

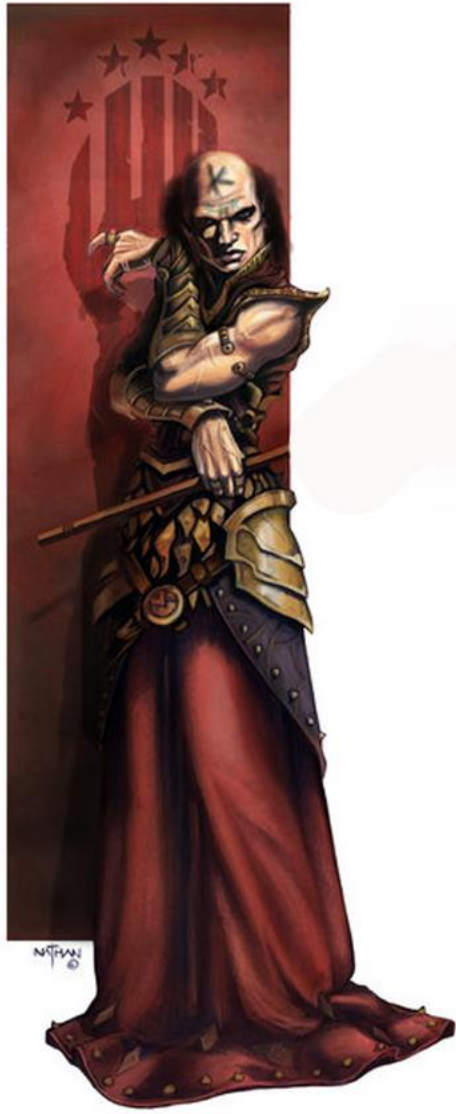


Adventure #17

Last Session...

The elf rogue Elgweh found himself cursed by a journal belonging to a Red Wizard of Thay. They had just finished clearing out Wyvern Tor and were heading to Cragmaw Castle when they decided to confront the necromancer a second time. The necromancer, calling himself *KERAPTIS*, did not survive the encounter, but the spellbook he left behind apparently belonged to the BLACK SPIDER, the drow elf the party had killed in the Lost Mines, the same drow that had been orchestrating the Redbrands in Phandalin and the goblins in Cragmaw and possibly even the orcs at Wyvern Tor, all in the hopes of salvaging the Forge of Spells. A Forge now in the possession of a maniacal beholder mage.

The Black Spider is dead - sort of - reanimated as a zombie minion by the beholder Xezzlomax, but the drow's journal uncovered a new mystery that changes everything, something about a mysterious place called White Plume



Mountain as the seat of the curse upon Elgweth. Twin “K” tattoos have appeared on the backs of both his hands and he now possesses a supercharged *Magic Missile* spell in his memory, cast at 8th level when he spends a 1st level slot, so the damage output is devastating.

But according to the journal the tattoo is just the first stage of a debilitating doom, one which the Black Spider was also a victim. Vile dreams, visions, unwanted thoughts and the presence of another intelligence are soon to come. How the necromancer came to be cursed as well by “Keraptis” they don’t know, or how he came by the journal, or how the ogress mother of Wyvern Tor also had an identical tattoo.

To find answers to these questions they headed back to Phandalin to wait for Sildar Hallwinter and the others who would hopefully return with a regiment of soldiers from Neverwinter.

And return they did! With no less than 20 shining Neverwinter Knights in gleaming gold chain and plate. To sweeten the deal even further, their old companion Fyghta Wan had leveled up to 6th after being suffused by magic from the *Deck of Many Things*, so he’s now technically the strongest person in the group but relegated to purely NPC status.

The Neverwinter Knights do have a leader amongst them, not counted as one of the twenty, by the name of Sir Gerard, but the players opt to call him *Threadbeard*.



He's a fast talking, order-spewing, hardcore drill sergeant of a man who fully embodies all the verbal traits and idiosyncrasies of Sgt. Apone.



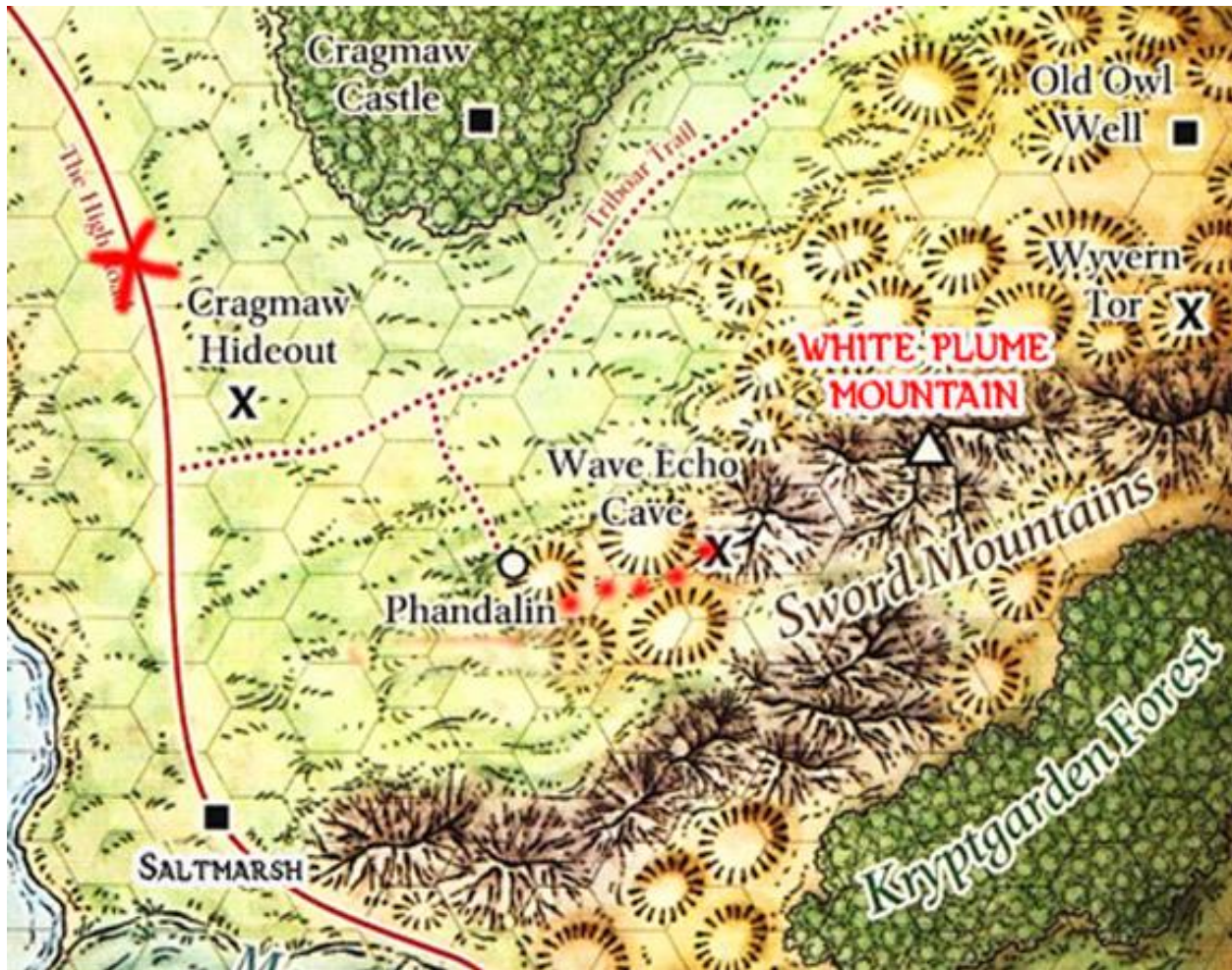
“Buck up, soldier! Tighten that gear! Act like you’re a Neverwinter Knight, by the high and mighty gods. Impress me!”

He’s had two days on a march with Sildar and Gundren and Fygha Wan, so he’s been fully briefed on everything to expect in the Lost Mine of Phandelver, but he still scrutinizes Elgweth, Cora, Carp and Thorin, making it clear that he brooks no cowardice among his troops, newcomers included. Well, Elgweth isn’t too keen on being reprimanded by this red-thread-bearded captain, Sir Gerard (I’m just calling him

Threadbeard from now on) and the elf is quick to point out all the devastating “clearing” they’ve already accomplished in the region, including the Redbrands (for better or worse) and Wyvern Tor and the bugbears and such in the Lost Mine. Grunting, Threadbeard seems pleased enough with their bravado and backs down. He’s not a bad sort, just gruff.

The entire brigade decides to leave first thing in the morning. It’s not far to the entrance to the mine, now that they know where it is, and if they leave at dawn they should arrive by evening. And they highly doubt any sort of creature will dare to confront an overland party of *27 heavily armed people*.

On the way Threadbeard, Fygha Wan, Gundren, Sildar and the PCs discuss their plan of action. The goal is **A)** to secure the Lost Mine, clear out the encroaching forces and find a way to nullify the gateway to Mideon, if it’s even still there. They don’t know and won’t know until they get inside. It has been nearly SEVEN DAYS since they were last here so they have no idea what to expect. **Goal B)** If possible, find the Black Spider, kill him, again, and have the cleric use *SPEAK WITH DEAD* to learn about the Curse of Keraptis on Elgweth.



The group arrives at the mine at dusk, finding it nestled deeply in the foothills of the Sword Mountains, but to their surprise and dismay they see that the entrance has collapsed under a pile of rubble.



Grunting, their resident miner and explorer Gundren Rockseeker taps the boulders with a pick, sniffs the dust and tastes the chalky residue with a finger.

“This weren’t natural,” he says to everyone. “They collapsed it on purpose. They don’t want none of us going back in!”

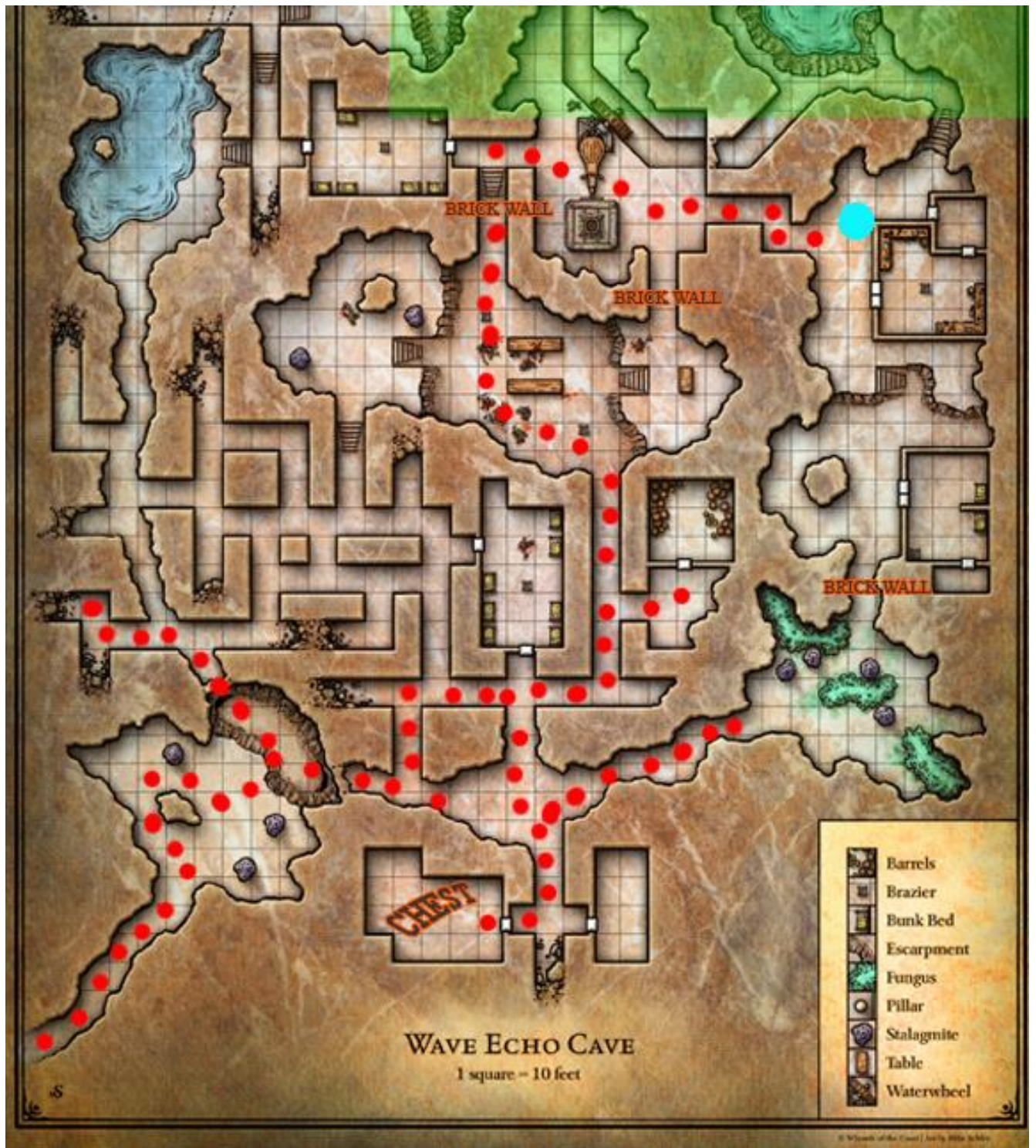


Well, gods-be-damned, this puts Sir Threadbeard in a foul mood and he immediately orders his soldiers to form a line and start hauling rubble out.

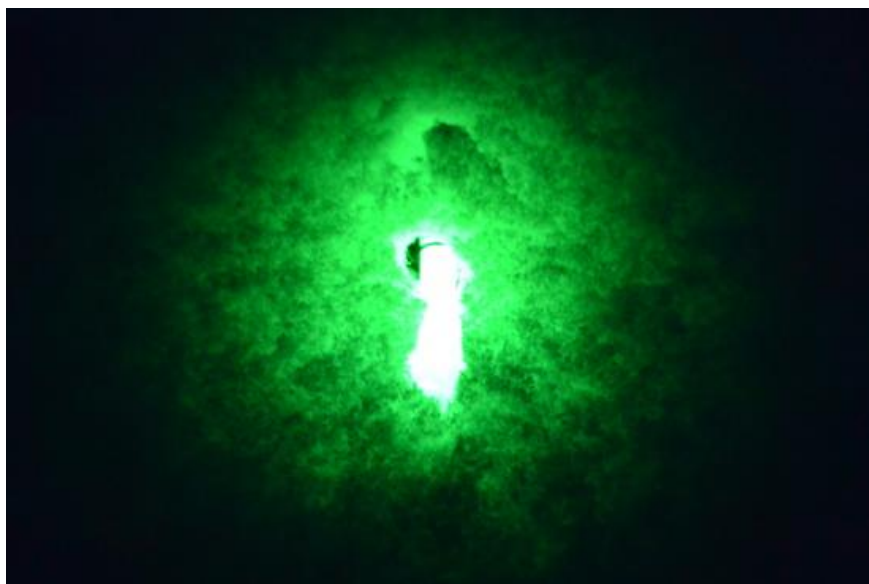
“Assholes and elbows! Get to it, then. A beautiful day to be a soldier. *AND WATCH THOSE CORNERS!*”



It takes two hours, but finally there’s enough room for Carp the halfling druid to enact a rather daring, audacious plan – he transforms into a **mouse** and slips into the tiniest crack available, hoping to scout on the interior before they enter in a huge group. The digging alone has undoubtedly attracted someone’s attention by now.



Carp-the-mouse scurries into the tunnel with darkvision, his nose and whiskers twitching. There IS light in the foyer, coming from a glow globe from the end of a rod stuck into a stalagmite. He scurries a circuit around the room, seeing the old dead dwarf here from last time, as well as the bloody, slick



bones of what looks like might have been a bugbear. Carp the Mouse's goal is pure reconnaissance, and he has approximately 30 minutes to get this done before he reverts back to his normal shape and size, and he doesn't want to be stuck in this place alone when that happens. He doesn't

notice anything else in the entry foyer and scampers down the rope to the crumbled floor and the two tunnels branching east and west.

Then he hears it.

BBBOOOOOOOOOONGGGGGGGG...

A deep, reverberating gong-like sound echoes from the western tunnel and then fades to nothingness. It doesn't sound anything like the Wave Echo they heard before. This is new. Curious, he pokes a head in but sees just dark tunnels and he doesn't advance that direction, opting instead to head east to where the stirges first attacked.

The first time they were here the wide, high chamber was filled with the desiccated bones of dwarves and orcs who died hundreds of years ago. They're still there, but a wide swath of SOMETHING sliding through the chamber has pushed to the bones to the left and right. The swath of something's passage leads straight to the green fungus chamber, and that's where Carp tentatively crawls, failing to see the ROOF FULL OF *PIERCERS AND DARKMANTLES...*



He doesn't enter. In fact, they've never entered this room, the carpet of green fungus always intimidated them, but there's something new here, a tall stalagmite in the middle of the floor that Carp swears he doesn't remember being there. Fungus has already started growing up its sides and there's no evidence of anything else sliding into the room; the fungus would have already covered it.

He also notices that the entrance on the far side has been bricked up. This is a dead end now.

He looks in another room and sees a CHEST SITTING in the middle of the floor that was not there previously. Strange. He backtracks and heads north, peeking into the barrel chamber where they hid once. He sees that the door is open and something oily and black and glistening quivers at the back of the chamber, huddled among the barrels like some wet amoeba. Disgusted, he leaves it alone and continues.

(Oddly enough, Googling “black pudding” reveals this unpleasant Euro treat :)



Then he hears the clacking sound. It's from the chamber with the old dining tables in the big, big central cavern room where there was a gaggle of ghouls originally. The sound does not seem mechanical but rather natural or organic, and Carp the mouse creeps forward and peeks around the corner.



A hulking black shape waits in total darkness. Two big pincers clack one after the other, and it moves slowly around the room as if searching. To the right of the room down the passage where they fought the Flame Skull, Carp sees it has also been hastily bricked and mortared. Beyond the clicking, clacking monster Carp spies a THIRD brick wall sealing off the corridor and stairs, but this one is not complete. He knows where it leads – the Forge Room.

Carp wants to get by the thing so he scurries onto the table and knocks over an old pewter urn draped in webs. It clatters loudly to the flagstones and the monster pounds a wooden table out the way, lurching closer to investigate. Carp runs past it, climbs the unfinished brick wall and enters the waterwheel chamber.

He sees a bluish glow and hears a hum to the east where the Forge Room lies, so creeping forward carefully, he peeks in here as well, and is somewhat dismayed – the Eyeball Portal is right outside the Forge Room, but it's TWICE the size it used to be!



The door to the Forge Room is closed, and even though the PCs TOOK THE FORGE TO THE BEHOLDER IN MIDEON, the green flame nearly sputtered out and Gundren told them it would only work in conjunction with the Forge Room in the mine. And then Carp the Mouse hears the thundering wave echo from somewhere not far away in another part of the complex they never explored. But he's had enough. Time is running out and he wants to get back to the others and tell them what he found.

So back he goes, dodging the big weird clacking hulk and he winds through the corridors, and he's about to climb up the rope to the main foyer when he hears the sound again –

BOOOOOONNNNNNNNNNNNGGGGGGGGGGGGGG...

A deep reverberating bong, and this time he investigates. Elgweth had invisibly mapped out these rough mining tunnels before and found several collapsed dead ends, and it's mostly the same this time...except for one.

One tunnel has been reopened and Carp the Mouse sees a green glow. The tunnel slopes down into a wide, open cavern and it extends far beyond the reach of his darkvision. He senses a wide open space and he sees another glowing magical globe on a metal rod nearby, but this one is gonging at regular intervals. That's what was making the sound.

Almost like it's deliberately trying to attract attention.



Screw that, he leaves the entry quickly, chills crawling up his furry back, and climbs the rope to the main entrance where the soldiers have finally cleared a big enough entrance for a human to crawl through. Carp transforms and tells them everything he saw. But most importantly, this place is NOT empty!

There's no sign of bugbears or goblins or drow or beholders, but there's something else crawling around in the darkness, and it ain't pretty.

The PCs finally enter the mine and cross the entry chamber, but Elgweth has no sooner set foot into the middle of the room before the the floor buckles and curls up and clamps shut around him!



It's a fake floor that looks exactly like a real floor, and it has him trapped, squeezing tighter and tighter and trying to crush the life from him. Carp the Mouse had walked right over it several times but didn't trigger the thing, which is some sort of flat organism with seamless, chameleon-like color and texture control.

Elgweth manages to slip free and the heroes bombard the aberration with attacks, soon destroying it.

The rest of the group enters the newly opened Lost Mine of Phandelver and they take stock of the situation.



“Weapons out, boys!” barks Sir Threadbeard. Raspy clangs ensue and twenty blades are drawn from scabbards. Four groups of five soldiers each are formed, with Fyghtha Wan, Sildar, Gundren and Threadbeard as squad leader of each. The four PCs are a fifth squad on their own. Altogether there are 28 heavily armed people to take back the mine, and they hope that’s enough.

And then they slowly filter into the mine, Elgweth the rogue elf leading the way, sort of, invisibly and stealthily. The trapper in the room before already whammed him pretty bad and he’s not looking for another fight quite yet.

First things first, they return to the source of the BONGING sound and the entrance the deep levels. Now, they've heard of the Underdark and they know stories that there are deep, dark places beneath the world. This top level of the Phandelver mine is not particularly deep, but the cavern he's looking at now is awash in darkness and shadows and cold, stagnant drafts.

"What can we do?" they ask Gundren, resident dwarf miner and expert. The dwarf inspects the walls, traces a finger down the inky surfaces and tastes a bit of dust and grime.

"We collapse it!" he says. "Bring me a barrel!"

Oh yeah, I forgot to mention, they have brought three small kegs of black powder from Phandalin. It's not a whole lot, but enough to cause some serious structural damage if needed. Gundren positions the barrel in the entrance, lights the wick, and cautions the others to stand well back.

"It's gonna be noisy, and every critter in this damn place is gonna hear it. Get ready for some hell..."

And then it EXPLODES.



Dust and rock and debris are flung far and wide and the tunnel collapses again, sealing off the giant chamber beyond from the twisting corridors of the mine. The PCs WERE going to take the glowing gong globe but it would have required them to step into the cavern, and something about that didn't sit well with them. I'm sure I had nothing to do with it, eagerly holding the d20 poised and waiting for their decision....

And Gundren was right.

Soon after they hear distant squeals and sputtering and squeaking and scuttling. It's not like a whole brigade of human soldiers in metal armor and waving torches was exactly stealthy anyway, but the thunderous explosion has spread throughout the entire complex, alerting even the most blind and deaf of things.



Elgweth clenches his teeth and slides down a corridor. They know that the eastern side of the mine is bricked off, he wonders if the western approach is the same. There's a pool room they never fully investigated, but even as he

maneuvers toward the entrance he sees a big, black, leathery cloak hanging across the entrance. And then the cloak moves.

Wings unfurl and bony ivory claws flex and fangs glisten and a serpentine tails whips out and seconds later the horrible thing has LAUNCHED down the hallway, screeching right toward a bewildered soldier who barely sees it coming out of the gloom!





Screaming, the soldier raises his sword and thrusts it into the thing's milky belly. Membranous wings flutter all around him and the creature lets loose an unnatural moan that sets everyone's teeth on edge, but one trait the Neverwinter Knights share in common is great bravery and they're all able to resist the supernatural terror. Five swords hack into the flying bat thing and then Thorin's hammer cracks it upside the head. Elgweth melts into the shadows, not wanting to enter the fray, but when the thing abruptly retreats it is downed by a spell from the cleric and crumples at the Elgweth's feet.

I'm going to wear that sonofabitch, he thinks, admiring the leathery cloak.



But the cloaker wasn't the only horror alerted by the explosion. Sildar's squad is guarding another route (each squad was stationed to keep watch different directions) and all of a sudden Sildar alone sees a glimmer of motion not ten feet away.

Something invisible in the darkness is nearly on top of them!

"LOOK OUT!" he screams.

The entire hallway is filled with a transparent, gelatinous mass of clear ooze and it surges forward, completely engulfing a hapless soldier while another one is pushed away.



Ooze fills his mouth and nostrils and he helplessly thrashes inside the cube, acidic enzymes dissolving his flesh as the others watch in horror.

“At the thing!” bellows Sildar and they start attacking, cutting out big chunks of the thing’s clear body. Blobs of quivering jelly fall to the floor, but it’s far too late for the soldier inside, his flesh is liquefied and all that remains is floating armor and wet bones. The cube barrels forward, trying to engulf two more soldiers but they’re able to dodge it. They’re finally hack the thing into so many tiny pieces that it falls apart, but this only makes room for something even worse to enter the hall.

A soldier’s eyes go wide as he sees another monstrosity lumber in – and he starts gibbering, his eyes roll back in his head and he swings at an ally in total confusion, burying a blade in his shoulder.

“What are you DOING, man?”



This foe proves to be horrific, causing confusion in everyone nearby if they meet its gaze. Sword clatter harmlessly off a shell that is hard as platemail, and serrated claws cleanly cut a soldier in half, his upper body still screaming on the way to the floor as his lower torso crumples. Even Sildar is befuddled by the thing's gaze, standing listlessly by as his men are butchered, and another soldier begins banging his head into a wall. Things would DEFINITELY have gone for the worse if the PCs were not here to turn the tide of battle.



Thorin summons a Spiritual Guardian, this time taking the form of a glowing fist of his god. The knights do manage to land some hits on the thing and magical attacks from the warlock, but the real killer comes when Elgweth uses his curse spell – the *Magic Missile of Keraptis*.

Ten glowing darts burst from his fingertips and explode into the monster for nearly 50 points of damage. That, combined with the other hits, is sufficient to finally drop the horrible thing.

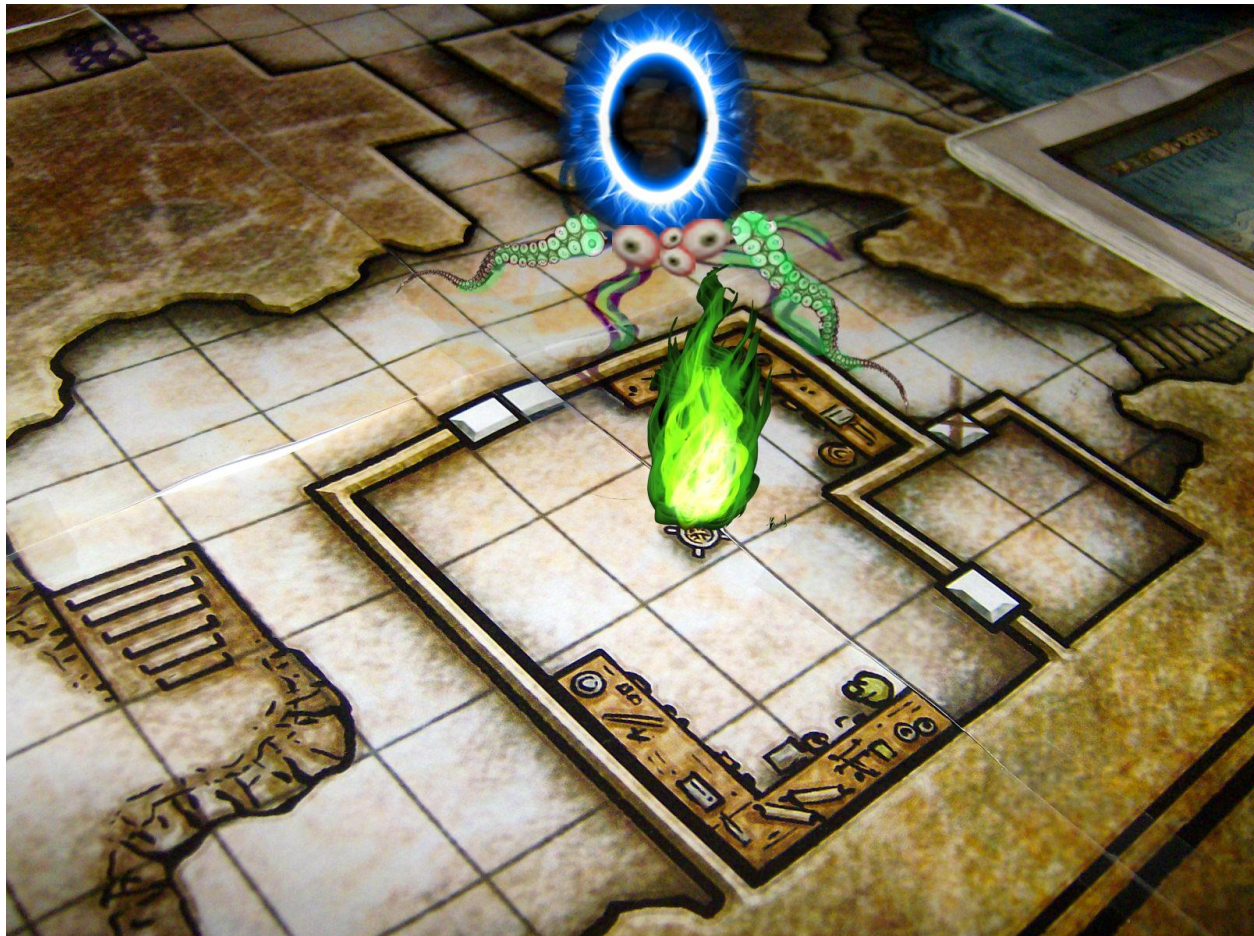
Carp the druid peers down at the corpse.

I'm gonna wear that sonofabitch, he thinks.

Meanwhile Elgweth checks out the pool room but doesn't go inside. The stairwell here is bricked up as well, so their reconnaissance of the known part of the labyrinth is complete: the invaders from Mideon have sealed off the Forge Room parts of the mine and tried to summon as many horrible things as they could to populate the rest of it. First line of defense: Underdark critters, you're up!

Things could have gone much, MUCH worse if they weren't here. The hulking monster would have ripped through the soldiers like a knife through butter, easily killing half of them. The heroes put a stop to that and there's only 3 casualties so far.

Next stop – The Portal to Mideon and the Forge of Spells



Their goal still is to secure the mine and make sure the beholder can't get to the Forge. Hopefully the Forge is back in the forge room, sans beholder, but they're not sure.

And if they can find the Black Spider somewhere that will be icing on the cake. Thorin the cleric has already prepared *Speak with Dead* and Elgweth the elf has some questions, namely – HOW DO I GET RID OF THIS CURSE?

But the Black Spider might only create more questions than answers....

