

DRAWING A BLANK

A DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® *LIVING* *FORGOTTEN REALMS* ADVENTURE

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The city of Westgate is the focus of many rumors and plots. Recent stories tell of “blank-faced spirits” who wander the city’s streets at night and then vanish into thin air when confronted. Who or what could be causing this phenomenon? This module could be of special interest to those that have previously come to the aid of Westgate and its citizens. *A Living Forgotten Realms* adventure set in Westgate on the Dragon Coast for characters levels 11-14.

Based on the original DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® rules created by E. Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson and the new DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game designed by Andy Collins, Rob Heinsoo, and James Wyatt.

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By sanctioning and reporting this adventure you accomplish a couple of things. First, it is an official game, tracked under your play history. Second, DMs gain rewards for sanctioned RPGA play if they are members of the DM REWARDS program. DMing this adventure is worth one (1) point.

This adventure retires from RPGA-sanctioned play on December 31, 2012.

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PREPARING FOR PLAY

In order to play this adventure, you'll need copies of the following D&D 4th Edition rulebooks: *Player's Handbook*, *Dungeon Master's Guide*, and the *Monster Manual*. Any other rules referenced in this adventure will be noted in the **New Rules Items** section at the end of the adventure.

Throughout this adventure, text in bold italics provides player information for you to paraphrase or read aloud when appropriate. Information on nonplayer characters (NPCs) and monsters appear in abbreviated form in the adventure text.

Along with this adventure, you'll find a RPGA Session Tracking sheet. If you're playing this adventure as part of an RPGA-sanctioned event, complete and turn in this sheet to your organizer directly after play.

READING MONSTER STAT BLOCKS

Most of the information should be easy to understand, as it mirrors the information presented in the *Monster Manual*. Attacks may have a letter next to them designating the type: M for melee, R for ranged, C for close, and A for area. A lower-case letter (used only in some melee and ranged attacks) denotes that the attack can be used as a basic attack.

IMPORTANT DM INFORMATION

As the DM of the session, you have the most important role in facilitating the enjoyment of the game for the players. You take the words on these pages and make them come alive. The outcome of a fun game session often creates stories that live well beyond the play at the table. Always follow this golden rule when you DM for a group:

Make decisions and adjudications that enhance the fun of the adventure when possible.

To reinforce this golden rule, keep in mind the following:

- **You are empowered to make adjustments to the adventure and make decisions about how the group interacts with the world of this adventure.** This is especially important and applicable outside of combat encounters, but feel free to use the "scaling the encounter" advice (usually for adjusting to different-sized groups) to adjust combat encounters for groups that are having too easy or too hard of a time in an adventure.
- **Don't make the adventure too easy or too difficult for a group.** Never being challenged makes for a boring game, and being overwhelmed makes for a frustrating game. Gauge the experience of the players (not the characters) with the game, try to feel out (or ask) what they like in a game, and attempt to give each of them the experience they're after when they play D&D. Give everyone a "chance to shine."
- **Be mindful of pacing, and keep the game session moving along appropriately.** Watch for stalling, as play loses momentum when this happens. At the same time, make sure that the players don't finish the adventure too early; provide them with a full play experience. *Living Forgotten Realms* adventures are designed to be played within 3.5 - 4 hours; try to be very aware

of running long or short. Adjust the pacing accordingly.

- **Give the players appropriate hints so they can make informed choices about how to interact with their environment.** Players should always know when enemies are affected by conditions and are bloodied. They should be given clues about how to interact with their surroundings so they can tackle skill challenges, combats, and puzzles without getting too frustrated over lack of information. This helps to encourage immersion in the adventure and gives players “little victories” for figuring out a good choice from a clue.

In short, being the DM for a *Living Forgotten Realms* adventure isn't about following the adventure's text word-for-word; it's about creating a fun, challenging game environment for the players. Chapters 1 and 2 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide* are filled with good information about being a DM for a D&D game.

APPROPRIATE CHARACTER LEVELS

This adventure is designed for player characters (PCs) levels 11-14. Characters that fall outside of the level range may not participate in the adventure. Make certain to check the levels of the PCs before beginning play to ensure that they are the proper level.

Each adventure has a low-level version and a high-level version. The low level is meant for a group whose levels, on average, fall in the lower levels of the adventure's level spread. The high level is meant for a group whose levels, on average, fall in the higher levels of the adventure's level spread.

A group may decide to play the high level when their levels are more suited to the low level if everyone in the group agrees to do so; however, some of the rewards may not be available to them. Conversely, a group may decide to play the low level when their levels are more suited to the high level if everyone in the group agrees; however, some of the rewards may be less than what they'd ideally want from the adventure.

Reading the Numbers: Each encounter has a level and sometimes other values (such as XP or skill check DCs) listed with two numbers divided by a slash. The number before the slash is always the value for the low-level version of the adventure; the number after the slash is the value for the high-level version of the adventure.

FAILING TO DEFEAT AN ENCOUNTER

If a group fails to defeat an encounter – that is, if they have to flee from a combat because it's too tough or they reach the predetermined number of failures in a skill challenge before reaching success – they are only awarded half experience points (round down) for the encounter. If they manage to tackle the encounter later and defeat it, award them the other half of the experience points for the encounter.

CHARACTER DEATH

If a PC dies during the course of the adventure, the player of that character and the rest of the group have two options, provided that they have access to the Raise Dead ritual (either a PC has it and can use it or the characters return to civilization), they have access to the body, and it is possible to return the dead PC to life.

- **Pay the component cost for the ritual.** If the group chooses this option, the cost should be divided evenly among the group (500 gp for heroic tier, 5,000 gp for paragon tier, and 50,000 gp for epic tier). Using a source outside the group to cast the ritual costs 20% more than the component cost. Total cost when using an outside source is 600 gp for heroic tier, 6,000 gp for paragon tier, and 60,000 gp for epic tier. A PC that dies and chooses this method of return gains full (or half, if the party was defeated) experience points from the encounter in which the character died, but no experience points for any encounters that were missed while the character was dead. If there are encounters remaining, the PC continues to earn experience as normal, and receives a normal cut of the rewards at the end of the adventure.
- **Invoke the Death Charity clause.** If the group cannot afford to pay for the ritual (or doesn't desire to do so), the PC can choose to return to life at the end of the adventure. Doing so forfeits all rewards (including treasure and story rewards) earned for the adventure except experience points gained prior to the character's death (the character receives the experience point award for the encounter in which they died). The PC cannot participate in the same adventure a second time.

MILESTONES

No matter if the characters succeed or fail in an encounter, they reach a milestone if it is the second encounter they've had since the start of the adventure or their last extended rest. **Encounters that do not give**

out experience points do not count for purposes of reaching a milestone. Make certain to mention this information to the players when applicable, as it gives each PC another action point and affects how some magic item powers are used.

LASTING EFFECTS

Sometimes a PC suffers a lasting effect that isn't easily resolved before the end of the adventure. The two most common lasting effects are the death penalty and diseases.

Death Penalty: When a character dies and is brought back to life by the Raise Dead ritual, that character suffers a -1 penalty to all attack rolls, skill checks, saving throws, and ability checks until they have reached three milestones. The player should simply record the adventure where the character died on their adventure log, and then keep a running tally of milestones reached. Once the PC has reached the third milestone since coming back to life, they no longer suffer the penalty.

Diseases: Diseases take hold of a character and last until they are cured or they reach their final state. Normally, a PC makes an Endurance check after each extended rest to see if the disease improves, worsens, or maintains its current condition. At the end of the adventure, any character suffering from a disease must resolve the disease to either its cure or final state, using the necessary number of extended rests to do so. Other characters adventuring with the PC may decide to aid the afflicted character during this time. If a disease reaches its final state and the PC can get a Cure Disease ritual cast (and pay the appropriate costs), they may do so.

Other Lasting Effects: Other effects that last beyond the scope of the adventure should be resolved at the DM's discretion. Any effects that last for a specific period of time (that end after a certain number of days or a certain number of extended rests) should be resolved at the end of the adventure in which the effect was obtained (unless otherwise specified). Effects that use some sort of adventuring benchmark of unknown duration (such as milestones) should be recorded on the character's logsheet and tracked across adventures.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

A warped creature known only as the Plaguechanged Thing dwells in a series of caverns beneath the city of Westgate in the Dragon Coast. (See the sidebar on page 51 of the Forgotten Realms Campaign Guide.) Its exact motivations are unclear, but it is described as having "impressive psionic abilities." It is able to form

protoplasmic constructs called "blank-faced spirits" that it uses to explore its surroundings. These are basically humanoid in appearance, even including simple clothing, but with a complete lack of facial features. The Thing can conduct some very basic communication through the spirits, consisting mainly of pantomime and gestures, but it cannot carry on conversations or use its own telepathic powers through the constructs.

The Thing has tentatively begun sending these constructs out at night to explore the streets of Westgate. It is able to extend its own perceptions through them, basically scrying on a localized area with the construct as the focus. If and when one of the creatures is discovered, the Plaguechanged Thing simply dissolves it, creating the illusion that the creature vanished into thin air. The few citizens of Westgate who have encountered this phenomenon have been quite unnerved by the incidents, but so far, the reports of mysterious spirits wandering the city at night are considered nothing more than rumor and ghost stories by the city authorities.

Unfortunately, the Plaguechanged Thing has attracted the attention of the Abolethic Sovereignty as it has begun tentatively exercising its vast psionic power. Westgate is the one coastal city along the Sea of Fallen Stars that has never drawn the attention of the Sovereignty, perhaps because of the Thing's presence, perhaps not. The aboleths' motives, as ever, are inscrutable to mortals, but for whatever reason, the aberrations have begun to move some of their agents into the caverns beneath the city. These include a group of kuo-toa, who have begun kidnapping people from the city streets of Westgate and offering them to their aboleth masters to be transformed into servitors.

The Plaguechanged Thing is aware of the aboleths' arrival, and although it doesn't quite know what to make of these creatures, it feels threatened by their alien nature. Even to a monster created by the Spellplague, the horrors of the Far Realm are terrifying and incomprehensible. Thus, the Thing has begun to get a bit more aggressive, actually touching the minds of the people its constructs see. It wants to find a way to communicate with the people of Westgate and tell them about the aboleths. The Plaguechanged Thing can sense roughly how powerful a person is when that person comes into view of one of its constructs, and it knows that the aboleths are quite powerful. Thus, the Thing has started seeking individuals who it thinks will be strong enough to fight the aboleths. This, of course, leads to the PCs. The Thing's aim is to lead them into a direct confrontation with the aboleths without drawing the attention of either party to itself.

DM's INTRODUCTION

When the adventure begins, the Plaguechanged Thing reaches out to the PCs' minds, trying to enlist their aid through their dreams. Unfortunately, the concept of dream communication is new and is something the Plaguechanged Thing needs to work on, especially when it comes to directing its communication to a single or specific target. Its attempts to touch the minds of those it sees, as well as its attempts to reach the PCs, result in nightmares plaguing many of those living in Westgate. For those it is trying to reach, these nightmares can be startlingly real, but for those around them, they manifest as dreams of amorphous and unspecified terror.

The PCs dream of being alone in an empty tavern and gain the impression they are being hunted by a blank-faced spirit. When the dream seems to become reality and the spirit confronts them in the Gentle Moon Inn, they must choose between facing their fears or fleeing with the ordinary people around them. If they choose to face their fears, the blank-faced spirit leads them into Westgate's undercity.

Here they encounter a group of kuo-toa slavers, and after defeating them, must decide what to do with the slaves. Once the slavers and slaves have been dealt with, the PCs are able to find their way to the aboleths' lair—a cyst floating on an underground lake beneath Westgate. Having found it, they must overcome its defenses and work their way to the center of the cyst where they find a number of missing Westgate citizens encased in columns of jelly-like goo. The citizens are currently undergoing the transformation process that will turn them into aboleth servitors and the PCs must work out which of these citizens have undergone the transformation and which can be rescued in a skill challenge complicated by them having to combat an aboleth slime mage and its lasher guards. After defeating the aboleths, the PCs must then flee the cyst as it begins to dissolve, ensuring any rescued townsfolk also reach safety.

Having reached the relative safety of Westgate's streets, the PCs are again dream-touched by the Plaguechanged Thing and gain the impression that its psionic power gives Westgate some protection from the Abolethic Sovereignty. The PCs must decide if they will attempt to maintain peaceful contact with the Plaguechanged Thing or if they will recoil in horror from the monstrosity. The Thing is terrifying, but so are the aboleths. Forming an alliance of sorts could set the PCs on the path toward a future confrontation with the floating city of Xxiphu.

PLAYER'S INTRODUCTION

The PCs have come to the city of Westgate for reasons of their own. (See pages 116-117 in the *Forgotten Realms Campaign Guide* for some basic information about the Dragon Coast.)

As Westgate is a major trading city on the Sea of Fallen Stars, and is also open to beings of all races and faiths, finding a reason to come here should not pose a problem for any of the PCs. Don't tell the players that the beginning of the adventure occurs inside their characters' dreams. Instead, you want to make them think that everything they see is real, until they find out what is really going on.

Read the following:

Westgate, city of free will and a city of thieves, or so the bards claim. It's also a city where it's said you can find anything you might desire... and quite a few things you might not. Arriving at its gates, you notice that, instead of the usual traffic, only a few other travelers are present.

If some or all of the PCs are not traveling together, now is a good time for them to introduce themselves. Don't give them too much time to relax, however. Proceed to Encounter 1 when everyone is ready.

ENCOUNTER 1: WESTGATE DESERTED

SETUP

In this encounter, the PCs dream of entering a deserted Westgate and of being hunted by blank-faced spirits. Just as an attack seems imminent, they wake up and find themselves safely ensconced in the Gentle Moon Inn.

As you run this scene, try to create a sense of urgency. Don't give the players too much time to make up their minds. Keep up the pace. Try to make them feel like something terrible is going to happen at any second.

Read or paraphrase the following:

There is no movement from the gates, and the walls have taken on a strange gray tinge. A cold wind brushes your face, and still nothing moves, either in the city, at the gates, or on the road behind you.

A strange foreboding washes over you, leaving an empty hollow feeling in your stomach and a strange heaviness in your chest.

Let the PCs decide what to do next. If they're hesitant about entering the gate, read:

The color has leached out of the day when movement catches your eye in the open land behind you. The idea you're being hunted, that someone or something is searching for you, tugs at your mind. The weather changes, tongues of lightning flickering silently across the darkened sky as storm clouds gather over the city. Still there is no movement at the gates.

Was that a flicker of blue behind you?

A DC 20 Arcana check brings to mind the blue fires of the Spellplague and the fact that plaguestorms still occur. Westgate is known to have weathered a few and taking shelter inside the city would be a much better decision than standing outside the walls and waiting to get blasted by the storm.

On the other hand, if the PCs decide to investigate the gates they find them unlocked...and unmanned. Once they are in a position to look through the gates and into the city beyond, read:

It's not just the gates, the whole place is deserted. There's not a single person to be seen, and no sign of habitation, human or otherwise, anywhere in sight. It's as though everything and everyone who made this city the thriving place it was, has simply disappeared. Taken away, like everything else.

Twilight is all that remains of the day and the temperature foretells a storm. You're going to need shelter before long, and not just from the weather. Something is coming.

Ask what the PCs wish to do next. At this point, they may wish to explore the city, or head for a specific location to check up on people they know (especially if they have adventured in Westgate before), or just find a watch house. Once they begin investigating the city, read:

You discover that Westgate is indeed an empty city, completely devoid of people, its roads swept clean of the detritus of everyday life. Silent buildings and deserted streets greet you. The eerie quiet is broken only by the wind moaning between the rooftops.

And you.

You search the alleys and avenues and find nothing, not even the shades and ghosts of those who should have been. The weather is closing in and so is something else.

You can't see it or hear it, but it's there—a flicker of movement on the edge of your vision, the sense of something following you when there's nothing in your wake, a gut-felt hunter's growl that doesn't reach your ears.

Your feet take you to the doorway of a small inn, the Gentle Moon. Perhaps it has been a shelter to you before, and perhaps it could be again. The shimmer of blue lightning saturates the air, and shadows flicker, coming closer without having drawn any nearer when you take a closer look.

Ask the PCs what they want to do next. If they enter the inn, read (adjusting if necessary for the number of PCs):

Five tankards of ale stand on a table as though waiting for you. They are poor comfort, but they are also the only sign that you might not be alone in this deserted city. The fireplace is filled with cold gray ash and the world seems to hold its breath.

Allow the PCs to respond. Searching the inn reveals it is empty, and the feeling of impending doom strengthens. If they all sit down and go to drink their ale (or at least one of them does), read:

It comes. You can feel it. Cold hands tighten in your chest so that your breath becomes short and your heartbeat slows. Your eyes seek the street beyond an open window and then you see it.

Descending from the nearest rooftop is a humanoid figure, its arms outstretched. Its feet never touch the cobbles. There isn't a drop of emotion on its pallid face, because as it draws closer, you see clearly that it has no face at all, only a featureless flat plane with two glowing dots of light for eyes. It approaches you, striding forward slowly, deliberately, one arm reaching out...

No matter how high the characters might get on a skill check (such as Arcana, Nature, or Religion), none of them have any idea what this spirit is. (It is a unique creation of the Plaguechanged Thing.) The only clue is that characters whose classes use the Psionic power source, and characters with a spellscar, feel a strange resonance between these ghostly figures and their own energy. The Plaguechanged Thing is both an incredibly powerful psionic entity and a creation of the Spellplague, so those who have been touched by these forms of energy feel a strange, uneasy connection to the Thing's creations.

Allow the players to react and describe what their characters want to do (attack, ask questions, run away, whatever), but before any of their actions take effect, move on to Ending the Encounter.

ENDING THE ENCOUNTER

If the PCs are particularly uncooperative and decide they don't want to enter the city or the inn, the dream loops regardless of their actions and they find themselves standing in front of the gates or the inn once more. Emphasize that something is coming closer and the city or the inn offers the only chance of shelter and of limiting the directions from which they could be attacked. Inside the city, they could find a building to shelter in, inside the inn, they could organize to control the coming battle. If this doesn't work, then regardless of what they do next the dream kicks in and the world fades to black. When they can see again, they are seated in an inn, with a tankard of ale in their hands and it doesn't seem strange. Go to the last read-aloud section of text above and move them on until they reach the inn.

Once the PCs have had time to respond to the blank-faced spirit in their dream, read:

You wake, bathed in sweat, trying to shake the feeling that the hunt is on, and you're the prey. You only entered Westgate yesterday and you'd heard the rumors of blank-faced spirits roaming the night.

Now light from beyond the shutters in your room reveals it is morning and you recall that you are resting in the Gentle Moon Inn, a place renowned for its excellent breakfasts.

Perhaps some food and seeing that there really are people in Westgate will do something to shake the lingering feeling that you are being watched... that the hunt has only temporarily come to a halt.

Allow the PCs to decide what they are going to do and go to Encounter 2.

EXPERIENCE POINTS

The PCs do not earn any XP for this encounter, and it does not count towards a milestone.

ENCOUNTER 2: A SPIRIT IN THE FLESH

SETUP

Blank-faced spirit: Acrobatics +10, Bluff +12, Stealth +15

Once the PCs have descended from their rooms and settled to having breakfast in the dining room of the Gentle Moon Inn allow them to meet (if they were not traveling together) and decide what to do next. If they do not decide to stop and eat breakfast modify the following read-allowed text accordingly. If they do stop to eat, read:

Your breakfast is disturbed by the sound of screams in the street beyond. Those nearest the windows look out and their cutlery clatters to the table as they overturn chairs and push each other aside in their haste to leave.

And they're not rushing for the front door...but racing toward the kitchen and the back alley beyond.

Give the PCs time to react. If they go to investigate the source of the panic, read:

Outside, the street is rapidly clearing. People are vanishing up side alleys—even respectable people who'd never usually venture off the main road. You see a finely dressed merchant leap down a hole leading into the sewers, his eyes fixed in terror on the sky above.

Give the PCs time to react. If they follow the merchant's gaze, read:

Descending from the nearest rooftop, its gaze focused firmly on the front door of the Gentle Moon Inn, is the spirit from your dreams. While its arms are not outstretched towards you, its ghostly face is still devoid of all features and all emotion.

The PCs have seen the arrival of the blank-faced spirit that's been haunting their dreams as well as the dreams of much of Westgate's populace. How they handle it is up to them, but some possible responses and their consequences are noted below.

If the PCs decide to wait and see what the spirit does, read:

The spirit drifts to a halt, floating above the cobbles in front of the Gentle Moon Inn. Its expressionless face

turns toward you and it appears to be waiting for your response.

Allow the PCs to respond and tailor the encounter accordingly.

FLEEING THE SPIRIT

If the PCs decide to flee from the spirit, read:

Through the inn and out the back door, or down a side alley, or across the street and into the sewers. Nothing makes any difference. Westgate's populace has gone to ground and barred its doors behind it, and everywhere you turn only brings you face to face with another spirit.

And now your steps have brought you to a high-walled cul-de-sac in a dead-end street with nary a door, window or sewer opening in sight. Worse than that, you can see three of the strangely emotionless spirits closing in on you from the street entrance and the shadows of more descending around you.

Give the PCs time to react. If they attempt to communicate with the spirits, go to Talking to the Spirit below. If they attempt to attack them, go to Attacking the Spirit below. If they just stand there and wait to be hammered read:

The spirits stop a few feet from you, drifting to a halt on the cobbles and appearing to wait.

Again, the PCs have the option of attacking or communicating. Go to the appropriate section when they decide what to do.

ATTACKING THE SPIRIT

If the PCs attack the spirit, there is no need to roll initiative. Any attack roll resulting in a 10 or more causes the spirit to vanish in a cloud of sticky green mist that momentarily clings to everything in a 2-square radius before evaporating into nothing.

Two rounds later, other spirits arrive. Read:

Just when the danger seems to be over, another spirit drifts down from the rooftops, and a third floats around a corner. Their faces show no anger at the fate of the first spirit, but the intensity of their gaze is disturbing. They drift to a halt ten feet away and seem to wait for your response.

The spirits do not appear to be armed (either naturally or with weapons), nor do they act aggressively in any

way. Allow the PCs to respond. If they attack and destroy the spirits this time, read:

The green goo coating the cobbles and anything nearby hasn't had time to dissipate when another spirit arrives. This one is as tall as the nearest building and holds its hand out in a gesture commanding you to stop.

Allow the PCs to react. If they attack this time, their weapons pass through the spirit but it doesn't dissipate. It merely folds its arms and waits for them to stop. When they do, they may either flee, or choose to talk to it. If they flee, go to Fleeing the Spirit. If they choose to talk, go to Talking to the Spirit. (Note: Once the PCs decide to talk to the giant spirit, it shrinks to normal size.)

TALKING TO THE SPIRIT

If the PCs decide to talk to the spirit, it shows itself to be all too willing to communicate, although its ability to do so is limited to pantomime and projecting emotions.

Asking the spirit questions along the lines of those below results in it attempting to answer as suggested below. The spirit's goal is to get the PCs to follow it into the tunnels below Westgate, so it can guide them to the aboleths' lair.

What do you want?

The spirit half turns away and gestures with its hand that you should follow it. At the same time it places a finger on its lips and mimes tiptoeing.

Why should we follow you?

The spirit clasps its hands under its chin, shaking them slightly back and forward, and seems to bow to you, then beckons you to follow it.

Do you want us to help you?

The spirit nods, hands still clasped beneath its chin as it bounces up and down on the spot.

What's down the tunnel OR What do you want us to help you with?

At this question, the spirit places its thumbs against its cheeks and fans its open hands back and forth on either side of its face, while its mouth opens and closes like that of a fish breathing, then it raises its hands to either side of its head and makes claws and projects a feeling of anger and fear, before pointing urgently down the tunnel.

PCs who guess something along the lines of 'fish monster' may attempt a DC 20 Nature check to identify that the spirit means 'kuo-toa'—a guess that it will

enthusiastically confirm by nodding its head, and pointing down the corridor. A DC 15 Nature check gives a guess of 'sahuagin', which will lead to it shaking its head, but again pointing vigorously down the corridor.

PCs who guess 'sahuagin' may attempt a second Nature check to guess correctly. Any further attempts to guess the creature lead to the spirit shaking its head and walking away down the corridor, exasperation in its body language, but not on its face, as it signals for the PCs to follow it.

PCs who guess correctly are able to make another Nature check to figure out what they know about the kuo-toa. This works exactly like a Monster Knowledge check as detailed in the *Player's Handbook*. (Remember that kuo-toa are paragon tier monsters, so the DCs for knowledge checks about them are higher.)

ENDING THE ENCOUNTER

Once the PCs decide to follow the spirit, go to Encounter 3.

EXPERIENCE POINTS

The PCs do not earn any XP for this encounter, and it does not count towards a milestone.

ENCOUNTER 3: UNDER WESTGATE

SETUP

Following the spirit through the sewers and tunnels below Westgate is easy, but the journey comes to an abrupt halt.

The spirit leads you into the sewer tunnels beneath Westgate. At first you notice evidence of others in the tunnels, catching glimpses of people hiding in dark corners, fleeing away from your group and its frightening guide, leaving nothing but rapidly fading footsteps.

As the journey progresses, the sewer stench is replaced by the slightly damp, stale scent of abandoned and rarely used tunnels. The air grows cool and the darkness closes in around you.

Find out what the PCs intend to use for light sources at this point. (This is important since the kuo-toa in the next area will see a visible light source approaching, should the PCs have one. If they all have darkvision or if they use a ritual that does not shed visible light, then they might be able to surprise the kuo-toa.)

The tunnels require careful navigation, containing sudden fissures in the stonework beneath your feet, and evidence of past cave-ins and rockfalls, but the spirit leads you on, until you reach a section where the older areas of worked stone give way to caverns that look more natural. You are far beneath the city streets by now, in places where no one from Westgate ever comes.

A few feet from the next tunnel junction, the spirit cocks its head for a moment and then signals for you to stay where you are.

Allow the PCs to react. If they do as they are told, read the following.

The spirit advances cautiously to the junction and looks quickly around. After a brief pause, it begins moving towards another tunnel. It's halfway there, when a spear arcs out of the darkness, catching it firmly in the chest before it explodes in a shower of green mist.

If one, or more, of the PCs decided to accompany the spirit, go to Encounter 4 and alter it accordingly.

ENDING THE ENCOUNTER

When the spirit explodes, go to Encounter 4.

EXPERIENCE POINTS

The PCs do not earn any XP for this encounter, and it does not count towards a milestone.

ENCOUNTER 4: SLAVERS

ENCOUNTER LEVEL 14 / 17 (4,900 / 7,000 XP)

SETUP

This encounter includes the following creatures at the low tier:

2 chuuls (Level 12) (C)
5 kuo-toa guards (Level 12) (G)
2 kuo-toa harpooners (Level 12) (H)
1 kuo-toa whip (Level 12) (W)
1 kuo-toa shaman (Level 12) (S)
plus 10 non-combatant slaves

This encounter includes the following creatures at the high tier:

2 chuuls (Level 14) (C)
5 kuo-toa guards (Level 14) (G)
2 kuo-toa harpooners (H)
1 kuo-toa whip (Level 14) (W)
1 kuo-toa shaman (Level 14) (S)
plus 10 non-combatant slaves

The PCs encounter a group of kuo-toa slavers in the tunnels beneath Westgate. If the PCs are using visible light sources, the kuo-toa set up an ambush in a corridor junction, but they spring the ambush early to prevent the blank-faced spirit from escaping.

If the PCs let the spirit lead the way, they are aware that danger lurks ahead when the spirit triggers the ambush and "dies." The kuo-toa are aware of the party if the party is using light sources. In this case, neither side is surprised.

If one or more of the PCs accompanied the spirit, they must make a DC 18/19 Perception check (the DC is set by the kuo-toa guards, who have the lowest Stealth score among the monsters) to avoid being surprised. Those PCs who did not accompany the spirit begin the battle back in the tunnel.

When everyone is ready, begin the combat.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

Illumination: The tunnels are in complete darkness. The only illumination down here is that brought by the PCs.

Cavern Floor: Unless otherwise noted, the cavern floor, although uneven, counts as normal terrain.

Pools of Water: These pools of stagnant water are not very deep, but the bottom is slippery. A successful

DC 20 Acrobatics check is required to cross these squares at the cost of one extra square of movement per square of puddle. A character who fails this check slips and falls prone. Creatures without a swim speed grant combat advantage while they are in pool squares. Creatures with a swim speed (or that can walk on or fly over the water) do not treat the pools as difficult terrain, do not have to make Acrobatics checks, and do not grant combat advantage.

Rubble and Stones: These squares are filled with rocks and stones that have fallen from the ceiling. They are considered difficult terrain.

Crevasse: This rift is 40 feet deep (4d10 falling damage). It takes a DC 15 Athletics check to climb out of the crevasse. PCs in the crevasse gain the advantage of total concealment and superior cover until they reach the last five feet below the opening.

Slaves: The kuo-toa divided the 10 slaves up into two smaller groups of five. The slaves are wearing manacles and leg irons, reducing them to a speed of 1 square (requiring a standard action to move at all, similar to crawling). Place markers on the battle map so that the PCs can see the exact locations of the slaves. Should the PCs include slaves in their attacks, use the following statistics to determine if the slaves are killed. The slaves will mostly cower (treat as the total defense action) but will try to crawl away if an opening presents itself. Freeing a slave requires a standard action to either break a set of leg irons (Strength DC 21) or pick the lock (Thievery DC 25).

Enslaved Westgate Citizen	Non-Combatant
Medium natural humanoid (various races)	XP --
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	
AC 14; Fortitude 13, Reflex 11, Will 10	
Speed 1 (requires standard action; cannot shift, run, or charge)	

TACTICS

The kuo-toa forces are divided into two groups because they separated the slaves (smaller groups are easier to drag around). The kuo-toa prefer to knock PCs unconscious rather than kill them, in an attempt to add the adventurers to their slave quota.

None of the kuo-toa surrender, since they know that they will be killed by the authorities of Westgate if they allow the PCs to take them prisoner. The kuo-toa do not want to face the aboleths' wrath if they show up without the expected "offering" of slaves. However, the kuo-toa are not above bargaining with the slaves' lives in exchange for their own freedom. In particular, the harpooners know that they cannot defeat the PCs by themselves (they don't deal enough damage). Once the whip, the shaman, and the chuuls are dead, the guards

and the harpooners grab any nearby prisoners and threaten to kill them unless the PCs allow the kuo-toa to leave. This provides you with a way to end the combat encounter without forcing the PCs to whittle away all the rest of the kuo-toas' hit points. It can also make for a nice roleplaying scene (perhaps an impromptu skill challenge).

The chuuls don't know how to attack with anything less than lethal force. These creatures fight until their master (the whip) tells them to stop. Even if all the kuo-toa are killed or run away, the chuuls fight to the death.

The guards and chuuls interpose themselves between the PCs and the slaves. The guards try to ensure the harpooners have a clear line of sight, but the chuul do not worry about such things.

The whip uses its ranged attacks to eliminate ranged threats first, or to assist its fellow kuo-toa who look as though they could be overwhelmed. The whip waits to use its *slime vortex* power until it believes all of the PCs are on the battlefield.

The harpooners use their *reeling harpoon* attacks against the most effective fighters in the PC group, leaving the spellcasters to take out any opponents attacking from range. The harpooners attempt to pull any particularly troublesome PCs into the chasm.

The shaman uses *bane lightning* whenever it is recharged, and *psychic fangs* or its bite attack otherwise. Once the guards have been eliminated and the battlefield is a bit less cluttered, the shaman tries to move into the center of a group of PCs and trigger its *psychic wave*.

SCALING THE ENCOUNTER

Make the following adjustments to the combat based on the number of PCs present.

Four PCs: Remove one of the kuo-toa harpooners.

Six PCs: Add a second kuo-toa whip.

ENDING THE ENCOUNTER

Once the kuo-toa and chuuls are defeated, the PCs may wish to question the slaves. All speak Common, and a few among them understood enough of the Deep Speech of their captors to glean the following information:

- All of the slaves were snatched off the streets of Westgate at night during the last few days. They have been held in a cavern not too far from here. There were originally more captives than the ten in this group, but the kuo-toa have been taking prisoners out of their at regular intervals.
- The slaves don't know where kuo-toa were taking them, but the kuo-toa seems to be planning to

offer the captives as a sacrifice or offering to their masters. The slaves assume that they were simply going to be eaten or sacrificed to some horrible monster, although the kuo-toa actually spoke of a "glorious transformation."

- The slaves believe they are nearing the end of their journey as the kuo-toa had become less vigilant and appeared almost relaxed (at least as far as it's possible to tell such things with these creatures).
- The PCs can tell which direction the kuo-toa were heading. If they backtrack the slaves, they find the kuo-toa lair, but it is empty. This was the last batch of slaves. It's possible that some of the others are still alive, though.
- The slaves obviously can't stay down here, and they don't want to try and find their way back to Westgate alone. Would it be possible for the PCs to escort them to a safe place on the surface, rather than ask them to continue the journey?

Once the PCs have decided on whether or not to return the slaves to the surface, they are free to return to the tunnels and forward track the kuo-toa to wherever they were heading.

If the PCs seem reluctant to delay their mission to take the slaves back to the surface, the slaves beg and plead for mercy. A few minutes later, they notice another blank-faced spirit who gestures for the slaves to follow. The slaves are terrified of this apparition, but if the PCs can convince the slaves that the spirit means them no harm and will lead them to safety, the slaves will follow the spirit back to the surface.

Regardless of whether the PCs escort the slaves themselves or allow the spirit to lead them to the surface, when they head down the tunnel that the kuo-toa were about to enter, proceed to Encounter 5.

EXPERIENCE POINTS

Each PC receives 980/1,400 XP for defeating the slavers. (Note: According to the *Dungeon Master's Guide* 2, at the paragon tier, five minions are the equivalent of one standard monster. Thus, this encounter uses five kuo-toa guards, but only awards XP for four of them.)

TREASURE

PCs find gems, jewels, and strange statuettes worth a total of 500/1,000 gp each on the kuo-toa, as well as the following magic items: *rogue's gloves*, *shield of warding*, and *crown of the dream king* (high-level only).

ENCOUNTER 4: "SLAVERS" STATISTICS (LOW LEVEL)

Chuul (Level 12)	Level 12 Soldier
Large aberrant magical beast (aquatic)	XP 700
Initiative +11 Senses Perception +10; darkvision	
HP 126; Bloodied 63	
AC 29; Fortitude 29, Reflex 22, Will 23	
Speed 6, swim 6	
m Claw (standard; at-will)	
Reach 2; +19 vs. AC; 1d8 + 7 damage, or 3d8 + 7 damage against an immobilized creature.	
M Double Attack (standard; at-will) ♦ Poison	
The chuul makes two claw attacks. If both claw attacks hit a single target, the chuul makes a secondary attack against the same target with its tentacles. <i>Secondary Attack</i> : +16 vs. Fortitude; the target is immobilized (save ends).	
Tentacle Net ♦ Poison	
A creature hit by a chuul's opportunity attack is immobilized until the end of the chuul's next turn.	
Alignment Unaligned Languages Deep Speech	
Str 23 (+12)	Dex 17 (+9) Wis 19 (+10)
Con 22 (+12)	Int 5 (+3) Cha 15 (+8)

Kuo-toa Guard (Level 12)	Level 12 Minion
Medium natural humanoid (aquatic)	XP 175
Initiative +8 Senses Perception +9; darkvision	
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	
AC 25; Fortitude 20, Reflex 21, Will 19	
Speed 6; swim 6	
m Spear (standard; at-will) ♦ Weapon	
+17 vs. AC; 8 damage.	
Slick Maneuver (move; at-will)	
A kuo-toa adjacent to an enemy shifts to any other square adjacent to that enemy.	
Alignment Evil Languages Deep Speech	
Str 13 (+7)	Dex 14 (+8) Wis 7 (+4)
Con 13 (+7)	Int 9 (+5) Cha 11 (+6)
Equipment leather armor, light shield, spear	

Kuo-toa Harpooner (Level 12)	Level 12 Soldier
Medium natural humanoid (aquatic)	XP 700
Initiative +11 Senses Perception +12; darkvision	
HP 120; Bloodied 60	
AC 26; Fortitude 24, Reflex 24, Will 22	
Speed 6; swim 6	
m Harpoon (standard; at-will) ♦ Weapon	
+18 vs. AC; 1d8 + 2 damage, and the target is grabbed and takes ongoing 5 damage (until escape). While the target is grabbed, the kuo-toa harpooner cannot use the harpoon to make attacks.	
R Reeling Harpoon (standard; at will) ♦ Weapon	
Ranged 5/10; +18 vs. AC; 1d8 + 2 damage, and the kuo-toa harpooner makes a secondary attack against the same target. <i>Secondary Attack</i> : +16 vs. Fortitude; 1d8 + 2 damage, and the target is pulled 3 squares.	
M Sticky Shield (immediate reaction, when missed by a melee attack; at will)	
The kuo-toa marauder makes an attack against the attacker: +16 vs. Reflex; a weapon wielded by the target drops in the target's space.	
Slick Maneuver (move; at-will)	
A kuo-toa adjacent to an enemy shifts to any other square adjacent to that enemy.	
Alignment Evil Languages Deep Speech	
Str 16 (+9)	Dex 16 (+9) Wis 12 (+7)
Con 16 (+9)	Int 12 (+7) Cha 14 (+8)
Equipment leather armor, harpoon	

Kuo-toa Shaman (Level 12)		Level 12 Artillery	
Medium natural humanoid (aquatic)		XP 700	
Initiative +10		Senses Perception +14; darkvision	
HP 91; Bloodied 45			
AC 24; Fortitude 20, Reflex 23, Will 25			
Speed 6; swim 6			
m Bite (standard; at-will)			
+17 vs. AC; 1d8 + 4 damage.			
A Psychic Fangs (standard; at will) ♦ Psychic			
Area burst 1 within 10; +15 vs. Will; 2d6 + 4 psychic damage.			
A Bane Lightning (standard; recharge 5 6) ♦ Lightning, Poison			
Area burst 3 within 20; +15 vs. Fortitude; 1d8 + 4 lightning damage, and the target takes ongoing 10 poison (save ends).			
C Psychic Wave (standard; encounter) ♦ Psychic			
Close burst 2; +15 vs. Will; 3d8 + 6 psychic damage, and the target is slowed (save ends). <i>Effect:</i> The kuo-toa shaman shifts its speed.			
Slick Maneuver (move; at-will)			
A kuo-toa adjacent to an enemy shifts to any other square adjacent to that enemy.			
Alignment Evil		Languages Deep Speech	
Skills Arcana +12, Nature +14			
Str 10 (+6)	Dex 18 (+10)	Wis 16 (+9)	
Con 13 (+7)	Int 13 (+7)	Cha 21 (+11)	
Equipment light shield			

Kuo-toa Whip (Level 12)		Level 12 Controller (Leader)	
Medium natural humanoid (aquatic)		XP 700	
Initiative +9		Senses Perception +13; darkvision	
HP 122; Bloodied 61			
AC 26; Fortitude 25, Reflex 24, Will 23			
Speed 6; swim 6			
m Pincer Staff (standard; sustain standard; at-will) ♦ Weapon			
Reach 2; +15 vs. AC; 1d8 + 1 damage, and the target is grabbed (until escape). While the target is grabbed, the kuo-toa cannot make attacks with its pincer staff. When the kuo-toa whip sustains the grab, it deals 1d10 damage to the target. The kuo-toa whip can release the target as a minor action, sliding the target to any other square within its reach.			
R Lightning Strike (standard; at will) ♦ Lightning			
Ranged 10; +14 vs. Reflex; 2d6 + 3 lightning damage, and the target is blinded until the end of the kuo-toa whip's next turn.			
A Slime Vortex (standard; encounter)			
Area burst 4 within 20; targets enemies; +14 vs. Fortitude; 1d8 + 3 damage, the target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends), and the target slides 3 squares and is knocked prone.			
<i>Miss:</i> Half damage, and the target slides 1 square.			
Slick Maneuver (move; at-will)			
A kuo-toa adjacent to an enemy shifts to any other square adjacent to that enemy.			
Alignment Evil		Languages Deep Speech	
Skills Dungeoneering +13, Religion +12			
Str 15 (+8)	Dex 16 (+9)	Wis 15 (+8)	
Con 18 (+10)	Int 13 (+7)	Cha 16 (+9)	

ENCOUNTER 4: "SLAVERS" STATISTICS (HIGH LEVEL)

Chuul (Level 14)	Level 14 Soldier
Large aberrant magical beast (aquatic)	XP 1,000
Initiative +13 Senses Perception +12; darkvision	
HP 143; Bloodied 71	
AC 31; Fortitude 31, Reflex 24, Will 25	
Speed 6, swim 6	
m Claw (standard; at-will)	
Reach 2; +21 vs. AC; 1d10 + 8 damage, or 3d8 + 8 damage against an immobilized creature.	
M Double Attack (standard; at-will) ♦ Poison	
The chuul makes two claw attacks. If both claw attacks hit a single target, the chuul makes a secondary attack against the same target with its tentacles. <i>Secondary Attack</i> : +18 vs. Fortitude; the target is immobilized (save ends).	
Tentacle Net ♦ Poison	
A creature hit by a chuul's opportunity attack is immobilized until the end of the chuul's next turn.	
Alignment Unaligned Languages Deep Speech	
Str 24 (+14) Dex 18 (+11) Wis 20 (+12)	
Con 23 (+13) Int 6 (+5) Cha 16 (+10)	

Kuo-toa Guard (Level 14)	Level 14 Minion
Medium natural humanoid (aquatic)	XP 250
Initiative +9 Senses Perception +11; darkvision	
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	
AC 27; Fortitude 22, Reflex 22, Will 21	
Speed 6; swim 6	
m Spear (standard; at-will) ♦ Weapon	
+19 vs. AC; 9 damage.	
Slick Maneuver (move; at-will)	
A kuo-toa adjacent to an enemy shifts to any other square adjacent to that enemy.	
Alignment Evil Languages Deep Speech	
Str 14 (+9) Dex 15 (+9) Wis 8 (+6)	
Con 14 (+9) Int 10 (+7) Cha 12 (+8)	
Equipment leather armor, light shield, spear	

Kuo-toa Harpooner	Level 14 Soldier
Medium natural humanoid (aquatic)	XP 1,000
Initiative +12 Senses Perception +13; darkvision	
HP 137; Bloodied 68	
AC 28; Fortitude 26, Reflex 26, Will 24	
Speed 6; swim 6	
m Harpoon (standard; at-will) ♦ Weapon	
+20 vs. AC; 1d8 + 3 damage, and the target is grabbed and takes ongoing 5 damage (until escape). While the target is grabbed, the kuo-toa harpooner cannot use the harpoon to make attacks.	
R Reeling Harpoon (standard; at will) ♦ Weapon	
Ranged 5/10; +20 vs. AC; 1d8 + 3 damage, and the kuo-toa harpooner makes a secondary attack against the same target. <i>Secondary Attack</i> : +18 vs. Fortitude; 1d8 + 3 damage, and the target is pulled 3 squares.	
M Sticky Shield (immediate reaction, when missed by a melee attack; at will)	
The kuo-toa marauder makes an attack against the attacker: +18 vs. Reflex; a weapon wielded by the target drops in the target's space.	
Slick Maneuver (move; at-will)	
A kuo-toa adjacent to an enemy shifts to any other square adjacent to that enemy.	
Alignment Evil Languages Deep Speech	
Str 17 (+10) Dex 17 (+10) Wis 13 (+8)	
Con 17 (+10) Int 13 (+8) Cha 15 (+9)	
Equipment leather armor, harpoon	

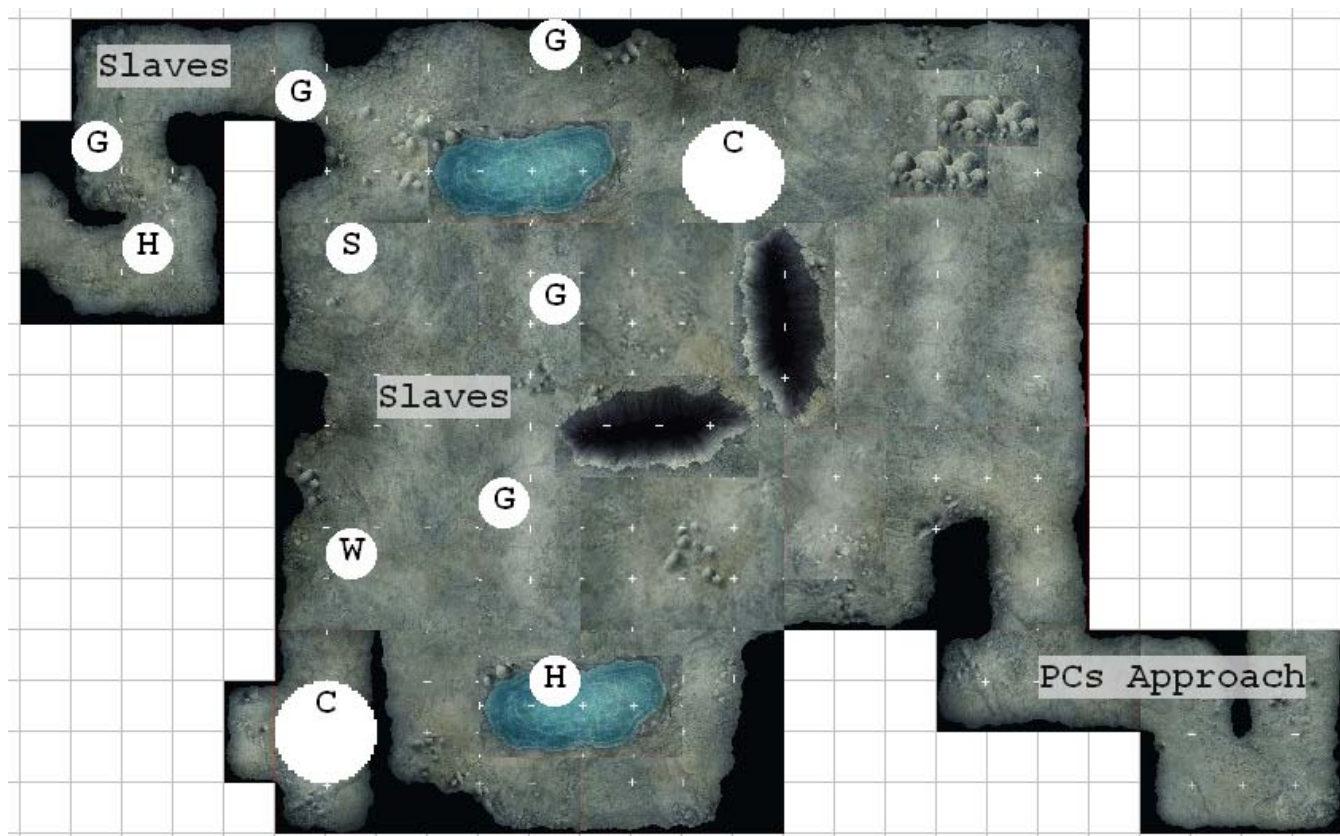
Kuo-toa Shaman (Level 14)		Level 14 Artillery	
Medium natural humanoid (aquatic)		XP 1,000	
Initiative +11 Senses Perception +15; darkvision			
HP 104; Bloodied 52			
AC 26; Fortitude 22, Reflex 25, Will 27			
Speed 6; swim 6			
m Bite (standard; at-will)			
+19 vs. AC; 1d10 + 5 damage.			
A Psychic Fangs (standard; at will) ♦ Psychic			
Area burst 1 within 10; +17 vs. Will; 2d6 + 5 psychic damage.			
A Bane Lightning (standard; recharge 5 6) ♦ Lightning, Poison			
Area burst 3 within 20; +17 vs. Fortitude; 1d10 + 5 lightning damage, and the target takes ongoing 10 poison (save ends).			
C Psychic Wave (standard; encounter) ♦ Psychic			
Close burst 2; +17 vs. Will; 3d10 + 7 psychic damage, and the target is slowed (save ends).			
<i>Effect:</i> The kuo-toa shaman shifts its speed.			
Slick Maneuver (move; at-will)			
A kuo-toa adjacent to an enemy shifts to any other square adjacent to that enemy.			
Alignment Evil Languages Deep Speech			
Skills Arcana +14, Nature +15			
Str 11 (+7)	Dex 19 (+11)	Wis 17 (+10)	
Con 14 (+9)	Int 14 (+9)	Cha 22 (+13)	
Equipment light shield			

Kuo-toa Whip (Level 14)		Level 14 Controller (Leader)	
Medium natural humanoid (aquatic)		XP 1,000	
Initiative +10 Senses Perception +15; darkvision			
HP 139; Bloodied 69			
AC 28; Fortitude 27, Reflex 26, Will 25			
Speed 6; swim 6			
m Pincer Staff (standard; sustain standard; at-will) ♦ Weapon			
Reach 2; +17 vs. AC; 1d8 + 2 damage, and the target is grabbed (until escape). While the target is grabbed, the kuo-toa cannot make attacks with its pincer staff. When the kuo-toa whip sustains the grab, it deals 1d10 damage to the target. The kuo-toa whip can release the target as a minor action, sliding the target to any other square within its reach.			
R Lightning Strike (standard; at will) ♦ Lightning			
Ranged 10; +16 vs. Reflex; 2d8 + 4 lightning damage, and the target is blinded until the end of the kuo-toa whip's next turn.			
A Slime Vortex (standard; encounter)			
Area burst 4 within 20; targets enemies; +16 vs. Fortitude; 1d10 + 4 damage, the target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends), and the target slides 3 squares and is knocked prone.			
<i>Miss:</i> Half damage, and the target slides 1 square.			
Slick Maneuver (move; at-will)			
A kuo-toa adjacent to an enemy shifts to any other square adjacent to that enemy.			
Alignment Evil Languages Deep Speech			
Skills Dungeoneering +15, Religion +14			
Str 16 (+10)	Dex 17 (+10)	Wis 16 (+10)	
Con 19 (+11)	Int 14 (+9)	Cha 17 (+10)	

ENCOUNTER 4: "SLAVERS" MAP

TILE SETS NEEDED

DT5 Lost Caverns of the Underdark x2



The kuo-toa and their slaves are traveling from the bottom left to the top left of the map. (The first group of slaves is already being dragged down the exit tunnel by one of the guards and one of the harpooners.) The blank-faced spirit gets killed a few squares into the room, so any PCs that are accompanying the spirit should already be in the room when combat starts. PCs that hang back, allowing the spirit to take the lead, start farther back in the small tunnel labeled "PCs Approach" in whatever marching order they please. Try to avoid having this combat bottleneck at the entrance to the room. Engage the PCs closer to the area around the crevasses if at all possible.

ENCOUNTER 5: CYSTIC INCURSION

SETUP

The PCs arrive at the cavern in which the cyst housing the aboleths is currently anchored. Their first sight of the cyst gives them some indication that the cyst is not entirely natural.

The tunnel you've been following ends in a broad pebbled beach. Gray stones stretch from the tunnel mouth to a short drop into a small inland sea. Waves brush the edge in an almost soothing motion, and blue-tinged foam catches among larger stands of rocks to dissolve in the next swell.

What stands out the most here is the enormous cyst floating off-shore. Wreathed in spray and marred by patches of floating blue and purple mist, it is connected to shore by the most tenuous of seaweed bridges.

The cyst moves with the waves, but does not shift from its position on the surface, although any physical anchor is out of sight.

The cyst's walls resemble a long-dead coral reef dipped in dull shades of purple, green, and blue. A twisted, fleshy mass rises from the center, its edges blurred by mist and spray.

The turbulence of the waves indicates that some force is at work in the cavern. There is no wind blowing, yet the water churns and foams as if the ocean itself understands that this ... thing ... has no place in the natural world.

Allow the PCs to decide what to do here. There is nothing stopping them from crossing the seaweed bridge unharmed. It's perfectly safe as a structure—just a little unstable and wet. Alternatively, they can swim out to the cyst and attempt to climb it, or find some other means to gain access.

Once they have reached the main body of the cyst, read:

The bridge leads to a winding trail that navigates the strange landscape surrounding the cyst's center. It dips into mist-filled hollows and twists through arching structures that are neither coral, nor rock, but a glistening mass resembling both, pulsing as if to the beat of an unseen heart. Leathery branches of seaweed, wavering tendrils of interlocking lace, solid shapes caught between animal, monster, and rolling cloud obscure your passage or seem to move at the edge of your vision. All around you, the vapor squirms half in and half out of reality, coating everything in its path

with shifting color and rapidly evaporating textures that seem like a window to another plane, a place of alien hues and howling madness.

The trail takes you to the very center of the twisted mass you observed from the gravel shore. What looks like a natural cavern entrance has been sealed by a thick curtain of ropy mucus. Nearby, another patch of oddly-colored mist forms. This one has a greenish tinge and is larger than the others. It drifts toward you like a hunter pretending disinterest in its prey.

Allow the PCs to choose what they would like to do next. As they decide, or if they focus on the mist, read:

The mist draws closer, something large and dark forming in its depths. A long tubular shape wreathed in tentacles and waving fronds moves as though in another world. It pauses and turns towards you.

Allow the PCs to react. This abolethic form is just an echo of the Far Realm, an illusion, but in case the PCs had any doubt about what they face, now they know for certain. At the first attack, skill check to avoid it, or when the PC's attempt to interact physically or talk with it, the mist dissipates. However, it acts as an alarm of sorts, alerting the real aboleths to the presence of intruders.

Investigation of the coral mound reveals no other potential entry points aside from the thick curtain of mucus. When they are ready to proceed, they must push their way through the disgusting slimy curtain that blocks the tunnel entrance. This has no ill effects, but just to keep the players guessing, roll an attack against each PC's Fortitude and Will defenses and make a note of which characters get "hit" by the curtain as they pass through. If the PCs come up with a clever stratagem for bypassing or destroying the curtain, they may do so (there is no harm in this and it gives the players a sense of accomplishment for avoiding what looks like an obvious trap).

ENDING THE ENCOUNTER

Once PCs have disabled, destroyed, or worked their way past the curtain of mucus, they are free to enter the aboleths' lair. Go to Encounter 6.

EXPERIENCE POINTS

The PCs do not earn any XP for this encounter, and it does not count towards a milestone.

ENCOUNTER 6: ABERRATIONS

ENCOUNTER LEVEL 14 / 16 (5,200 / 7,300 XP)

SETUP

This encounter includes the following creatures at low level:

- 1 aboleth slime mage (Level 14) (M)
- 3 aboleth lashers (Level 14) (L)
- 10 aboleth servitors (Level 14) (S)
- 1 aboleth pillar tendrils trap (Level 12) (T)

This encounter includes the following creatures at high level:

- 1 aboleth slime mage (Level 16) (M)
- 3 aboleth lashers (Level 16) (L)
- 10 aboleth servitors (S)
- 1 aboleth pillar tendrils trap (Level 14) (T)

The aboleths are aware of the PCs' entry into their cyst. It is not likely for the PCs to be able to gain surprise. However, paragon-tier PCs (and their players) are quite resourceful. If you judge that the PCs have come up with a means of entry that would bypass all the protections and senses of the aboleths, then you should adjust this encounter as necessary. If the PCs do manage to enter without alerting the aboleths to their arrival, then the lashers and slime mage are in the main cavern area encasing another hapless townsman in a jelly-like pillar.

As the adventurers enter the cyst, read:

The inside of the cyst would be pitch black, if it weren't for the slightly phosphorescent mists drifting inside and the softly shining coating of slime on the walls. Walking down the entry way reminds you of entering the slippery gullet of some strange misshapen beast.

Strange lights flare briefly in the mist, and then vanish. Odd smells erupt in distant corners right under your nose. Indiscernible whispers touch the edge of your hearing, but their message remains unrecognizable. No breeze stirs the air within this tunnel, but the mist drifts regardless, appearing and disappearing with no rhyme or reason.

This area is a large central fleshy sac surrounded by tunnels (like intestines). When the PCs arrive, the aboleths are lurking in some of the tunnels, as shown on the map. The aboleths allow the PCs to progress into the main cavern area, letting them advance until the lashers have them surrounded and the aboleth slime mage can

open the attack with a *slime burst* centered on the party (also triggering the emergence of the first four servitors).

Once some or all of the PCs can see into the central area, read:

All semblance of coral and rock has vanished. The further you progress into the cyst, the more it resembles the innards of some otherworldly creature. The mist and scents continue to plague you and the whispers are louder, but no more distinct. At last the passage opens up into a large cavern dominated by a number of glistening, almost crystalline pillars within which can be seen vaguely humanoid forms.

The strange substance coating the walls is thicker here, running in bulbous drops down the wall and falling from the ceiling with audible splats. The smells released with each spatter vary from the incredibly nauseating to the unbelievably sweet. Despite this, the floor underfoot is relatively dry, the oozing liquids somehow finding their way beneath its surface to vanish into the cyst itself. A pool of watery slime congeals at the very center of the cavern.

Allow the PCs to react to what they see. The slime mage and lashers allow the PCs to enter the room and progress to the center. If they stop to inspect one of the pillars, read:

Drawing closer, you see that the pillar isn't really made of crystal, but seems to be of the same jelly-like substance as the chamber's walls. It is clear enough, however, for you to easily make out the very human face of what might have been a resident of Westgate above. Even though her eyes are closed, her face contains an expression of horrified disbelief.

If the PCs have chosen a pillar marked S, read:

As you study her, the woman's eyes snap open and her mouth widens in an unheard scream. Around her, the pillar begins to crumble as she raises a hand toward you, her face now filled with murderous intent.

If the PCs have chosen a pillar marked T, read:

Whoever the pitiful creature entombed in this pillar might once have been, she clearly has become something entirely beyond redemption. A mass of writhing tentacles erupts from the sides of the pillar, lashing in all directions.

Investigating a pillar marks the beginning of the skill challenge, which will continue through this combat. Unless they are somehow seen earlier, the aboleths wait until the PCs reach the room's center before the aboleth slime mage springs the trap. If PCs have not sensed the lurking aberrations, they are surprised. The lashers do not spring the ambush unless they are somehow spotted (in which case neither side gains a surprise round). One way for the PCs to spot the lashers would be by making their way around the outside of the main chamber, using the tunnels, instead of taking the bait and heading directly into the central area.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

Illumination: The phosphorescent mist fills the area with dim illumination. (All the monsters have darkvision, though.)

Ceiling: The main cavern's ceiling is 20 feet high. Creatures with a fly speed can hug the ceiling and thereby stay out of reach of the trapped pillars. They cannot, however, avoid the Large-sized aboleths' melee reach. The side tunnels have 15-foot ceilings.

Pillars: The pillars are five feet wide but of irregular shape. It is not possible for a character or creature to share the same space as a pillar. Each pillar provides cover and counts as blocking terrain. A character who tries to climb or jump onto a pillar quickly discovers that he or she just starts sinking into the slime. The character is slowed (save ends).

Slime: Multicolored ichor coats the walls of the tunnels and the main cavern. In the main cavern, this ichor forms slow-moving rivulets down the walls, and falls from the ceiling in large globules. At the end of each round, roll +17/+19 vs. Reflex against a randomly-chosen PC in the main cavern as globs of slime drip down on them. On a hit, the PC is immobilized (save ends). The aboleths and their servitors are immune to this effect.

Slimy Pool: The two water pools (one in the center of the main cavern and another in one of the side tunnels) are filled with disgusting slime and are ten feet deep. The aboleths can use their swim speed in these squares; all other creatures treat these squares as difficult terrain and must make Athletics checks (DC 20) to swim through the slime.

SKILL CHALLENGE LEVEL 12 / 14, COMPLEXITY 1 (700 / 1,000 XP)

SAVE THE TOWNSFOLK!

Goal: The PCs need to identify the townsfolk who can be rescued before the transformation is complete and rescue them, and they need to destroy those who cannot be saved before the transformation is complete to avoid facing them in battle.

Complexity: 1 (4 successes before 3 failures)

Primary Skills: Athletics, Heal

Other Skills: Arcana, Dungeoneering, Nature, Perception, Religion

Victory: PCs identify and save those that can be saved and destroy those who cannot be saved before having to face them in combat.

Defeat: PCs fail to save any townsfolk but must defeat them all in combat.

There are two components to saving townsfolk (and thereby earning successes in this skill challenge). First, the PCs need to determine which pillars contain people who have not yet been completely transformed. Then, they need to find a way to get those people out of the pillars before it's too late. Because each success requires two successful checks (one "observation" skill and one "action" skill), making the checks is not a standard action. This is intended to allow the PCs to work on the skill challenge during the fight without having to give up their standard actions (which they need to make attacks).

Arcana, Dungeoneering, Nature, Perception, or Religion DC 21/23 (trained only; minor action; not a success or failure; unlocks primary skill checks)

With a successful check, a PC studies the nearby pillars and can tell whether each one contains townsfolk who can be saved (the pillars marked "S") or those for whom it is too late (the pillars marked "T"). Each successful check identifies all pillars within 2 squares of the character making the check.

You should describe the results of these checks differently based on which skill the character used. For example, Arcana checks identify the aura of the ritual that transforms people into aboleth servitors. Dungeoneering checks identify aspects of the aberrant creatures and whether or not a particular person has been completely transformed. Nature checks look for signs of corruption that can still be reversed. Perception checks see feeble movements and indications that someone is still alive and sane. Religion checks feel the

"wrongness" of the Far Realm and the strength of its incursion in each pillar.

Athletics or Heal DC 16/18 (move action; 1 success; no maximum, but only 1 success per "S" pillar)

Once a savable townsman has been identified through any of the secondary skills, the PCs need to get those people out of the pillars. A character must be adjacent to one of the "S" pillars, and that pillar must have been "identified" using one of the secondary skills, before they can attempt to rescue someone from that pillar.

As a move action, the character reaches into an adjacent gelatinous pillar and pulls someone free. Each successful Athletics or Heal check to pull an untransformed townsman free and clean the slime out of his or her nose and mouth counts as one success towards the overall skill challenge. This also deactivates the "S" pillar, which means if you roll that number in future rounds, no servitors come out. (Do not re-roll that die -- this is a reward to the players for working on the skill challenge during combat).

On a failed skill check, a body still comes out of the pillar, but it's too late. The victim has already transformed into an aboleth servitor. Add this monster to the map and the initiative order. It does not count against the limit of 10 servitors for the battle and the PCs do not earn any extra XP for killing it.

When the PCs have achieved a total of 4 successes before 3 failures, they have disrupted the aboleths' ritual enough that all of the "S" pillars stop producing servitors. After the battle, the PCs can go around and free the rest of the surviving townsfolk. If the PCs reach 3 failures before 4 successes, then they cannot stop the ritual and they will not be able to save any more of the victims here.

Destroying a Servitor before it Emerges: The PCs might decide to just start destroying the pillars. This is possible, but difficult because the gelatinous slime of the pillars quickly reforms after any attack. The pillars have the following statistics: AC/Reflex 5, Fortitude 10, HP 60, and regeneration 15. Destroying a pillar kills any remaining townsfolk trapped within, but does stop that pillar from producing any more aboleth servitors, so it counts as a success on the skill challenge.

Trapped Pillars: Note that the "T" pillars are not part of the skill challenge. The PCs might destroy them to stop them from attacking, as detailed above, but they cannot rescue any townsfolk from these pillars, and destroying these pillars does not garner successes towards the skill challenge.

Each "S" pillar contains a number of bodies in different stages of transformation, which is why the PCs have to "identify" each pillar before they can rescue someone from that pillar. Otherwise they might accidentally pull out another servitor instead of a person who can still be saved.

TACTICS

The aboleth servitors do not start out on the battle map. They are encased within tall pillars of the same slimy consistency as the cyst walls, and break out of these pillars during the combat. At the end of each of the aboleth slime mage's turns, if it is in the main cavern, roll three eight-sided dice. Aboleth servitors burst out of the slimy pillars at the locations indicated by those numbers (S1, S2, S3, up to S8). If you roll duplicates, then discard the duplicate results (one servitor per pillar per round is the maximum). In this fashion you will add between one and three servitors to the battle each round, until a total of ten servitors have been created. The PCs can stop the arrival of more servitors by completing a skill challenge during the battle (see "Save the Townsfolk!"), or they can wait until after they have dealt with the aboleths. New aboleth servitors enter the initiative order directly following the slime mage and act immediately on their turn.

All the aboleths use the tunnels to best advantage. If they can draw the PCs into the tunnels to isolate them, or use the tunnels to duck in and out of the battlefield, they do so. The aboleth lashers interpose themselves between the slime mage and the PCs. The slime mage remains at a safe distance from which it can use its ranged powers and give the soon-to-hatch servitors room to move.

If the aboleths were waiting for the PCs' arrival, then the lashers do not attack until either the PCs discover them or when the aboleth slime mage starts the fight by using its *slime burst*.

The aboleth lashers and the servitors fight to the death. If the slime mage sees all the lashers defeated, it retreats so that it may return and complete its studies once the intruders have left. If this is not possible, it fights to the death.

SCALING THE ENCOUNTER

Make the following adjustments to the combat based on the number of PCs present.

Four PCs: Remove one of the aboleth lashers.

Six PCs: Add a second aboleth slime mage.

ENDING THE ENCOUNTER

The skill challenge can be completed outside of combat if the PCs do not want to try and do it during the battle. (If they don't complete the skill challenge during the battle, then they have to fight 10 aboleth servitors). This encounter is over only when the PCs have both defeated the aboleths and gained enough successes to rescue the townsfolk or when the PCs are killed or forced to flee.

EXPERIENCE POINTS

For defeating the aberrations, the PCs earn 1,040/1,460 XP each. The PCs earn the full XP for all the aboleth servitors even if they didn't fight all 10 because they completed the skill challenge.

If they successfully complete the skill challenge (regardless of whether it was during or after the fight), each PC earns an additional 140/200 XP (or half that if they fail).

TREASURE

In their search of the cyst, the PCs discover the following magic items (which the aboleth slime mage collected to study): a jar of *Keoghtom's ointment*, *bloodhound bracers*, a *medallion of the mind* +3, a *blasting circlet* (high-level only), and a ritual book containing *Arcane Lock*, *Call Wilderness Guide*, *Consult Mystic Sages*, *Knock, Raise Dead*, and *Traveler's Feast*.

CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

If the PCs defeated the aboleths, as they are preparing to return to the surface, read the following:

Another of the blank-faced spirits suddenly appears before you. Although it is incapable of smiling, you nevertheless feel a sense of satisfaction and relief emanating from the ghostly figure as it presses its palms together and bows low before you.

Allow the PCs to decide if they want to try and communicate with the spirit in any fashion. (Talking to it, trying to use telepathy on it, anything will do.) If they seem at least non-hostile, the spirit conveys an image to them from the Plaguechanged Thing.

The spirit's eyes flash for a moment and the world around you shimmers and wavers. You plunge into vast caverns below the city of Westgate, even deeper than those in which you now stand. Within these caverns is something immense and indescribable, a rolling sea of flesh. Blue light flickers at the edges of your vision. Yet somehow you know that this disgusting mass is also the entity that created the blank-faced spirit.

Images flash into your mind too fast to fully comprehend. A dwarf, clambering through the rocks. An explosion of blue fire. Pain... so much pain. Growing, changing. Finally, after what seems like an eternity, a single thought escapes, and is answered. Is someone there?

A tentacled, bulbous mass crawls into view. Are you... like me? No! NO! More pain... such pain... help. Images of people, hundreds, thousands of people, on darkened city streets. Fish-like humanoids pop in and out of view, grabbing some of the people. People. My people! Must find... must find... there! A clear image of you and your companions. HELP!

A battle, and at last the tentacles stop moving. Relief. But why? Where? A powerful mind casts its net across the world. There! A writhing obelisk, floating high above the ocean. It is wrong, alien in a way that even a plaguechanged monster would understand.

The dizzying sequence of images stops, frozen on the floating obelisk. You suddenly get an overpowering sense of anger and hatred, directed at the obelisk. Then a question of sorts forms in your mind. It is indistinct and wordless, but you understand what is being asked.

The effort of so much communication taxes the Plaguechanged Thing's control to the point where it can no longer maintain the link. Let the PCs respond if they choose. Regardless of what they say or do, the blank-faced spirit explodes, dissolving into green mist. But the

PCs are left with a sense that they have just made contact with ... something, and whatever it is, it does not like aboleths. (The PCs can make Streetwise and History checks when they get back to Westgate to learn the legends of the Plaguechanged Thing. Nobody in Westgate has any idea of its true nature or motives, however.)

If the PCs rescued at least one of the slaves from the kuo-toa and also rescued at least one townsfolk alive from the aboleths, read the following:

With the caverns now empty of horrors, you are free to return to the streets of Westgate where, strangely enough, a group of children watches you emerge from the sewers. Shortly afterwards, members of the city watch appear and ask that you accompany them for questioning. Your interaction with the blank-faced spirit has raised interest in a variety of quarters. Soon after your appearance before the city watch, you receive an invitation to dine with some local nobility, and even a request to visit Fan-Ji's famous teahouse.

Is it your imagination, or do people on the street fall quiet and watch you pass with speculation in their eyes? Things are afoot in Westgate and it seems to be you who've spun the wheel.

If the PCs rescued at least one of the Westgate townsfolk alive from the aboleth cyst and rescued at least one of the kuo-toa slaves, and made sure that they reached the surface safely, they receive the story object CORE31 Paragon Friend of Westgate. They also receive a Minor Quest award of 80 / 160 XP each.

PCs who receive CORE31 and who also possess the story object DRAG03 Docks District Enforcer / Liberator / Meddler Award from DRAG1-2 The Thin Gray Line, or the DRAG05 Westgate Reputation Award from DRAG1-3 A Stab in the Dark find their reputations enhanced. Meddlers and Troublemakers are now viewed as merely having the potential to be useful, without the stigma attached. The players need to note this on their Adventure Records (or they can make the appropriate notes directly on their older story object certificates).

If the PCs defeated the aboleths, they gain the story object CORE32 Contact with the Plaguechanged Thing. It does not matter how the PCs reacted to the blank-faced spirits earlier in the adventure as long as they defeat the aboleths.

If they fell to the aboleths, or were defeated by the kuo-toa slavers, the PCs are held prisoner for a few hours, but are eventually rescued by another party from Westgate who also saw a blank-faced spirit and were more successful in defeating the invaders.

ENCOUNTER 6: "ABERRATIONS" STATISTICS (LOW LEVEL)

Aboleth Lasher (Level 14)	Level 14 Brute
Large aberrant magical beast (aquatic)	XP 1,000
Initiative +9 Senses Perception +12; darkvision	
Mucus Haze aura 5; enemies treat the area within the aura as difficult terrain.	
HP 169; Bloodied 84	
AC 26; Fortitude 25, Reflex 23, Will 21	
Speed 5, swim 10	
m Tentacle (standard; at-will)	
Reach 2; +17 vs. AC; 2d8 + 7 damage (4d8 + 7 damage against a dazed target), and the target is dazed (save ends).	
Combat Advantage	
The aboleth lasher makes an extra tentacle attack against any enemy it has combat advantage against.	
Alignment Evil Languages Deep Speech, telepathy 20	
Skills Arcana +18, Dungeoneering +17, Insight +17	
Str 25 (+14) Dex 15 (+9) Wis 21 (+12)	
Con 19 (+11) Int 22 (+13) Cha 16 (+10)	

Aboleth Pillar Tendrils (Level 12)	Level 12 Obstacle
Trap	XP 700
Trap: This trap consists of eight slimy pillars. When a creature steps into a square adjacent to one of the trapped pillars, mucus-covered tentacles lash out and attack the creature.	
Perception	
♦DC 16: The character notices that the surface of the trapped pillars is covered with writhing tentacles.	
♦DC 21: The character estimates the reach of the tentacles and realizes that all squares adjacent to a trapped pillar are part of the trap.	
Arcana	
♦DC 16: The character recognizes the slime and mucus of the pillars as being similar to aboleth tentacles, and surmises that the trap's attacks will probably damage and daze those who are struck.	
♦DC 21: The character's knowledge provides a +2 bonus to Thievery checks to disable the trap.	
Trigger	
When a creature enters a square adjacent to one of the trapped pillars, the trap attacks that creature.	
Attack	
Opportunity Action	Melee
Target: Creature adjacent to a trapped pillar	
Attack: +17 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d8 + 5 damage, and the target is dazed until the end of the target's next turn.	
Special	
The pillars count as allied creatures with melee reach 1 for purposes of flanking with aboleths and aboleth servitors.	
Countermeasures	
♦A character who makes a DC 16 Acrobatics check during movement can move through a trigger square without provoking an attack. The trigger square moved through counts as difficult terrain for this purpose.	
♦As a standard action, an adjacent character can disable a pillar with a DC 21 Thievery check.	
♦As a minor action, a character within 5 squares of a pillar can suppress that pillar for 1 round (keeping that pillar from making attacks) with a DC 21 Arcana or Religion check.	

Aboleth Slime Mage (Level 14)	Level 14 Artillery (Leader)
Large aberrant magical beast (aquatic)	XP 1,000
Initiative +9 Senses Perception +14; darkvision	
Mucus Haze aura 5; enemies treat the area within the aura as difficult terrain.	
HP 109; Bloodied 54	
AC 28; Fortitude 25, Reflex 25, Will 26	
Speed 5, swim 10	
m Tentacle (standard; at-will)	
Reach 2; +16 vs. AC; 1d8 + 5 damage (3d8 + 5 damage against a dazed target), and the target is dazed (save ends).	
R Slime Orb (standard; at-will) ♦ Psychic	
Ranged 10; +19 vs. Reflex; 2d8 + 6 psychic damage, and the target is slowed (save ends).	
R Dominate (standard; at-will) ♦ Charm	
Ranged 10; targets a dazed humanoid; +17 vs. Will; the target is dominated (save ends). An aboleth slime mage can dominate only one creature at a time.	
B Slime Burst (standard; encounter) ♦ Psychic	
Area burst 4 within 10; targets enemies; +14 vs. Reflex; 2d8 + 6 psychic damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends). <i>Aftereffect:</i> The target is slowed (save ends).	
Alignment Evil Languages Deep Speech, telepathy 20	
Skills Arcana +18, Dungeoneering +19, Insight +19	
Str 22 (+13) Dex 15 (+9) Wis 24 (+14)	
Con 19 (+11) Int 22 (+13) Cha 19 (+11)	

Aboleth Servitor (Level 14)	Level 14 Minion
Medium aberrant humanoid (aquatic)	XP 250
Initiative +9 Senses Perception +7; darkvision	
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	
AC 28; Fortitude 26, Reflex 21, Will 19	
Speed 6, swim 6	
m Slam (standard; at-will)	
+17 vs. AC; 6 damage.	
Aboleth Devotion	
An aboleth servitor gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls against enemies in an aboleth's mucus haze aura. If an aboleth servitor is ever more than 10 squares from its aboleth master, the servitor becomes dazed, weakened, and immobilized until its master moves within 10 squares of it.	
Alignment Unaligned Languages Common	
Str 24 (+14) Dex 15 (+9) Wis 10 (+7)	
Con 20 (+12) Int 10 (+7) Cha 10 (+7)	

ENCOUNTER 6: "ABERRATIONS" STATISTICS (HIGH LEVEL)

Aboleth Lasher (Level 16)	Level 16 Brute
Large aberrant magical beast (aquatic)	XP 1,400
Initiative +11 Senses Perception +14; darkvision	
Mucus Haze aura 5; enemies treat the area within the aura as difficult terrain.	
HP 190; Bloodied 95	
AC 28; Fortitude 27, Reflex 25, Will 24	
Speed 5, swim 10	
Tentacle (standard; at-will)	
Reach 2; +19 vs. AC; 2d8 + 8 damage (4d8 + 8 damage against a dazed target), and the target is dazed (save ends).	
Combat Advantage	
The aboleth lasher makes an extra tentacle attack against any enemy it has combat advantage against.	
Alignment Evil Languages Deep Speech, telepathy 20	
Skills Arcana +19, Dungeoneering +19, Insight +19	
Str 26 (+16)	Dex 16 (+11) Wis 22 (+14)
Con 20 (+13)	Int 23 (+14) Cha 17 (+11)

Aboleth Pillar Tendrils (Level 14)	Level 14 Obstacle
Trap	XP 1,000
Trap: This trap consists of eight slimy pillars. When a creature steps into a square adjacent to one of the trapped pillars, mucus-covered tentacles lash out and attack the creature.	
Perception	
♦DC 18: The character notices that the surface of the trapped pillars is covered with writhing tentacles.	
♦DC 23: The character estimates the reach of the tentacles and realizes that all squares adjacent to a trapped pillar are part of the trap.	
Arcana	
♦DC 18: The character recognizes the slime and mucus of the pillars as being similar to aboleth tentacles, and surmises that the trap's attacks will probably damage and daze those who are struck.	
♦DC 23: The character's knowledge provides a +2 bonus to Thievery checks to disable the trap.	
Trigger	
When a creature enters a square adjacent to one of the trapped pillars, the trap attacks that creature.	
Attack	
Opportunity Action	Melee
Target: Creature adjacent to a trapped pillar	
Attack: +19 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d10 + 6 damage, and the target is dazed until the end of the target's next turn.	
Special	
The pillars count as allied creatures with melee reach 1 for purposes of flanking with aboleths and aboleth servitors.	
Countermeasures	
♦A character who makes a DC 18 Acrobatics check during movement can move through a trigger square without provoking an attack. The trigger square moved through counts as difficult terrain for this purpose.	
♦As a standard action, an adjacent character can disable a pillar with a DC 23 Thievery check.	
♦As a minor action, a character within 5 squares of a pillar can suppress that pillar for 1 round (keeping that pillar from making attacks) with a DC 23 Arcana or Religion check.	

Aboleth Slime Mage (Level 16)		Level 16 Artillery (Leader)	
Large aberrant magical beast (aquatic)		XP 1,400	
Initiative +11		Senses Perception +15; darkvision	
Mucus Haze aura 5; enemies treat the area within the aura as difficult terrain.			
HP 122; Bloodied 61			
AC 30; Fortitude 27, Reflex 27, Will 28			
Speed 5, swim 10			
m Tentacle (standard; at-will)			
Reach 2; +18 vs. AC; 1d8 + 6 damage (3d8 + 6 damage against a dazed target), and the target is dazed (save ends).			
R Slime Orb (standard; at-will) ♦ Psychic			
Ranged 10; +21 vs. Reflex; 2d8 + 7 psychic damage, and the target is slowed (save ends).			
R Dominate (standard; at-will) ♦ Charm			
Ranged 10; targets a dazed humanoid; +19 vs. Will; the target is dominated (save ends). An aboleth slime mage can dominate only one creature at a time.			
B Slime Burst (standard; encounter) ♦ Psychic			
Area burst 4 within 10; targets enemies; +16 vs. Reflex; 2d8 + 7 psychic damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends). Aftereffect: The target is slowed (save ends).			
Alignment Evil		Languages Deep Speech, telepathy 20	
Skills Arcana +19, Dungeoneering +20, Insight +20			
Str 23 (+14)		Dex 16 (+11) Wis 25 (+15)	
Con 20 (+13)		Int 23 (+14) Cha 20 (+13)	

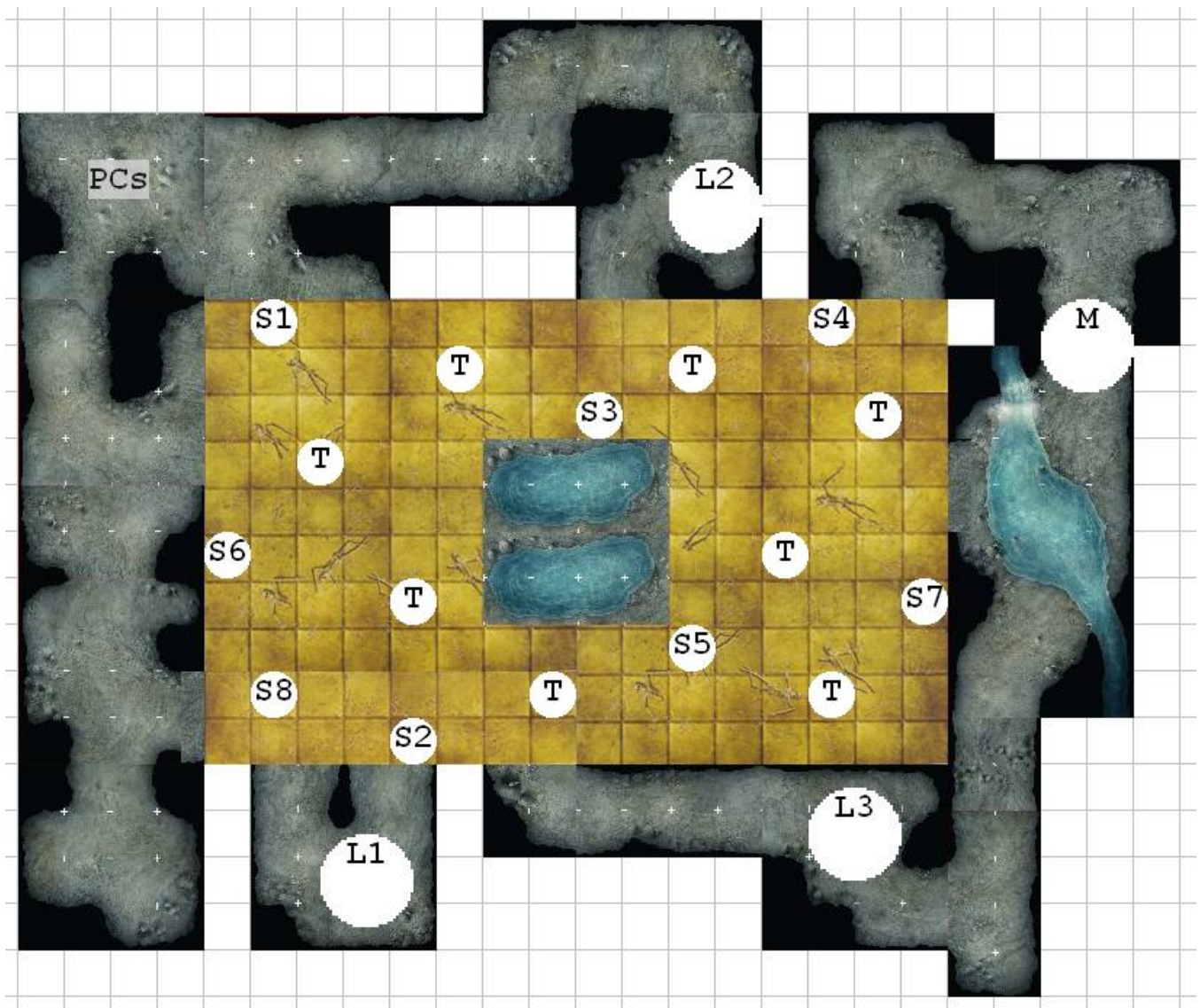
Aboleth Servitor		Level 16 Minion	
Medium aberrant humanoid (aquatic)		XP 350	
Initiative +10		Senses Perception +8; darkvision	
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.			
AC 30; Fortitude 28, Reflex 23, Will 21			
Speed 6, swim 6			
m Slam (standard; at-will)			
+19 vs. AC; 7 damage.			
Aboleth Devotion			
An aboleth servitor gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls against enemies in an aboleth's mucus haze aura. If an aboleth servitor is ever more than 10 squares from its aboleth master, the servitor becomes dazed, weakened, and immobilized until its master moves within 10 squares of it.			
Alignment Unaligned		Languages Common	
Str 24 (+15)	Dex 15 (+10)	Wis 10 (+8)	
Con 20 (+13)	Int 10 (+8)	Cha 10 (+8)	

ENCOUNTER 6: "ABERRATIONS" MAP

TILE SETS NEEDED

DT5 Lost Caverns of the Underdark x2

DT6 Dire Tombs x2



T = Trapped Pillars; S1 - S8 = Servitor Pillars

Everywhere a tunnel touches the central room is an entrance. (All entrances are at least 2 squares wide.) Because there are so many entrances and tunnels, it should be very easy to avoid having this combat bottleneck. The aboleths

know all the tunnels and where they lead, and will maneuver in and out of the room as needed to gain the best advantage. Remember that the trap squares count as allied creatures to the aboleths and their servitors, allowing the monsters to flank PCs using any of the pillars marked "T" and thereby gain combat advantage. A pillar that is disabled or suppressed (as detailed in the trap's statistics block) can no longer flank in this fashion.

REWARDS SUMMARY

At the conclusion of the adventure, the PCs earn experience points, treasure, and possibly story awards. All totals listed here are per PC. A number before the slash is the low-level value; after the slash is the high-level value.

EXPERIENCE POINTS

Give PCs a full award for each encounter they successfully completed, and a half award if they were unsuccessful. Give no award if the characters did not play the encounter at all.

Encounter 4: Slavers

980 / 1,400 XP

Encounter 6: Aberrations

1,040 / 1,460 XP (combat) plus

140 / 200 XP (skill challenge)

Minor Quest: Rescue the Citizens of Westgate

80 / 160 XP

Total Possible Experience

2,240 / 3,220 XP

Gold per PC

1,200 / 2,200 gp

(Encounter 4: 500 / 1,000 gp; Encounter 6: 700 / 1,200 gp)

TREASURE

Each PC receives treasure in the form of gold pieces as well as one share from a treasure bundle. The treasure bundle may give the PC more gold, a magic item, or something else of value. Each player makes one and only one selection for their character; players may choose the same treasure bundle. Note that it is possible (and likely) that some characters will not select a bundle for each session of play.

If characters buy or sell magic items or other gear during the adventure (or pay for services) add or subtract that amount from the total gold the PC receives at the end of the adventure. If a player selects an option that gives their character more gold, add that amount to that character's base gold award. It is possible and permissible for a character who spends more gold than he or she earns to have a negative total for the adventure. PCs receive 20% of the item's market price when they sell any magic item or consumable. They

receive 50% of the market price for ritual books and alchemical formulas.

If a player selects a magic weapon or suit of armor for their PC that is not specific on the type of item listed, they must select the exact item at the time they choose that bundle. For example, if a *duelist's weapon +1* is listed as a choice in a bundle, a player selects the form of the weapon amongst the choices possible for that magic item (light blades). If the player selects the item as a *+1 duelist's dagger*, the player writes that information down on the PC's adventure log and the item is forever after that specific weapon.

An asterisk next to a magic item means that it is an item that appears in the **New Rules** section.

EACH PC SELECTS ONE OF THE FOLLOWING BUNDLES:

Bundle A: *rogue's gloves* (PH; level 12)

Found in Encounter 4

Bundle B: *Keoghtom's ointment* (PH; level 12)

Found in Encounter 6

Bundle C: *shield of warding* (PH; level 14)

Found in Encounter 4

Bundle D: *bloodhound bracers** (AV2; level 13)

Found in Encounter 6

Bundle E: *medallion of the mind +3** (AV2; level 14)

Found in Encounter 6

Bundle F: *crown of the dream king** (AV2; level 15; high-level version only)

Found in Encounter 4

Bundle G: *blasting circlet** (AV; level 16; high-level version only)

Found in Encounter 6

Bundle H: ritual book containing Arcane Lock, Call Wilderness Guide*, Consult Mystic Sages, Knock, Raise Dead, Traveler's Feast

Found in Encounter 6

Consumable plus Gold: If a player doesn't want to select one of the bundles listed above for their character, they can choose to add a *rust bark** (level 11 consumable reagent from *Adventurer's Vault* 2) plus 950 / 1,750 gp to their rewards from this adventure. The player should write the consumable gained on their adventure log. That character (and only that character) then receives the consumable plus the listed amount of gold (if any) instead of any other treasure bundle. Consumable items

obtained in this fashion do not take up found magic item slots.

More Gold: If a player doesn't want to select one of the bundles listed above for their character, they can choose to add 1,300 / 2,100 gp to their rewards from this adventure. That character (and only that character) receives more gold instead of any other treasure bundle.

STORY AWARDS

Award these if the PC completes the condition for the award in the adventure. Pass out certificates to the players for their story awards.

CORE31 Paragon Friend of Westgate

You pursued the fearsome blank-faced spirits and rescued a number of citizens of Westgate who were facing a fate worse than death. Tales of your deeds spread quickly through the city, and you find that the attitude of Westgate's citizens has become more favorable towards you. Your interactions with the city's inhabitants are always affected by your reputation; perhaps now some opportunities may exist where there weren't any before.

This story object may have an impact on past and future Dragon Coast regional adventures and Core adventures set in and around Westgate.

CORE32 Contact with the Plaguechanged Thing

You defeated an alien threat lurking beneath the streets of Westgate. In doing so, you have made contact (of a sort) with an incredibly powerful psionic entity known only as the Plaguechanged Thing. This creature is not necessarily benign; its original nature has been so horribly transformed by the Spellplague that no one can really say what its purpose or intentions might be. The only thing that seems clear is that the Plaguechanged Thing and the Abolethic Sovereignty are not working together. Although its methods of communication are crude and confusing, the Plaguechanged Thing has imprinted a powerful image in your mind: a giant, terrifying obelisk, covered with writhing tentacles, floating above the Sea of Fallen Stars. You aren't sure what this portends, but you have a sense that you will find out... whether you want to or not.

This story object is the beginning of a Major Quest that will be resolved in future Core adventures.

ADVENTURE QUESTIONS

Mark the answers to the following adventure questions on the tracking form.

1. Did the PCs interact directly with the blank-faced spirit?

- a. Yes, they "communicated" with the spirit and understood its message.
- b. The PCs weren't able to figure out what the spirit was trying to tell them, but they followed it anyway.
- c. The PCs fled from the spirit or otherwise refused to interact with it in any meaningful fashion.
- d. The PCs destroyed every spirit that tried to approach them.

2. Did the PCs defeat the kuo-toa slavers and free the slaves, guiding them out of the sewers?

- a. Yes, they took the slaves straight up to Westgate's streets.
- b. Yes, but they didn't take the slaves out, only pointed the way or allowed a spirit to guide them.
- c. Yes, but they ignored the slaves completely, leaving them to find their own way out.
- d. No, the PCs were defeated by the kuo-toa.

3. Did the PCs find and defeat the aboleths?

- a. Yes, every last fishy one of them.
- b. Yes, but the aboleth slime mage got away.
- c. No, some or all of the PCs were forced to retreat from the lair.
- d. No, all of the PCs were captured or killed by the aboleths.

4. Did the PCs succeed at the skill challenge in the aboleth lair?

- a. The PCs completed the skill challenge during combat and did not have to fight all of the servitors.
- b. The PCs completed the skill challenge successfully, but not until after they had defeated the aboleths.
- c. The PCs attempted the skill challenge during the battle, but they failed.
- d. The PCs attempted the skill challenge after the battle was over, but they failed.
- e. The PCs did not finish the skill challenge (either successfully or unsuccessfully), either because they ignored it or because they were defeated by the aboleths.

NEW RULES

ITEMS

Blasting Circlet

Level 16

The intricate silver circlet adorning your brow hums with mystical power.

Item Slot: Head 45,000 gp

Power (Daily): Minor Action. Make a ranged attack: Ranged 10; Dexterity +4 vs. Reflex; on a hit, the target takes force damage equal to your level. If you score a critical hit with this item, you don't expend the use of this power and no daily use of a magic item power occurs.

Reference: *Adventurer's Vault* 2, page 138.

Bloodhound Bracers

Level 13

You can track a wounded foe and strike it down when it's most vulnerable.

Item Slot: Arms 17,000 gp

Property: Creatures that are taking ongoing damage grant combat advantage to you.

Power (Daily): Free Action. *Trigger:* You bloody an enemy.

Effect: That enemy takes ongoing 5 damage (save ends).

Reference: *Adventurer's Vault* 2, page 53.

Crown of the Dream King

Level 15

This ornate golden ring looks like a tiny crown, complete with miniature jewels.

Item Slot: Ring 25,000 gp

Power (Daily): Immediate Interrupt. *Trigger:* You are hit by an illusion, a psychic, or a sleep power. *Effect:* You gain a +4 bonus to all defenses against the triggering power.

If you've reached at least one milestone today, the bonus to all defenses lasts until the end of your next turn.

Reference: *Adventurer's Vault* 2, page 69.

Medallion of the Mind +3

Level 14

The amethyst pupil on this medallion glows softly when your thoughts take root in the minds of those around you.

Lvl 14 (+3) 21,000 gp

Item Slot: Neck

Enhancement: Fortitude, Reflex, and Will

Property: You gain an item bonus to Insight checks equal to the medallion's enhancement bonus.

Property: You can communicate telepathically with any creature you can see. Those willing to communicate with you can send thoughts back to you, allowing two-way communication. This telepathic communication fulfills the requirement of a class feature or power that a target be able to hear you.

Power (Daily): Free Action. *Trigger:* An enemy you grant combat advantage to hits or misses you. *Effect:* The triggering enemy grants combat advantage to your allies until the start of your next turn.

Reference: *Adventurer's Vault* 2, page 67.

Rust Bark

Level 11

When ground into a fine dust, this reddish tree bark expands the area of your powers.

Lvl 11 350 gp

Reagent

Power (Consumable): Free Action. You expend this reagent when you use an area burst power of up to 5th level that has a damage keyword. The size of the burst increases by 1.

Reference: *Adventurer's Vault* 2, page 88.

RITUALS

Call Wilderness Guide

An animal native to the local wilderness answers your call, approaching you and then walking away. A moment later it pauses, looking over its shoulder as if to make sure you are following.

Level: 6

Component Cost: 144 gp

Category: Exploration

Market Price: 360 gp

Time: 30 minutes

Key Skill: Nature

Duration: Special

You call a nature spirit into your service to act as a guide. The guide takes the form of a Medium or smaller natural beast, with defenses equal to yours at the time you perform the ritual. The guide has 1 hit point, and a missed attack never damages it. It has a speed of 8, but it measures its pace so that you and your party can keep up with it.

The guide leads you to a location you name as you perform the ritual. The destination must be a specific place, such as Shathrax's Lair or the Tower of Kettendor. The guide cannot lead you to a general location, such as "a cave full of treasure," or to an unknown place, such as "the secret lair of the dragon Arrythis." For the ritual's duration, the guide leads you to the destination by the shortest (although not necessarily the safest) route.

Your Nature check determines how long the guide serves you. If you can't reach the specified destination within the allotted time, the guide leads you as far as it can along the way and then vanishes.

Nature Check Result	Duration
19 or lower	1 hour
20-29	4 hours
30-39	8 hours
40 or higher	16 hours

Reference: *Player's Handbook* 2, page 213