



Tarnished Reputation

A One-Round DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® BLACKWHEEL COMPANY™ Faction Adventure for 4th to 7th-Level Characters

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Based on the original DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® rules created by E. Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson and the new DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game designed by Jonathan Tweet, Monte Cook, Skip Williams, Rich Baker, and Peter Adkison.

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Adventure Background

Several weeks ago, a fragment of prophecy was discovered by a Blackwheel platoon in the ruined Giant city of Ek Tnelwot:

*Twice born, Death Bloom's child
in Ek Tlelnak lives
Black-clad strangers come and begin the end*

Blackwheel researchers discovered a "sister" city to Ek Tnelwot, far on Western Xen'drik called Ek Tlelnak. Additional research pointed Blackwheel at a tableaux in that city which would describe the "end" hinted at by the first prophecy.

A platoon of Blackwheel Company members were sent to the ruins of Ek Tlelnak. There, in the center of the city next to the fallen center tower, they found a patch of vines grown in the shape of a dragonmark, all surrounding a tableaux depicting one giants' culture destroying another. The vines animated and attacked the platoon without mercy, killing all but one within seconds. Only the platoon leader Tevat Nolar, survived.

Though a highly decorated and respected member of Blackwheel, Tevat's will was crushed and, without even realizing it, he fled back to Stormreach, abandoning his platoon. When he arrived back at *The Glory Road*, Tevat was reduced to gibbering incoherently, occasionally punctuated by draconic prophecy. After three days of non-stop babble, and with all attempts at healing him proven fruitless, Tevat succumbed to his mysterious ailment.

Elsewhere, word of the increasing interest by various factions in the draconic prophecy has reached the Seren barbarians, and one tribe has sent its chieftain to investigate and, if possible, to scare Blackwheel Company (and other Forsaken) away from the prophecy.

Despite the circumstances, Blackwheel is not about to leave the bodies of its fallen behind — and furthermore, still needs that tableaux.

Adventure Synopsis

Introduction: The giant city of Ek Tlelnak is deep within the Marsh of Desolation. The party is sent to the city to find the rest of the fragments and to discover the mystery of Tevat's death. Armed with few clues, the party heads into the swamp.

Ek Tlelnak Lives: Most of the defenses of the city are long-lost, but a few remain. In addition to magical sentries, the residual magic of the area has made the plants in the city into a strange form of undead.

Flight Through Ek Tlelnak: Several undead vine horrors chase the party into the interior of the city.

Voices of the Past: As they explore the city, the party encounters numerous environmental hazards, undead plant monsters, and the remains of powerful Giant magic. They find an ever more-blighted landscape as they venture closer to the center of the city.

Mehmet's Demand: The party is approached by Mehmet, a Dragon Totem Hero. He is working on orders from his tribe's dragon to hinder Blackwheel Company's efforts to work with the Caldyn Fragments. He and his companions — an orc wizard named Gorashk and a Warforged barbarian named Rage — confront the party. He warns them that the factions' efforts are angering the wrong people. He has not yet been ordered to kill, but leaves the party with a clear warning: Blackwheel must back off.

The Death Bloom: In the center of the city, they find a living dragonmark of unknown design formed of glowing tendrils of a massive plant — an undead yellow musk creeper. The remains of the original adventuring party, now more plant than person, protect the plant.

Troubleshooting

Mehmet: Mehmet, the Dragon Totem Hero, is intended to be a recurring villain. At 11th-level, he clearly outmatches

the party, but does not, at the time this adventure takes place, have orders from his tribe's dragon to kill the PCs. His companions, Rage and Gorashk, are under no such orders; Gorashk respects Mehmet's wishes, but Rage will stop at nothing to kill the party.

Tone: There are two main tones you should try to present during this adventure — encounters 1, 3, and 4 are intentionally slower, with a broad sense of exploration. However, underneath the scenic vistas, you should present a sense of mystery and despair. The other encounters are designed for quick-paced escalation of challenges. A single undead vine horror appears, and the party narrowly defeats it... then more show up, forcing the party to flee — and as they do, their very escape route crumbles beneath their feet.

Adventure Start

Part One: Prophecy Revealed.

The adventure begins as the party rouses after a restless night in one of the few dry spots in the Marsh of Desolation. The PCs have been tasked with finding the rest of Tevat Nolar's platoon, finding out what happened to them, and retrieving the remaining pieces of the prophecy tableau.

Curse Tevat Nolar and curse the whole of Xen'drik! Two weeks, you've been stuck in this accursed swamp. Tevat Nolar abandons his platoon in Ek Tlelnak in a fit of insanity, and you get sent in to clean up the mess. His death at least saved his family the embarrassment of his impending court martial.

You haven't slept right in a week, not since you entered the Marsh of Desolation, and it's all because of that weak-willed black-leather.

Nothing is right here — strange animals track your movement through the swamp, bizarre visions haunt your dreams, and you could see strange green lights in the distance from the only dry spot you found to camp last night.

You have just three things: a rubbing of a tableaux containing fragments of draconic prophecy and giant history that Tevat was clutching as he died, the location of the giant city he and his group were investigating... and this assignment. His final coherent screams — "I left them there! They live! They live! Death Bloom's children live in the shadows of the fallen tower!" — still echo in your head, but that's no excuse.

Few things were known about the circumstances of Tevat's death. Whatever happened to him in there, in that wretched swamp, drove him mad. You were able to pry some details from your overly-chatty and jovial quartermaster, the all-too-familiar half-orc, Gridd. What you learned was a bit surprising. Tevat's platoon was one of yours in the Six Paths battalion, a sister platoon of yours under the command of Sgt. Skyne Tragar. They'd just come off a surgical strike of a Codex warehouse and had earned high praise for their Sergeant and battalion. The rumor has it that while they were on hard-earned R&R, they were summoned by General Ogdin and immediately dispatched on a clandestine mission to the center of this host-forsaken mire. This makes twice now that General Ogdin has personally pulled Six Paths platoons in the service of the White Hand battalion, and tensions are higher than ever between their respective leadership.

Company infighting aside, Sgt. Tragar's orders were clear: No one leaves members of their platoon behind, not in the Blackwheel Company. And not in the Six Paths battalion, she growled under her breath.. Your battalion's reputation is tarnished, and there is a mark on Skyne Tragar's nearly flawless record of service. You've been sent to determine exactly what happened. In the process, you have the potential to learn more about the Draconic Prophecy. Perhaps more importantly, you have the opportunity to restore the reputation of your stalwart commanding officer and your battalion; it's time to break camp. The city awaits!

At dawn, as the party packs up to move out, they find a three-pronged Xen'drik boomerang lodged in a tree inside the camp within inches of where each of them slept. A search check does not reveal any traffic into or out of the camp.

The PCs are still an hour's march through the filthy, calf-deep swamp water away from the city. Take this time to encourage the players to introduce themselves during the hellish march to Encounter 1.

1. Ek Tlelnak Lives (EL 4)

Although most of the ancient defenses surrounding the city stopped functioning thousands of years ago, some yet remain. As the party approaches the city, read the following:

The nearby plants are strangely gray, withered, and somehow not wholly alive. Many are tropical plants that don't normally thrive in swampy areas. The plants have giant blossoms, some as large as six feet across. Instead of beautiful fragrances, however, these flowers give off the scent of rotting flesh.

Ahead of you, glowing green orbs bob and weave in haphazard circles around the remains of the outermost defenses of the city. They become agitated, buzzing and moving in increasingly chaotic patterns the closer you get.

There are hundreds of orbs surrounding the city, though only as many orbs as there are characters are ever in the vicinity of the characters. Each orb is approximately four feet in diameter. Some glow more brightly than others, while some blink off and on. When the giants still inhabited this city, the orbs' procession was neat and orderly, but the orbs' magic is failing at different rates, leaving them somewhat more chaotic today.

Anyone who gets within 100 feet of the city's perimeter is attacked by an orb. The orb makes a ranged touch attack at +7; for this attack, characters are flat-footed. If this hits, the character is exhausted for 3 minutes. Otherwise, this spell has the same effect as *ray of exhaustion* (DC 13). Each character is shot by a single bolt; if it misses, the character is ignored by further orbs.

The orbs have an AC of 16, a hardness of 8 and 20hp. Once destroyed, they return within 1d6 hours. New orbs do not attack party members that have already been shot at.

Exhaustion: An exhausted character moves at half speed and takes a -6 penalty to Strength and Dexterity.

Once the characters move further into the perimeter of the city, read the following:

Although dry patches are becoming more prevalent, you still must slog through several deep spots of water to move into the city. A floating patch of gray algae lurches at you, forming a vaguely humanoid shape as it moves in for the attack.

Use **Map 1**. Place the characters near (C) on the map. The undead vine horror appears at (V). A Spot check DC 15 (to spot the undead vine horror as it approaches) is required to act in the surprise round for this encounter. The locations of the undead assassin vines it can animate are marked with (A); it can only animate one undead assassin vine at a time, but it can switch between vines as a free action as necessary to maximize the number of characters its animated vines can reach.

Foes:

Undead Vine Horror (1): hp 54; Combat Statistic

Undead Assassin Vine (special): hp 30; Combat Statistic

Tactics: The undead vine horror attacks to the death, using its ability to move through cracks in the ruins to move from character to character. It animates vines to attack any divine spellcasters in the group (though unintelligent, it has an innate sense of spellcasters) while it engages any fighters itself. Any undead assassin vines animated by the undead vine horror revert to normal vines when the undead vine horror is defeated.

Features of the Area

Deep Swamp: There is about 4 feet of standing water in these squares. It costs 4 squares of movement for Medium characters to enter these squares. Small characters must swim (Medium characters can choose to swim), and Tumbling is impossible.

Shallow Swamp: The water in these squares is approximately 1 foot in depth. It costs 2 squares of movement to enter these squares. The DC of Tumble checks increases by 2 in these squares.

Canal Walls: The crumbling edges of a canal leading into the city are in these squares. The walls are 2 feet thick, and characters can stand on them to gain a bonus for higher ground (+1 to attack rolls). They can also be used for cover against attacks from the other side of the wall (+4 AC, +2 Reflex). Climb DC 20, break DC 35, hardness 8, 90 hp.

At the end of this encounter, the orbs' *ray of exhaustion* effect ends no matter how much time has passed.

Scaling the Encounter:

4th-level: Only one Undead Assassin Vine can be created during the encounter.

6th-level: No change.

7th-level: Begin the encounter with two animated Undead Assassin Vines

Undead Vine Horror (augmented Vine Horror) CR 4

Fiend Folio 185

HP 54

NE Medium Plant (Undead)

Init -1; **Senses** blindsight 30 ft.; Listen +3, Spot +3

Languages None

AC 18, touch 10, flat-footed 18

HD 5

Immune poison, magic sleep effects, paralysis, polymorph, stunning, mind-affecting spells and abilities, sneak attack, and non-lethal damage; half damage from piercing and slashing

Fort +8, **Ref** +1, **Will** +2

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares); swim 20 ft. (4 squares)

Melee 2 slams +7 each (1d6+4)

Base Atk +3; **Grp** +7

Atk Options Animate Vines

Abilities Str 18, Dex 8, Con —, Int 5, Wis 13, Cha 10

Feats Alertness, Blind-Fight

Skills Hide +15, Listen +3, Spot +3, Swim +16

Possessions None

Animate Vines (Sp) A vine horror can animate any vine or similar plant life within 90 feet as a free action. An animated vine fights as an assassin vine in all respects. An animated vine loses its ability to fight if the vine horror that animated it is incapacitated or moves out of range.

Malleability (Ex) Because of its unusual body structure, a vine horror can compress its body enough to squeeze through a 1-inch-wide crack. Cracks and similar openings that are 1 inch or more in width do not slow the vine horror at all.

Undead Assassin Vine (augmented Assassin Vine) CR 3

Monster Manual 20

hp 30 hp

Large Plant (Undead)

Init +0; **Senses** blindsight 30 ft.

Languages None

AC 15, touch 9, flat-footed 15

HD 4

Immune electricity, poison, magic sleep effects, paralysis, polymorph, stunning, mind-affecting spells and abilities, sneak attack, and non-lethal damage

Resist cold 10, fire 10

Fort +7, **Ref** +1, **Will** +2

Speed 5 ft. (1 square)

Melee slam +7 (1d6+7)

Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.

Base Atk +3; **Grp** +12

Atk Options Construct, Entangle, Improved Grab

Abilities Str 20, Dex 10, Con —, Int —, Wis 13, Cha 9

Possessions None

Constrict (Ex) An assassin vine deals 1d6+7 points of damage with a successful grapple check on a character that it

has grappled with its Improved Grab ability.

Entangle (Su) An assassin vine can animate plants within 30 feet as a free action (Reflex save DC 13 partial). The effect ends when the assassin vine dies. This ability is otherwise the same as entangle (caster level 4th).

Improved Grab (Ex) After hitting a victim with a slam attack, an assassin vine can attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If it wins the grapple check, it establishes a hold and can constrict.

2. Flight Through Ek Tlelnak (EL varies)

After narrowly defeating the undead vine horror, a half dozen more approach. Swamp deeper than they can wade through is ahead of them, and it is filled with undead vine horrors.

You barely have time to catch your breath before a dozen more of the creatures rise up out of the water. As a group, you survey the lay of the land, and find the crumbling edge of an ancient canal. You can easily scramble up it and use the decaying berm of the canal to get deeper into the city.

Play this scene frantically, playing up the creepy nature of the vine horrors who move in a lumbering yet somehow fluid manner, deforming into a splash of gray algae, then crawling along the surface of pools, before finally leaping towards the party in the shape of a humanoid.

To simulate the results of this frenetic chase, print out **DM's Handout 1** and place a token representing the party on the appropriate square. This is an abstract representation of the relative distance between the two groups. To maintain the tension, do not show the characters the abstract representation, and instead describe the distance between the groups as near-miss attempts to grab the characters, the party momentarily stumbling, and so on.

The chase consists of a series of events taking place in and around the canal walls as the party moves deeper and deeper into Ek Tlelnak. For each event, roll on the following table, then handle the event as described. At the end of each event, move the token representing the party either further away from or closer to the line representing the end of the chase.

At the end of the 10th event, or at the end of any event where the party's token falls in the Fight! or Escaped! squares, the chase ends. Depending on the outcome of the chase, the party may have to fight additional vine men before escaping into the city.

d6 — Result

- 1-2 – Easy Progress
- 3 – Vine Horror Attack
- 4 – Crumbling Walls
- 5 – Gap
- 6 – Swamp Gas

Easy Progress

In a moment's respite, the walls of the canal you're traversing are stable and level as you pick your way across them quickly.

Move the party's token one square towards the Escaped! square.

Vine Horror Attack

It only takes a moment's hesitation, a single mis-step from one member of your platoon, and suddenly, one of the creatures is on you!

Foes: The lesser undead vine horror (same stats as above, except 26 hp) fights to the death. There are no plants large enough at the top of the wall for it to animate. If the party defeats it in three rounds or less, move the party one square towards the Escaped! square. If the party takes longer than three rounds, move the party one square towards the Fight! square. The undead vine horror may appear on any square on the combat map.

Undead Vine Horror (1): hp 26; Combat Statistic

Crumbling Walls

Suddenly, the berm of the canal gives way, sending giant blocks of stone crashing 30 feet into the swamp.

Just before the canal crumbles, give each character a Spot check (DC 14) to notice the imminent collapse. Each character must make a Reflex save (DC 18). Characters that succeeded on the Spot check gain a +2 circumstance bonus to this save. Characters that fail the save take 1d6 damage, but manage to catch the lip of the collapse before falling into the swamp.

If four or more characters fail their save, move the party one square towards the Fight! square; if one or fewer fail their save, move the party one square towards the Escape! square. Otherwise, do not move the party on the Chase Track.

Re-roll this event if it comes up more than once during the chase.

Gap

Ahead of you, a 10-foot gap lies between you and escape. Several of the plant creatures have gathered around the base of the gap, and have started climbing.

The characters must traverse a 10-foot gap in the berm. There are several vines surrounding the gap that could be used to make a makeshift bridge (DC 10 Knowledge (Engineering) check to spot them; DC 12 Use Rope check to construct the bridge). If the party crosses the gap in under 3 rounds, move their token one square closer to the Escaped! square. Otherwise, move the token one square closer to the Fight! square.

Swamp Gas

You pick your way across the canal walls quickly, when suddenly, there is a burst of green gas from a nearby plant. The gas envelops you. Your mind clouds, and you stumble precariously at the edge of the wall, as the tendrils of a carnivorous plant grasp hungrily at you.

Each character must make a Will save (DC 20) or become stunned for a round. The plant itself is easily killed, and retreats after a single tendril takes a 4 points of damage (AC 12, slashing weapons only). If all characters fail the save, move the party's token two squares closer to the Fight! square.

Fight or Flight

At the end of the 10 events, if the party has reached the Escaped! square, read the following and go to Encounter 3.

Finally, the canal's wall drops you into the city proper. With skill and no small amount of luck, you've managed to lose the plant creatures and can search the city for the central tower at your leisure.

If the party does not manage to make it to the Escaped! square, they still reach the inner city, but must fight one or more undead vine men before they can proceed.

Finally, the canal's wall drops you into the city proper. Unfortunately, while you managed to outpace the bulk of the oncoming horde, a few advance scouts are waiting for you.

The square the characters end in on the Chase Track tells you how many undead vine men the party must face (and the hp of each) before proceeding into the city. Use **Map 2**. Set the characters up at the end of the canal wall, at (C), while the undead vine horrors start in any of the squares marked (V).

Tactics: There are no plants appropriately sized for the undead vine horrors to animate during this combat, so they are unable to use their animate vines ability during this combat. The undead vine horrors are not intelligent enough to use even basic tactics such as flanking, but have an innate hatred of spellcasters. They will move to attack any divine spellcaster they can reach, even at the expense of taking attacks of opportunity from more able combatants to do so. If they cannot reach a spellcaster in a single move, they move in and attack the closest character.

Features of the Area

Shallow Swamp: The water in these squares is approximately 1 foot in depth. It costs 2 squares of movement to enter these squares. The DC of Tumble checks increases by 2 in these squares.

Canal Walls: The crumbling edges of a canal leading into the city are in these squares. The walls are 2 feet thick, and characters can stand on them to gain a bonus for higher ground (+1 to attack rolls). They can also be used for cover against attacks from the other side of the wall (+4 AC, +2 Reflex). Climb DC 20, break DC 35, hardness 8, 90 hp.

Part Two: A Blighted Past.

Voices of the Past

Ek Tlelnak is a vast and mysterious city, full of wonders to make even the most experienced adventurers swoon. This encounter presents a number of non-combat encounters the party can encounter while searching the city ruins for evidence of the previous platoon. The encounters have no set locations, and you can present them in any order, both before and after “The Death Bloom.” If the adventure is moving too quickly, feel free to have the PC’s meander around each section before reaching the final encounter.

The city was once vast, but is almost completely overgrown now, with only a thin sliver of ruins still remaining. The canal walls dump the characters at one edge, while the central square they seek lies ahead of them through massive piles of rubble and occasional patches of swamp and jungle plants.

1. Crashed Monolith

Giant black monoliths are scattered throughout the city -- some float in the sky, while others are crashed into the ground. A very few still have some residual magic.

You see a number of massive black disk-shaped monoliths, easily a hundred feet per side and four feet thick, floating in the sky above you, ranging from just a few dozen yards to hundreds of feet high. You see others floating in scattered clumps throughout the city.

Just ahead, one of the monoliths, cracked and scarred, is half buried in an intersection of streets, surrounded by faint outlines where buildings once stood. It hums faintly and crackles with energy.

If the party approaches the monolith, a circle of runes appears on the stone and pulses with a faint yellow light. A Knowledge (engineering) check (DC 20) can determine the original function — precursors to the skylifts of Sharn. If anyone steps into the circle, the runes pulse red momentarily. One round later, the monolith lurches into the sky, carrying anyone on board. The characters must make a DC 10 Balance check or be thrown from the platform as it rises, taking 1d6 damage as they tumble off.

The runes stop glowing red and turn a steady purple while the stone rises unstably to ninety feet in the air and hovers; at it comes to a stop, the circle of runes fades. Two rounds later, the runes pulse red again, followed a round later by a decent to the ground, where it lands clumsily.

2. Quiet Disagreement

Many reminders of the giant’s civilization are mysterious and their purpose unknown. As the characters round a corner of a ruined building, read the following:

Ahead, in the center of a paved area, you see a mosaic. The tiles are broken, dull, and colorless, and show an imposing barbarian arguing with a warforged. Amazingly, the tiles rotate and drift, animating a brief scene. Though there is no sound, it’s clear that the argument is heated, with the warforged repeatedly raising his massive greatsword and slamming it into the ground. After a minute of argument, the scene is repeated.

A Knowledge (geography) check DC 15 will tell a character that the barbarian is Seren; a DC 20 reveals that the barbarian is a dragon shaman; finally, a DC 25 reveals that he is a Seren tribe chieftain. A Knowledge (history) check DC 14 reveals that the warforged is of modern design.

The image is replaying an argument between Mehmet and Rage as to how to deal with the characters. Mehmet prefers to merely warn the characters now and deal with them later if necessary, while Rage would rather simply

dispose of them immediately to ensure there can't be any problems in the future.

If the party investigates the mosaic for more than 1 minute, the image clears, then an image replaying 30 seconds of the party's interaction with the mosaic is shown, which also repeats.

3. Art Installation

While the party explores the city, if they take a moment to gain their bearings or rest, the following occurs:

You hear a clinking, like party revelers' toasting of glasses — rising from the ground is a swarm of crystals. Quickly, they form a loosely-spaced column of floating crystals. The crystals themselves move within the column, some moving slowly, and others zipping around.

Upon investigation, the crystals appear to be burned out *ioun stones*. A DC 14 Search check finds a single working crystal, a *dusty rose prism ioun stone*. Pulling the stone from the swarm requires a Strength check (DC 12). Unlike most ioun stones (which take 24 hours to attune to a character), this one's effects take affect immediately.

Event Treasure: *dusty rose prism ioun stone*; +1 insight bonus to AC.

3. Ruined Temple

If the party was particularly roughed up by the undead vine horror attacks, or is enjoying the exploration of the city, you can use this encounter to give them brief respite.

A massive structure, flanked by dozens of toppled statues, looms ahead. You catch a glimpse of an alcove that looks large enough and secure enough to shelter you for a moment's rest. Inside the alcove is a pedestal made of an unknown stone, carved with intricate designs.

The design carved in the stone is similar to that of the dragonmark formed by the Death Bloom (see Encounter 5), but this truly is a safe place. If a character touches the pedestal, they feel momentarily calm. Have them make a Will save DC 14. If successful, the character heals 2d8+3 damage. The pedestal functions three times (whether successfully healing or not) before the last of its magic ebbs away.

4. Mehmet's Demand (EL Varies)

You can place this encounter at any time during or after the events that take place in "Voices of the Past."

Moving further into the ruins, you catch a glimpse of movement and a glint of adamantite in the rubble ahead. Instinctively, your squad immediately takes cover. A moment later, the head of a warforged bobs between two columns fifty feet ahead of you, definitely moving in your direction. A tall barbarian and orc in tattered green robes walk alongside it. A quick assessment of the nearby terrain makes it clear you will be unable to avoid them. The question is: do you fight or talk?

If the party has encountered the mosaic, it is immediately obvious that the barbarian and warforged here are the same as shown in the mosaic's moving images.

Due to their ongoing argument, Mehmet and his companions take 0 on their Spot and Listen (which garners them a 12 on Spot and 10 on Listen). The characters are assumed to take 20 on their Hide and Move Silently checks, so the characters gain a surprise round on Mehmet, Rage, and Gorashk.

The party may set up anywhere in the area marked as the Start area, while Mehmet, Rage, and Gorashk start at (M), (R), and (G) respectively.

Mehmet is clearly the leader of the group, and attempts to talk to the characters. He is, however, arrogant and stubborn:

The barbarian is built like a bloodstriker dinosaur. He scowls at you, raising a mace festooned with bones. In a disconcertingly calm, but powerful, voice, he says, "Go home, insects! The secrets of Ek Tlelnak belong to the past, not to carrion feeders chasing Caldyn's scraps. So says Hruuagoryn, my voice, and my people's god. Tell your dwarf to stay out of the affairs that rightly belong only to dragons."

With some diplomacy, especially if the characters give reasons why Blackwheel Company is interested in the prophecy, they can convince Mehmet and his companions to leave them alone. Even then, the Seren is gruff and suspicious.

Creatures: Mehmet has no reason to attack the PCs, but will defend himself if they attack him, Gorashk, or Rage at this point. If the PCs persuade Mehmet to leave, Rage becomes furious and attacks the party on his own. Mehmet looks bemused for a moment, then strides off. Gorashk follows Mehmet.

Mehmet: hp 142; Combat Statistic

Rage: hp 43; Combat Statistic

Gorashk: hp 17; Combat Statistic

Tactics: Mehmet generally keeps his Senses aura up outside combat, but switches to his Toughness aura in combat. Mehmet clearly outmatches the party, easily able to take them all down without breaking a sweat. He prefers, however, to strip them of power — by first using an Entangling Exhalation-enhanced breath weapon, then sundering any shields they wield, then disarming their weapons — to prove to them how small they are compared to him (and by extrapolation, his tribe's dragon, Hruuagoryn). He moves from character to character, disarming each in turn. Note that while Mehmet does not have Improved Disarm, he can afford a few attacks of opportunity as he disarms the PCs.

Mehmet strides off the battlefield confidently once all characters have been disarmed. Mehmet also leaves if either Gorashk or Rage fall in combat. If forced to stay in combat, Mehmet uses strikes for non-lethal damage (taking a -4 penalty to do so). No matter the circumstance, Mehmet will not use his Rage ability in this combat, feeling that the characters are beneath that.

In the first round, Gorashk casts *mage armor* on herself; in the second round, she seeks out a spellcaster and uses *touch of idiocy*; in the third and fourth rounds, she casts *magic missile*, always spreading the bolts among as many different targets as possible. After the fourth round, Gorashk begins to use Aid Another actions to boost Mehmet's armor class.

Rage draws his great sword and wades into battle with bloodthirsty eagerness. His orders from the Cabal were to stop the PCs from gaining access to the Death Bloom's secrets, and he intends to fulfill them. He is careful to fight from a location which yields the least opportunity for being flanked. He has a particular hatred for rogues, and attacks them first if possible.

If still alive, Gorashk follows Mehmet when he leaves. Rage, however, is not so easily swayed. He continues the battle until dead. (Mehmet casts a disapproving glance at Rage as he leaves, but does nothing to stop him from continuing the fight.) If the characters pursue Mehmet, he will turn and fight until one character goes down, then order the PCs as a group to yield. If they do so, he considers his warning well-delivered and leaves them. Otherwise, he fights until a second character is down, then orders them to yield again. He continues like this until the PCs yield or are all left for dead.

Features of the Area

Low Stone Walls: Crumbling block stone walls are in these squares. The walls are 2 feet thick, and characters can stand on them to gain a bonus for higher ground (+1 to attack rolls). They can also be used for cover against attacks from the other side of the wall (+4 AC, +2 Reflex). Climb DC 20, break DC 35, hardness 8, 90 hp.

Mehmet CR 11

Player's Handbook II 11

Male human barbarian 3/dragon shaman 8

hp 142 hp

CN humanoid

Init +7; **Senses** Spot +12, Listen +10

Languages Common, Draconic

AC 13, touch 11, flat-footed 13

HD 11

Resist acid 10

Fort +13, **Ref** +4, **Will** +11

Speed 45 ft. (8 squares)
Melee +2 *adamantine heavy mace* +12/+7 (1d8+7)
Reach 5 ft.
Base Atk +10; **Grp** +15
Atk Options Cleave, Breath Weapon, Improved Sunder, Power Attack

Abilities Str 21, Dex 12, Con 18, Int 13, Wis 19, Cha 15
Feats Cleave, Dash, Entangling Exhalation (*Races of the Dragon* 101), Improved Initiative, Improved Sunder, Power Attack, Skill Focus (Hide), Skill Focus (Move Silently) **Possessions** combat gear

Rage (Ex): Once per day, Mehmet can rage, giving him +4 to Strength, +4 to Constitution, and a +2 morale bonus to Will saves. His AC gets a -2 penalty. His rage lasts 9 rounds.

Uncanny Dodge (Ex): Mehmet retains his Dexterity bonus to AC when flat-footed or when struck by an invisible attacker.

Trap Sense (Ex): Mehmet has a +2 dodge bonus to his AC against traps.

Draconic Auras (Su): Mehmet can choose any one of his Draconic Auras to be active at once; changing the active aura is a free action. His auras affect himself and his allies within 30 feet and line of effect of himself.

Draconic Aura — Energy Shield (Su): Any creature striking Mehmet with a natural or nonreach melee weapon takes 4 points of acid damage.

Draconic Aura — Power (Su): Mehmet has a +2 bonus to all melee damage rolls.

Draconic Aura — Resistance (Su): Mehmet has 10 points of resistance to acid.

Draconic Aura — Senses (Su): Mehmet gains +2 bonus to Listen and Spot checks and to Initiative rolls.

Draconic Aura — Toughness (Su): Mehmet has DR 2/–.

Draconic Aura — Vigor (Su): Mehmet has fast healing 2 when below 71 hp.

Draconic Adaptation — Water Breathing (Ex): Mehmet can breathe underwater indefinitely and can freely use abilities under water.

Breath Weapon (Su): Once per 1d4 rounds, Mehmet can use a 15-ft. cone of acid dealing 4d6 points of damage. When Mehmet uses his breath weapon, he can use his Entangling Exhalation feat to choose to have it deal half damage (2d6 acid damage), but any creature that takes damage becomes entangled and takes an extra 1d6 points of acid damage at the start of each of Mehmet's turns for 1d4 turns.

Draconic Resolve (Ex): Mehmet is immune to paralysis and sleep effects and to the frightful presence of dragons.

Touch of Vitality (Su): Mehmet can heal up to 17 points of damage per day. This healing can be divided into as many creatures as desired and does not have to be used all at once.

Natural Armor (Ex): Mehmet has natural armor +1.

Rage (raging) CR 4
Male-personality warforged barbarian 4
hp 43 hp
CE construct (living construct)
Init +2; **Senses** Spot +6, Listen +6
Languages Common

AC 12, touch 10, flat-footed 12
HD 4
Resist Light Fortification
Fort +9, **Ref** +3, **Will** +3

Speed 40 ft. (8 squares)
Melee masterwork greatsword +10 (2d6+5), slam +9 (1d4+5), or short bow +7 (1d6)
Base Atk +5; **Grp** +8
Atk Options Power Attack, Improved Bull Rush, *elixir of fire breath*

Abilities Str 20, Dex 14, Con 19, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 6
Feats Improved Bull Rush, Power Attack **Possessions** combat gear plus *potion of repair light damage*

Rage (Ex): Twice per day, Rage can rage, giving him +4 to Strength, +4 to Constitution, and a +2 morale bonus to Will saves. His AC gets a -2 penalty. His rage lasts 4 rounds. The above statistics already take his use of Rage into account, and Rage has already used one use of his Rage ability today.

Uncanny Dodge (Ex): Mehmet retains his Dexterity bonus to AC when flat-footed or when struck by an invisible attacker.

Trap Sense (Ex): Mehmet has a +1 dodge bonus to his AC against traps.

elixir of fire breath (Sp): Rage has recently drunk an elixir of fire breath; though he has used two gouts, he has one remaining. He can target a single creature up to 25 feet away, causing 4d6 fire damage (DC 13 Reflex save halves).

Composite Plating (Ex): Rage has a +2 armor bonus.

Light Fortification (Ex): When a critical hit or sneak attack is scored on Rage, there is a 25% chance that the critical hit or sneak attack is negated and damage is rolled normally.

If forced out of his rage (such as through the use of calm emotions), Rage has the following changed statistics:

hp 39 hp

AC 14, touch 12, flat-footed 14

Fort +9, **Ref** +3, **Will** +1

Speed 40 ft. (8 squares)

Melee masterwork greatsword +8 (2d6+3), slam +7 (1d4+3), or short bow +7 (1d6)

Abilities Str 16, Dex 14, Con 15, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 6

Gorashk **CR 5**

Female orc wizard 5

hp 17 hp

N humanoid

Init +3; **Senses** Spot +2, Listen +2

Languages Common, Orc, Draconic

AC 17, touch 13, flat-footed 11

HD 5

Fort +2, **Ref** +5, **Will** +6

Speed 40 ft. (8 squares)

Melee dagger +3 (1d6+2) or masterwork crossbow +3 (1d4/19-20)

Base Atk +2; **Grp** +2

Wizard Spells Prepared (CL 5th):

2nd—*touch of idiocy*

1st—*mage armor*, *magic missile* (2)

Abilities Str 14, Dex 14, Con 13, Int 14, Wis 10, Cha 6

Feats Brew Potion, Combat Casting, Scribe Scroll, Toughness **Possessions** combat gear plus *bracers of armor* +1, *cloak of resistance* +1, *potion of blur*, *potion of cure moderate wounds*

Light Sensitivity (Ex): Gorashk is dazzled in bright sunlight (this is reflected in the stats above).

5. The Death Bloom (EL 8)

The Death Bloom Caldyn discovered in the draconic prophecy is a massive undead yellow musk creeper. Its tendrils and roots form a massive dragonmark in the crumbling plaza. It is protected by the members of Tevat Nolar's adventuring and excavation party, now yellow musk zombies augmented by the residual magic of Ek Tlelnak. At the base of the Death Bloom are the remaining parts of the bloom prophecy.

Ahead of you, rising a hundred feet out of the cracked paving stones of Ek Tlelnak's central square, is what must be the Death Bloom. A massive plant towers even over the giant city's ruins. It is covered with gray flowers from which a yellow powder flows into the air. The area around the plant is sweet and cloying. Roots of the plant form an intricate, faintly glowing pattern. Five bodies clad in black leather are scattered around the base of the plant, their necks wrapped by tendrils. The Death Bloom sways unnaturally, then animates, tossing one limp body at you, while two more bodies stand and lurch towards you.

The meaning of this dragonmark is lost to the ages, but a Bardic Knowledge check (DC 17) detects some similarities to the fabled Mark of Death and to the Mark of Protection.

Foes: The Death Bloom is on the map at (D), and two Death Bloom's Children are at the spots marked (C). The characters enter the map from the south edge of the map, in the squares marked (P).

Death Bloom; hp 82; Combat Statistic

Death Bloom's Children (2): hp 70, 60; Combat Statistic

Tactics: The Death Bloom's Children fight under cover of the plant's tendrils, so that anyone who attacks them in melee is within reach of the Death Bloom's vine and puff attacks. The Death Bloom itself attempts to use its puff attack on each new individual who comes within range, concentrating its vine attacks on a single individual on all other rounds.

Other than the Death Bloom, there are no trees in the immediate area, so the Death Bloom's Children cannot use their Treewalk ability.

Both the Death Bloom and its children fight to the death.

Features of the Area

Low Stone Walls: Crumbling block stone walls are in these squares. The walls are 2 feet thick, and characters can stand on them to gain a bonus for higher ground (+1 to attack rolls). They can also be used for cover against attacks from the other side of the wall (+4 AC, +2 Reflex). Climb DC 20, break DC 35, hardness 8, 90 hp.

Dragonmark: Plant creatures within the area of this dragonmark gain a +2 bonus on attack rolls. Spells on the Earth domain and Plant domain spell lists are cast at +1 caster level. Creatures not of the plant type attempting to enter the area are affected as though by an *entangle* spell (caster level 1st) (Reflex DC 11).

Scaling the Encounter:

4th-Level Characters: Remove the 70 hp Death Bloom's Child

6th-Level Characters: Add one Death Bloom's Child (hp 45; Combat Statistic)

7th-Level Characters: Add two additional Death Bloom's Children (hp 45, 38; Combat Statistic)

Development: After the PCs defeat the Death Bloom, they easily find the remaining fragments of the prophecy tableau and can take rubbings of them and the bodies of the fallen Blackwheel Company members back to Stormreach. They will surely please their battalion leaders, but first they have to survive the trip home...

Death Bloom (augmented Yellow Musk Creeper) CR 6

Fiend Folio 190

hp 82

N Huge Plant

Init +3; **Senses** blindsight 30 ft.

Languages None

AC 21, touch 11, flat-footed 18

HD 10

Immune poison, magic sleep effects, paralysis, polymorph, stunning, mind-affecting spells and abilities, sneak attack, and non-lethal damage; regeneration 5

Fort +9, **Ref** +5, **Will** +3

Weakness fire and acid deal normal damage

Speed 5 ft. (1 square)

Melee 4 vine whips +7 each (1d6+2)

Ranged Touch musk puff +5 (DC 16, see below)

Reach 15 ft.

Base Atk +6; **Grp** +14

Atk Options Musk Puff

Abilities Str 14, Dex 16, Con 21, Int —, Wis 10, Cha 9

Feats Weapon Finesse^B

Skills —

Possessions None

Consume Intelligence (Ex) As a free action, the Death Bloom can extend tendrils into the head of any helpless or unresisting creature that occupies its space. These tendrils deal 1d4 points of Intelligence damage per round. If the damage reduces a victim's Intelligence to 0 the victim must make a Fortitude save (DC 16); those who succeed die.

Those who fail become a Death Bloom's Child the following round.

Musk Puff (Ex) This attack has a range of 30 feet. On a successful ranged touch attack, the victim must make a DC 16 Fortitude save or fall under a mind-affecting compulsion to get closer to the tree. This effect lasts 1d4 rounds. Victims get a new save to be released from the compulsion at the end of each round.

Musk Explosion (Ex) Upon its death, the Death Bloom explodes in a cloud of poisonous gas. All characters within 60 feet of the plant must make a Fortitude save (DC 14) or become infected with Death Bloom disease. (See the Death Bloom Disease cert for further information.)

Death Bloom's Child (augmented Wood Woad) CR 4

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hp 60, 70

N Medium Plant

Init +1; **Senses** low-light vision; Listen +3, Hide +7

Languages None

AC 17, touch 11, flat-footed 16

HD 8

Immune poison, magic sleep effects, paralysis, polymorph, stunning, mind-affecting spells and abilities, sneak attack, and non-lethal damage

Fort +9, **Ref** +5, **Will** +3

Weakness vulnerability to fire

Speed 40 ft. (8 squares)

Melee club +9/+4 (1d6+3)

Ranged club +7 (1d6+3)

Reach 5 ft.

Base Atk +6; **Grp** +9

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 8th):

at will—*warp wood* (DC 13)

Abilities Str 17, Dex 12, Con 16, Int 7, Wis 12, Cha 8

Feats Alertness, Lightning Reflexes^B, Stealthy, Track

Skills Balance +, Climb +9, Hide +7, Listen +3, Move Silently +4, Spot +4, Survival +4

Possessions None

Ending the Adventure

The adventure ends when the party has killed the Death Bloom and is able to retrieve the remaining pieces of the tableau. By retrieving the items and the bodies of the fallen Blackwheel Company members, the characters are able to restore honor to their battalion.

Any PCs that fail their save against the Death Bloom disease save gain the Death Bloom Disease cert. Finally, all PCs that survive the adventure gain the Keep the Boots Dry cert.

Adventure Questions

1. How did the PCs fare in the vine horror chase?

- a. They handily overcame each obstacle and outran the vine horror horde.
- b. They stumbled a few times, and had to fight undead vine men at the conclusion of the chase, but defeated them.
- c. The PCs were overrun by undead vine men and defeated by them.

2. How much of Ek Tlelnak did the PCs explore?

- a. The PCs explored every nook and cranny and hungered for more.
- b. The PCs explored much of what the city had to offer, but ignored other parts.
- b. The PCs barely scratched the surface of Ek Tlelnak.

3. How did the PCs tackle Mehmet's demand?

- a. The PCs simply hid quietly and let Mehmet and his group pass by.
 - b. The PCs used diplomacy to avoid the fight.
 - c. The PCs fought, but yielded to Mehmet when he requested it of them.
 - d. The PCs fought and were cut down by their refusal to yield to the Seren.
 - e. Against all odds, the PCs defeated Mehmet.
4. How did the PCs treat Mehmet?
- a. With respect, but not with deference.
 - b. Indifferently — he was just another obstacle to be overcome.
 - c. With open hostility.
5. How did the PCs handle the Death Bloom?
- a. The PCs took down the plant and its minions through superior tactics.
 - b. The PCs defeated the plant and its minions, but did so in a haphazard, disorganized manner.
 - c. The PCs became the next group of Death Bloom's Children.
6. How was the role-playing of the players?
- a. Fantastic; everyone was clearly a member of Blackwheel Company. United aim!
 - b. Good; the players made an effort to role-play where appropriate.
 - c. Poor; the characters were just numbers on a sheet of paper.

Story Objects

Death Bloom Disease

Cert ID: EXBC16

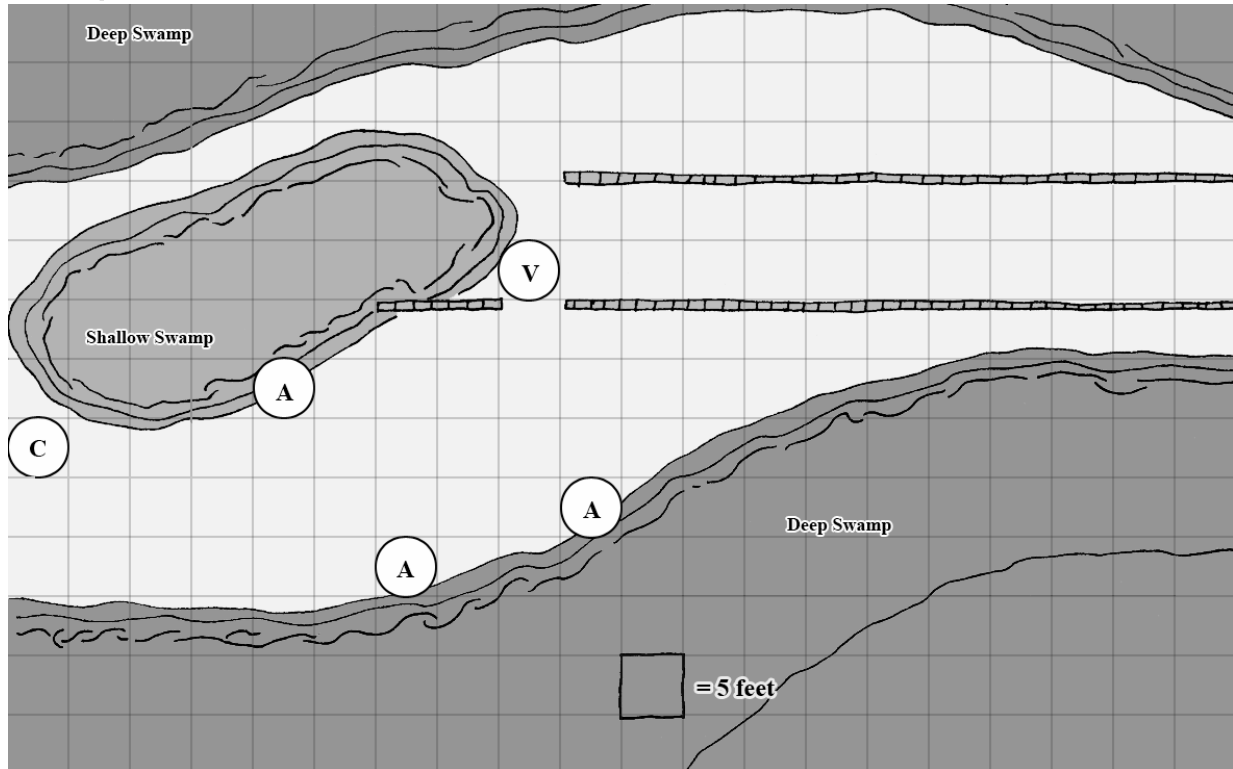
The PC has contracted Death Bloom disease, which causes the character to lose 5 ft. of movement from his or her speed during the next adventure the PC participates in.

Keep the Boots Dry

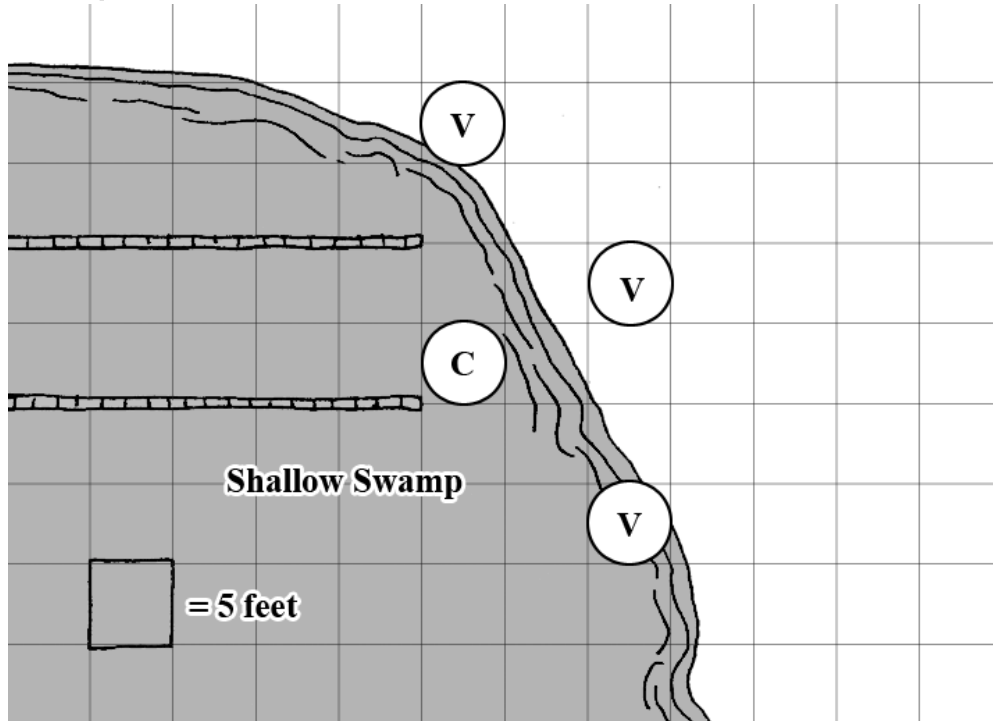
Cert ID: EXBC17

The PC has survived four long weeks of trudging through the Marsh of Desolation, and has a better constitution for it. The PC has a +1 bonus on Fortitude saves versus disease.

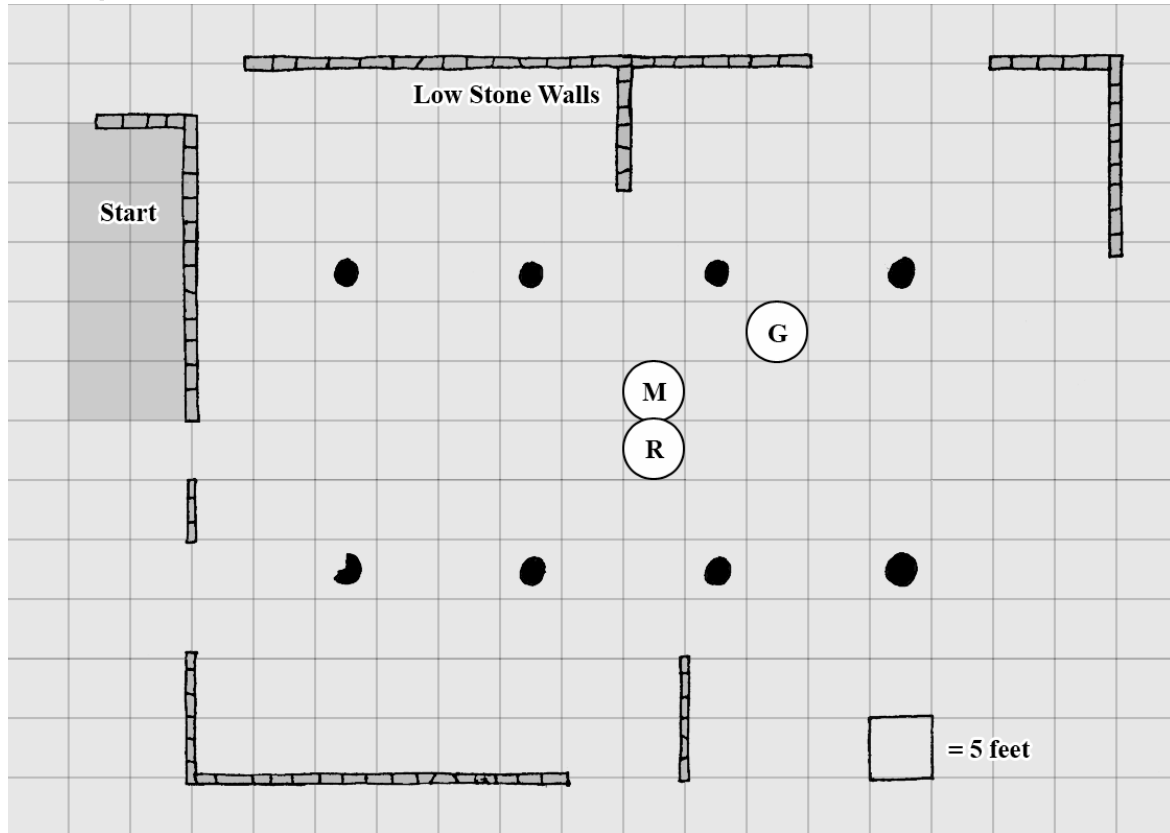
Map 1



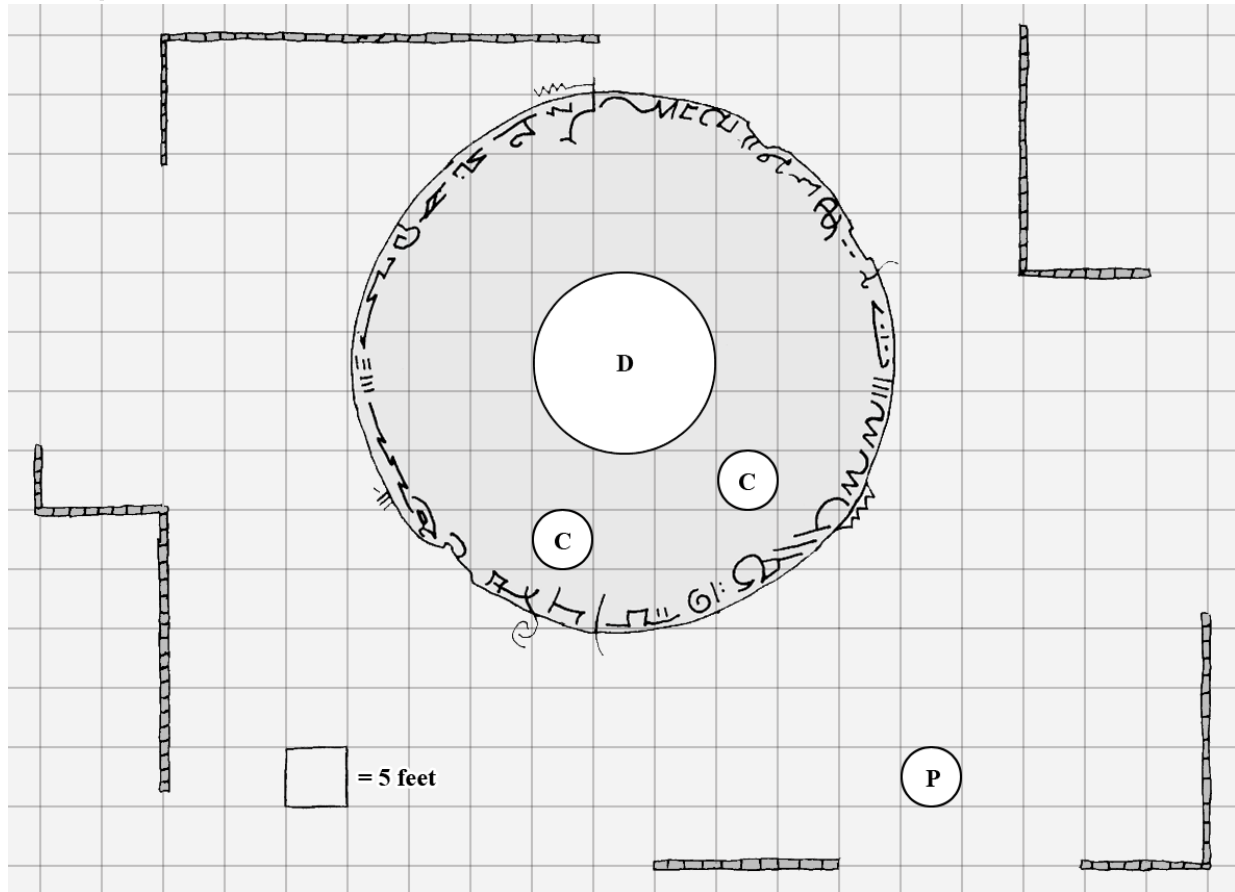
Map 2



Map 3



Map 4



Fight!		Start					Escaped!
3 Vine Men	3 Vine Men	2 Vine Men	2 Vine Men	1 Vine Men	1 Vine Man	1 Vine Man	– No Vine Men –