. At its end is a 2' thick wall, 10' high, that blocks this ramp from the chamber beyond, and acts as a narrow bridge between the two halves of the ledge along the top of the short cliff. If one were to remove the 2' wall, they could walk down the ramp between the two arms of the ledge and out onto the floor of the chamber.

In the chamber below is a sight unseen outside Shadowfell. Shuffling around aimlessly, moaning and rasping, a horde of zombies and skeletons nearly fill the chamber floor.

If the party steps into the chamber, out onto the ledge, more and more of the undead will become aware of their presence. They will move toward the bottom of the short cliff, hands raised, trying to climb over each other and up the cliff to get to the party. The adventurers realize quickly the zombies will not be able to reach them.

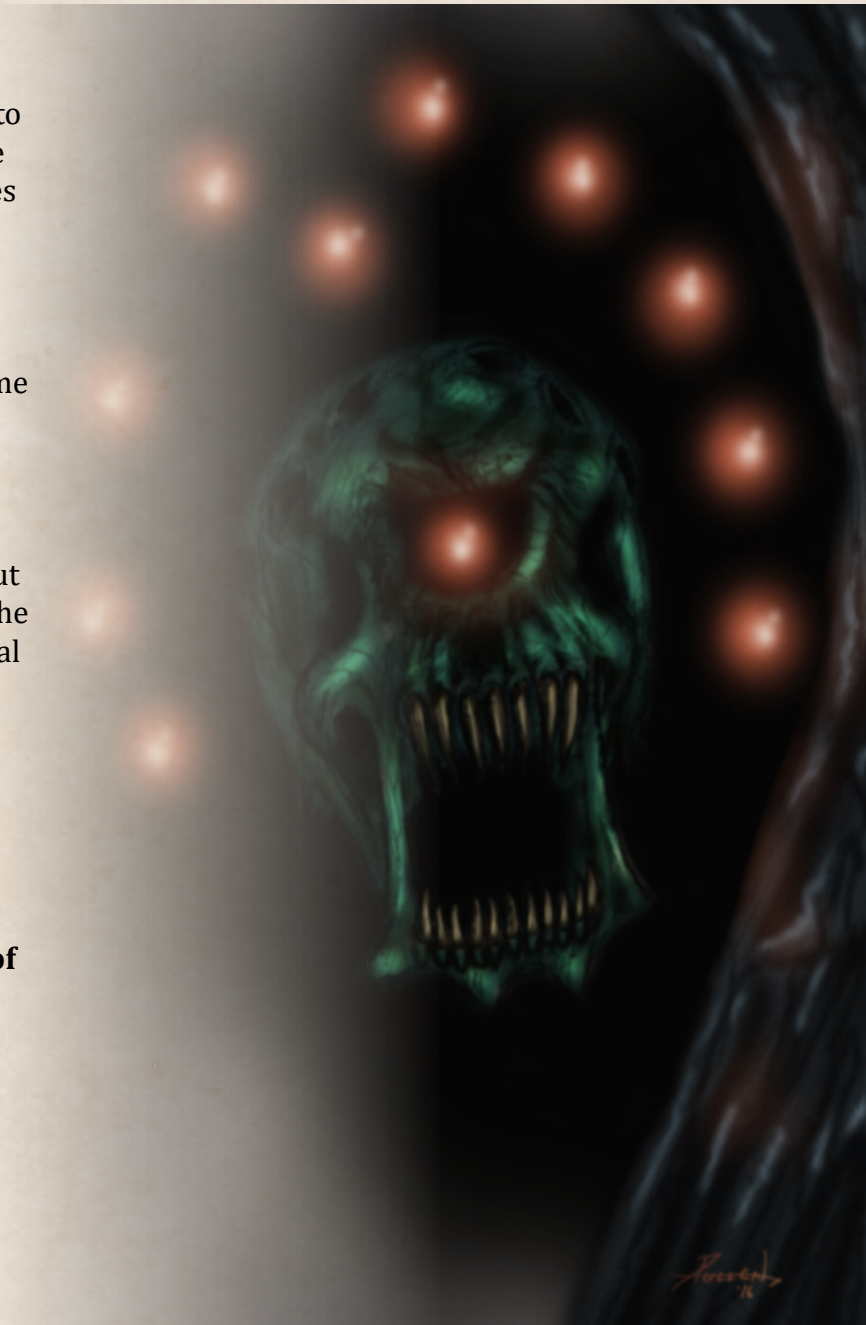
Nelacor, among his other schemes, has as the centerpiece of his long-range plan for Mulmaster this horde of **80 zombies**. When he deems the time is right, when the city is vulnerable and its institutions weak, he will unleash his horde – when it is MUCH bigger - on the city above. He wants this horde and any living minions he can muster (his goblins and the Silver Skulls) to destroy or cast out all major organizations – the Blades, the Cloaks, the Watch, etc. And then, perhaps, he will finally reveal himself and rule over the ashes. In particular, he is aware of and fears the power the Cloaks could bring to bear still, so he is not yet ready to put his plan into action.

After the cube is dead and the party has seen the zombies, or they attempt the stairs again, Nelacor emerges from the tunnel at the back of the ledge, 30 feet above the ledge's surface.

"I see you have dealt with my door warden. Sad. He was unique in this world." Looking up to the ledge you see a massive floating skull with a pinpoint of red light gleaming in a single central eye socket. Ten spectral eyes hover around the creature. Addressing the goblins, the creature says, "Be calm, little ones, and witness. We add to our horde this day."

Most characters will not have seen a death tyrant before. An **Intelligence (Nature)** may reveal what he is and perhaps details (DM's discretion).

Tactics: Nelacor is very intelligent, if insane by any standard. He will appear out of melee range from any who can't fly. He is in his lair, so gets Lair Actions in addition to his standard actions and Legendary actions. There is no benevolence in him – he will be ruthless and will not hesitate to kill the party. But he is also arrogant and will not immediately use his zombie minions.



In combat, he will prefer his eye rays to his bite attack. His main ray attacks are randomly selected, but **he chooses the targets**. He has a genius-level intelligence, so he will select his targets well based on their susceptibility to a given ray. He also gets to choose his Lair Actions, with certain limitations. See the Appendix for his stat block.

As for his Legendary Actions, he will use them much like his standard action.

The goblins will not attack unless they are attacked first. The females and the young huddle close to the entrance to their caverns and enter their caverns if AOE magic occurs. The males stand and begin to wave their arms over their heads, cheering for Nelacor in a creepy worshipful manner.

Torbitha Ex Machina: It is about this time the party may curse Torbitha's very existence. Justifiably. But there is help on the way.

If the party released the xorn, and didn't murder hobo the poor thing, he has followed the party, making his way through the stone and earth. Xorns are intelligent beings, and he is grateful – assuming they didn't mess with him unnecessarily. **He will arrive in the second round on Initiative count 21**, emerging from a wall or ceiling behind Nelacor and attacking. Or perhaps from the ceiling and grappling with him. Be creative.

Torbitha, since the characters left the basement, has had time to reflect. While she is talented at getting others to do the dirty work, she wants to put some skin in the game. Nelacor has taken from her things that not even the Devastation managed to take. She wants her will back. She will have recovered her channel divinity use(s) thru short rest regardless of how events played out after the audience in Part 1. Any 2nd or 3rd level spell she used during the audience will only be recouped if the party has taken a long rest after leaving the basement. **She will arrive in the antechamber in round 3 on initiative count 15.**

For very weak parties, Torbitha will have taken the time since the party entered the sewers to explain matters to Arturo. And they both elect to help the party.

Tactics: The xorn will attack Nelacor until incapacitated or his hit points fall to 20. If he is able, he will enter the closest rock wall. He will wait there, seeking an opportunity to try and surprise Nelacor again. If Nelacor wins he will retreat to the chamber in which he was found and return to his home plane. If the party is victorious, he will sift thru the dust be sure Nelacor is dead, then will return to his home.

Torbitha will fight to the end. Her fear that she would seize up in the moment against Nelacor was unfounded. In fact, she screams abuse at him as she does her best to kill him and destroy zombies. *Banishment* (followed by healing the party while he is gone if it works), *spiritual weapon*, *guiding bolt*, *sacred flame* all could come into play. She is aware of his undead nature and will make sure the party understands that. She also understands there is less than a 50/50 chance of success to turn him, and worse for *Banishment*. Regardless, she holds nothing back. **Don't forget *revivify*!** As the party pursues Him into his chamber, she might hold the ledge against the zombies. Her channel divinity could do impressive damage to tightly packed zombies. And *spirit guardians*.

As the battle unfolds, when Nelacor's hit points are reduced to 80, he uses his next Lair Action to disintegrate the wall keeping the horde back. In his genius, he has prepared for this eventuality. They pour forth and he retreats into His Sanctum proper. The party is their sole focus – they ignore the goblins as long as He lives. The zombies will pursue the party up the steps, onto the ledge, and into His chamber.

Adjusting the Encounter

Here are recommendations for adjusting this combat encounter.

D&D is at its best when neither the party nor the DM knows what the outcome will be. Threading that needle is the art of being a DM. Use your discretion to modify the advice below. Some parties may math out strong, but play weak, and vice versa. Be creative.

These are not cumulative.

Very weak: Torbitha and Arturo arrive in round 2

Weak: Torbitha arrives in round 2

Strong: The xorn does not attempt to help, Torbitha arrives in round 2.

Very strong: Neither the xorn nor Torbitha attempt to help.

Nelacor is no longer a typical beholder, who might flee certain death if that appeared to be the likely outcome. As he is truly ancient, his subconscious curiosity about death led to his rebirth as a death tyrant. Seeing what is on the other side of death holds no fear for him, only a sense of discovery, a sense of the new. If he is killed:

“What lies on the other side of the veil? Aahhhhhhhh...” Nelacor’s eyes wink out one by one, his central eye last. His skull body turns to dust and slowly falls to the ground.

After Nelacor is defeated, the party will find, in the bottom of his resting pit, a scroll of *fear* and a scroll of *fly*. There are also 14 unworked gems worth 3500 gp, 500 gp worth of gold ore, and 1250 sp worth of silver ore.

THE INNER SANCTUM

A **glyph of warding** (thunder; 22 (5d8) hit point damage in a 20’ radius, DC 15 save for half damage) is set at the midpoint of the passage from the ledge in the antechamber to his inner sanctum which will alert him to an intruder.

If he has retreated from the party into his chamber, he will take a *healing potion*, if possible, as he waits for them. In either case, he is in his small resting area, below floor level. Whenever he becomes aware of their presence, he rises to give battle.

“Your persistence is impressive. Have you discovered who murdered the boy? Has the journey been worth what you have found at the destination? You might have earned a place among my chosen, but you will have to serve me in death instead.”

PART 6. GOOD NEWS, BAD NEWS

The party deals with the remaining Skulls, and reports to Doran Hightower and faction contacts.

Expected Duration: 15 minutes

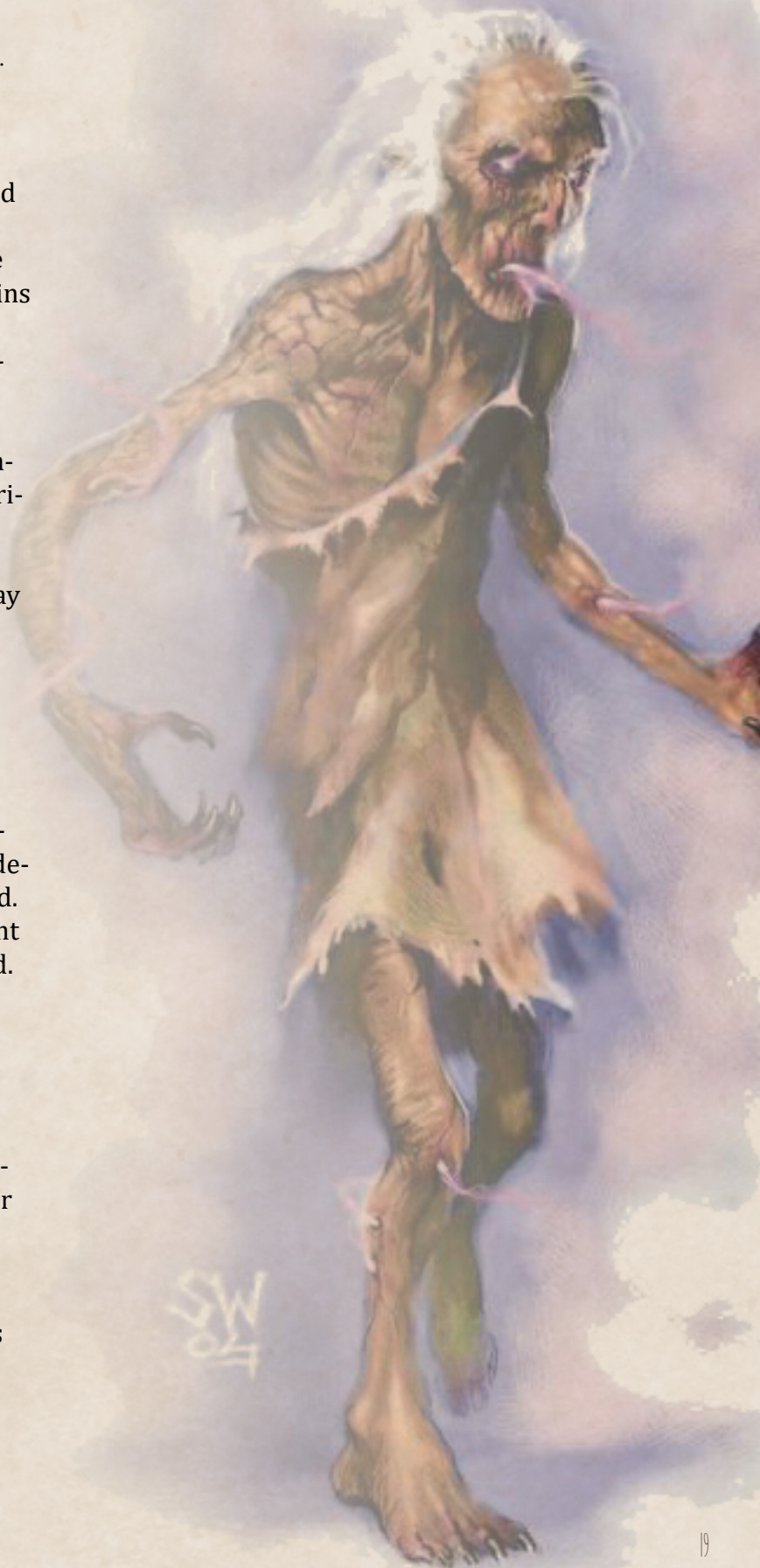
Hightower receives the closure he wanted, if not satisfaction. The Skulls still exist but have less disturbing leadership.

The zombies, if any survive, will lose their sole focus on the party when He dies. The goblins still in the antechamber will fall to their knees stunned and unaware of their surroundings. The zombies will do what zombies do. They will still attack the PCs if they can see them, but they fall on the goblins too. That said, the remaining zombies shouldn't prove too much of a challenge to the PCs. At minimum, the PCs are likely faster than the zombies.

The goblins, if any survive the zombies, are catatonic. Please note they do not appear in the Experience section. No reward for killing them! Any survivors from the party and Torbitha (perhaps Arturo as well) will be able to make their way back to the basement without incident. Torbitha will explain to any remaining Skulls the truth of who the Godfather, the Boss Himself really was. They are invited to explore the chambers and see for themselves.

Ultimately, it becomes clear their primary loyalties were to Torbitha and Arturo, and to a lesser degree Lars who was difficult to like and understand. The Boss was a voice behind a wall. They just want excitement, coin and other loot, and to be well led. Whomever has survived, Torbitha and/or Arturo promise both. Any Zhents in the party successfully connect the Skulls with the Network. All are pleased with what the future holds!

Zor Prince Doran Hightower receives the full report with less enthusiasm. He thanks the party for their efforts, particularly those in the Lord's Alliance. He finds comfort that the murderer is dead, and that the source of the murderer's madness has been removed as well. He delivers 1000 gp as promised.



ADVENTURE REWARDS

Upon completing the adventure, the characters each receive rewards based upon their accomplishments. These rewards include advancement and treasure, and may include special rewards, such as story awards or new downtime activities, as follows:

ADVANCEMENT AND TREASURE CHECKPOINTS

The characters receive 4 advancement checkpoints and 4 treasure checkpoints for completing this adventure.

PLAYER REWARDS

The characters earn the following player rewards for **completing the adventure**:

MAGIC ITEM UNLOCK

Characters completing the adventure unlock:

Dimensional Shackles. This item can be found in **Appendix 6**.

DUNGEON MASTER REWARDS

In exchange for running this adventure, you earn **advancement and treasure checkpoints** and downtime as though you played the adventure, but none of the adventure's **player rewards**.

However, this adventure may qualify for rewards earned by completing DM Quests. See the ALDMG (*Adventurers League Dungeon Master's Guide*) for more information about DM Quests.

APPENDIX 1. DRAMATIS PERSONAE

The following NPCs are featured prominently in this adventure:

Arturo Scrivani (Ahr-to-row Skree-vahn-ee).

A master thief who has enlisted the party and/or their predecessors in his activities. High up in the Skulls' organization, he leads any operations that involve stealth and guile rather than muscle. Stealing while not being caught, essentially.

Doran Hightower (Door-un Hie-tau-wuhr).

A Blade of Mulmaster, and uncle to the victim whose murder began the events of the trilogy.

Nelacor (Nell-lah-core). A Death Tyrant. The Boss, whose true name is Nelacor, is a being whose intellect and motivations are decidedly alien to civilized races and certainly the party. As DM you can make Him as quirky as you like. Devious, cruel, sinister, manipulative, but subtle.

When the Devastation struck Mulmaster, the damage above ground was evident. However, beneath the streets, His lair and its environs were not connected to the sewer systems, but the Devastation caused collapse and shifts opened new passages. Nelacor had lost most of his entourage in the chaos and death of the disaster; the reach of which extended into the underdark. Afterwards, He and his goblin worshippers discovered Lars in the sewers, and He, using his intellect and fearsome presence, brought first Lars, then Torbitha, and ultimately all their minions, under his wing – forming the Silver Skulls. Lars handles muscle operations, Arturo burglary, and Torbitha intelligence gathering and unloading their haul. He has built the Skulls with force of will.

He is truly the Godfather of his own little personal empire. Don Corleone, but no love for others. All are chess pieces on His board. Since He has an intelligence of genius+, he isn't easily fooled. But He is very paranoid – he can fool himself.

He skeletal skull is the inspiration behind the name "Silver Skulls" and their symbol. His central eye and each of the eyes that dart around his skull are spectral points of red light.

Torbitha (Tore-bith-ah). One of the few Skulls who knows Nelacor's true nature. She is the spy-master and quartermaster for the gang, and desperate to be out from under Nelacor's thumb. Her time working for Him has worn her down. She still has the skills to manage her role in the Skulls well but does so without the lust for life she once had.

Torbitha was a Zhent agent before the elemental disaster struck Mulmaster, with a growing enterprise headquartered in the Zhent slums. She was a canny merchant and spy. But the destruction of Mulmaster caught her unprepared, and all she had was lost in the flames and sinkholes. Thus, she had limited resources and influence in the devastated Mulmaster. After the disaster she allied herself to Lars, who she had worked with in the past, and others as they had the common interest of surviving in the hell that Mulmaster had become.

Among the human and demi-human Skulls, only Torbitha, Lars, and Arturo know Nelacor's true nature, and while Torbitha has enjoyed a form of safety in the time she has served him, she knows it is temporary. He has repeatedly charmed his lieutenants, using this control to interrogate them and his awful presence to intimidate them in a perverse attempt to fortify their loyalty. His paranoia makes him brutally cautious with his trust. As a result of the abuse, she cannot speak his name, or reveal his nature, due to the psychic scars. And even if those scars were healed – via Greater Restoration, etc. – her fear of him makes her hesitant to reveal more than she must.

Lars (Lahrs). Also aware of Nelacor's true nature, he is the chief of muscle operations for the gang. Extortion, protection, etc. And he also happens to be a murderer.

Lars, like Torbitha, has suffered psychic trauma at the hands of Nelacor. His symptoms are different – he is paranoid and is obsessed with the idea that Torbitha sees him as a rival and wants to eliminate him.

Silver Skulls (Sill-vur Skulls). A new factor in the criminal underworld of Mulmaster. The group's intentions are unclear but aren't benevolent.

ARTURO SCRIVANI (MASTER THIEF)

Medium human, neutral evil

Armor Class 16 (studded leather)

Hit Points 84 (13d8 + 26)

Speed 30 ft.

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

Saving Throws Dex +7, Int +3

Skills Acrobatics +7, Athletics +3, Perception +3, Sleight of Hand +7, Stealth +7

Senses passive Perception 13

Languages Thieves' Cant, Common

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Cunning Action. On each of its turns, the Arturo can use a bonus action to take the Dash, Disengage, or Hide action.

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

Sneak Attack (1/Turn). Arturo deals an extra 14 (4d6) damage when it hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally of his that isn't incapacitated, and he doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Arturo makes three shortsword attacks.

Shortsword. Melee Weapon Attack: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. **Hit:** 7 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage.

Light Crossbow. Ranged Weapon Attack: +7 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. **Hit:** 8 (1d8 +4) piercing damage.

REACTIONS

Uncanny Dodge. Arturo halves the damage that he takes from an attack that hits him. He must be able to see the attacker.

ASSASSIN

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

Armor Class 15 (studded leather)

Hit Points 78 (12d8 + 24)

Speed 30 ft.

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

Saving Throws Dex +7, Int +5

Skills Acrobatics +7, Deception +4, Perception +4, Stealth +11

Damage Resistances poison

Senses passive Perception 14

Languages Thieves' Cant plus any two languages

Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

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

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

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

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The assassin makes two shortsword attacks.

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

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

GELATINOUS CUBE

Large ooze, unaligned

Armor Class 6

Hit Points 84 (8d10 + 40)

Speed 15 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	3 (-4)	20 (+5)	1 (-5)	6 (-2)	1 (-5)

Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, prone

Senses blindsight 60 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 8

Languages —

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Ooze Cube. The cube takes up its entire space. Other creatures can enter the space, but a creature that does so is subjected to the cube's Engulf and has disadvantage on the saving throw.

Creatures inside the cube can be seen but have total cover.

A creature within 5 feet of the cube can take an action to pull a creature or object out of the cube. Doing so requires a successful DC 12 Strength check, and the creature making the attempt takes 10 (3d6) acid damage.

The cube can hold only one Large creature or up to four Medium or smaller creatures inside it at a time.

Transparent. Even when the cube is in plain sight, it takes a successful DC Wisdom (Perception) check to spot a cube that has neither moved nor attacked. A creature that tries to enter the cube's space while unaware of the cube is surprised by the cube.

ACTIONS

Pseudopod. Melee Weapon Attack: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 10 (3d6) acid damage.

Engulf. The cube moves up to its speed. While doing so, it can enter Large or smaller creatures' spaces. Whenever the cube enters a creature's space, the creature must make a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw.

On a successful save, the creature can choose to be pushed 5 feet back or to the side of the cube. A creature that chooses not to be pushed suffers the consequences of the failed saving throw.

On a failed save, the cube enters the creature's space, and the creature takes 10 (3d6) acid damage and is engulfed. The engulfed creature can't breathe, is restrained, and takes 21 (6d6) acid damage at the start of each of the cube's turns. When the cube moves, the engulfed creature moves with it.

An engulfed creature can try to escape by taking an action to make a DC 12 Strength check. On a success, the creature escapes and enters a space of its choice within 5 feet of the cube.

LARS (GLADIATOR)

Medium humanoid (any race), any alignment

Armor Class 16 (studded leather, shield)

Hit Points 112 (15d8 + 45)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	15 (+2)

Saving Throws Str +7, Dex +5, Con +6

Skills Athletics +10, Intimidation +5

Senses passive Perception 11

Languages any one language (usually Common)

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Brave. The gladiator has advantage on saving throws against being frightened.

Brute. A melee weapon deals one extra die of its damage when the gladiator hits with it (included in the attack).

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The gladiator makes three melee attacks or two ranged attacks.

Spear. Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft. and range 20/60 ft., one target. **Hit:** 11 (2d6 + 4) piercing damage, or 13 (2d8 + 4) piercing damage if used with two hands to make a melee attack.

Shield Bash. Melee Weapon Attack: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. **Hit:** 9 (2d4 + 4) bludgeoning damage. If the target is a Medium or smaller creature, it must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

REACTIONS

Parry. The gladiator adds 3 to its AC against one melee attack that would hit it. To do so, the gladiator must see the attacker and be wielding a melee weapon.

MAGE

Medium humanoid (any race), any alignment

Armor Class 12 (15 with mage armor)

Hit Points 31 (7d8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
9 (-1)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	17 (+3)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)

Saving Throws Int +6, Wis +4

Skills Arcana +6, History +6

Senses passive Perception 11

Languages any four languages

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Spellcasting. The mage is a 7th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). The mage has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *fire bolt, light, mage hand, prestidigitation*
1st level (4 slots): *detect magic, mage armor, magic missile, shield*
2nd level (3 slots): *misty step, suggestion*
3rd level (3 slots): *counterspell, fireball, fly*
4th level (1 slots): *greater invisibility*

ACTIONS

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

NELACOR (DEATH TYRANT)

Large undead, lawful evil

Armor Class 19 (natural armor)

Hit Points 187 (25d10 + 50)

Speed 0 ft., fly 20 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	19 (+4)	15 (+2)	19 (+4)

Saving Throws Str +5, Con +7, Int +9, Wis +7, Cha +9

Skills Perception +12

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 22

Languages Common, Deep Speech, Undercommon

Challenge 14 (11,500 XP), in its lair 15 (13,000 XP)

Negative Energy Cone. The death tyrant's central eye emits an invisible, magical 150-foot cone of negative energy. At the start of each of its turns, the death tyrant decides which way the cone faces and whether the cone is active.

Any creature in that area can't regain hit points. Any humanoid that dies there becomes a zombie under the tyrant's command. The dead humanoid retains its place in the initiative order and animates at the start of its next turn, provided the body hasn't been completely destroyed.

ACTIONS

Bite. Melee Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. **Hit:** 14 (4d6) piercing damage.

Eye Rays. The beholder shoots three of the following magical eye rays at random (reroll duplicates), choosing one to three targets it can see within 120 feet of it:

1. **Charm Ray.** The targeted creature must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or be charmed by the beholder for 1 hour, or until the beholder harms the creature.

2. **Paralyzing Ray.** The targeted creature must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or be paralyzed for 1 minute. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

3. **Fear Ray.** The targeted creature must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or be frightened for 1 minute. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

4. **Slowing Ray.** The targeted creature must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, the target's speed is halved for 1 minute. In addition, the creature can't take reactions, and it can take either an action or a bonus action on its turn, not both. The creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

5. **Enervation Ray.** The targeted creature must make a DC 16 Constitution saving throw, taking 36 (8d8) necrotic damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

6. **Telekinetic Ray.** If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 16 Strength saving throw or the beholder moves it up to 30 feet in any direction. It is restrained by the ray's telekinetic grip until the start of the beholder's next turn or until the beholder is incapacitated.

If the target is an object weighing 300 pounds or less that isn't being worn or carried, it is moved up to 30 feet in any direction. The beholder can also exert fine control on objects with this ray, such as manipulating a simple tool or opening a door or a container.

7. **Sleep Ray.** The targeted creature must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or fall asleep and remain unconscious for 1 minute. The target awakens if it takes damage or another creature takes an action to wake it. This ray has no effect on constructs and undead.

8. **Petrification Ray.** The targeted creature must make a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, the creature begins to turn to stone and is restrained. It must repeat the saving throw at the end of its next turn. On a success, the effect ends. On a failure, the creature is petrified until freed by the greater restoration spell or other magic.

9. **Disintegration Ray.** If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw or take 45 (10d8) force damage. If this damage reduces the creature to 0 hit points, its body becomes a pile of fine gray dust.

If the target is a Large or smaller nonmagical object or creation of magical force, it is disintegrated without a saving throw. If the target is a Huge or larger object or creation of magical force, this ray disintegrates a 10-foot cube of it.

10. **Death Ray.** The targeted creature must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw or take 55 (10d10) necrotic damage. The target dies if the ray reduces it to 0 hit points.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

The beholder can take 3 legendary actions, using the Eye Ray option below. It can take only one legendary action at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The beholder regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

- **Eye Ray.** The beholder uses one random eye ray.

LAIR ACTIONS

When fighting inside its lair, a death tyrant can invoke the ambient magic to take lair actions. On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), the death tyrant can take one lair action to cause one of the following effects:

- An area that is a 50-foot cube within 120 feet of the tyrant is filled with spectral eyes and tentacles. To creatures other than the death tyrant, that area is lightly obscured and difficult terrain until initiative count 20 on the next round.
- Walls sprout spectral appendages until initiative count 20 on the round after next. Any creatures, including one in the Ethereal Plane, that is hostile to the tyrant and starts its turn within 10 feet of a wall must succeed on a DC 17 Dexterity saving throw or be grappled. Escaping requires a successful DC 17 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check.
- A spectral eye opens in the air at a point within 50 feet of the tyrant. One random eye ray of the tyrant shoots from that eye, which is considered to be an ethereal source, at a target of the tyrant's choice. The eye then closes and disappears.

The death tyrant can't repeat an effect until all three have been used, and it can't use the same effect on consecutive rounds.

REGIONAL EFFECTS

A region containing a death tyrant's lair is warped the creature's unnatural presence, which creates one or more of the following effects:

- Creatures within 1 mile of the tyrant's sometimes feel as if they're being watched even when they aren't.
- When a creature hostile to the tyrant and aware of its existence finishes a long rest within 1 mile of the tyrant's roll a d20 for that creature. On a roll of 10 or lower, the creature is subjected to one random eye of the tyrant.

If the death tyrant dies, these effects fade over the course of 1d10 days.

SPY

Medium humanoid (any race), any alignment

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 27 (6d8)

Speed 30 ft.

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

Skills Deception +5, Insight +4, Investigation +5, Perception +6, Persuasion +5, Sleight of Hand +4, Stealth +4

Senses passive Perception 16

Languages any two languages

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Cunning Action. On each of its turns, the spy can use a bonus action to take the Dash, Disengage, or Hide action.

Sneak Attack (1/Turn). The spy deals an extra 7 (2d6) damage when it hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally of the spy that isn't incapacitated, and the spy doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The spy makes two melee attacks.

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

Hand Crossbow. Ranged Weapon Attack: +4 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one target. **Hit:** 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

THUG

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

Armor Class 11 (leather armor)

Hit Points 32 (5d8 + 10)

Speed 30 ft.

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

Skills Intimidation +2

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages any one language (usually Common)

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

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

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The thug makes two melee attacks.

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

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

TORBITHA (WAR PRIEST)

Medium humanoid (any race), any alignment

Armor Class 18 (Plate)

Hit Points 117 (18d8 + 36)

Speed 30 ft.

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

Saving Throws. Con +6, Wis +7

Skills. Intimidation +5, Religion +4

Senses. Passive Perception 13

Languages. Common, Elvish

Challenge. 9 (5,000 XP)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The priest makes two melee attacks.

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

REACTIONS

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

VETERAN

Medium humanoid (any race), any alignment

Armor Class 17 (splint)

Hit Points 58 (9d8 + 18)

Speed 30 ft.

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

Skills Athletics +5, Perception +2

Senses passive Perception 12

Languages any one language (usually Common)

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The veteran makes two longsword attacks. If it has a shortsword drawn, it can also make a shortsword attack.

Longsword. Melee Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. **Hit:** 7 (1d8 + 3) slashing damage, or 8 (1d10 + 3) slashing damage if used with two hands.

Shortsword. Melee Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. **Hit:** 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage.

Heavy Crossbow. Ranged Weapon Attack: +3 to hit, range 100/400 ft., one target. **Hit:** 5 (1d10) piercing damage.

XORN

Medium elemental, neutral

Armor Class 19 (natural armor)

Hit Points 73 (7d8 + 42)

Speed 20 ft., 20 ft. burrow

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	10 (+0)	22 (+6)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)

Skills Perception +2, Stealth +3

Damage Resistances piercing and slashing nonmagical attacks not made with adamantine weapons

Senses darkvision 60 ft., tremorsense 60 ft., passive Perception 16

Languages Terran

Challenge 5 (1800 XP)

Earth Glide. The xorn can burrow through nonmagical, unworked earth and stone. While doing so, the xorn doesn't disturb the material it moves through.

Stone Camouflage. The xorn has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks made to hide in rocky terrain.

Treasure Sense. The xorn can pinpoint, by scent, the location of precious metals and stones, such as coins and gems, within 60 feet of it.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The xorn makes three claw attacks and one bite attack.

Claw. Melee Weapon Attack: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. **Hit:** 6 (1d6 + 3) slashing damage.

Bite. Melee Weapon Attack: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. **Hit:** 13 (3d6 + 3) piercing damage.

ZOMBIE

Medium undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 8

Hit Points 22 (3d8 + 9)

Speed 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	6 (-2)	16 (+3)	3 (-4)	6 (-2)	5 (-3)

Saving Throws Wis +0

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities poison

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 8

Languages understands the languages it knew in life but can't speak

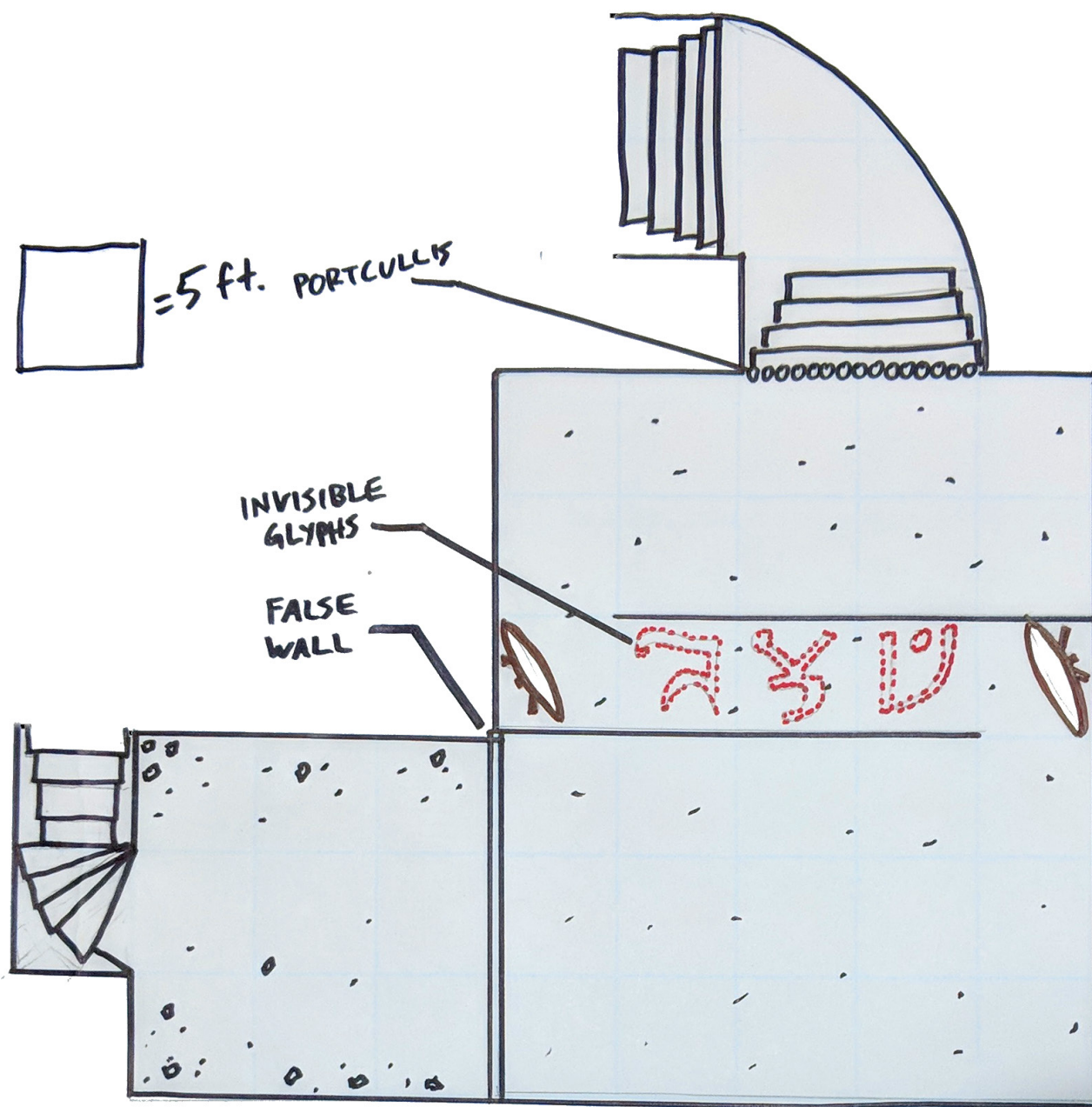
Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Undead Fortitude. If damage reduces the zombie to 0 hit points, it must make a Constitution saving throw with a DC of 5 + the damage taken, unless the damage is radiant or from a critical hit. On a success, the zombie drops to 1 hit point instead.

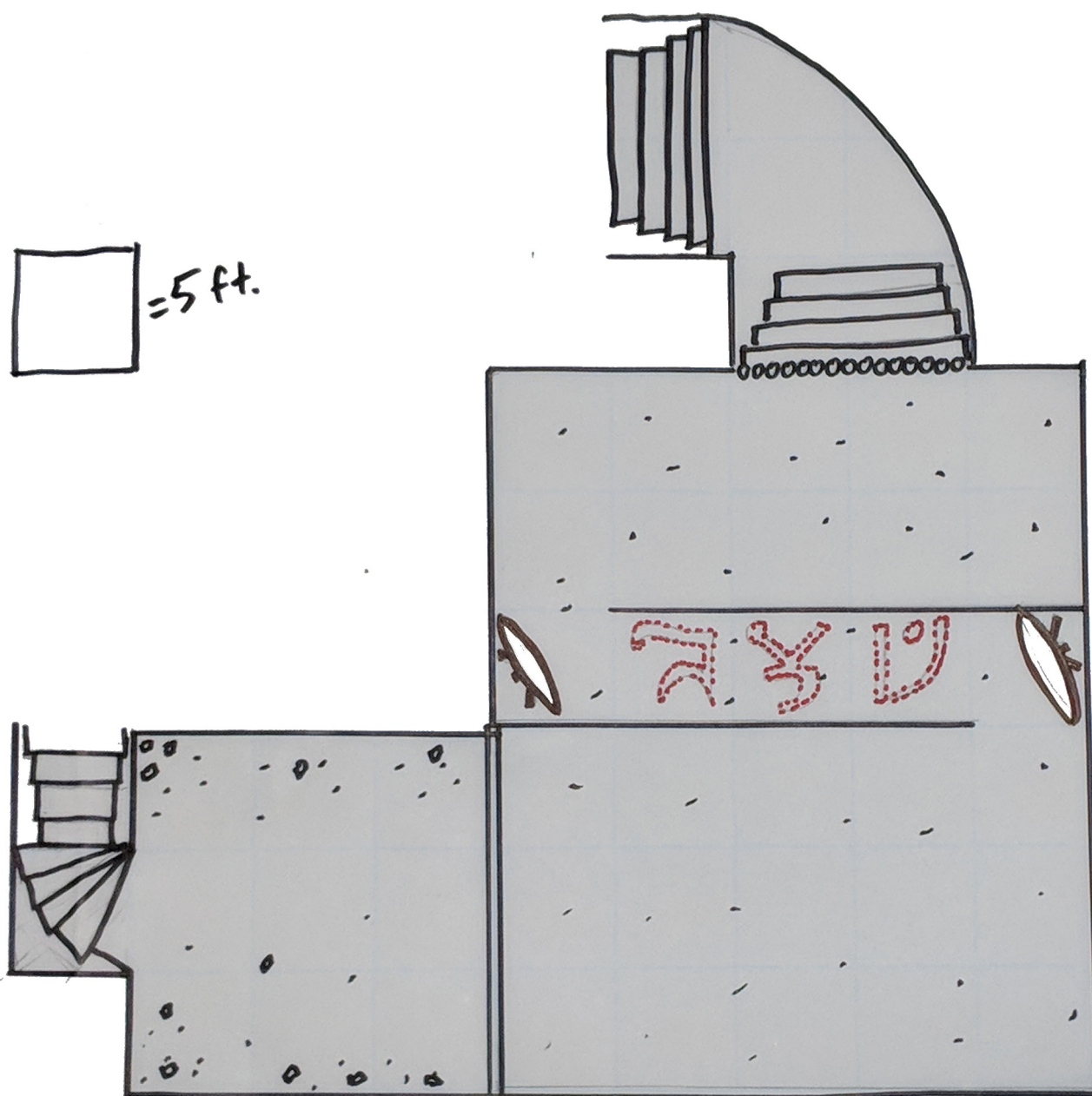
ACTIONS

Slam. Melee Weapon Attack: +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. **Hit:** 4 (1d6 + 1) bludgeoning damage.

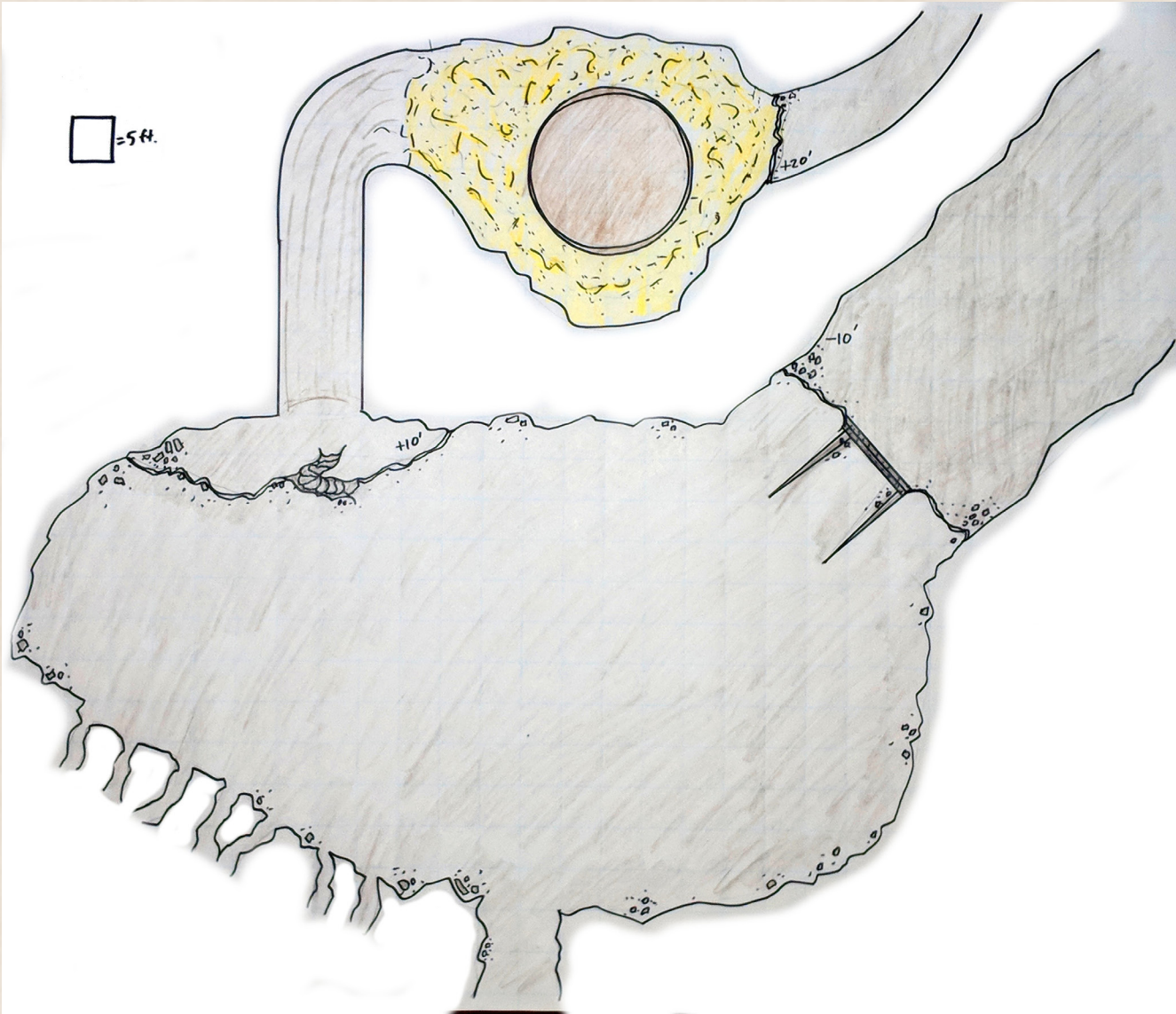
APPENDIX 3. RECEPTION WITH LABELS



APPENDIX 4. RECEPTION WITHOUT LABELS



APPENDIX 5. NELACOR'S LAIR



APPENDIX 6. MAGIC ITEM (PLAYER HANDOUT)

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

DIMENSIONAL SHACKLES (TREASURE TABLE G)

Wondrous Item, rare

You can use an action to place these shackles on an Incapacitated creature. The shackles adjust to fit a creature of Small to Large size. In addition to serving as mundane Manacles, the shackles prevent a creature bound by them from using any method of extradimensional Movement, including teleportation or travel to a different plane of existence. They don't prevent the creature from passing-through an interdimensional portal.

You and any creature you designate when you use the shackles can use an action to remove them. Once every 30 days, the bound creature can make a DC 30 Strength Athletics) check. On a success, the creature breaks free and destroys the shackles. This item is found on **Magic Item Table G** in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.

APPENDIX 7. DUNGEON MASTER TIPS This adventure is designed for **three to seven 5th-10th level characters** and is optimized for **five characters with an average party level (APL) of 7**. Characters outside this level range cannot participate in this adventure.

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To DM an adventure, you **must** have 3 to 7 players—each with their own character whose level is within the adventure’s level range. Characters playing in a **hardcover** adventure may continue to play to but if they play a different hardcover adventure, they **can’t return** to the first one if they’re outside its level range.

PREPARING THE ADVENTURE

Before you start play, consider the following:

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

Players can play an adventure they previously played as a Player or Dungeon Master but may only play it once with a given character. Ensure each player has their character’s adventure logsheet (if not, get one from the organizer). The players fill out the adventure name, session number, date, and your name and DCI number. In addition, the player also fills in the starting values for advancement and treasure checkpoints, downtime days, and renown. These are updated at the conclusion of the session.

Each player is responsible for maintaining an accurate logsheet. If you have time, you can do a quick

scan of a player’s character sheet to ensure that nothing looks out of order. If you see magic items of very high rarities or strange arrays of ability scores, you can ask players to provide documentation for the irregularities. If they cannot, feel free to restrict item use or ask them to use a standard ability score array.

Point players to the D&D Adventurers League Players Guide for reference. If players wish to spend downtime days and it’s the beginning of an adventure or episode, they can declare their activity and spend the days now, or they can do so at the end of the adventure or episode. Players should select their characters’ spells and other daily options prior to the start of the adventure, unless the adventure specifies otherwise. Feel free to reread the adventure description to help give players hints about what they might face.

ADJUSTING THIS ADVENTURE

When combat is a possibility, the adventure will provide a sidebar that helps you to determine the best mix/number of opponents to provide them with to create an appropriate challenge. While you’re not bound to these adjustments; they’re here for your convenience and consideration.

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

DETERMINING PARTY STRENGTH

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