



XEN'DRIK EXPEDITIONS

Cairn of Stone Hearts

Xen'drik Expeditions Scenario #3

An Adventure for 6th Level Characters

(Scaled for 4th to 8th Levels of Play)

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Adventure Background

“Hearts of stone can break like any other, some may even crumble with the slightest touch. Beyond the pillars of the sun and along the great waste, twenty thousand stones mark the harvester’s tomb. In the sacred place fire points the way to what, once broken, can never mend. The crumbling thing, thrown into the hydra’s mouth, can stop the great shadow for a measure of three score and seventy.”

All four factions have the same piece of the Caldryn Fragments but, as is their nature, each one has interpreted it differently. All four of the organizations have agreed on one point, however. The Cairn of Stone Hearts, an ancient ruin long thought impenetrable to excavation and impossible to explore, is the focus for this piece of the Draconic Prophecy.

The story of the Cairn began ten years ago when Valek d’Orien discovered the ruin on the northern edge of the Wasting Plain, a huge desolate area far to the southwest of Stormreach. The Cairn, a mysterious temple-like structure surrounded by more than 20,000 vaguely humanoid statues and held shut both by an incredibly powerful magic and by stone gates too dense and heavy to move, proved to be more than the famed explorer could handle on his own. Vowing to return when he possessed enough power to force the edifice open, Valek spread the legend of the Cairn through his numerous visits to Stormreach thereafter.

The great d’Orien archaeologist and treasure hunter never kept his oath to the Cairn. For the rest of his short life after visiting the strange site, Valek fell victim to one misfortune after another until finally, two years to the day after leaving the Wasting Plain, he died in his sleep from a massive heart attack. News of his death and the circumstances surrounding it led to the place being considered “cursed”; with black magic rumored to linger on the site and nothing material to be gained from the place, no one chose to pick up where Valek left off.

Thus, the site lay dormant and abandoned for nearly a decade. During that time, the inroads Valek created to reach it through the jungle overgrew and the entire area became little more than another Stormreach legend of misfortune and hidden gold. It is likely the Cairn of Stone Hearts would have slipped into obscurity and been lost from the minds of men had fate not stepped in to remind Stormreach of its ancient glory.

One week before the start of this adventure, an abandoned ship drifted into Stormreach’s harbor, colliding with the dock. There were no hands aboard and no signs of any struggle. The only thing of note on the vessel was a single piece of parchment map with the location of the Cairn circled and a message in red ink reading, “Found it! The way in requires a fourfold key.”

On the back of the parchment, four items were scrawled and underlined – “Wings of Ascent”, “Spider’s Eye”, “Rod of Sephraman”, and “Eye of Flame”. While these things were obscure to most who learned of the parchment’s existence, the objects mentioned meant a great deal to the leaders of Stormreach’s four major factions. Each one either knew of or had recently come into the possession of an item from the list. That fact, combined with a recently revealed piece of the Draconic Prophecies, led the factions to believe that a moment of destiny regarding the Cairn of Stone Hearts was at hand.

Each faction immediately set out to secure the item they knew about, risking much and paying a dear price in blood to possess a piece of the “fourfold key”. These acquisitions were difficult and dangerous but one by one, the objects were gathered. The only problems that remained were how the factions were going to get their hands on the other three pieces of the key and how to find the Cairn once more. Because the map was burned to ashes in an abortive attempt by thieves to steal it, finding the ancient site’s location was easier said than done.

For the first time in their history, the four factions came together under a flag of truce to discuss what could be done. While this meeting only occurred after unsuccessful attempts on all sides to secure the key fragments for themselves, the discussion went surprisingly well. No bloodshed occurred and while the factions disagreed strongly on ideological grounds, everyone present could concede that their goals regarding the Cairn of Stone Hearts were not mutually exclusive.

The specific results of this unique conference are actually determined by the mix of factions represented at each instance of the scenario being played. The factions present have agreed to work together while those not represented by one or more PCs were unable to reconcile their difference and refused to assist the joint effort (if any).

Once a determination of the factions involved in the game has been determined, the scenario is ready to begin. If any faction is left out of the group dynamic, missing pieces of the key will have to be secured.

These “mini-adventures” make up the Introduction segment of this scenario, with play actually beginning in Part One where the coalition of factions must turn to a possibly-familiar face to get the information they need on the Cairn of Stone Hearts.

Adventure Synopsis

The adventure begins with the PCs gathering at a neutral location with orders from their various factions. They also bear with them items from their groups and their first order of business is to secure the ones they do not have. This immediately segues into small introductory missions into places held by the factions not represented by the PCs themselves.

After each of these are complete, the scenario's true introduction occurs with the PCs returning to their neutral ground and meeting with an interested party retained by the factions as a whole – Grave, the Stormreach city necromancer. His job is to take the PCs with him to Valek d'Orien's tomb and query the dead explorer as to the location of the Cairn of Stone Hearts. The PCs have the chance here to get even more information from Valek's spirit if they are clever enough to ask the right questions.

Armed with the four parts of the Cairn Key and a basic map leading to the central location of the adventure, the PCs are hastened on their way through the use of a Blackwheel Company warship. This brings them to the Wasting Plain, just a short hike from the supposed location of the Cairn of Stone Hearts. They have the key, a Caldyn Fragment, and Valek's final warning to guide them in its exploration.

First, of course, they have to get to the Cairn itself. This does not prove to be an easy task; a wide stretch of devastated jungle lies between them and the ancient ruin. Crossing this band of deforestation requires the PCs to do battle with a swarm of beetles and evade many more of the same. The jungle around the Cairn seems to be infested and the PCs, not that they know it yet, are headed right into the reason why.

Once on site, the PCs witness first hand the marvels of the Cairn site. This place was one of the final battlegrounds between the elves of Xen'drik and their giant oppressors. A magical backlash between dueling wizards on both sides caused a wave of energy to turn more than twenty thousand of the combatants into lifeless stone. These eerie, eroded statues ring the Cairn, their forms still locked in eternal struggle against similarly frozen enemies.

The front of the Cairn's central building bears two things of interest to the PCs. One is a set of pillars that run the length of the Cairn's courtyard and end at a short pedestal-like altar. Each pillar is topped in a wide, flat crystal the color of yellow fire. The second item of interest is a massive carving of a scarab beetle set into the front wall of the building. Completely intact despite the erosion that has affected every other part of the structure, it has a small, oddly shaped alcove about four feet from the ground between its folded wings.

Shortly after the PCs arrive, the sun begins to set and a change takes place with the pillars. The light of the setting sun aligns with the crystals at their summits, shining through and focusing into a brighter beam with each one passed. The last pillar's crystal angles downward, shining the collected light of the sun onto the pedestal and causing faint engravings on the platform to glow. Several of these sigils match those on the four pieces of the Cairn Key which, until this moment, has defied all attempts to assemble it.

The PCs can bring the pieces together on the pedestal, using the focused solar energy as a catalyst for its assembly. The separate pieces fuse into a single item, the magical Cairn Key. This item is useful for so much more than what is seen in this single adventure, but that is a matter for future scenarios. For now, it fits in the scarab's alcove and unlocks the doors of the Cairn.

The scarab's wings come to life, animating and unfolding to spread across the main wall of the building. This reveals a passage inside and takes the PCs into the Cairn of Stone Hearts, a journey that has not been taken in more than a thousand years. Now they merely need to find a meaning for the rest of the Prophecy regarding this place.

Once inside, the PCs will have to contend with a pair of animated statues. These unliving guardians of the tomb cannot be reasoned with and must be destroyed. The PCs have nowhere to run to from this battle; the wings closed as soon as they were inside and the Cairn Key cannot open them again until it regains power by exposure to sunlight. Since the sun has now set and the PCs are indoors, they face the prospect of being trapped a very long time.

The destruction of the guardian statues calls forth a resting shade of the tomb's true keeper. A drow priest to Siiq'cha the Harvester, he retains enough sanity despite his undead nature to be of use to the PCs. He will aid the PCs in freeing themselves if they agree to help him free his trapped deity. Assuming the PCs will listen to his tale, he can explain much of what has happened in the Cairn of Stone Hearts.

His plan is a simple one but it requires something he cannot do. The inside of the ziggurat tomb is hollow save for walkways that lead up to a suspended temple and down to a huge chasm with an island at its heart surrounded by a ring of whirling, watery vortexes. On the island, the PCs can see a colossal beetle

– the avatar of Siiq'cha itself. Far too powerful for the PCs to destroy directly, the insane avatar must be slain so that its essence can be freed and the god reborn once more.

The shade directs the PCs to passages that lead to the four chains of light suspending the crumbling temple high above the mad god. Each chamber has a sentry beetle with a crystal heart guarding one of the chains. To slay the avatar of Siiq'cha, the undead priest bids the PCs to defeat the beetle and make a blood sacrifice on the crystal. This sacrifice needs not be fatal; just a few drops of blood each will suffice. The crystal will shatter and its chain will fall. The loss of all four chains will destroy the magic holding the temple aloft. Once done, the falling temple will crush Siiq'cha and end the priest's imprisonment here.

This act also fulfills the PCs' quests, though in different ways. The drow priest, overjoyed to finally be free, uses the last of his worldly power to recharge the Cairn Key and grant each willing PC the Mark of the Harvest, a magical tattoo similar to a dragonmark, which will bring them the bounty of the earth for the rest of their lives. (For members of the Crimson Codex, this Mark solves their mission objective.)

Troubleshooting

The scenario is fairly straightforward, as befits an adventure designed primarily for convention play. The only issues that might arise will be pacing, as this adventure is meant to echo the feel of a tomb-raiding style story. The action needs to be larger than life and the descriptions must bear this out. The text sections in the adventure are a good place to start but you will have to tailor each encounter to the players themselves. Ensure that there are no long lulls between the combats and that when the PCs are exploring, they have the feeling of being in a long abandoned place with possible danger around every corner.

Another matter that you will want to keep in mind is Siiq'cha itself. The PCs need to understand that this creature is *not* a combat encounter. Do not use Siiq'cha to slay the PCs out of hand if they are foolish enough to approach it with the intention of doing battle. Let the first few attacks, should a battle ensue, miss but wreak utter havoc on the environment. A bite that cleaves through several feet of solid stone or a spray of digestive acid that boils the water for a dozen feet around the point of impact should get your message across. Let the PCs decide to withdraw and give them every chance to do so. The avatar is trapped on its island; the PCs are free to come and go.

This is important enough that it bears repeating. Do not run Siiq'cha as a normal combat. If the PCs find a way to destroy him that doesn't involve dropping the temple on him, that is perfectly acceptable, but do not use the avatar as a way of utterly annihilating them. At their present level, the PCs cannot defeat Siiq'cha and any battle between them will end in their deaths. Do not allow this to happen unless the PCs absolutely insist on a frontal assault even after your warnings to the contrary.

Adventure Start

Butcher Lane, one of the worst streets in all of Stormreach is aptly named because of the number of dead dragged off its paving stones every day. Your instructions bid you to come here at a specific hour and wait in a specific alley but gave you no particular reason why. Along with the note to be here, you received a piece of parchment with seemingly random words and small holes cut in its surface. Some of your leaders like to play games, it seems...

The PCs meet each other in this scene. You can have them describe themselves to each other and roleplay now, as nothing is going to directly happen for a few minutes. This is a good opportunity for the PCs to get to know each other and establish themselves in a roleplaying sense. Aside from describing the occasional sound of combat in the distance or muffled footsteps just out of line of sight, do not interrupt the PCs while they are roleplaying with each other.

Once they seem content with each other (or conversely, if it looks like things are about to come to blows), move into the next section of descriptive text. As always, feel free to paraphrase if you wish.

A swarthy-complexioned man walks down the middle of the lane in front of you. Nodding your directions, he kneels for a moment before rising and walking on. Where he was standing, a small bundle of darkly-tanned leather now rests on the ground.

The man is an independent courier hired by the factions to bring instructions to their operatives (the PCs). He will not respond to the PCs if they ask him to stop and will run if attacked. He is not being paid to chat and he has other deliveries to make. If the PCs insist on stopping him, the courier will use his dragonmark to *dimension door* away. This should ensure that he leaves the area without further trouble. The PCs have a lot to do in this adventure and they'll never get it all finished if they waste time with the likes of him.

The bundle is far more important. It contains scrolls for each of the factions, even those not represented by

PCs . Those scrolls that have PC members present (Player Handout Two) also instruct them to take their strangely-marked parchments and place them together with those of the other PCs. When aligned properly, the notes create a complete message (Player's Handout One). There are also objects the PCs might recognize if they have played the faction adventure immediately preceding Cairn of Stone Hearts.

In addition, there is a small black silk pouch with the symbol of the Cabal of Shadows protected by a *sequester* spell. Only members of the Cabal of Shadows are immune to this effect; they can see the pouch normally. Inside is a small brass coin with a strange demonic mark on both sides. The item radiates weak conjuration magic and is similarly *sequestered*. This is the "token" referenced in Player's Handout Two.

The scrolls from factions not represented by PCs are missions intended for the ones present. Each one (assuming there are any; the party might be made up of all four factions) leads to a sub adventure as listed below. Read the next section of text when the PCs are ready to compare their odd notes and read the additional scrolls. Do not hurry the PCs; let them get to these things in their own time.

Your faction scroll reads, "Greetings. Enclosed, you will find an item precious to us and instructions on how to find others. When you and those you are being asked to work with have all four, further directives will be forthcoming. For now, verify you are with the proper individuals by placing the numbered letters you are carrying on top of each other in sequential order."

This action creates the combined message labeled as Player's Handout One. From there, when the PCs are ready to move on, go to the appropriate sub-mission(s) below. Let the Players choose which order they wish to do them in, but then jump right into the action. This style of play will keep things flowing quickly and give the Players the feeling of taking part in an action-adventure movie (which is exactly the play experience this scenario is designed to impart).

How to Run These Subquests

Each of the mini-adventures below has been purposefully left open-ended and lack complete details. They are designed to be run in roughly 15 minutes each, with some taking longer than others if combat ensues. Their unfinished nature allows you to fill in details as you wish to challenge and stimulate the Players as you wish. They are practically DMs Marks in that regard.

Do not worry about statistics or outside concerns in these scenarios. They merely exist as a way for you to give the PCs some "asides" to show how the items they will be using to form the Cairn Key used later in the adventure were acquired. If you feel the subquests do not match your play style or would take too long to run, you are free to skip them and have Grave hand the PCs the items they do not already have during the Introduction. (This will result in a slight loss of experience points and gold at the end of the adventure but the reduction is not a serious one.)

On every map, the X denotes where the PCs begin the sub-quest.

Subquests

The Blackwheel Company – In and Out

This quest begins with the PCs having stealthed their way into the main cargo bay of the Glory Road, the massive airship that serves the faction as its mobile command center and primary fortress. The mission is simple; find a specific package currently in the hold awaiting processing and abscond with it. No contact, no combat, no discovery; those are the watchwords for this subquest. In and out is the order of the day.

The last guard cycle leaves the bay, moving down the huge ship's starboard gantry. You have one objective here in the Glory Road – a golden rod called Sephraman's Scepter. Because this place is filled with Blackwheel soldiers, more than a hundred of which could be here within a minute if an alarm is sounded, you must be quiet and you must be quick!

The cargo bay is divided into several smaller rooms, each one tasked to a different purpose. The subquest starts with the PCs having located the right bay; all that remains is finding the quartermaster's room log and a packing crate marked with a black wheel-shaped brand and an entry number matching the right log entry.

The map for this subquest shows the location of the log and where the crate is stored. No combat is expected or desired during this mission. For a more exciting scene, have a group of five heavily armored bugbear soldiers enter from the west side of the room and walk a slow, careful circuit down the hold before leaving to the east. These soldiers are not a combat encounter; they are just present to heighten tension.

Make it clear to the PCs that they are **not** to engage anyone aboard the Glory Road. If the Blackwheel

Company knew that the other factions could infiltrate even this far into their headquarters, security would be raised to a drastic degree and there could be violent reprisals from the powerful mercenaries – an outcome no one desires.

The mission ends when the PCs exit the chamber with the scepter. If there is any combat, the mission is effectively a failure even if the scepter is recovered. The overall scenario is still playable but there will be ramifications as per the Adventure Questions at the end.

Creatures: The quartermaster is not present but it is possible for the PCs to run afoul of both goblin stock workers and the occasional bugbear guard patrols. Use the statistics below if either of these things occur but keep in mind that the mission is only a true success if the PCs do *not* draw any attention to themselves. As long as they are careful and do not take undue risks, Move Silently and Hide checks should not even be necessary. This scene is more about PCs taking the mission seriously and going to the effort of being careful rather than specific skills or dice rolls.

Goblin Stockists (2): male and female goblin scout 1: hp 5, 4; these goblins will not use ranged weapons in the hold for fear of damaging the stores.

Bugbear Guard Patrol (5): hp 16, 15, 15, 14; *Monster Manual* 29; these bugbears are equipped with spiked armor and a shortspear in addition to their listed equipment.

Cabal of Shadows – Eye Spy

Another quick mission, this short scenario involves the PCs waylaying a spy for the Cabal on his way to deliver the Eye of Flame to a Cabal wizard interested in examining its magical properties. The setup is very straightforward and except for the courier not being what he appears, there are no real surprises. Unlike the mission into the Glory Road against the Blackwheel Company, this scene is an intentional combat. Indeed, the courier is not just going to hand over the Eye of Flame. He will have to be *convinced*, probably through pain and bodily harm.

That is not to say this mission cannot be achieved through diplomacy or stealth. A high Slight of Hand skill, strong Intimidation, or any number of non-lethal methods could get the gem away from M'therog, the Cabal's ogre mage spymaster. Obtaining the gem is the important part of this mission. How it is garnered is irrelevant to the masters of the factions so long as their ideals (for those who have any) are maintained.

The evening fog is thick over the back streets of Stormreach, making travel difficult and spotting people on the city's cobbled and broken roads a daunting prospect. Your mission scrolls have led you here to await a well-dressed elven man by the name of Milithan. Milithan is supposedly a courier and a spy for the secretive faction, out tonight on a mission of his own to deliver a parcel you need. Rumored to be quite skilled in combat, it is unlikely Milithan will give up his package quietly...

Foe: M'therog (Milithan is just one of his covers) is a devout member of the Cabal of Shadows, specifically of the Mourners of Yore. His sense of honor runs almost as deep as his love for history and his desire to see the past glories of his youth restored. He takes missions for the Cabal of Shadows as much for the fun of doing something clandestine as he does for the faction's betterment. If he had to choose between the Cabal and his own well-being, he would choose himself every time *unless* he has given his oath to see a task accomplished.

Fortunately for the PCs, he has not promised to see the Eye of Flame safely to its destination. This makes him reasonable on the subject, though his starting attitude of Unfriendly will have to be moved to Helpful before he will consider giving up the jewel. If combat begins, his personal code will no longer allow him to discuss the matter; he always finishes opponents once a battle begins.

Because of this, M'therog will coup de grace if given a chance and will not show mercy of any sort. He won't sunder or disarm unless these are done to him first and then he will confine such tactics to opponents that have done such "dishonorable" things. He does not expect mercy either, which could be very shocking to him if the PCs offer it.

One more item of note; the ogre mage will not reveal his true form until he is reduced to ten hit points or more unless forced to do so. He shape changes into his base form both to heal slightly and in the hopes that his real appearance will frighten off the PCs.

M'therog, Orge Mage: hp 40; *Monster Manual* 200; M'therog will not use his *darkness*, *invisibility*, *charm person*, or *sleep* spell-like abilities in this combat, nor will he use *cone of cold* unless he has an area effect spell or psionic ability used on him first. His code of conduct will not allow him to do otherwise.

Once defeated (by combat or otherwise), the gem is in a hidden pocket of his vest that requires a Search (DC 15) check to find. This search can be attempted by each of the PCs and can be completely circumvented by a *detect magic* or similar ability. The Eye of Flame radiates both divination and evocation magic, each moderately.

Covenant of Light – For I Have Sinned

There is no immediate challenge in this mini-adventure aside from the moral one surrounding its execution. The item the PCs must gain, the Wings of Ascent, are currently on display over the door of a memorial erected in honor of the fallen warrior they were recovered from in a previous Covenant of Light adventure. The remembrance stone is deep in the heart of Stormreach's main graveyard, a place that has recently seen severe undead activity. The site is currently clear, but the PCs do not know that.

The grey stones beneath your feet shift as you move, the ground unstable after so many deadly battles with the living dead that have poured from these graves of late. The city guard claim to have cleared Stormreach's graveyard, but most of the city's residents believe otherwise. No one comes here save for the mad, the desperate, and the devout.

Ahead, a white marble marker stands amid freshly turned soil. The Covenant of Light has spared no expense erecting a fine monument to one of their most beloved heroes, Sir Barrak of the Shining Blade. On the marker's finely engraved crown, a jeweled scarab rests in a complex cage of expensive platinum wire.

On the morrow, mages employed by the Covenant will be enchanting the monument with spells to discourage thievery. That makes it all the more imperative that you get the scarab tonight. Faction operatives have distracted the guards.

Now is your chance!

This mini-adventure is mostly an exercise in moral flexibility and whether the PCs can bring themselves to deface a monument to a good and decent man. For some (like the Cabal), there is not likely to be any hesitation at all. For others, this might be a greater challenge. If the PCs appear to be uncertain or unwilling to take the scarab, the Wings of Ascent, let them know that it should be possible to put the jeweled amulet back once they are done with their mission. That may convince them to act.

Though the scarab seems unguarded and free for the taking, there are two things that would normally bar theft. The first is not an issue now; there were two guards that have been lured away by other agents of the PCs' factions. The second is very much still in effect and could claim a victim if the PCs are not cautious in how they proceed.

Glyph Trap: CR 6; spell; spell trigger; no reset; spell effect (glyph of warding [blast], 16th-level cleric, 8d8 sonic, DC 14 Reflex save half damage); multiple targets (all targets within 5 ft.); Search DC 28; Disable Device DC 28.

The trap is behind the Wings of Ascent, making it very difficult to see (hence the high Search DC) before it is set off. This glyph was laid by the priest that consecrated the monument and is intended to removal once non-lethal deterrents are laid in place tomorrow. Until then, it remains as a very dangerous surprise for the PCs if they blithely take the scarab without being careful.

To scale this trap for 5th level PCs, make the DC to find and remove the *glyph of warding* 24 instead of 28. This ad hoc reduction simulates the consecrating priest being rushed and not doing as exacting a job of warding the scarab as he would have liked.

The roar of thunder accompanying this *glyph of warding* going off alerts the guards that their post has been violated. The PCs will have to flee the area if they will be caught, something their orders are very clear about them avoiding.

Crimson Codex – Forest for the Trees

The adage "needle in a haystack" is an appropriate one for this subquest. The PCs have a short amount of time to search a library belonging to the Crimson Codex for the Grasp of the Spider's Eye, a monocle loop that has been hidden in a book for safekeeping. The book was brought to this library and placed on a specific shelf to await pick up by agents of the faction. The PCs have been directed here first but they've only barely arrived in time. In the short window between the loremaster leaving the library to brew a new pot of tea and the Codex agents showing up to fetch the Grasp, they must get in, find it, and run.

The window looking in the library is fogged over with moisture from the nearby port and the cold air of the

night. The library's sole occupant, an aged loremaster and one of the Crimson Codex' lead scholars on ancient artifacts and ruins, has finally pulled himself from his studies long enough to leave the room.

The information you were given seems to be holding up. Loremaster Theronis has a weakness for lilac tea and brews a pot of it at exactly ten o'clock every night. With him gone and Codex agents on their way to pick up the Grasp of the Spider's Eye, now is your chance to sneak in and get it first!

This mission is a matter of using searching skills and even the Investigate feat to locate a small item in a very short amount of time. Be sure to invoke all of the rules around the Search skill, including the amount of time needed to check a given area and the ability of other PCs to Aid Another. For your reference, relevant sections of the Search Skill have been reprinted here.

Getting into the library requires an Open Lock (DC 20) or other manner of getting through a locked door quietly. The door is a standard wooden door and can certainly be bashed in but doing so quietly is not a likely occurrence.

Search (Int)

Check

You generally must be within 10 feet of the object or surface to be searched. The list below gives DCs for typical tasks involving the Search skill.

Search DCs

- Ransack a chest full of junk to find a certain item 10
- Notice a typical secret door or a simple trap 20
- Find a difficult nonmagical trap ([rogue](#) only) 21 or higher
- Find a magic trap ([rogue](#) only) 25 + level of spell used
- Notice a well-hidden secret door 30
- Find a footprint Varies

Action

It takes a [full-round action](#) to search a 5-foot-by-5-foot area or a volume of goods 5 feet on a side.

Special

An elf has a +2 racial bonus on Search checks, and a half-elf has a +1 racial bonus. An elf (but not a half-elf) who simply passes within 5 feet of a secret or concealed door can make a Search check to find that door. If you have the [Investigator](#) feat, you get a +2 bonus on Search checks.

There are two things in the room that searching PCs might find – one good, one bad. The good thing to find is the Grasp of the Spider's Eye, which is hidden in a tome entitled [The Talent of Obfuscation](#). The bad thing to locate is the *sepia snake sigil* which awaits any PC foolish enough to open a book called [The Price of Curiosity](#). These books are both located with a Search check (DC 20) look very similar and will be found by a successful Search check while looking in their area as shown on the subquest map.

The Price of Curiosity: CR 4; spell; spell trigger; no reset; spell effect ([sepia snake sigil](#), 5th-level [wizard](#), DC 14 [Reflex save](#) negates); [Search](#) DC 28; [Disable Device](#) DC 28. Cost: 650 gp to hire NPC spellcaster.

The only other challenge in this subquest is that two minutes after the PCs enter the library, four Codex agents arrive to retrieve the Grasp for their faction leaders. This poses a serious obstacle for the PCs, who should be informed before the mission begins that they are under a time constraint and may only have five minutes before they have to abort or risk detection. Once again, their orders are very clear about not being seen; discovery will cause this mission to be considered a failure.

Once the Missions are Over

If the PCs failed any of the subquests, there is still hope for the scenario. While they were busy being chased by guards or fighting people who shouldn't be fought, other members of their factions went in and acquired what they could not attain. This might be a blow to the PCs' egos but it does mean they can proceed with the real task at hand. Be sure to include the section below about Grave turning over the missing parts of the Cairn Key if the PCs were unable to get some of them.

Whether or not they succeeded at all of their subquests, the PCs have orders to return to Butcher Lane for further instructions. These instructions come in the form of a neutral operative that has been seeing a lot of employment by the factions lately – the city necromancer and undead consultant, Grave.

When the PCs are ready to proceed with the true Introduction, move to the text below and begin the

adventure in earnest!

Introduction

Someone is already in the alley on Butcher Lane when you arrive. Two someones, actually. An extremely tall man wearing a slate-gray, fully-concealing cloak and hood and a shorter one in a black long coat. The shorter man has a shock of white hair pulled back in a silver clasp and hanging loose over his left shoulder. His thigh-high boots are made of dark leather and have silver skull buttons up their outside edges. Finely tailored fingerless gloves cover his hands as they rest on a tall darkwood staff with a hinged scythe blade on top, currently folded shut.

"Ah, there you all are. Excellent. Shall we get started?"

The finely dressed man is Grave, a grim necromancer and known consultant for the city of Stormreach. His services have been retained by all four of the factions in the past and he is known to serve without favoritism or partiality. He is also known for a quirky sense of humor and a willingness to "get messy" when the need arises. For the time being, the factions all consider him too valuable an occasional ally to jeopardize and too useful not to hire when the time calls for his peculiar talents.

That time is now.

Hired by the same alliance that has set the PCs in motion, Grave is here to escort them to the final resting place of Valek d'Orien. The explorer died almost destitute and so was not able to afford a proper burial in the city's overrun and overpriced cemeteries. Instead, his last remaining follower took him out of Stormreach and buried him beneath a small, unmarked pile of stones. Grave has been tracking this site for days and is eager to get this particular job over with as soon as possible.

"A pleasure to be sure. You lot are to come with me. We've a night's work ahead of us and a long walk to reach it. Hope you've all got strong stomachs. This could get messy."

Grave is referring to the reason they have to reach Valek's tomb; he's been retained to cast *Speak with Dead* on the explorer's corpse and find the Cairn of Stone Hearts. He has no trouble at all performing such grisly activities but as he's seen many times (and in several previous XEN'DRIK EXPEDITIONS scenarios), PCs are not always so disaffected by gore.

He is happy to answer questions if he can but he has been instructed and well paid to keep his mouth shut about the necromantic communion he's about to perform. The factions do not want other interested parties finding out about the Cairn before they've had a chance to learn its secrets. If asked, Grave can and will provide proof of his status as a hireling of the factions.

For the Cabal, he bears a black silk scarf with the faction's symbol embroidered on one corner. For the Covenant, he has a small glowing crystal in the shape of their symbol. For the Blackwheel Company, he has a signet ring with its wheel spoke sigil and for the Crimson Codex, he has a small glyphbook embossed with their motto. If the PCs ask for this identification, inform them that these items are indeed legitimate proof of alliance with their factions.

Once everyone is satisfied and ready to depart, Grave lets the large, fully cowed and cloaked man beside him lead the way. This "man" is actually a flesh golem named Tatters, constructed by Grave using a manual. The golem is Grave's protector and silent companion, unable to speak even though Grave often talks to it as if it can. If you wish, having Grave carry on off-handed conversations with Tatters and act as if it is talking back can make for a humorous and memorable scene. Feel free to have fun with this aspect of the necromancer's eccentric personality.

The necromancer and his golem take the PCs out of the city on a long (one hour) walk to the edge of the jungle directly west of the city. The trip is uneventful but the PCs may well prepare for attack. If they do, allow them the time to plan out their tactics and spare a little time discussing the journey overland. The Players do not know there isn't an encounter planned, after all, so letting them react as if a combat was imminent will keep them on their toes.

The Unsettled Grave

Grave follows his massive companion into a thicket of jungle trees. "It's just in here. We are almost there!" he calls back to you. Then, a few moments later, you hear his oddly accented voice as he says, "Oh... well... damn."

The reason Grave has reacted so poorly will be made evident if the PCs investigate. Keep in mind that if the

PCs have insisted on having someone with Grave or scouting ahead, they may see what is described below before Grave does. Adjust the text accordingly.

In the small green glade, there is a clearing littered with stones. Some large, others little larger than river rocks, they form a broken mound in the center, an area where nothing is growing – not even the ever-present Xen'drik underbrush. The only things peeking out of the rich, nearly black jungle soil between the scattered stones are small fragments of something white.

Without magical protection, Valek's grave was a magnet for scavengers. Only a few days after being buried, the explorer was exhumed by the animals of the jungle. What remains of him is still here; his bones are the "fragments of something white".

Grave is displeased. Without a skull, he can't do his job and if he can't do his job, he isn't going to get paid. Still, he has enough knowledge of the natural world to believe that Valek's head was probably not carried very far. Few animals would find much of interest in a human skull; once the ears, nose, and other fleshy protrusions were consumed, the rest would probably have been left behind for an insect feast. (Be sure to have Grave explain it just like that. The terminology is sure to turn a few stomachs.)

While the PCs and Grave look for the skull, Tatters has been tasked to find one of the explorer's index finger bones. Grave has a special plan for that.

"Well, looks like a new game, fish. Hide and seek. The good sir Valek's head is hiding. We have to seek it. See? Told you this would get messy." And with that, Grave pulls off his fine gloves, sits down next to the stone pile and starts digging through the loamy soil with his bare hands.

He expects the PCs to help. If they do not, it will take him more than an hour to find the skull himself. If the PCs help, the Search DC is 20 and retries are allowed. The Track feat will be of aid as well; animal tracks will show a PC with this ability where several creatures have circled the skull's resting place (DC 15). The skull is located ten feet north of the sundered tomb pile, buried about an inch below the surface. Much to the flippant necromancer's relief, the lower jaw is still attached by thin, dry ligaments and strings of desiccated muscle.

Once Grave has the skull, he unrolls a leather bundle, takes out several cleaning tools, and begins the long process of preparing Valek's head for his magic. The skull is stripped of everything but the lower jaw, cleaned, polished, and engraved with necromantic symbols – a procedure that takes thirty minutes. Describe this in as much detail as the PCs desire. Some groups like all the gory bits while others will have no interest in the raking sound of a bone rasp pulling dried flesh off a human forehead.

Once the preparation is complete, the spell is ready. Grave lets the PCs know what they need to do by saying the following.

"All right, fishes. This is the deal. I am going to call back a shade of this man's soul into his skull so you can ask him some questions. Three or four, I'd say, depending on how much effort it is to hold him steady. The skull's old, so don't expect too much from this. I recommend the first thing you ask be 'Where is the Cairn of Stone Hearts'. Beyond that, you're on your own."

As he talks, Grave takes a small white bone handed to him by his large bodyguard and sets it down on a piece of light tan parchment. Beside the parchment, he places an open inkwell, its depths murky and slowly swirling.

"Let's begin."

The casting of the *Speak with Dead* spell can be as detailed as you wish. Feel free to use the following description or use one of your own. The key is to make the scene memorable.

Grave murmurs a few words and his eyes close. Symbols of light flare along his hands and face, crawling lines that match those drawn on the skull at his feet. His voice takes on an otherworldly tone, echoing as if into an endless void. As the lines of radiance reach his eyes, they open suddenly. Beams of white light burst forth, bathing the skull and setting all of its graven runes aflame. Burning now, the skull starts to hover, lifting into the air to rest in front of the necromancer's face.

With a shout, Grave slams his hands down into the earth. Power races between the twin impacts and the column of light upon which the skull is resting. Necromantic energies spiral up the pillar, infusing the skull and binding it to the patterns moving over Grave's visage.

The necromancer speaks and as he does, the skull turns to look at you all. What he says, the skull says. Their jaws move at the same time. Two voices, one message.

"What... do you... want?"

The PCs now have the opportunity to ask their questions. They have likely planned it exactly what they

want to inquire about and how to phrase it. Such caution is good, though it will prove irrelevant very quickly. The PCs will actually only get one question before the skull is destroyed in a spectacular fashion (as seen below). If the PCs ask anything besides the location of the Cairn, answer as best you can using what knowledge you have given the Background and Synopsis sections of the scenario. When in doubt, make up something that sounds plausible or entertaining.

Fortunately, the PCs have not ruined their chances if they do not ask where the Cairn is; Grave has a back-up plan. He has recently learned a special way of casting the *Speak with Dead* spell that incorporates other parts of a corpse. In this case, Valek's finger bone will use the parchment and ink to draw a basic map to the Cairn of Stone Hearts. (Describe this happening if the PCs specifically pay attention to the bone.)

If the PCs do ask the location, use this answer or paraphrase as you desire.

"Sail you past the northern capes and downwards past the western coast.

Move then through the pitchy waves, the shudders that frighten sailors most.

Reach the gray and wasted sands, the plain where waits the darkest death.

Make your port the claw-filled cove adorned by column – dragon's breath.

Your bearing now, between both suns, is cautious safe. Move just by night.

You'll find your path when the great eye soars. Follow you the beetle's flight."

As soon as the skull finishes speaking, the last act of Siiq'cha's curse on Valek takes place. Give the PCs only a few seconds to consider the fallen explorer's words, then move immediately to this next section of text:

Just a few heartbeats after the skull stops speaking, a low peal of thunder echoes through the night sky. A flare of light appears around the hovering skull, taking the shape of a massive set of insect mandibles. The thunder roars again, this time echoing as a single word.

"Venorsh!"

Then the mandibles close, brutally shattering the skull into a thousand burning shards!

This of course ends the spell, though no one is injured by the detonation of Valek's skull. Grave is *stunned* for a round but he recovers quickly. When he does, he stands up, shakes off the fatigue of the spell, and hands the nearest PC the map (Player Handout 3). "Venorsh" is Drow elf for 'silence'.

"Lovely. Just lovely. Well, that's yours and I am heading back to town. Rest in pieces, Valek d'Orien. Damn shame about the curse and all."

Grave is only assuming the mandibles (which were a manifestation of Siiq'cha's power, not that he knows that) were some kind of curse and has no proof to back it up. In any case, he's never had a *Speak with Dead* interrupted like that before and he's a little out of sorts. The PCs are welcome to accompany him back to Stormreach but he is leaving immediately.

He does have one last thing to tell the PCs, though, and he does so as he's packing up his tools.

"Oh, there's a Blackwheel galleon called the Fourteenth Spire waiting for you back in town. It'll sail you wherever you have to go. My suspicion? That cryptic little rhyme sounds like you're on your way to the Wasting Plains.

Lucky you! Gosh I wish I could go, but I have something to do. A prior engagement. It's called breathing.

Still, I'm sure you all will be fine. Big strong adventuring types like you? No worries. I doubt any of the horrible dangers or ancient ruins filled with certain death will be a concern for you. Lap you next wave, fishes!"

And with that, Grave is on his way back to Stormreach and the PCs have their path laid out for them. Proceed to Part One, A Short Sail to Nowhere, when the PCs are ready to proceed.

What the Hades does Valek's Answer Mean?!?

The riddle spoken by Valek's skull is of use to the PCs only if they can decipher it or if they relate it to people skilled in navigation and geography. In this way, the Players do not have to decrypt the shade's words to get some use from his answer. After each line given below, the meaning is given as well as any skill checks needed to figure it out.

"Sail you past the northern capes and downwards past the western coast" *This one is simple; it just means to take a ship out of Stormreach's harbor and go north and then west around the peninsula. No skill checks needed as sailors on the Fourteenth Spire can figure this out if the PCs do not.*

"Move then through the pitchy waves, the shudders that frighten sailors most" *A Profession (sailor) or (geography) check at a DC 10 will reveal that this references the rough waters of the west Xen'drik coast and specifically the Shudders, a geographical feature of the shoals around the edge of the Wasting Plains. These shoals are narrow and fragile; when a ship's hull breaks through them, they make the whole vessel 'shudder'.*

"Reach the gray and wasted sands, the plain where waits the darkest death." *This is talking about the Wasting Plains. Grave was correct and the galleon's navigator can confirm it.*

"Make your port the claw-filled cove adorned by column – dragon's breath." *No skill checks can discern this one. The ship will simply have to sail through the shoals (the Shudders) and find the cove in question. It is discussed below in Part One.*

"Your bearing now, between both suns, is cautious safe. Move just by night." *Survival (DC 15) can decipher this one. It is a reference to traveling south (between the rising and setting sun) and moving only at night because of the heat of the day.*

"You'll find your path when the great eye moon soars. Follow you the beetle's flight." *This line references both the moon Lharvion and the swarms of beetles that surround the Cairn of Stone Hearts. A Knowledge (astronomy) skill check (DC 10) or basic Player knowledge can determine the first one; only encountering the swarms will reveal the latter.*

Grave's odd pattern of speech, calling PCs fishes and the line about "lap you next wave" comes from his association with the sahuagin of Stormreach. They call anyone not of their own race "fish" as a way of saying they are similar but inferior. Grave doesn't mean it quite so harshly but he is amused by its connotations.

Part One: A Short Sail to Nowhere

Read the following section (or paraphrase it, as always) when the PCs reach the Stormreach docks. This passage encapsulates their boarding the Fourteenth Spire and segues into the journey section of their adventure. If you wish to extend this part of the scenario and there is time left in the gaming slot to do so, letting the PCs explore their vessel and interact with the NPCs aboard is perfectly acceptable.

The ship before you is a proud three-masted warship, replete with heavy weapon doors along her hull and a mercenary house pennant flying high over the crow's nest. The vessel's figurehead is an armored man, his halberd borne aloft as if to challenge the distant horizon.

A grizzled looking sea veteran calls down from the main deck, "It's about time you all arrived. We've precious little wind left to get us out of port so get aboard or sleep out the night on the dock!" From the insistent way he is gesturing for you to climb up the gang plank or the eager looks of the ready sailors around him, the latter option isn't likely an available one.

The speaking sailor is Sarvan, the ship's deck officer and a Blackwheel soldier through and through. He answers only to his Captain and the Gods, in that order. If the PCs are mindful of their manners and do what they are told when they are told, he will not have any quarrel with them. If they try to make trouble while on the Spire, he'll be the first to "correct their behavior issues" with the heavy end of a belying pin. No one causes problems aboard the Fourteenth Spire. **No one.**

The twenty two crewmen under Sarvan's command treat him like the wrath of Dol'Arrah itself. They are

a handpicked crew, each one taken from other Blackwheel Company vessels and extremely skilled in their tasks. Considered some of the finest sailors the company has to offer, these men are proud of their work and rightly so. Some are conversational while others are stoic and gruff, but *all* of them are professionals.

There are three other people aboard the Fourteenth Spire of note – the Captain, First Mate, and the navigator. The navigation officer is a half-elf named Giranys. Cordial and precise, he is far more at home with his maps and charts than outside the navigation room among the crew. He isn't anti-social; he just prefers to be alone unless he has to interact with people. His personal interest in the elven half of his heritage might cause him to open up to elven PCs if they try to talk with him, especially the Valenar.

The ship's First Mate is Gurrak Thunderthane, a dwarven man with a beard so thick and full the crew quietly joke that if he ever went overboard, it would serve as his own personal life raft. He doesn't appreciate humor at all, so such jibes are made far out of his earshot. Dour almost to a fault, Gurrak holds his rank through sheer ability and his deep concern for the well-being of both the ship and every living soul on it. He might not be friendly or visibly compassionate but in the thick of things, he would take a crossbow bolt for any member of the crew.

Lastly, there is Captain Thessalie d'Lyrandar. An honored member of both the Windwrights Guild and the Blackwheel Company, Thessalie is an oddity for several reasons. Beyond the rarity of being a female naval commander, she is also curious because of her blood red hair, personal habit of wearing full armor (a breastplate and chain) aboard a ship, and her tendency to treat everyone from guests to the lowest ranking crewmen as close friends. As jovial as Gurrak isn't, "Cap'n Thess" is a minor legend among the seafaring segment of the company and the subject of many sailors' heartsick fantasies.

Once Aboard

The PCs will get the chance to meet the personalities named above after they are shown by Sarvan to their cabin. The ship is a sizable one but because of cargo and martial supplies space is at a premium. Unless there is a pressing need to have two rooms, the PCs are expected to stay in a single 12' x 14' room. Accommodations may be cramped but they are treated well in every other way.

One of the crewmen, a human named Smit the Spit, is an excellent cook and provides hot meals on demand. There are two set meal times, one at dawn and the other at dusk. Otherwise, the galley is open and freely accessible as long as the privilege is not abused. This policy is only possible because of Sarvan's watchful eye and First Mate Gurrak's threat of turning gluttons into fishing bait; no one on the crew would dare misuse the Captain's generosity.

One of the hold rooms is set up as a wash chamber with soap, boards, and a barrel of suitable water. Drying racks take up the back half of the room and are also freely available. The PCs are expected to do their own washing, though any member of the crew will gladly show them how if they don't already know. The wash water is replaced through distillation every three days, so most of the crew wait to do their cleaning up until the barrel is replenished; by day three, the water in it is rather murky.

The PCs are not barred from helping out with shipboard tasks, though Gurrak will not-so-subtly hint to anyone without a rank or more in Profession (sailor) that he or she should "leave sailing to those who know how". Aid of any kind aboard the Fourteenth Spire is met with a grateful smile and a compliment from the Captain. Being useful is a good way to ingratiate one's self to Thessalie.

The Journey Itself

Travelling north around the top of the peninsula is usually uneventful as long as the waters are calm. The Straits of Shargon are often treacherous but vessels hugging the coastline are typically spared its wrath. The Captain's dragonmark helps ensure the Spire's safe passage; there are no encounters for the PCs to worry about during this part of the voyage.

The rest of the Journey to the Wasting Plains may not be so placid. The following encounter is an optional one. *Use this encounter only if the PCs went through two or fewer subquests.* Because the rest of the adventure is likely to take a considerable amount of time, the session may not be long enough to include the combat below. If you wish to run it for the PCs, feel free to do so but stay mindful of how long remains in the time slot. If less than two hours are left by the time you reach this point in the scenario, it is advisable to skip this encounter and go straight to Part Two, The Dragon's Path.

Claws of the Deep

For some time, the waters west of the peninsula have been a troubled area. The sahuagin fight their own wars, far below the gaze of the land-borne races. These conflicts are as violent of anything the surface of Eberron has endured. Tragedies, victories, glory, and terrible destruction have all played out countless times beneath the surface of the world's oceans.

While the same cannot be said for all the waters of Eberron, the sahuagin are the dominant aquatic species in and around Xen'drik. As such, their society has flourished and prospered despite the constant challenges of living in such a turbulent area. This relative stability has manifested in the emergence of the sahuagin as a nautical power to be reckoned with. Sahuagin guides are available for hire in Stormreach and

few vessels travel through their controlled territories without paying some sort of price for the privilege.

In the case of the Fourteenth Spire, the sahuagin and the Blackwheel Company have come to an understanding about its right to ply the Xen'drik seas. In exchange for a seasonal fee, the warship is granted free passage through recognized sahuagin waters. This right is communicated to the amphibious sahuagin as a abstract magical sigil placed on the underside of the Spire's hull in the shape of a squid. No harm will come to the ship at the webbed hands of the sahuagin so long as this arcane mark is renewed every three months by one of their shaman leaders.

Unfortunately for the Spire, the sahuagin are not the only race of sentient creatures to swim beneath the dark waves of Xen'drik. Others, like the chuul, vie for a lesser dominance in the underwater areas where the sahuagin do not hold sway. Fully capable of recognizing familiar signs, the chuul know the mark of passage that their "betters" place on ships and when they have the chance, they attack vessels bearing them as a form of petty revenge.

This encounter involves a lone chuul in a coastal reef attacking the Fourteenth Spire from within. The PCs are sent down to investigate and find themselves face to face with one of the most terrifying humanoids the waters of Eberron can produce.

It has been many days since you set sail from Stormreach and the passage has been smooth so far. After rounding the north end of the peninsula, the Fourteenth Spire has kept to the western coast as close as possible. A very labor-intensive way to sail, this has been beneficial in that you've stayed out of most bad weather and away from possible pirate territory.

It is late on the tenth day when your ship finds itself near a section of shallow reefs. You are not far from the Wasting Plains now. Your Captain expects to make landfall tomorrow or the day after. Right now, every hand is on deck, keeping the sails tight and the rudder steady. Reefs are dangerous business; one slip and the hull could get ripped out from under you. Everyone is nervous, with even the most jovial members of the crew tense and focused.

That's why all of them startle at the sound of something heavy falling over below the deck. "Blast!" shouts the Captain, her emerald gaze never wavering from the treacherous coast. "I can't spare anyone to check that out. Would you all go make sure whatever that is gets stowed proper?"

If the PCs go down to check out the noise, they will encounter the chuul described below in the battle deck. Use the Hold side of the Chuul Map in the appendix for that battle. If they do not, the chuul will eventually come up through the battle deck's stairwell and onto the deck. Use the Main Deck side of the Chuul map if this happens.

Foe: This chuul has climbed in through one of the ballista doors on the battle deck and is looking to slaughter anything it can get its claws on. More than capable of killing normal sailors, the creature will easily slaughter the crew of the Fourteenth Spire unless the PCs intervene.

Chuul (1); hp 90; *Monster Manual* 35

Development: This creature fights to the death, unwilling to surrender or withdraw until all of its foes are dead. Looking to make a name for itself with its own kind, the chuul will attack the PCs in preference to the crew. It has incorrectly assumed the PCs must be valued allies of the sahuagin and wants to take their heads as trophies of defiance.

The chuul will not coup de grace as long as there are PCs left standing to fight and begins the encounter with an attitude of Hostile. It is out for blood pure and simple; it wants nothing more than to murder everyone aboard the ship and take their body parts back to its lair as food for its young and honor marks for its people. Beyond that, it had no goals or needs. This makes diplomacy very unlikely, though if it can be convinced that no one aboard the ship is truly allied with the sahuagin, it *might* be convinced to leave. Use your discretion on that matter.

If the PCs are in real danger of dying, the Captain and First Mate will intervene. They do not have combat statistics in this adventure because they are not intended to enter combat. If they have to rescue the PCs, assume they defeat the Chuul in three rounds and take moderate wounds doing so. Saving the PCs will not change the Captain's opinion of them, though First Mate Gurrak will think a little less of them unless they put up a good fight against the chitinous beast.

Scaling the Encounter:

4th Level Characters: The chuul is mostly attacking out of rage from being gravely injured. In addition to the changes for 5th level, drop its hit points to 50.

5th Level Characters: The chuul has seen better days; it does not have paralytic tentacles any longer and it's missing one claw. The creature can't grab, can only make a single attack even with a full attack action, and has 75 hit points as opposed to 90.

7th Level Characters: No changes.

8th Level Characters: If you think the PCs can handle the combat, there are two chuul, both with 90 hit points. If not, increase the one chuul's hit points to 110 and give it a morale bonus of +1 to hit and damage. This accounts for its near-frenzy at the thought of attacking allies of the sahuagin. If it is convinced the PCs are not friends of the fish men, it loses the morale bonus if it keeps fighting.

Treasure: The chuul's stomach contains one 100 gp value pearl for each PCs. The Captain and crew of the Fourteenth Spire unanimously vote to let the PCs keep these since they saved the sailor's lives and likely stemmed off some serious damage to the vessel as well. These are event treasure and should be recorded in the PCs' Adventure Journals.

Once the combat ends, this part of the scenario is over. Let the PCs clean up, heal, and roleplay if they wish but move the action quickly to Part Two. The rest of the adventure awaits~!

But None of Us are With the Blackwheel Company!

It might seem incongruous for the Blackwheel Company mercenary house to provide so much support if none of the PCs are members of their faction, especially seeing as how they were just robbed of one of their artifacts. The key to understanding why they would help in this instance is to keep the word "mercenary" in mind. The alliance behind the PCs has also contracted the Blackwheel Company for the use of their warship; the Company is helping because it has been well paid to do so.

It is also possible that the PCs, not wishing contact with the Blackwheel Company after having robbed them, will not want to use the Fourteenth Spire for fear of reprisals or treachery at sea. If this is the case, feel free to let them charter their own vessel for the voyage. A trip of this magnitude will cost 1000 gold up front with another 500 payable when the ship (use the name Dawnstar or make up one of your own) reaches its destination. This fee covers a round trip but the ship will only wait one week before heading back to Stormreach.

Part Two: The Dragon's Path

The Fourteenth Spire will reach the area described below eleven days after leaving harbor in Stormreach. Keen-eyed PCs will recognize it from Valek's cryptic answer. If not, the navigator will make a verbal note of having never seen a cove like it before. If he has been told about Valek's response, he will suggest that it might be where they need to drop anchor. If not, the PCs will have to make that decision for themselves.

Assuming the PCs realize they need to stop in this place, move to the text below. If not, feel free to run the PCs through more empty days of nautical travel until their either figure out that they need to return to the cove or give up and head home. The scenario, of course, ends in failure if they choose the latter option.

A day before the Fourteenth Spire reaches the cove described below, it enters the Shudders. Be sure to relay to the PCs the feeling of the entire ship shaking side to side as it plows through fragile coral reefs and narrow sand bars. None of this does any real damage to the ship and is unavoidable; if the Spire sails any farther away from the coast, it won't be able to spot the cove the PCs need to find.

Early the second day, read or paraphrase the following:

The Fourteenth Spire is still trembling from stem to stern, a sensation that has the morning watch understandably on edge. With the first light of dawn creeping over the eastern horizon, everything seeming oddly ethereal. Even the beach nearby is unreal, a collection of strange shadows and deep, black pools. Only the dim lavender radiance of the east sky grants any depth, nearly swallowed up by the calm waters all around you.

From above you, a voice shouts out, "A light!" and points past the bow of the ship. A moment later, what he has spotted becomes visible. In the distance, along the coast, there is a faint glimmer. Something in glowing at the back of a narrow cove, beckoning you closer.

The glow is one of the crystal eyes of the first Pillar of the Sun, hidden in a cove that would normally be very difficult to spot (DC 25 Search check under normal conditions). Now that it has been revealed, the ship can chart its own course to enter the cove and find a safe place to drop anchor. This will take thirty minutes, more than long enough for the PCs to gear up and prepare to investigate.

The Spire's long boat carries you and two sailors to shore, bringing you ever closer to the source of the strange glow. The sun is higher in the sky now, giving you enough light to make out the coastline of the hidden cove a little better. Protected by tall shoals on all sides with only one way in and one way out, this coastal nook is almost invisible from the ocean.

Once inside it, the cove's main feature becomes obvious. Set upon a wide block of sandstone, a tall pillar rises over the glittering sand. Atop the column of white-gray marble, a finely carved dragon's head stares out over the cove, its stony gaze forever frozen in a triumphant roar. Its eyes are golden crystal, glowing from the ambient light of the rising sun.

A careful inspection (Search 20 or the Investigate Feat with no roll needed) will reveal that the dragon's head is a different style of carving than the rest of the pillar. It seems to have been incorporated into the column rather than made at the same time or by the same craftsmen. In truth, the giants found the dragon's head on this beach and mounted it on a pillar as a way of defending the cove. The fortification that used to be here is long gone but the pillar remains.

Its defensive ability does as well, though the passing years have rendered it little more than a curiosity. The first living creature to make physical contact with the pillar will cause the following to occur. If none of the PCs touch the column, have a small sand crab crawl up the block and set off the dragon's head for a dramatic effect.

Contact with the pillar causes the eyes of the dragon's head high above to glow more fiercely. The entire edifice shakes as the dragon's mouth erupts! A gout of flame a hundred feet long bursts forth, a fiery cone that arcs over the cove and blasts the coral cliff beyond. Motes of fire rain down out of the flaming breath, extinguishing themselves in puffs of vapor as they land on the waves below.

Unless a PC is flying directly in front of the dragon's mouth 40 feet above the ground, there is no chance of damage from the fire breath. This pillar is the one referenced in Valek's riddle, a fact that will probably not escape the PCs now that it has exhaled so spectacularly.

Searching the cove, the PCs can find a section of stone blocks forming a wide, weathered road leading off into the Wasting Plains. The dismal, ashen sands swallow the road and obscure it after a few miles, but it is enough of a path to get them on the right track. There is nothing else of interest here, though diligent or determined PCs can uncover the foundation of the giant's sea fortress here if they wish to spend the time digging. Nothing remains of the building except its base stones and no treasure can be unearthed here.

On the Dragon's Path

How well the PCs navigate depends on whether they follow Valek's advice and their own skills. PCs with Survival can plot a course through the Wasting Plains that keeps them from straying too far off a south heading. They need to move straight south from the coast (the direction the partial road they found was heading) to reach the Cairn of Stone Hearts – a journey that will take three days on foot.

The Captain of the Fourteenth Spire can spare each PC a week's worth of water and food if they need it, but she will not promise to wait more than two weeks before heading back to Stormreach. She's been contracted for a week, but she'll offer the extra time as a kindness. She urges the PCs not to need it; the storms both on the coast and on the sands can get violent. They are all in danger the longer they have to stay here.

Traveling by night as the riddle suggested has one other benefit. At night, the Pillars of the Sun can be seen in the distance because of their glowing crystals. The Pillars absorb sunlight and glow at night like dim beacons over the wasted dunes. Because they shed light in the same manner as a hooded lantern, their radiance can only be seen to the north and south of each one. This directional property is why they have remained hidden for so long. Only by finding the Dragon's Cove have the PCs been able to discover the Pillars themselves.

By day, the Pillars are only visible when the PCs are close enough to see them. Because each one is nine miles apart, it will take a Survival check (DC 20) each day for three days to remain on a south heading straight enough to find each one. The Pillars are landmarks that can show the PCs they are on the right track, regardless of when they travel. Their description is below.

Towering over the dunes, this forty foot pillar is graced at its summit by a carving of a beetle with its wings spread in flight. The mandibles of the beetle are closed around a gold-colored crystal in a setting of weathered bronze. Bronze plates decorate the beetle as well, forming a crown of sorts for it to perch upon. A set of glyphs are carved into the crown, the same word repeated over and over again around its brow.

The language of the glyphs is Drow script. These pillars used to be plain stone with a crystal set in a pyramid-shaped cap. The drow, after defeating their former masters, took over most of their intact structures and turned them to their own purposes. The drow in this area remade each of the Pillars of the Sun in the image of their god Siiq'cha, reshaping their tops, adding the bronze, and resetting the crystals as they are now.

The word repeated in Drow around the crown is *vash'uu*, the dark elven word for "harvest".

The Seventh Pillar

Travel across the Wasting Plains is never safe. While the PCs manage to get more than fifty trackless miles into the area without significant difficulty, the odds eventually catch up with them when they reach the seventh Pillar of the Sun. Read the PCs the following text section as a bit of foreshadowing before the actual attack.

The sands and ash here look to have been through significant turmoil. The dunes have been sculpted by high winds into a deep valley with high walls and treacherous pitfalls. The sand walls are pockmarked in several places by shadowy holes leading into darkness. All is quiet here; even the ever-present zephyrs seem to have died down for the moment.

If that description doesn't set the PCs on edge, they deserve to be surprised by the formian charge about to occur to them. The insect men do not like having their territory challenged, a fact they are more than willing to violently communicate to the PCs.

Foes: These formians usually hunt underground since the lack of prey on the surface discourages them from spending any significant time above the dunes. That lack of vigilance is why the PCs have been able to get so far into their territory before any of them noticed. Now that they have, they begin the encounter as Hostile and will fight to the death to drive the "invaders" from their home.

First Wave

Formian Warriors (6): hp 26, 26, 27, 27, 28, 28; *Monster Manual* 109.

Second Wave

Formian Warriors (4): hp 27, 27, 28, 28; *Monster Manual* 109.

Third Wave

Formian Taskmaster (1): hp 40; *Monster Manual* 109.

Tactics: The first wave attacks initially, charging in the first round to close on the PCs. They fight without mercy but will not coup de grace until all standing PCs are down. They are also fighting to buy time for their reinforcements to arrive, since the hive rarely comes to the surface and they were not prepared to defend from an assault above the dunes.

The second wave of formians exits the hive opening at the start of round five. They also charge, trying to flank if at all possible. Any PCs that has already killed a formian is a primary target, while those that have not yet inflicted damage on one is ignored in this second charge unless there are no other available PCs to engage in combat.

When the taskmaster arrives on round nine, all surviving formians attempt to break off from combat and rally on its position at Hive Exit #1 (see the map). If it can, the taskmaster will try to use Diplomacy and communicate with the PCs. The taskmaster speaks Common, though very poorly. If they will agree to leave immediately and not return, any downed PCs will be allowed to leave with them and the taskmaster will provide an antidote to any poison they may be suffering. This is a one-time offer and if refused, the taskmaster orders the hive exits collapsed and fights to the death along with its remaining warriors.

This is the last wave; if the PCs defeat all the formians, no more will arrive. The hive exits have been caved in and the rest of the insectoids have pulled back to their main cavern. Any assault on that would require the PCs to dig through nearly a mile of sand and take on a force of nearly a hundred furious, fearless ant-creatures on their home ground.

Scaling the Encounter:

4th Level Characters: Do not use the Taskmaster at all. Change the waves as given below for 5th level characters and when the second wave of soliders is done, the formians collapse their tunnels.

5th Level Characters: The first two formian waves are four and two creatures strong, respectively. The taskmaster is still recovering from wounds sustained in another battle; it only has 20 hit points.

7th Level Characters: The first wave of formians is nine strong with the extra three having 30 hit points each. The taskmaster is unchanged.

8th Level Characters: Use the changes listed for level 7 characters, add three formians to the second wave, and increase the taskmaster's hit points to 50.

This is the only significant encounter in the Wasting Plains before the PCs reach the Cairn of Stone Hearts. Because of the godly energies surrounding the site, most creatures avoid it. Thus, the PCs have a much easier time of traveling through the gray wastes of this ruined landscape than they normally would. Once the PCs are ready to proceed, take them past the last few Pillars of the Sun and then move to Part Three,

The Lonely Cairn by reading the next section of text.

In the distance, a glimmering cloud catches the light of the green moon high overhead. Like a shimmering mist, it moves against the wind, flying from east to west and then back again. Very faintly, the sound of insect wings can be made out over the low whisper of the desert breeze. The lights are coming from beetles, hundreds of tiny beetles, flying in a swarm.

As one, they turn and fly south rapidly. Within moments, they are joined by another swarm. And another. And another. All of the beetles seem to be going to the same place, somewhere over the next dune rise...

Part Three: The Lonely Cairn

The swarms of beetles are traveling to the stone statues surrounding the Cairn, where they perch and wait for the rising sun to warm their tiny bodies. They have been doing this for hundreds of years, ever since the power of Siiq'cha started emanating from the site that serves as its godly prison. The constant grip of their legs and mandibles have caused the erosion that renders all of the statues unrecognizable as anything but just roughly humanoid. Their size can discern giants from elves but beyond that, all are in the same deteriorated condition.

Once the PCs top the rise mentioned in the last text section, read the following to reveal to them, at last, the Cairn of Stone Hearts!

Beyond the tall dunes lies a wide valley of gray sand. An avenue of tall pillars, each with the now familiar beetle topping them, cuts a line through it to a tall ziggurat pyramid of dull white and pale green stone. Surrounding this huge structure, thousands of statues, some tall and others tiny, stand frozen in the sand. Not arranged in any particular pattern, they seem almost scattered around the wastes – twenty thousand humanoid obelisks ringing the Cairn at their heart.

Moving down to the Cairn itself is perfectly safe as long that they do not hesitate. An hour of night remains, which is more than enough time for them to enter the Cairn grounds and reach the pyramid before the sun rises. Of course, they still do not have the constructed key needed to open the Cairn nor do they know where to assemble it. That will only be revealed through exploration.

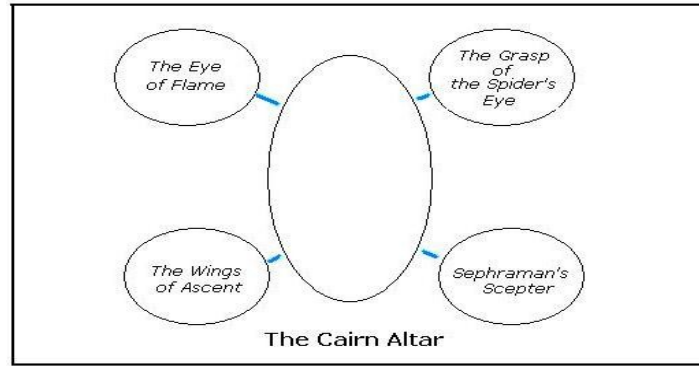
As shown on the exterior map of the Cairn of Stone Hearts, there is an altar next to the temple's sealed stone doors. When dawn comes, read the following text section if there are any PCs close enough to witness the event. If not, they have thirty minutes to see the beam of light mentioned in the text as it bathes the altar and makes its glyphs visible. If they miss it, they will have to wait another day before they can assemble the key on its surface (which is the only way the parts will allow assembly).

The rising sun casts the entire valley in a rose-lavender glow. The slow song of beetles clicking their wings together fills the area, a constant rhythm that echoes from every stone in this place's macabre gallery. At the far east, the first of the Cairn's pillars catches the first rays of dawn, its crystal igniting in a golden fire. Then the next. Then the next and the next until each one burns brightly.

Now a focused beam of light, the radiance of the sun reaches the pillar closest to the Cairn. The beetle atop it makes a grinding sound as it shifts on its perch to angle towards the wide altar block in from of the building's massive doors. The light held captive in its gemstone shoots downwards, surrounding the altar in a wave of gilded illumination – a magical spotlight as warm as it is brilliant.

Across the surface of the altar, four depressions form around a fifth larger one. Each of the four bear strange glyphs of light in their depths, spidery lines spelling out mysterious messages beneath the relentless onslaught of sunlight from above.

This should be all the prompting the PCs need to take the four items they bear and place them in the depressions. It takes a Decipher Script check (DC 25) or a Spot check (DC 15) to determine that the glyphs strongly resemble the writing on each piece. The pieces each have a specific place to go as noted here:



It takes one round to place each item correctly, during which time the person doing so suffers one point of fire damage from the intense sunlight. Any form of fire damage prevention or resistance will negate this. After four rounds, the placing PC can step out of the sunlight beam; the rest of the process takes ten more rounds and is completely automatic; the magic of the altar has taken over.

Now glowing as brightly as the sunlight that surrounds them, each of the four items begin to hover above their respective receptacles. The Wings of Ascent come to life, its talons opening as its wings spread. The Grasp of the Spider's Eye unhinges, its top half coming loose as it flares wide.

Each piece moves slowly towards the middle. The Eye of Flame settles into the Grasp, which closes tight around it with a flare of light. The Grasp then merges with the upwards arcs of the Wings of Ascent, becoming a permanent part of the jeweled scarab. The claws of the brooch grasp the looped end of Sephraman's Scepter, locking tight as the Eye erupts in a column of burning energy that hurtles skyward!

The thin clouds above you iris open, a heavenly eye of shadows and white to echo the magical one now lying on the altar before you. The beam of flames disappears into the sky as the clouds close again. A low rumble of thunder marks their passage...

If the PCs (or the Players) have the sudden feeling that something very important has happened, they are entirely correct. The completion of the Cairn Key has awakened dormant magics in ruins and crypts all across Xen'drik. Once quiet buildings deep in the heart of the jungle will now begin to come alive once more with the ancient powers of the Giants and energies that predate even those auld worthies. The Emerald Continent just got a great deal more interesting. And a great deal more dangerous.

But for now, there is the matter of the Cairn of Stone Hearts. The completion of the key has caused a glowing sigil in the shape of the Key to appear on the stone lock between its doors. Touching the key to the sigil will open them, revealing the secrets of the Cairn for the first time in an eon.

There is one challenge left to face before this can happen, however. The moment the key is completed (10 rounds after the fourth item is placed on the altar), the swarms of beetles nearest to the doors awaken and surge towards the area of the doors. Drawn by the attention of Siiq'cha, they do what sand scarabs do.

They attack.

Foes: These swarms of winged vermin are lethal in their relentless drive to feast upon anything in their path. Driven by the mad hunger and rage of Siiq'cha, they are even more relentless than normal scarabs; very little will deter them except fire or cold (see Development below).

Scarab Swarms (4): hp 20, 20, 20, 20; *Monster Manual* 239; Use the statistics for Locust Swarm. Keep in mind that any damage from fire or cold will instantly disperse the affected swarm even if it has hit points remaining after the attack.

Tactics: The swarms will immediately converge to cover a 20' by 20' (four swarms) area in front of the doors, attacking anything in that space with a relentless and voracious appetite. They will not move unless destroyed or driven off; they will remain in front of the temple until Siiq'cha is destroyed or the sun sets and they are forced to seek the warm sands of the Wasting Plains for heat once more.

The scarab swarms will *not* enter the temple. The will of Siiq'cha is almost painful to them and while they are an extension of their god's might, they cannot bear to be any closer to his power than they are right now. Even if the doors are opened, they will stay in the 20' by 20' area in front of the Cairn.

Development: The swarms are driven by the will of Siiq'cha but this includes its primal fears of fire and cold. Because both forces are detrimental to the harvest and living things, they invoke a basal terror in the

insect god. As such, if any swarm suffers damage from fire or cold, that swarm will immediately disperse, its component insects scattering out into the Wasting Plains and disappearing.

Scaling the Encounter:

This encounter does not scale. It is mostly an event for atmosphere and excitement; it is not really intended to be a challenge for the PCs so much as a way for them to see that this place emanates some kind of powerful control over the insects of the area.

That said, it might be best for 4th and 5th level parties of PCs if you use only one or two swarms instead of four. Use your best judgment in this case, keeping in mind that the encounter is not intended to kill or even seriously challenge the group. Rest assured that the fights inside the Cairn will handle that end of things without needing any help from these winged pests.

The Cairn of Stone Hearts

Once inside, the PCs have reached the climax of the adventure. This part of the scenario is a site-based exploration with a twist. The site is fairly simple in design, with one primary goal and four secondary objectives needed to accomplish it. The PCs can explore the temple, what there is of it, is a short amount of time. The key to sustaining the sense of adventure needed for this event is the constant sense of danger provided by the temple's primary occupant – Siiq'cha itself.

Be sure to describe it in painful detail as given below as soon as the PCs are in a position to see it. Before they even witness the god in all its bejeweled, chitinous glory, impart a sense of tremendous power in the Cairn itself. Tell the PCs that the air feels thick with an invisible energy. Give PC divine casters the sense that they are in some other deity's domain, their personal connection to their gods all but lost in this unhallowed place. Make sure the PCs know as soon as they enter the Cairn that they are in an alien place, one more ancient than anywhere they have been before and unflinchingly hostile.

Once the PCs and the Players are in the right frame of mind, the exploration can begin!

Exploring the Cairn

1. The Door of Five Seasons (EL -)

The dense stone door shudders as the Cairn Key makes contact. A moment later, the block begins to slide to the left, revealing a second block of solid rock behind it. This one has a bas relief of elves sowing a field with small shoots of greenery.

The block slowly slides to the right, uncovering a third stone slab decorated with the same elves tending the field, now filled with tall foliage and large, round fruits and vegetables. No sooner does the second block retreat fully into the side of the Cairn than the third one starts moving to the left.

Behind it is a fourth engraved door. On its wide surface, the elves are hard at work harvesting each and every stalk, gathering the fruits of their long labors. In the background, the sun is superimposed by a beetle, its wings spread like the one atop each of the pillars that led you here. The fourth block opens to the right when the third one vanishes into the wall.

A fifth slab can now be seen. Its decoration is of a desolate field being tilled by elves. The figures are burying huge body parts, likely those of giants, in shallow trenches. The flesh is being devoured by thousands of beetles while the massive scarab over the sun watches while it sets over the horizon.

The fifth block, when it slides away to the left, reveals a passage beyond. The way is now open into the Cairn of Stone Hearts.

The drow elves who turned this place into a shrine for their god, Siiq'cha the Harvester, dubbed this passage the Door of Five Seasons. The PCs may only count four but the blank door at the beginning marks what they celebrated as a month of rest – a season of its own. During this fifth season, the harvester scarabs consumed the flesh left in the fields, excreted rich, valuable fertilizers, and left to lay their eggs elsewhere just before the start of planting time. The drow elves took a much needed break during these few weeks, spending time with their families and tending to the rest of their needs.

A holdover from the war between the giants and the elves still lingers on the doors and on the entire surface of the temple itself. An intrinsic magical property of the gray-green stone here prevents the damage reduction and hardness ignoring property of adamantine from functioning. Against this stone, adamantine is treated like normal steel for purposes of tunneling or sundering.

Each door is ten feet thick and reinforced magically to possess a hardness of 20. In all other ways, the stone of the doors and temple are considered normal. PCs with the right knowledge skills (Profession (mining), Knowledge (geology), or the like) can identify the rock as lesser xendrite, an uncommon mineral used in a few of the ruins and structures of the giant culture that once dominated this entire continent.

Once the PCs are through, the doors will shut in the same order they closed. Their reverse sides all show the same image – a harvester scarab with its wings unruled in front of a blazing sun. Once closed, they can only be opened again through the use of the Cairn Key. See the next section of the Cairn for more details on that.

2. The Lay Shrine (EL 7)

Ahead, the heavy stone corridor ends at a junction that turns left and right. It also proceeds past a pair of columns decorated to resemble a mass of beetles spiraling around a giant's femur onto a wide landing. There is no wall past the landing; it seems to overlook a huge open area that extends up and down as far as the eye can see.

The shrine was once used by the drow of this area as a place of worship. One of the priests, typically the lowest ranking member of Siiq'cha's clergy, would lead services every fifth day from this place, with worshipers spreading out down the right and left hallways all the way to the stairs leading up in both directions.

The shrine has a plain stone altar upon which the service's sacrifice, usually a sick or dying animal from the nearby farms, would be ritually slain and thrown over the side onto Siiq'cha's island far below. There hasn't been a sacrifice or a service in more than a thousand years but the shrine is not entirely uninhabited. One being remains in the area, his long sleep ended by the recreation of the Cairn Key. Now, filled with hope that this long imprisonment might finally end for both the god and himself, he approaches the PCs as soon as they enter the hallway in front of the shrine.

A small pile of dust and rags in front of a stone block on the far edge of the landing suddenly billows in a wind none of you can feel. The dust rises up sharply, taking the form of a burning humanoid figure bearing a curved knife in the shape of a beetle's pincer. It raises one blazing hand to point toward you and opens its dark, fire rimmed maw of a mouth.

Dolo'vai, once a priest of Siiq'cha, only wishes to speak to the PCs. They may well misinterpret his intentions and launch a preemptive attack on him. If they do, they automatically get surprise and the spectre will be overwhelmed by feelings of hostility. This will force him to defend himself violent for one full round before recovering his senses and trying to parlay again.

The best result of this encounter will be for the PCs to converse with Dolo'vai and learn of the temple's history and purpose. Dolo'vai has the information the PCs need to complete this adventure. It is perfectly possible for them to defeat Siiq'cha on their own and end his curse of plague and famine on their own but doing so will be very difficult without the priest's aid. Be sure to run this encounter with Dolo'vai's peaceful intentions in mind. Observant PCs should get the chance to take Sense Motive checks or just roleplay wishing to see if he means them harm.

Dolo'vai is the "fire" referenced in the Caldyn Fragment. He is literally pointing at the answer to the Draconic Prophecy regarding the Carin of Stone Hearts – the PCs themselves.

Creature: Dolo'vai was the lowest ranked preist of Siiq'cha at the time of the temple's magical accident. The doors slammed shut and all outside were petrified and slain, leaving him within its walls with only his now-insane god for company and no hope of rescue. Eventually, Dolo'vai slew himself with his own ritual dagger rather than die a slow death from hunger and dehydration. Vowing to remain with Siiq'cha until they could both be free, his spirit has remained in these enchanted halls ever since.

Dolo'vai, spectre; hp 82; *Monster Manual* 232; Because the power animating Dolo'vai's undead form is directly present, his hit points have been increased to maximum for his creature type. He is *not* intended as a combat encounter but will make for a deadly fight if pressed to do so.

If the PCs will talk with Dolo'vai, he tells them all he knows and entreats them to aid him in his bid for freedom. He will give them his idea of dropping the great temple on Siiq'cha's insane avatar, an act of blasphemy that may be the only way to save them both.

If any PC is particularly cordial or friendly, he may (at your discretion) off his ritual dagger to them as a permanent gift. If not, he will ask that it be replaced on the altar behind him here in the Lay Shrine when the PCs are finished using it. The dagger is all he has left in this world and unless one of the PCs makes a very favorable impression on him, he will prefer to have it remain behind in the ruin after he is gone.

"Please, stay your arms and listen to me for a moment. I mean you no harm. I am Dolo'vai, keeper of this most holy temple to the great Siiq'cha, the lord of the cycle and the Harvester. I fear that now, this place is more its most holy tomb than any shrine to the Harvester's glory.

"Long ago, some terrible tragedy closed the doors of the temple and sealed us away inside its walls to

spend eternity alone. The isolation has driven my god's physical form mad and left me... as you see me now. I remain as my Lord's loyal servant in death as I was in life. I do not know what happened to imprison us but the past is done. All that remains now is life, which is denied to me and I fear must also be taken from the mortal shell of Siiq'cha also.

"I have dreamed of a great famine that spreads from this place and may embrace all that is green from shore to shore across this land. Already it has left this place desolate, has it not? I see the wasteland outside though my eyes have long since fallen to dust.

"If you will aid me, I will aid you. You are now prisoners here as well, for you carry a key that can only regain its power through the touch of the sun or the power of the divine power that dwells here. Help me set things right in this great temple and I will renew your key's energies. What say you?"

Dolo'vai is not lying; the Cairn Key cannot reopen the door unless it is *blessed* by a priest of Siiq'cha (the power of this place) or it is exposed to the light of the sun for one uninterrupted hour. If the PCs ever wish to see the outside world again, they will probably have to go along with his plan. Of course, they might also be moved to help by the promise of restoring the land and preventing the famine curse from growing any larger.

If the PCs agree to listen further, continue with this:

"Come to the edge of the shrine and look first down and then up. I will explain after you have seen the truth of this place."

PCs doing this will see Siiq'cha far below on his island and the Great Temple hovering overhead suspended by four glowing paths of energy. This is probably the PCs' first glimpse of Siiq'cha; paraphrase the section of text from Area 11 below to describe its avatar.

"My Lord Siiq'cha cannot cross the moat and its icy flow keeps his wings from unfolding. He is trapped and without his worshipers, he is too weak to return to the godly realms from which he can. Untold years have driven him mad, mad enough to destroy what he once protected. If Siiq'cha remains in this world, he will surely devastate the lush lands outside with his swarms of beetles and his terrible, corrupted power. To stop this blasphemy, I am prepared to commit one of my own and pray for his forgiveness in the afterlife.

Do you see the great temple above you, the hovering edifice of stone and light?"

Again, paraphrase the description of the Great Temple of Siiq'cha, Area 9, keeping in mind that the PCs are seeing it from the underside.

"The power suspending the temple is contained in the stone hearts of four powerful insects that stand guard over the paths of light that connect it to this pyramid. If each heart is sacrificed on the main altar to my lord through an anointing of blood, they will shatter and the temple will fall. Even the mighty physical body of my god Siiq'cha will not be able to survive its crushing weight.

I have no ability to handle the tools needed to make this sacrifice happen but I can say the final prayer. If you will aid me, be my hands and shed a few drops of your blood, we can all be free."

This is the PCs' time to decide. The priest is a drow elf but he intends no treachery and earnestly wants to be done with his eternal servitude in this lonely place. He genuinely regrets having to slay his god's body but he honestly believes this will free the god's essence, let him go on to the afterlife of the Harvester, and release enough energy that he can recharge the PCs' Cairn Key. All of this will be verified if the PCs use the Sense Motive skill and, not that they have any guarantees but the priest is right on all counts.

If they agree, the task is set before them to slay the beetles, take their hearts, and make the needed sacrifices. The plan has four steps, all of which is explained by Dolo'vai before he vanishes to await them in Area 9, the Great Temple of Siiq'cha.

- **Step One:** *Find ritual garb that may have survived in the Preparation Rooms.* This is doable by climbing the pyramid stairs and going to either of the Area 3 rooms. A part of more than four PCs will have to visit both rooms to find enough mantles for all.
- **Step Two:** *Say a Prayer of Invocation in the Chamber of Devotion.* This is done by visiting Area 4 and speaking the following words in unison while kneeling before the Scarab Idol.
 - *"Vaal desht Siiq'cha. Vaal narat Siiq'cha. Esh vii-na tur-na, Siiq'cha."* The prayer is taught to the PCs by Dolo'vai and is also engraved on the Scarab Idol itself. It translates to, "All praise Siiq'cha. All glory to Siiq'cha. Life begins and ends with Siiq'cha."
- **Step Three:** *Slay each of the beetles and harvest their xendrite hearts.* Easier said than done, each one will be a difficult fight for the PCs. Harvesting the hearts does not require a skill check if the beetle is destroyed and cannot be done while it still exists and is functional.
- **Step Four:** *Anoint each stone heart on the Altar of the Harvest with blood drawn by a ritual dagger.* The dagger is either granted by Dolo'vai or found by the PCs after defeating him in Area 2. Any

PCs contributing blood will lose 1d4 hit points from the sacrifice. This damage will heal normally with rest or magical healing. A Knowledge (religion) check (DC 10) is needed to know how to anoint the stone heart properly. If none of the PCs can make this check, Dolo'vai can reveal the process.

- **Step Five: Run!** Not actually a step in the plan, it is still a very good idea. Once the stone hearts are anointed, Dolo'vai will give the PCs long enough to get off the Great Temple and onto one of the path landings before finishing the rite and destroying the light chains. This initiates the Death of Siiq'cha scene below and is effectively the end of the scenario.

Treasure: Within a hidden compartment on the altar (Search DC 24 to find), Dolo'vai has concealed his ritual dagger. A single edged blade carved from obsidian in the shape of a beetle's mandible, this weapon is a +1 *keen* dagger that always acts as if it were *blessed* by a Lawful neutral power. If the PCs find and are allowed to keep the dagger (or if Dolo'vai is destroyed and the weapon is found), it is event treasure and should be recorded in the Adventure Journal of the PC in question.

3. Preparation Room (EL -)

This stone room is virtually featureless. Long years of erosion and rot have claimed nearly all of its furnishings save for a pile of brittle-looking wood against the far wall and stone pillars carved like scarab swarms in all four corners.

In each of the "piles of wood", which were once wardrobes, there are three salvageable mantles made from iridescent scarab shells sewn into wide swaths of leather with a hole cut in the center for the wearer's head. Essentially leather tabards decorated with abstract beetle designs, these garments no longer have strings on either side for tying shut. They can still be worn, however, and will serve for the purposes of the rite Dolo'vai wishes to cast.

If the PCs are here without instructions from the specter priest, these tabards would normally be little more than a curiosity. However in the eastern-most room, there is a section of stone wall with a ritual described on its surface in pictograms. A Decipher Script (DC 25) or knowledge of the Drow language will enable the reader to determine that it explains how the chains of light were originally created. A successful Knowledge (arcane) (DC 20), Spellcraft (DC 25), or Knowledge (religion) (DC 15) will let the PCs figure out how the ritual could be reversed (through the steps given above) to bring the Great Temple crashing down on the huge beast below.

They Killed Dolo'vai! Now what?!?

It will become quickly apparent to you that if your group unload on Dolo'vai and annihilate him as soon as he appears, they will have no clue how to stop Siiq'cha and recharge their Cairn Key. Even worse, they won't even know that they should!

You have a number of options available to you if this occurs. One is to simply let them explore the temple and watch what they do. They will probably attack the golems on the paths since doing so is the only way to get to the Great Temple in the middle. If they destroy one of the golems, describe the path it was guarding growing slowly dimmer and the temple in the center shuddering slightly. This may get the hint across that the golems are key to bringing the temple down.

Of course, they still don't know they need to do that yet, so letting them make a Knowledge (arcana) or (religion) check to figure out they need a powerful source of divine energy to make their key work again is a good place to start. From there, another skill check might reveal that when an avatar or divine minion (since the PCs won't really know what the gigantic celestial bug below them is) is slain, a pulse of godly energy is always released. Then you just have to sit back and let them do the math.

This plus the ritual engraved on the wall in the eastern Preparation Room will give them all the tools they need to get the job done.

If all else fails, wing it. This is your adventure to run; do whatever you wish to make the game fun for both the players and yourself. As long as the PCs have a fair shot at getting out of the Cairn alive, you can't go far wrong.

4. The Chamber of Devotion (EL -)

Very little remains of what was once probably a grand religious chamber. The fine remains of a dozen ancient tapestries lie piled at the edges of the floor while the far wall holds the only intact feature of the room – a ten foot tall idol of a harvester beetle. A low stone shelf, the right height for a humanoid to kneel on, rests in front of the idol, almost invisible below centuries of dust.

This room was where the priests would go for private meditations and to prepare for religious festivals. The base of the idol, which must be cleared of dust before the pictograms can be seen, spells out the prayer given to the PCs by Dolo'vai above.

"Vaal desht Siiq'cha. Vaal narat Siiq'cha. Esh vii-na tur-na, Siiq'cha."

There is nothing else of interest in the chamber. If the idol is checked for magical auras, it does radiate a faint divination and a moderate transmutation. It is the transmutation effect that explains why the crafted idol has been able to survive the passing centuries without succumbing to age like everything else in this once exalted room.

A Quick Note About Worship: Some PCs may have a moral issue with praying to a giant bug. In this instance, they are not so much praying as they are invoking a magical effect. No faith is required or even expected. Performing this ritual will not jeopardize a PC's alignment or standing with the divine in any way, something they should be made aware of if the Players raise this issue during play.

5. West Wind Path (EL 6)

The platform of stone extends more than twenty feet over the huge empty center of the pyramid. On the other end of the platform, a statue of mirror-polished obsidian in the shape of a scarab beetle stands with its mandibles closed around a wide path of violet light extending out to the middle of the structure. The other end of the path is anchored on a hovering plinth of rock in the distance.

The statue is actually a celestial stag beetle in the form of a scarab. It will come to life and attack the moment the PCs actually set foot on the platform of the West Wind. This beetle fights as described below and will not show mercy but will also not leave the platform. As soon as it stops fighting for any reason (assuming it isn't destroyed), such as if the PCs all retreat off its platform, it returns to its position holding the path of light. Returning takes two rounds and once complete, the beetle returns to its obsidian form and completely heals.

Note that none of these Wind comments are scaled for different levels. The point of these encounters is to provide the PCs with a combat encounter and a challenge that successfully resolves the adventure. Any group should be able to defeat these creatures with teamwork and competent play. If 4th level characters have serious difficulty with this encounter, do not be afraid to reduce the beetle's effectiveness to give them a strong but not lethal combat.

Foe: The celestial stag beetle is a deadly foe with the ability to slice apart anything it catches in its mandibles and trample anyone in its path. This creature will instantly attack anyone coming within ten feet of it (onto the platform with it) without hesitation or remorse.

Scarab of the West Wind, Celestial Stag Beetle; hp 50; *Monster Manual* 285 and the Celestial template (*Monster Manual*). Modify the stag beetle with the following adjustments. In addition, the bite of the West Wind scarab inflicts +1d4 cold damage with each successful hit.

- Smite Evil ([Su](#))
 - Once per day a celestial stag beetle can make a normal melee attack at +7 points of damage against an evil foe.
- Special Qualities
- A celestial creature retains all the special qualities of the base creature and also gains the following qualities.
 - [Darkvision](#) out to 60 feet.
 - [Damage reduction](#) 5/magic.
 - [Resistance](#) 5 to acid, cold, and electricity.
 - [Spell resistance](#) 12.
- A celestial stag beetle's natural weapons count as magic for the purpose of overcoming damage reduction in other creatures.

Once the stag beetle scarab is defeated, its shell opens to reveal a chamber within its thorax. Inside is the beetle's stone heart, a nine-inch orb of gray-green xendrite that throbs to the touch. This orb is needed for the ritual that drops the temple on Siiq'cha and successfully ends the adventure.

Siiq'WHAT?

The name of the god is pronounced "Seek Chah" with the ch as in choose or chew.

Dolo'vai is pronounced "Dough low Vy" with the vy as in "vying" for attention.

Xendrite is pronounced "Zen drite" with the drite rhyming with tight.

6. East Wind Path (EL 6)

The platform of stone extends more than twenty feet over the huge empty center of the pyramid. On the other end of the platform, a statue of mirror-polished obsidian in the shape of a scarab beetle stands with its mandibles closed around a wide path of violet light extending out to the middle of the structure. The other end of the path is anchored on a hovering plinth of rock in the distance.

The statue is actually a celestial stag beetle in the form of a scarab. It will come to life and attack the moment the PCs actually set foot on the platform of the East Wind. This beetle fights as described below and will not show mercy but will also not leave the platform. As soon as it stops fighting for any reason, it returns to its position holding the path of light.

Foe: The celestial stag beetle is a deadly foe with the ability to slice apart anything it catches in its mandibles and trample anyone in its path. This creature will instantly attack anyone coming within ten feet of it (onto the platform with it) without hesitation or remorse.

Scarab of the East Wind, Celestial Stag Beetle; hp 50; *Monster Manual* 285 and the Celestial template (*Monster Manual*). Modify the stag beetle with the adjustments given in Area 5. In addition, the bite of the East Wind scarab inflicts +1d4 electricity damage with each successful hit.

7. South Wind Path (EL 6)

The platform of stone extends more than twenty feet over the huge empty center of the pyramid. On the other end of the platform, a statue of mirror-polished obsidian in the shape of a scarab beetle stands with its mandibles closed around a wide path of violet light extending out to the middle of the structure. The other end of the path is anchored on a hovering plinth of rock in the distance.

The statue is actually a celestial stag beetle in the form of a scarab. It will come to life and attack the moment the PCs actually set foot on the platform of the South Wind. This beetle fights as described below and will not show mercy but will also not leave the platform. As soon as it stops fighting for any reason, it returns to its position holding the path of light.

Foe: The celestial stag beetle is a deadly foe with the ability to slice apart anything it catches in its mandibles and trample anyone in its path. This creature will instantly attack anyone coming within ten feet of it (onto the platform with it) without hesitation or remorse.

Scarab of the South Wind, Celestial Stag Beetle; hp 50; *Monster Manual* 285 and the Celestial template (*Monster Manual*). Modify the stag beetle with the adjustments given in Area 5. In addition, the bite of the South Wind scarab inflicts +1d4 fire damage with each successful hit.

8. North Wind Path (EL 6)

The platform of stone extends more than twenty feet over the huge empty center of the pyramid. On the other end of the platform, a statue of mirror-polished obsidian in the shape of a scarab beetle stands with its mandibles closed around a wide path of violet light extending out to the middle of the structure. The other end of the path is anchored on a hovering plinth of rock in the distance.

The statue is actually a celestial stag beetle in the form of a scarab. It will come to life and attack the moment the PCs actually set foot on the platform of the North Wind. This beetle fights as described below and will not show mercy but will also not leave the platform. As soon as it stops fighting for any reason, it returns to its position holding the path of light.

Foe: The celestial stag beetle is a deadly foe with the ability to slice apart anything it catches in its mandibles and trample anyone in its path. This creature will instantly attack anyone coming within ten feet of it (onto the platform with it) without hesitation or remorse.

Scarab of the North Wind, Celestial Stag Beetle; hp 50; *Monster Manual* 285 and the Celestial

template (*Monster Manual*). Modify the stag beetle with the adjustments given in Area 5. In addition, the bite of the North Wind scarab inflicts +1d4 sonic damage with each successful hit.

9: The Great Temple of Siiq'cha

This eroded, almost crumbling platform of stone is shaped like an inverted pyramid with its "point" on the underside and its widest face as the floor. In the middle of the hovering plinth, an altar shaped like a crouching beetle is flanked by four candle holders carved from the rock itself. Each one is burning with a flame the same color as the purple arcs of radiance that link the platform to the four corners of the temple's inner walls.

If the PCs have talked with Dolo'vai, the spectral priest is waiting here for them to return with the glowing hearts of the four Wind scarabs. He directs them in how to slice open their palms, anoint the stone hearts, and arrange them as a sacrifice on the grand altar of the Harvester. Once this is done, he bids them a fond farewell and suggests they move quickly. He does not know how long the temple will remain airborne once the final spell is cast.

He is as good as his word; before they go, he will channel what little remains of his power as a priest into their Cairn Key, allowing the PCs to leave the Cairn of Stone Hearts the same way they came in. He thanks them for their good faith and their aid in freeing him. He calls down the blessings of Siiq'cha on each, asking that they trust him enough to allow a blessing. Doing this requires that he touch their right palm, a gesture they may well distrust given his existence as a spectre.

If they trust him, they gain the Story Object: Blessing of the Harvester. If not, he is saddened at the lack of faith but understands. He bids them goodbye and prepares to commit his own form of blasphemy. Deicide is difficult for any priest to do, even when it is the only way to redeem their god and themselves.

Proceed to the special scene, The Death of Siiq'cha.

If the PCs arrive at Area 9 without Dolo'vai's help, this place holds nothing of any real use to them unless they have deduced the ritual for themselves and have figured out that they need to perform it to escape this place. That is assuming you are requiring them to do the full ritual instead of just letting them kill the four beetle guardians and letting things go straight to Khyber afterwards. Adjudicate as desired.

The Death of Siiq'cha

This scene should be read aloud or paraphrased as you prefer.

With the last word of the prayer recited, there is an ominous sound of lightning, as if a long-abated storm were finally about to rage forth from the Great Temple. Its underside erupts in lightning, playing in all directions and striking most violently at the four platforms where the beetles once held their silent vigil. The ancient stones shatter under the assault as their paths of light vanish in a flash of failed magic.

The temple itself shudders once and then plummets like the stone it is. The four candle stands around its altar leave a trail of violet light as the heavy dais plunges earthward. The sound of a gargantuan insect's rage hisses up from below, a last moment of defiance before its shrine impacts it with crushing, lethal force. A roar of vicious thunder explodes from the island as the titanic beetle is smashed asunder, waves of golden light exploding out of its chitin as the living god is slain!

If the PCs are doing this on their own, allow four rounds after the end of the prayer for them to vacate the temple before it falls. The paths of light are dim but, until they fail as the text describes, they can still be used to escape the doom about to occur. If they stop on one of the Wind platforms, let them evade their perch's destruction through a narrow escape. Make the scene memorable and exciting but don't kill anyone with it. The only thing that should die here is Siiq'cha.

If they are acting on Dolo'vai's behalf, be sure to describe him on the temple platform as it falls. He will bow his head to the PCs as a final tribute before disappearing in the cataclysm of light below. He has escaped his eternal fate as an undead and become one with his released god. No better fate could be asked for by a loyal priest; Dolo'vai is content.

All that remains is for the PCs to leave the way they came in. At this point, all of their secret orders should either be completed or impossible to achieve. Proceed immediately to Ending the Adventure and the Adventure Questions.

10. The Moat of Ice and Fog (EL -)

A vast moat of rapidly swirling water, this circular river appears to be extremely cold. Chunks of ice are

floating along its swift waves and freezing mist rises like a dense fog out of several captive whirlpools. At least six waterspouts exist in the moat at any given moment, spiraling into shrouded darkness below.

The moat was created by the nightmarish fears of Siiq'cha itself. After becoming trapped here by the deaths of its worshippers, Siiq'cha's primal terror formed the moat as a physical representation of its bondage. It cannot cross the water because of its bitterly low temperature and its cold vapors make it impossible for the scarab god to open its wings and fly.

If the PCs for any reason try to enter the water, they will take 5d6 cold damage each round while they maintain contact. Even after leaving the moat, they suffer a d6 cold damage every minute until they dry themselves (a full round action that requires a change of clothes or drying magic like *prestidigitation*).

Being caught in one of the whirlpools (a 1 in 10 chance each round a PC is in the moat) affects the PC much like the Whirlwind special attack of an air elemental. This attack is reprinted and modified below for your convenience during play. Note that any effects from the Whirlpool are in *addition* to the 5d6 cold damage from the moat itself. Any form of damage mitigation regarding cold (such as *protection from elements*) will reduce the cold damage if applicable.

Whirlpool ([Su](#))

The whirlpools are 5 feet wide at the base, up to 30 feet wide at the top, and 50 feet deep.

A creature might be caught in the whirlpool if it touches or enters its area of effect. An immediate Reflex save (DC 16) is allowed; success means the PC resists the pull of the whirlpool this round. Each round the PC is in contact with the whirlpool, the Reflex save must be repeated. Once failed, the PC is caught until he or she successfully escapes or is slain.

Creatures of Medium size or smaller might take damage when caught in the whirlpool. An affected creature must succeed on a Reflex save when it comes into contact with the whirlpool or take 2d6 damage. It must also succeed on a second Reflex save or be picked up bodily and held suspended in the powerful waves, automatically taking the indicated damage each round. A creature that can fly or has a natural swim speed is allowed a Reflex save each round to escape the whirlpool. The creature still takes damage but can leave if the save is successful. The DC for saves against the whirlpool's effects is 16. The save DC is Strength based.

Creatures trapped in the whirlpool cannot move except to attempt to escape the effect.

Creatures caught in the whirlpool can otherwise act normally, but must succeed on a Concentration check (DC 15 + spell level) to cast a spell. Creatures caught in the whirlpool take a -4 penalty to Dexterity and a -2 penalty on attack rolls. The whirlpools of the Moat of Ice and Fog can only hold one PC of any size category each.

11. Siiq'cha's Isle (EL n/a)

A barren outcropping of stone, heavily worn and eroded by the swirling waters of the frigid moat that surrounds it, this island has only two features of interest. The first is the ring of stalagmites around the outer edge of the island, making it look like some kind of huge, fanged mouth. The second is the isle's sole inhabitant.

Nearly as large as the island itself, a gigantic stag beetle with a shell that looks like solid, iridescent gold stands astride the land mass. Its mandibles could close around a tree, its legs are the size of halberds and are just as wickedly bladed at the ends.

A palpable wave of raw power emanates from the insect. This is no mere insect, gargantuan or not. There is something legendary about it, something almost... divine.

This is the avatar of Siiq'cha, imprisoned and insane for an eon. It cannot be reasoned with, cannot be conversed with, and will show no mercy of any kind to a PC foolish enough to come within reach of it. Siiq'cha exists now only to destroy. It remembers almost nothing of its old existence and does not even recognize its one remaining priest. The only hope for redemption this creature has is to be destroyed, its energies dispersed, and then to reform in sixty seven years sane once more.

If the PCs *insist* on fighting Siiq'cha, offer them every chance to escape combat and try to convince them the battle is a fruitless one. They simply cannot win; they do not possess the power or magic to defeat a divine avatar in its home realm. If they persist, use the statistics for the tarrasque and let the dice fall where they may. Siiq'cha exists in this scenario only as a plot device and as the solution to the PCs' trapped predicament. Fighting it is an act of extreme foolishness and any PC that does so richly deserves to spend the rest of its after-existence as fertilizer. Perhaps something smarter will grow out of his or her remains...

In case PCs from the Cabal of Shadows think to do so, tossing the token they were given by their faction onto the island is a perfect way to accomplish their faction goal. Anywhere inside the Cairn is acceptable, but the island definitely counts as the structure's most potent "place of power".

Ending the Adventure

Once the PCs defeat Siiq'cha (or recharge their Cairn Key the way you allow them to if they've slain Dolo'vai), they can use their device to open the doors of the Cairn and escape. The PCs will have had every opportunity to fulfill their mission objectives, though Crimson Codex PCs will have to bring back a transcript of every prayer and sigil inside the Cairn if they failed to get the Mark of the Harvest from Dolo'vai. Otherwise, they will be deemed to have failed in their mission.

The Fourteenth Spire is waiting for them at the hidden cove and will make it back to Stormreach without incident. The chuul do not attack again; having been defeated once by this ship has made them hesitant to try again for a while. It is smooth sailing and blue skies all the way home.

One item of special note is the Cairn Key itself. When the PCs return to Stormreach, the key is taken by a neutral party acting on behalf of all the factions. Rather than go to war over the item, the factions have agreed to place the Key in trust while they decide what to do with it. The Cairn Key is to be held by the House Kundarak bank in Stormreach under the protection of its neutrality policy.

If necessary, the PCs are given orders to turn over the Key, orders they can verify come directly from the leaders of their factions.

Here ends the Cairn of Stone Hearts.

Proceed to the Adventure Questions, answer each one on the module's tracking sheet, record Event Treasure and other relevant information on the Player's Adventure Journals, and then report your results.

Adventure Questions

1. Did the PCs either succeed in all their subquests or not have to do one at all because all four factions were represented?
 - a) Yes; they did very well, either as a full mix of factions or in their subquests.
 - b) Somewhat; they succeeded at some and failed others.
 - c) No; if their factions hadn't bailed them out, this mission would never have happened.
2. Were the PCs responsive and helpful to Grave?
 - a) Very professional and diplomatic, they comported themselves very well.
 - b) Mixed reaction; some PCs were focused and controlled while others were less so.
 - c) Poor relations; the PCs did not really seem to care about the mission and did not help Grave at all during his part of the introduction.
 - d) Appalling. If Grave hadn't been working for someone else, he'd have walked away and never looked back at these acerbic knaves.
3. Did the PCs defeat the Chuul (not having to fight it because of too many subquests counts as defeating it for the purpose of this question)?
 - a) Yes, the beast could have been served to the ship's crew on the half-shell.
 - b) Yes, but it was a tough and ugly fight with at least two of the PCs down and out on the deck.
 - c) No, Thessalie and her officers had to kill the thing for them. How embarrassing.
4. Did the PCs defeat or drive off the beetle swarms in some way?
 - a) Completely, the scarabs were put down or convinced to go away.
 - b) Partially, the beetles were dispersed but not before knocking unconscious or killing one of the PCs.
 - c) The PCs were defeated or had to flee into the Cairn to escape their insectoid foes.
5. How did the PCs fare inside the Cairn?
 - a) They spoke with Dolo'vai, discovered how to end the curse on the land, and did everything right to make that happen.
 - b) The party had to make their own way because they killed or otherwise were prevented from talking to Dolo'vai. In the end, though, they escaped and the big bug got swatted.
 - c) Only luck and sheer force of arms saved them; there were no tactics or plan.
 - d) The Cairn did unfortunate things to the PCs; they were all defeated or remain trapped within as its permanent guests.
6. How would you rate the group's roleplaying?
 - a) Fantastic. Everyone had interesting and engaging characters that interacted with the adventure in very fun ways.
 - b) Good. Most everyone had interesting and engaging characters that interacted with the adventure in very fun ways.
 - c) Okay. There was some roleplaying.
 - d) None. They treated the adventure as a set of objectives. There was no roleplaying.

Story Objects:

"Mark of the Harvest" (Code: EXST01)

You possess an enchanted mark on your right palm in the shape of a glittering golden scarab in a sunburst. As a free action, you can turn this mark invisible; calling it back is a standard action. Neither action provokes an attack of opportunity. To use this mark's magical property, it must be visible and have remained that way for a full hour.

Once per adventure, you can call upon the Mark of the Harvest to *create food and water* as if cast by a 5th level cleric. The food created is simple but delicious and the water comes in green-gray urns of sun-dried clay. All dishes vanish once the food and water is consumed.

In addition, if six PCs all possess and use their Marks of the Harvest at the same time while in physical contact, the spell invoked is *heroes' feast* instead of *create food and water*. Casting time for both spells and all other relevant statistics are identical to the magic of the same name.

The Story Object: Faction's Favor is only gained if the PC in question succeeded at his or her faction mission during this scenario.

"Faction's Favor" (Code: EXST02)

Through hard work and yet another success in the name of your faction, you have earned another measure of respect and favor from your superiors. Your reputation continues to grow among your peers and your leaders, something that will show tangible benefits in the future.

After successfully completing your next faction adventure, you receive a *potion of cure moderate wounds* and a *potion of repair moderate damage*. These items come directly from your leaders, are recorded as event treasure, and count as if you had purchased them normally (meaning they refresh each adventure as usual).

Event Treasure:

Part One: One 100 gp value pearl per PC.

Part Three: The Bite of Siiq'cha, a +1 *keen* dagger as described in the text.

Player Handout One

(Once all the pages are aligned by number)

You have been gathered together to embark on a vital mission to an ancient ruin called the Cairn of Stone Hearts. When you have all four of the following items, return to this alley and another messenger will arrive to guide your further along your path.

- *Grasp of the Spider's Eye*
- *Wings of Ascent*
- *The Eye of Flame*
- *Sephraman's Scepter*

While you are engaged in this mission, you are to cooperate fully with your team mates, regardless of their affiliation. Infighting will not be tolerated and assistance, when required, is to be given freely.

Let this prophecy be your guide.

"Hearts of stone can break like any other, some may even crumble with the slightest touch. Beyond the pillars of the sun and along the great waste, twenty thousand stones mark the harvester's tomb. In the sacred place fire points the way to what, once broken, can never mend. The crumbling thing, thrown into the hydra's mouth, can stop the great shadow for a measure of three score and seventy."

Player Handout Two

(Each PC gets only the piece below that matches his or her faction.)

Blackwheel Company

You are to use this group you've been assigned to in whatever way you feel necessary to accomplish the successful completion of the Prophecy. It is imperative that you find a way to "drop the crumbling thing into the hydra's mouth", whatever that might mean.

Cooperation only goes so far. If you experience difficulty from anyone not of the Company in obtaining your goals, do not hesitate to leave them behind and attain victory on your own.

That is all.

Cabal of Shadows

These fools actually think we will help them and so they help us in return. So much the better for us, since this is one time we would have difficulty on our own. Use them, expend them, and let them die in your stead if the situation calls for it. Just make sure to leave behind the token you've been given after entering the Cairn. It must be indoors as close to a place of power as you can manage and protected from sunlight but open to the air. Above all, keep the token and its placement a secret.

By now, you understand that failure is not an option.

Covenant of Light

This is an excellent opportunity for you to show the other factions how much we could accomplish we set aside our personal differences and focus on a single task. We ask that you represent us in as good a light as you can. Be helpful, be diplomatic, and do not be afraid to go the extra league for your companions to make their lives easier.

You need accomplish nothing else for us to consider this mission a success. Just serve the Light and try to show your companions, whoever they are, the power of the Greater Good.

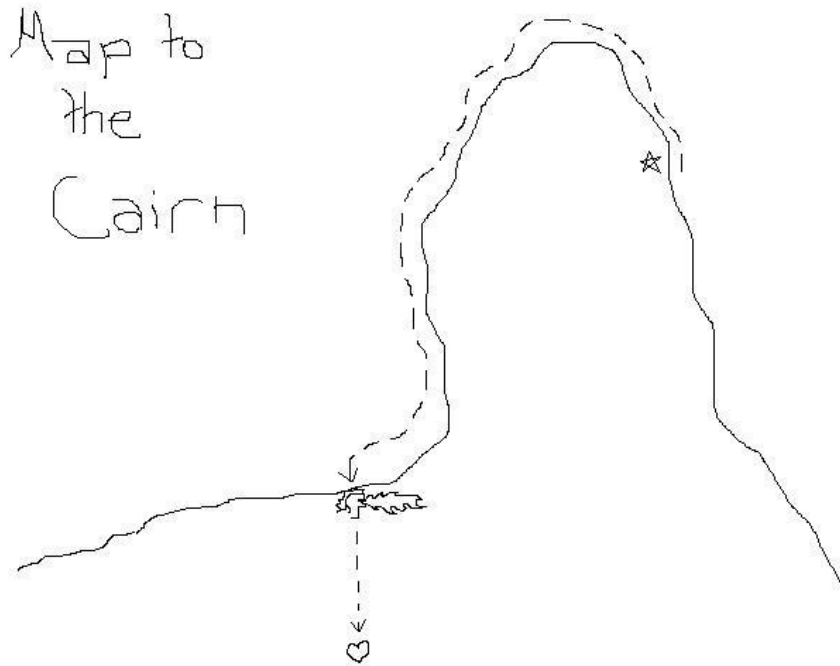
Help the helpless, free the oppressed, and defend those who cannot defend themselves. That is all we could ever ask of you, Scion.

Crimson Codex

There is a special magic to be had by fulfilling the terms of the Caldyn Fragment associated with the Cairn of Stone Hearts. We are not sure what that means but we do know that it will be made available to you once the Prophecy comes to pass. Be receptive and do not refuse any offer of lore or power.

We await your discovery eagerly. Do not disappoint us.

Player Handout Three



Sail you past the northern capes and downwards past the western coast.

Move then through the pitchy waves, the shudders that frighten sailors most.

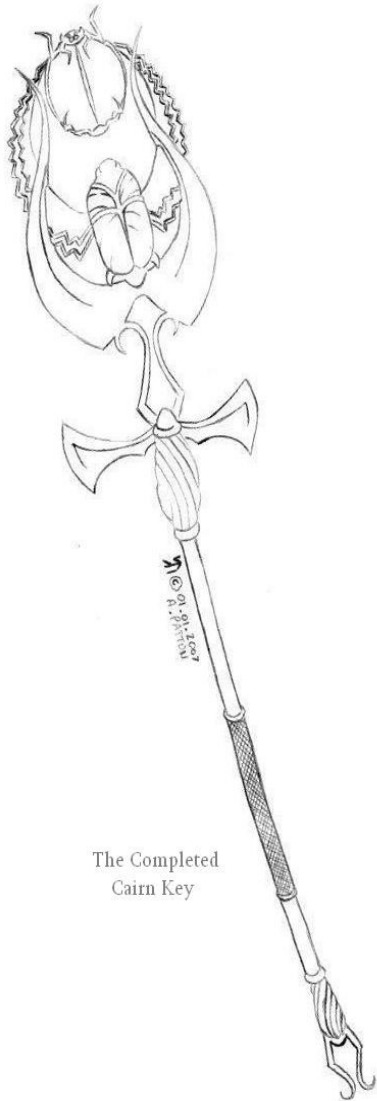
Reach the gray and wasted sands, the plain where waits the darkest death.

Make your port the claw-filled cove adorned by column - dragon's breath.

Your bearing now, between both suns, is cautious safe. Move just by night.

You'll find your path when the great eye soars. Follow you the beetle's flight.

Player Handout Four



The Eye of Flame



Grasp of the Spider's Eye



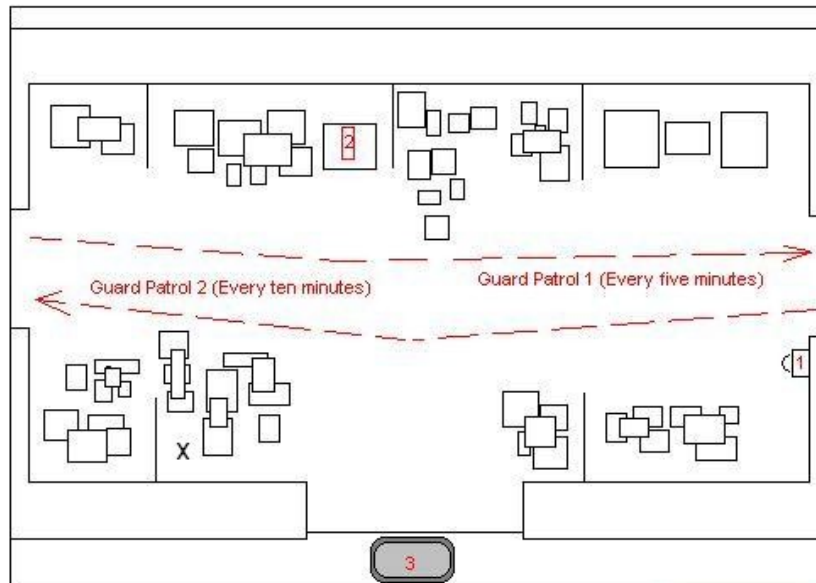
Wings of Ascent



Sephraman's Scepter

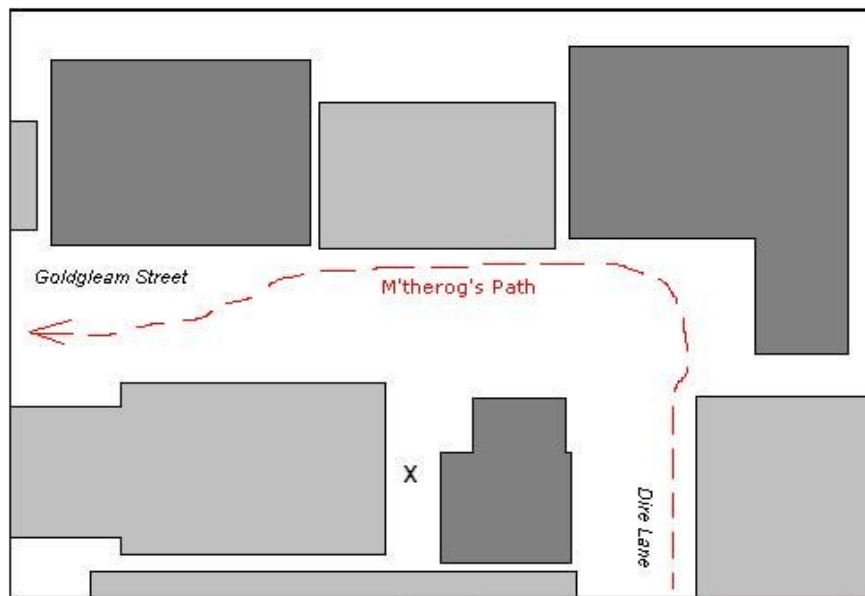
DM Instructions: This handout can be used as is or separated along the black lines to create five images, each one given to the players when they come into possession of the illustrated item.

Appendix: Maps

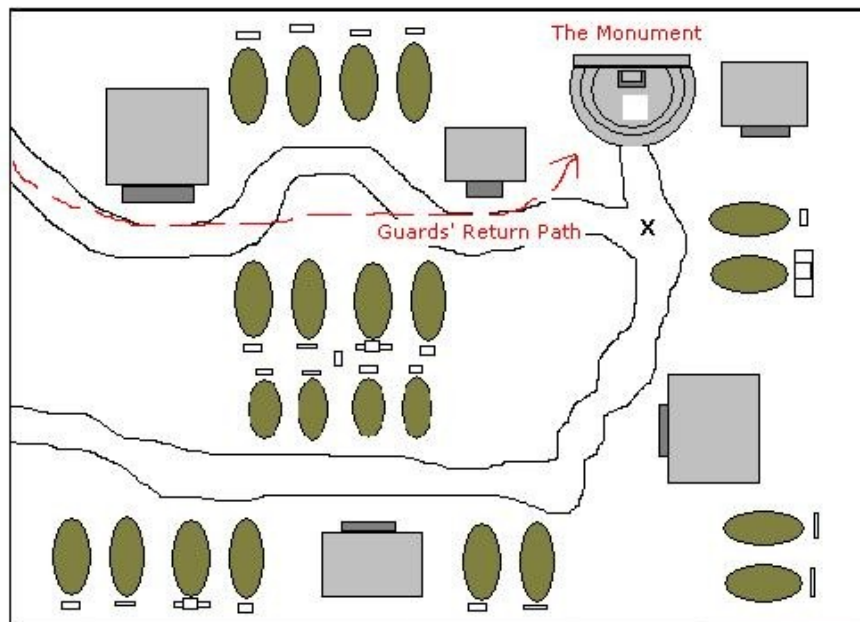


In and Out - Subquest 1

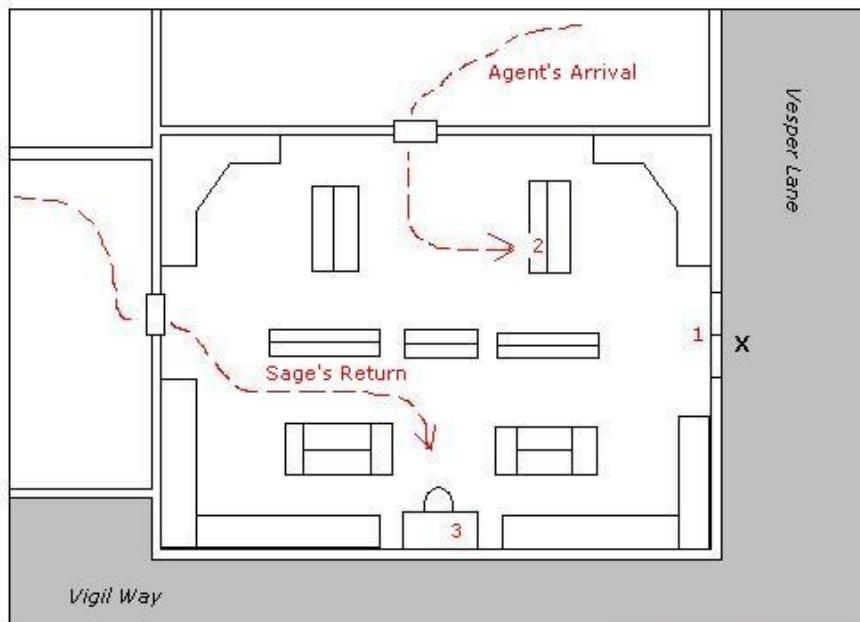
Map Key:	
1:	Log Book
2:	Scepter
3:	Hover Platform



Eye Spy - Subquest 2

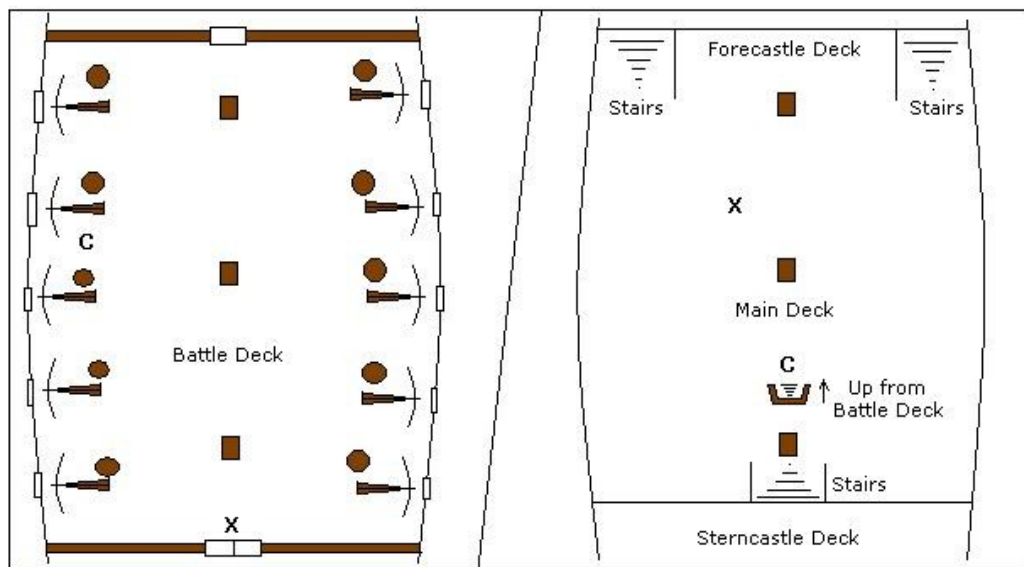


For I have Sinned - Subquest 3



*Forest for the Trees
- Subquest 4*

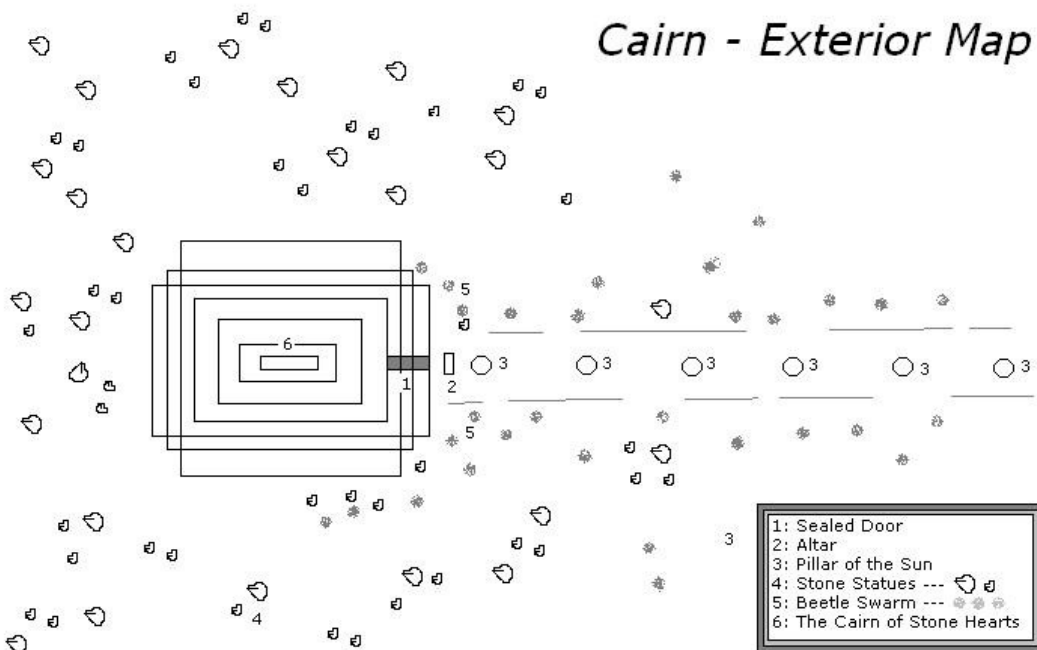
Map Key:	
1:	Locked Window
2:	Spider's Grasp
3:	Trapped Book



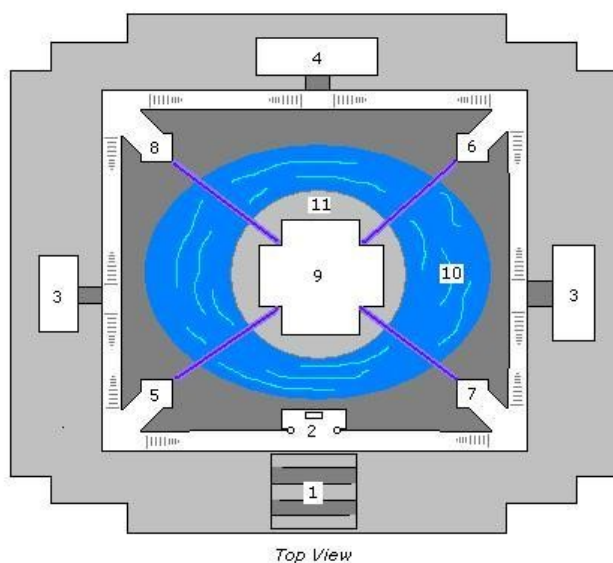
Battle Aboard the Fourteenth Spire



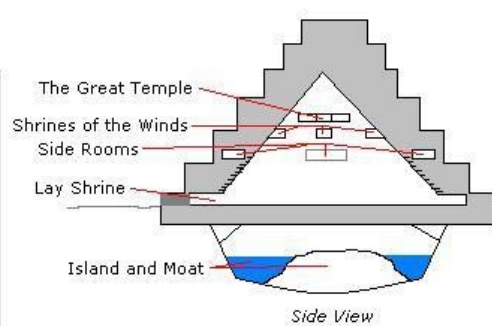
Cairn - Exterior Map



- 1: Sealed Door
- 2: Altar
- 3: Pillar of the Sun
- 4: Stone Statues ---
- 5: Beetle Swarm ---
- 6: The Cairn of Stone Hearts



The Cairn of Stone Hearts
Interior Map



- | |
|---------------------------------|
| 1: The Door of Five Seasons |
| 2: The Lay Shrine |
| 3: Preparation Room |
| 4: Chamber of Devotion |
| 5: The West Wind Path |
| 6: The East Wind Path |
| 7: The South Wind Path |
| 8: The North Wind Path |
| 9: The Great Temple of Siiq'cha |
| 10: Moat of Ice and Fog |
| 11: Siiq'cha's Isle |