

THE DM TOOL CHEST

A SOLDIER'S TAIL



A FORMER COMRADE-IN-ARMS IS IN TROUBLE AND NEEDS THE HELP OF A SOLDIER IN A TALE OF REVENGE AND BETRAYAL



A SOLDIER'S TAIL

A *Soldier's Tail* is a Fifth Edition hybrid adventure for **three to five characters with an average party level (APL) of 5, 8, or 11.** The story focuses on establishing a deeper connection and backstory for a character that utilizes a military background. A former military companion long thought to be dead has come seeking the character's help in rescuing other former comrades-in-arms from an old foe. After coming face to face with old adversaries, they learn the shocking truth that their old comrades were traitors. The characters must determine how they proceed in this story of broken oaths and traitorous companions. This adventure takes place in the Freelands campaign setting but easily fits any existing campaign with only a few modifications.

GM's Note: This adventure is designed to focus on developing a character with a soldier or similar military background. Throughout the adventure, that specific character is referred to as "The Soldier" for ease of reference. Every warrior has a complex story of lost comrades and defeats in combat that changed their lives, and this adventure allows a character to explore their past.

BACKSTORY

A soldier's life is filled with stories of triumphs and failures that leave permanent marks on their minds and souls. One of the biggest failures in The Soldier's life was the Battle of Kerlon's Well. A routine patrol turned into a disastrous ambush that allowed a horde of monsters to invade the area. The Crimson Claws were a fierce and terrible warband that terrorized the nation

for years. They had secretly built their army up to the point they could invade the area in force, capturing villages and establishing strongholds. Although the horde was eventually pushed back and the warband crushed, The Soldier lost many comrades in the struggle. The event was one among many that left a scar on The Soldier. But what they didn't know was that they were betrayed by those very comrades they thought to be dead.

Dusaro Moonbend, a decorated dragonborn soldier, felt that he deserved more than what the military gave him. He acted as sergeant for a squad of surly soldiers who were more interested in gold than they were in fighting for their people. Dusaro and his squad sold out The Soldier's patrol to the horde of monsters and slipped away during the battle, leaving them all to die. They proceeded to make new lives for themselves with the gold they earned, but it was not long before their greed took hold of them once more. Although the war was long over, the traitorous sergeant reached out to the remnants of the Crimson Claws to devise a new scheme. The Crimson Claws would terrorize a local village or town just enough to raise a bounty against them. Dusaro and his band would come in and pose as adventurers willing to "kill" the monsters in exchange for the reward, which they would split.

This con has been working for the better part of the last three years, with Dusaro's band of adventurers—the Moonbend Riders—gaining fame and accolades throughout the region. But Dusaro's greed got the better of him, and he attempted to cheat the Crimson Claws of their last score from the town of Clearwater. However, the Claws were not so easily fooled, and Dusaro barely managed to escape with his life as they

took the rest of his squad captive. The wounded dragonborn is now recuperating in Clearwater as the Claws threaten the town once more, demanding a ransom for the return of the “adventurers.”

ADVENTURE SUMMARY

A former military comrade of The Soldier named Dusaro Moonbend lies wounded in the town of Clearwater. Long thought dead, The Soldier is surprised to find that Dusaro and other former comrades also survived a battle from long ago. Dusaro asks The Soldier and their party to help him rescue the captured members of his “adventuring party” and “crush the last of the Crimson Claws,” a band of monsters that once ambushed The Soldier and killed their comrades. The characters are ambushed while tracking the Claws to their hidden base in the nearby hills. After rescuing the captive soldiers and confronting the leader of the Crimson Claws, the characters learn the truth behind Dusaro’s past treachery—he was the one who sold out The Soldier to the Crimson Claws’ ambush years ago. Dusaro and his squad attempt to escape with their ill-gotten goods while leaving the characters to deal with the Crimson Claws.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

Here are a few ways to get your characters hooked into this adventure:

A Town In Need. The characters hear word that an adventuring party named the Moonbend Riders was attempting to help the town of Clearwater, and all but one was captured. The Soldier recognizes the name Moonbend from their past and wonders if this could be a relative of their old friend.

An Old Friend. The Soldier receives a hastily written letter delivered by an anxious young farmer. The letter seems to be from an old military comrade named Dusaro Moonbend, who was presumed to have died years ago in a tragic ambush. He’s asking for the character’s help in saving the town of Clearwater from their old enemy, the Crimson Claws.

Heroes for Hire. The characters receive notice through their patron that the town of Clearwater has put out a reward for the defeat of a band of monsters that are terrorizing the area. They claim another party of adventurers attempted to defeat them and failed. These adventurers are now being held captive for ransom, and the town is offering a substantial amount of gold to mount a rescue and defeat the monsters.

RUNNING THIS ADVENTURE

This adventure is designed with multiple difficulty levels to accommodate characters with an average party level (APL) of 5, 8, and 11. While the overall story remains unchanged, there are traps, obstacles, and combat encounters throughout the adventure that change based upon the adventure level. Each of these are divided in the description text by the adventure level for ease of use. Sometimes these changes are dramatic and change the style of the encounter drastically. Other times these changes are minor and only affect the encounter, trap, or obstacle by increasing the lethality of what is already there. An example of this can be seen below in determining the leader and general makeup of the Crimson Claws.

THE CRIMSON CLAWS

The Crimson Claws were a mighty warband of allied monsters that were widely regarded as a legitimate threat to the local area. When their banner of a crimson dragon claw on a field of black was seen, it struck fear into the hearts of even the most seasoned warriors. The local military force banded together to break the warband apart and scatter the remnants. What remains now is a small band held together through the sheer ferocity of their leader and the promise of a return to glory. They have been working with Dusaro and his crew to regather their strength and rebuild their power. The makeup of this band and its leader is determined by the adventure level as follows:

5th-Level Adventure. Valgar One-Eye is the **jack-in-irons** (see Appendix) leader of a motley band of hobgoblin and bugbear warriors. Badly burned in a fire long ago, the grizzled one-eyed giant is a cunning adversary who has kept the Claws together through intimidation and tenacity.

8th-Level Adventure. Konrad the Loud is the **fire giant** captain of the only remaining platoon of the Crimson Claw berserkers and ogres. The mighty giant is covered in the scars of decades of combat, his ferocity only matched by his cunning. He has kept his warriors alive as he rebuilds their strength to the point where he can lead them back to the powerful force they once were.

11th-Level Adventure. Riorsith the Young is the **young red dragon** commander of the company of dragonborn gladiators and half-dragon warriors that make up the remnants of the Crimson Claws, the warband her father once commanded long ago. The young dragon despises being forced to work with the traitor Dusaro while rebuilding the Claws in secret. Still, she recognized the usefulness the relationship provided up to the point of his sudden but inevitable betrayal.

THE SOLDIER'S PAST

Some NPCs and items are earmarked explicitly as having a tie to The Soldier's past life before they became an adventurer. The adventure text includes possible connections that ties their past to the present story. Before running this adventure, it is recommended to determine specific information about the character's military past that can be utilized in the examples given.

Here are a few examples of questions to ask:

- What was the nickname and insignia of your former military unit?
- What was your rank?
- Who was your commanding officer?
- What was the name of a comrade you lost in combat? What was a trait about them you remember fondly?
- What was a good luck trinket that one of your comrades always carried?

ABOUT THE MOONBEND RIDERS

The Moonbend Riders are a party of fraud adventurers made up of a handful of soldiers influenced and led by Dusaro Moonbend. After betraying their comrades long ago at the Battle of Kerlon's Well, the soldiers disappeared into the countryside to spend their coin. Eventually, that coin ran out, and Dusaro came up with the scheme of working with the remnants of the Crimson Claws to scam local villages and towns. Thus were born the "Moonbend Riders," a band of traveling "heroes" who fight off monsters threatening the local populace.

GM's Note: The following descriptions are examples of members of the fraud adventuring party that may be known to The Soldier. A shared history with one or all of these members can be determined prior to the adventure, and you may change any of the details to better fit your own campaign.

Verya Coldsorrow. The youngest daughter of a fallen noble family, Verya joined the army as a last resort. A heavy chip has sat on her shoulder since the fall of her family's fortune, and it opened a way for Dusaro to find a loyal ally in the haughty gnome wizard.

Avery Treebreeze. A disgraced priest who was run out of his parish for acts unmentionable, Avery changed his name and hid within the army's ranks. His duplicitous nature and greed made it easy for Dusaro to manipulate the sinister elven cleric to his side.

Atar Redward. A former pirate who was given a choice to hang or serve in the army, Atar chose the latter to save his skin. The military trained the dwarf to become an accomplished ranger, but his desire for riches never left him, and he eagerly joined Dusaro.

Sasic Samon. Sasic was recruited into the army after growing up a street urchin in the capital city. The spark of magic exploded in her one day, and the military trained her to focus her rage on becoming a living weapon. The flames of anger she harbored against the wealthy were fanned by Dusaro, who quickly recruited the hot-headed human sorcerer to join his cause.

DUSARO MOONBEND

Dusaro Moonbend is a green-scaled dragonborn heavily scarred from years of combat. A once noble and proud warrior who threw himself into the tide of battle, he eventually grew disillusioned with his military service. The medals and accolades he earned from his service were not enough for his pride and ego—wealth is what he truly desired. Dusaro worked in secret to influence the men under him to turn traitors against their oaths and sell out their former comrades to the Crimson Claws. Eventually betraying the monsters, he barely escaped with his life, losing his tail and all of his comrades in the process.

His current sense of self-preservation knows no bounds; he cares little for the fate of his captured companions and wishes only to keep his traitorous decisions a secret by rescuing them and silencing the Crimson Claws. Dusaro wants to keep The Soldier's attention focused on saving their comrades as well as getting revenge on the Claws. He silences anyone before they have the opportunity to speak out against him.

Dusaro uses a stat block dependant on the adventure level—as determined on the Dusaro table below—with the following additions due to being dragonborn:

- He has resistance to poison damage.
- He has darkvision out to 60 ft.
- **New Ability: Poison Breath (Recharge 5–6).** The dragonborn exhales poisonous gas in a 15-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw, taking 7 (2d6) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. The damage increases to 10 (3d6) if he is a gladiator, and to 14 (4d6) if he is an assassin.

DUSARO

ADVENTURE LEVEL	DUSARO STAT BLOCK
5th	knight
8th	gladiator
11th	assassin





CLEARWATER

Clearwater is a rural town that lies on the banks of the Emrane River in the Proudmore Woodlands. Most of the six hundred residents are human, with a sizable minority of halflings and a scattering of other races. They are simple folk who fish the river and farm the countryside. Timber is sent downriver to the city of Hopewell Harbor to the south and is the primary source of income for the town. The recent attacks by the Crimson Claws on the local timber yard forced the town to seek outside help from Dusaro's adventuring party, the Moonbend Riders.

Significant locations in and around Clearwater, and the important people that can be found there, include the following:

Town Hall. The seat of government in Clearwater is filled by the halfling Mayor Kella Tenblossom, a chatty **noble** who likes her town to remain quiet and straightforward. The recent troubles have made her extremely anxious.

Inn & Tavern. The Stormy Peacock is the local favorite watering hole and is owned and operated by Mica Acargrim, a surly human *veteran* who opened the place after retiring from the army. He serves quality food and drinks, and the attached inn has a few rooms for rent for 2 gp a night.

General Store. Brim's Sundries is run by the eponymous Brim Merriweather, a cheerful halfling

commoner who provides the town with supplies. Although Brim does not stock weapons or armor, characters can purchase all other adventuring gear worth 25 gp or less here.

Guards. Ukrugul Naz is the grizzled half-orc **veteran** sheriff of Clearwater who has a dozen human **guards** under his command. While a competent force used to the occasional bandit, they are no match for the hardened Crimson Claws. Being forced to rely on outside help has frustrated Ukrugul to no end, but he does not risk his guards' lives needlessly.

Shrine. A small temple in the center of town holds a non-denominational shrine. The building and shrine are maintained by Ashton Cuthacar, a solemn human **priest** of Sylvanis, goddess of life and light. He provides advice, information, and healing services to those in need and can afford the cost. Ashton has access to the *raise dead* spell for 1,250 gp.

Blacksmith. Nellie Casagar, a human **commoner**, is Clearwater's quiet blacksmith. She provides repairs and has a small stock of simple weapons and mundane light and medium armor for sale.

Timberyard. Outside of town and in the nearby woods is the timber yard owned by the anxious Martin Littlefinger, a halfling **commoner**. The Crimson Claws have mainly targeted the lumberjacks and other workers, forcing Martin to shut down the yard until they are sure it is safe. He's frantic to get operations back up and running.

RUMORS IN CLEARWATER

The characters can learn the following additional information by spending time in the tavern or through conversation and asking the right questions of the locals.

- A band of monsters led by a one-eyed giant (or another leader as per the Crimson Claws, page 3) attacked the town, and the Moonbend Riders tried to defeat them but failed. The monsters came back with the blood-soaked clothing of the Riders and demanded a ransom to have them returned to the town.
- Dusaro Moonbend, leader of the Riders, is a hero that is well known in the local area. He's resting in the Stormy Peacock after barely escaping with his life.
- Nellie Casagar heard one of the Moonbend Riders—a hotheaded sorcerer—arguing with Dusaro the day before they were captured. She wasn't close enough to listen to what the argument was about but could see they were not happy.
- The monsters appeared more intelligent than the average bandits and very organized. They attacked the lumberyard with almost military precision but didn't kill many before disappearing back into the woods.
- Mayor Kella Tenblossom is anxious to take care of the monster problem and get the lumberyard up and running again. She's disappointed in the Moonbend Riders' performance, but she's open to suggestions and is offering an eye-watering amount of gold to any who can finish the job.

ARRIVING IN CLEARWATER

Once the characters arrive in Clearwater, read aloud the following:

The road through the woodlands leads directly to a small town sitting on the banks of a broad, fast-moving river. Tendrils of smoke drift upwards from a handful of chimneys, but after a moment, you realize the town is missing the typical noises of a settlement of this size at this time of day. A rough timber palisade circles the town with a large open gate flanked by a pair of anxious-looking guards. They appear to be keeping a close eye on the road and surrounding woods, fingering their weapons as they watch your approach.

If questioned, the two **guards** can point the characters in the direction of the Stormy Peacock or the Town Hall but gruffly tell the characters to move along beyond that—they are too busy looking out for a possible assault to stand around talking.

MEETING WITH DUSARO

Once the characters reach the Stormy Peacock, read aloud the following:

The main street running through the town is quiet, and the few townspeople that can be seen are quickly going about their business as if afraid to be caught outdoors. The only sounds of merriment come from a large building bearing a wooden sign etched with an angry-looking peacock. Music and conversation drift through the open windows, along with the smell of freshly baked bread.

The tavern's interior is filled with worried townsfolk hunched over their mugs and listening to a bard sitting on a small stage at the far end of the room. The bard is trying his best to lift the pall hanging over the room but is having limited success. Everyone is concerned about the Crimson Claws recently throwing bloody clothing at the front gates and demanding 5,000 gold pieces as ransom for the "heroes" the town sent against them. Mica, the tavern owner, answers any questions the characters may have (see Rumors in Clearwater) and leads them to Dusaro's room, where the dragonborn is being visited by the local priest Ashton Cuthacar. Once The Soldier enters the room, read aloud the following:

This room contains a single bed with a nightstand holding a flickering candle and a small chest. Lying on the bed is a bandaged dragonborn being tended to by a solemn, white-robed priest. The priest turns his head at the sound of the opening door and frowns at you before stepping aside. "He's awake but needs his rest," he cautions. The dragonborn coughs hoarsely before smiling and greeting you weakly, "Hello, old friend. It's been a long time."

Dusaro speaks with the characters and tells the story of how he and his team were held captive by the Crimson Claws until they could escape. They sought a life as adventurers and have been helping local villages ever since as the Moonbend Riders. The band failed in their last mission against their old enemies, the Crimson Claws, and now the rest of the team is being held for ransom. Dusaro laments the loss of his tail in the encounter and begs The Soldier to help rescue his team and get justice for their fallen comrades from the Battle of Kerlon's Well. He uses stories from The Soldier's past and their connection with the other members of the Moonbend Riders to influence their decision to help. A suspicious character that doubts Dusaro's story can make a Wisdom (Insight) check; if the character's check result is higher than Dusaro's Charisma (Deception) check, the character senses that Dusaro seems overly anxious for The Soldier to believe him, but can't tell why. A character proficient in Medicine who succeeds on a DC 15 Wisdom (Medicine) check determines that

Dusaro will be mostly fit and ready to go with another night's rest, though he may need a cane for the time being.

At some point, the priest ushers the characters out so Dusaro can recover. The characters can explore the rest of the town, restock supplies, and learn additional information (see Rumors in Clearwater, page 6). The following morning, Dusaro is packed and ready to lead them to the site where the Moonbend Riders were captured.

TRAVELING TO THE AMBUSH SITE

Dusaro leads the characters through the woods to where the Moonbend Riders were “ambushed” by the Crimson Claws. The site is about four miles away from Clearwater and just far enough away to swap old war stories with The Soldier and reminisce about old battles they fought together. The battle-scarred dragonborn expresses happiness that The Soldier has found a new calling and companions to continue fighting for good.

Encounter: Ambush. The party is ambushed along the way by a group of Crimson Claw scouts who have been keeping watch over the town. Characters with a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 15 or higher are not surprised by the attackers. Use the Ambush Encounter table below to determine the makeup of the ambushing party. The ambushers do not fight to the death, and each attempts to escape if dropped to a third of their hit points. Dusaro kills any captured enemies with a blade through the neck before they can speak out against him.

AMBUSH ENCOUNTER

ADVENTURE LEVEL	ENCOUNTER
5th	2 bugbears and 2 hobgoblins 2 orc berserkers (<i>New Trait: Aggressive</i> . As a bonus action, the orc can move up to its speed towards a hostile creature it can see)
8th	and 1 ogre
11th	2 dragonborn knights and 1 half-red dragon veteran

Treasure. A crumpled note is found on an ambusher written in a pidgin mix of their native language and Common. The message reads “attack town money” and gives the location of the lumberyard and a time. Each ambusher also wears a Crimson Claw sigil somewhere on their person or tattooed onto them. If the adventure is at 8th or 11th level and a character succeeds on a DC 17 Intelligence (Investigation) check, the characters also find a scrawled note tucked into the boot of an ambusher. The note reads “For the Flame” in either Giant or Draconic, as appropriate. This is the passphrase to open the *arcane lock* on the hideout's front door (see Tunnel Entrance, page 9).

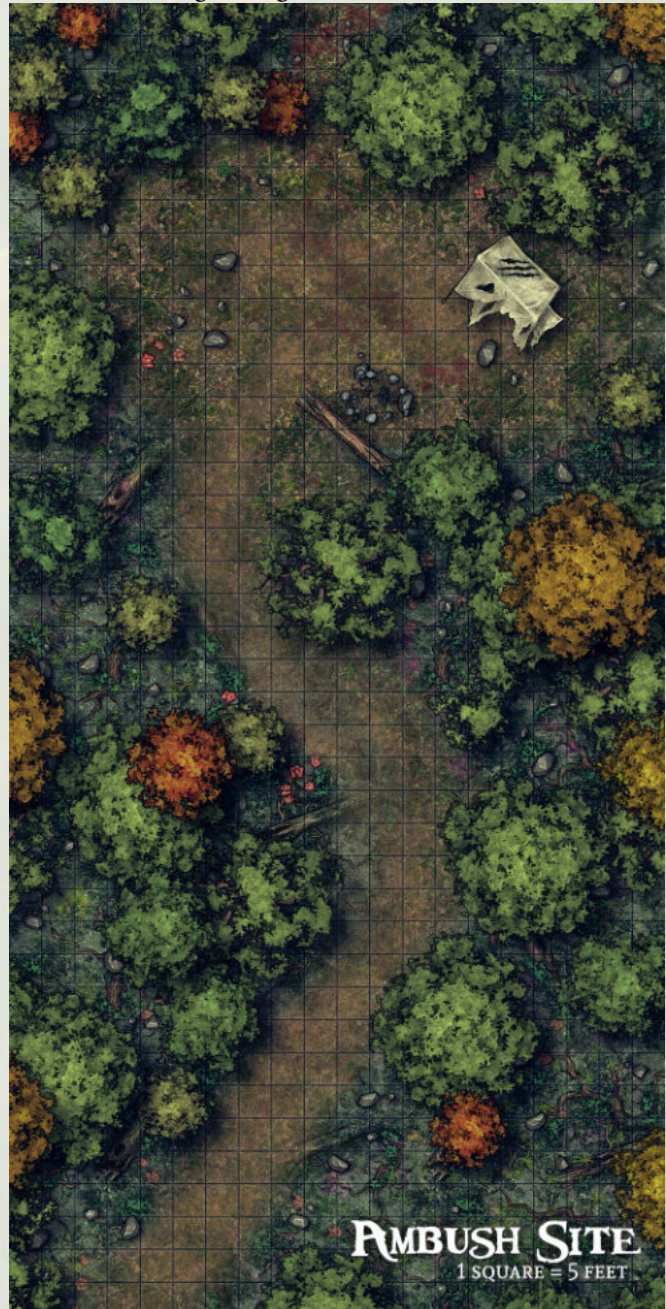
THE AMBUSH SITE

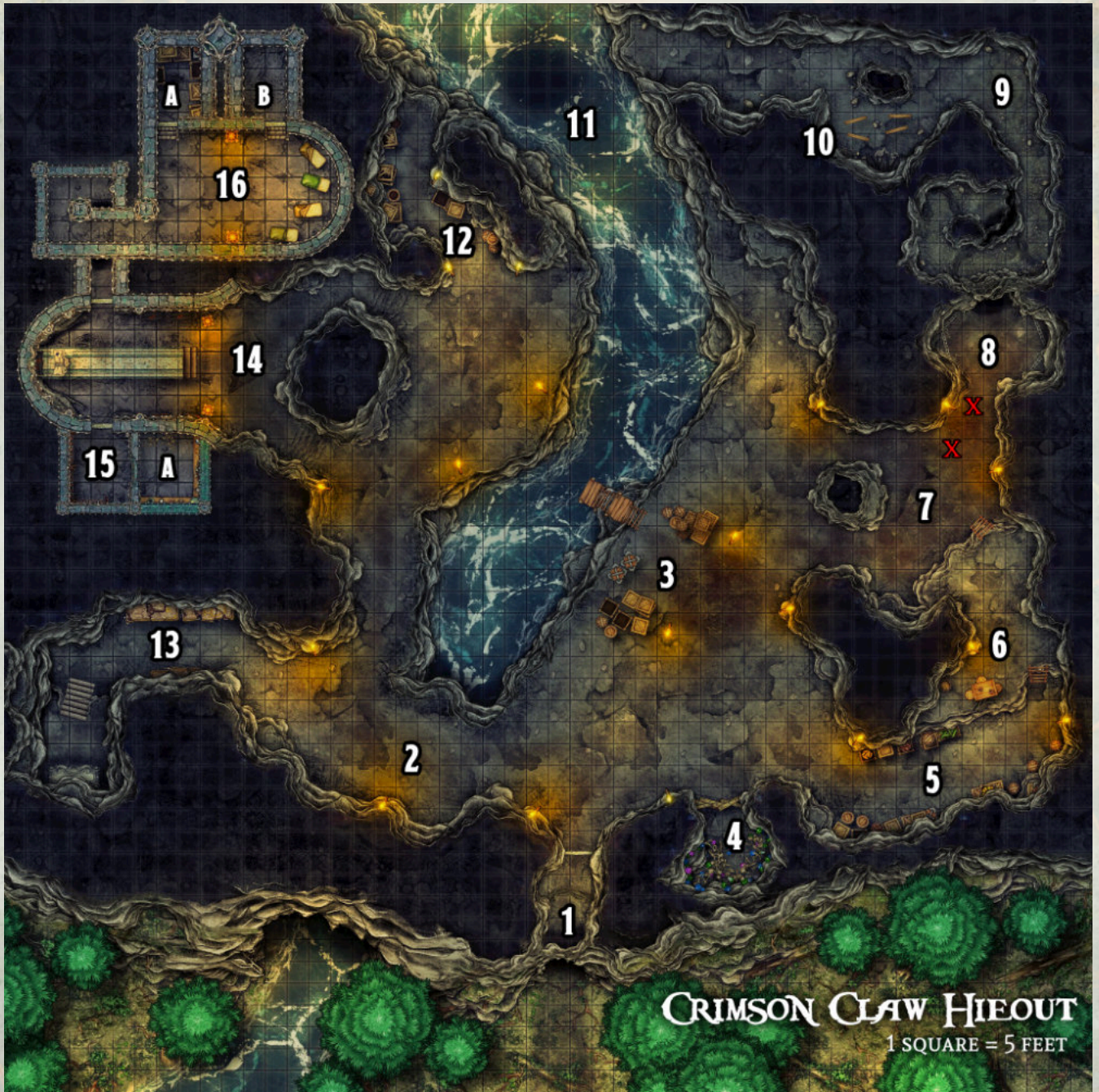
Eventually, the party reaches the ambush site. It is a trampled mess where an evident struggle took place. A character proficient in Survival who succeeds on a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check finds the bloody trail

Dusaro left after losing his tail to an ogre's blade. Dusaro sadly looks over his lost tail before solemnly burying it, using its loss to further bolster his call for vengeance.

A clear and concise trail leads from the ambush site directly to the Crimson Claw's hideout in the hills a mile away upriver. A character that attempts to determine the types of tracks and succeeds on a DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check determines them to be made by a group of creatures appropriate to the adventure level (see The Crimson Claws, page 3).

Treasure. A quick inspection of the site finds a broken leather strap holding a rough piece of amber with a small scorpion trapped inside (or other lucky charm, see The Soldier's Past, page 4). The Soldier recognizes the amber as the lucky charm of one of their comrades thought long dead.





CRIMSON CLAW HIDEOUT

The Crimson Claws found an old cave that hid an abandoned, octopus-worshipping cult's temple. The former occupants left an almost entirely intact series of rooms that the Crimson Claws now use as their base while conducting raids of the nearby settlements. The cave is full of the stolen loot and supplies they have gathered over the last few years. A small river runs straight through the underground complex and provides easy access to ferry supplies in and out.

Once the characters reach the hideout, read aloud the following:

The trail from the ambush site winds its way through the woodlands along the riverbank before diverting inland and following a smaller river. It eventually ends at a rocky outcropping with water flowing from a short cave entrance. The tracks lead directly up to another cave entrance partially hidden by broken tree branches.

The river is 4 feet deep and is considered difficult terrain due to its speed and rocky bed. The characters can wade through the river leading to the Rocky Bridge (**area 2**) or enter via the Tunnel Entrance (**area 1**).

GENERAL FEATURES

These general features are prominent throughout the Crimson Claw Hideout unless otherwise noted in the area descriptions:

Ceilings, Floors, and Walls. The cave is rough limestone with floors that have been worn smooth. The bandit base has been carved directly out of the cave with smooth stone walls and tiled floors. The ceilings in the cave and the temple range from 15 feet high to 40 feet high.

Doors. Typical doors are made of newly constructed oak planks banded in iron with AC 15, 18 hit points, and immunity to poison and psychic damage. Locked doors can be opened with proficiency in thieves' tools and a successful DC 15 Dexterity check, or broken down with a successful DC 20 Strength check.

Lights. The complex is well-lit from torches and the occasional sunbeam streaming through cracks in the ceiling. The two cave entrances at either end of the river are camouflaged but allow sunlight to shine through.

River. A fast-moving, 4-foot-deep river rushes through the center of the cavern. The rushing river's noises echo throughout the entire cavern, giving disadvantage on any Perception checks that rely on hearing. The river is considered difficult terrain, and any creature attempting to perform an action while wading through it must succeed on a DC 13 Strength saving throw or slip and fall prone.

Crimson Claws. Each Crimson Claw member wears a black uniform bearing the sigil of a blood-red dragon's claw. They are the remnants of a once-powerful military force and have been trained to respond to threats in tactical ways. This leads some to be overconfident in their capabilities and others to be more cautious when dealing with more vigorous opponents.

KEYED LOCATIONS

The following descriptions correspond to the keyed locations on the provided map of the hideout.

1. TUNNEL ENTRANCE

The cave entrance leads to a short tunnel that slopes downwards and ends in a rune-engraved stone doorway. The rough stone walls are covered in crude graffiti, and a black banner with a blood-red dragon's claw hangs above the door.

Both The Soldier and Dusaro recognize the Crimson Claw banner above the door. See The Crimson Claws on page 3 to determine the languages of the graffiti. A character studying the stone door who succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check recognizes the runes as part of an *arcane lock* spell. Consult the table below to determine the state of this spell.

ADVENTURE LEVEL ARCANE LOCK

5th The spell was once used by the cult that used to occupy the caves, but it was dispelled years ago, and it is now a simple stone door.

8th The door is locked with an *arcane lock* spell and can be opened by speaking the command phrase "For the Flame" in Giant.

11th The door is locked with an *arcane lock* spell and can be opened by speaking the command phrase "For the Flame" in Draconic. A character that succeeds on a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check notices scorch marks at the base of the door. A character who succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check uncovers a trapped lever in the doorframe that will trigger when the door is opened. This can be disarmed by a character proficient in thieves' tools who succeeds on a DC 15 Dexterity check—failing the check by 5 or more triggers the trap, causing a 15-foot-long spout of fire to burst from a nozzle in the doorframe and into the tunnel. All creatures in the path must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 22 (4d10) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. Triggering this trap also alerts the Crimson Claws in the Sparring Circle (see **area 3**) to the party's presence.

2. CAVERN BRIDGE

A rushing river divides a broad cavern into two halves connected by a rocky bridge. Crates, barrels, and other containers sit stacked against the rough limestone walls that hold a multitude of exits to the east and west. The river flows down from a tunnel to the north, and a small dock sits on the eastern bank.

If the trap in **area 1** was not triggered, the characters hear the sounds of the Crimson Claws in **area 3** sparring, and characters moving quietly that succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity (Stealth) check can sneak up on them or attempt to cross the bridge. If the trap in **area 1** was triggered, the Crimson Claws from **area 3** have taken cover behind crates and barrels to ambush the party.

3. SPARRING CIRCLE

If the trap in **area 1** was triggered, the Crimson Claws are alerted to the party's presence and ducked behind crates to ambush from range. If the trap was not activated, they are oblivious as they spar. Read aloud the following:

Guttural cheers and grunts of pain mingle with the sound of flesh hitting flesh. Two warriors battle in a fighting circle surrounded by another cheering pair seated on crates and barrels.

Encounter: Sparring Claws. The below encounter table determines the Crimson Claws in this location. The group is overconfident in their capabilities, but the last surviving warrior jumps into the river attempting to escape once the rest are defeated.

ADVENTURE LEVEL	ENCOUNTER
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5th	5 bugbears
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8th	4 human berserkers
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11th	2 human veterans and 2 half-red dragon veterans
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LEADER'S PRESENCE

The Crimson Claw leader (see page 3) spends most of their time in this area because their size stops them from entering the temple (**area 14**). Depending on the leader, hints at their presence are seen against the eastern wall as described below.

Valgar One-Eye. A massive makeshift bed covered in reeking furs sits under a collection of thick chains hanging from the walls.

Konrad the Loud. A fiery forge and anvil sit blazing against the wall with stacks of iron ingots and unsharpened newly made sword blades. A character proficient in smith's tools who succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence check recognizes the work as the style of giants.

Riorsith the Young. Scorch marks and layers of soot cover the half-melted stones in this area. A character proficient in nature who succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) check recognizes the claw marks and signs of a dragon.

4. FUNGUS GROVE

The entrance to this area is blocked by a pile of hastily nailed together planks with a large red X painted across them. The boards can easily be broken down and moved aside. When the characters enter the area, read aloud the following:

A musty odor wafts from the back of this dark cave filled with broken wooden crates and what appear to be at least half a dozen skeletons of various races dressed in tattered purple robes scattered across the floor. Every surface is covered in a thick layer of fuzzy mold and purple mushrooms. Larger clusters of fungi are growing from within the skulls and rib cages of the skeletons.



Hazard: Toxic Spores. Any creature that walks into the room disturbs the mold, which releases spores into a 10-foot-wide sphere centered on the creature. Any creature caught in the space must succeed a DC (8 + APL of the party) Constitution saving throw or become poisoned for 1 hour. Creatures that succeed on the saving throw are immune to the spores for the next 24 hours. Cold damage destroys a 5-foot-cube of mold in 1 round, but it feeds on fire which causes it to grow in 5-foot increments per round directly toward any flame larger than a torch.

Treasure. A character searching the area who succeeds on a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check uncovers a heavily water-damaged journal with an octopus-like creature on the cover. Only a few passages are legible, telling of the worship of the “many-tentacled god of the sea” and the “completion of his temple.” Written in a hasty scrawl is the repeated phrase “All Hail The Deep.”

5. STORAGE ROOM

This cave is filled with crates and barrels stacked neatly in orderly piles. A wooden ladder leads up the northern wall to a torch-lit ledge overlooking the area.

This room is where the Crimson Claws store all of their food supplies. Each crate is packed with enough rations and dried fruits to feed a battalion of soldiers for at least six months. If the Crimson Claws in **area 6** have not yet been encountered, they are heard laughing and jeering from up on the ledge. If the characters make too much noise in this area, it echoes up to alert the guards on the shelf.

6. GUARD LEDGE

This area overlooks the Storage Room (**area 5**) and the Dying Room (**area 7**). If the characters did not alert the guards to their presence, read aloud the following when they enter this area:

Warriors in black armor sit at a wooden table and drink from wooden mugs, laughing hoarsely as they watch an ogre throw a goblin up in the air and catch it just before it hits the ground. The goblin squeals in terror each time, causing the warriors to laugh louder.

Encounter: Bully Boys. A group of Crimson Claws are supposed to be keeping watch but have been instead entertaining themselves by terrorizing a **goblin** named Balmek they found wandering the woods outside while on patrol. The goblin scrambles to hide behind a barrel once combat is initiated. Use the encounter table below to determine the make up of the Crimson Claw group based on the level of the adventure.

ADVENTURE LEVEL ENCOUNTER

5th 1 ogre and 2 bugbears

8th 1 ogre and 2 orc knights (**New Trait: Aggressive**. As a bonus action, the orc can move up to its speed towards a hostile creature it can see)

11th 1 ogre and 2 half-red dragon gladiators (gains resistance to fire damage, darkvision out to 60 ft., and **New Ability: Fire Breath (Recharge 5–6)**. The half-dragon exhales fire in a 15-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 24 (7d6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one)

BALMEK THE GOBLIN

Balmek is a simple goblin that was hunting in the Proudmore Woodlands when he got separated from his party and stumbled into a Crimson Claw patrol. Balmek wants to escape as fast as he can, but he imparts the following helpful information to a character that can speak Goblin:

- “Da Big Boss not here now. Dunno where is, but not here.”
- “Dey was gonna feed Balmek to the crawlies in th’ dark place!” (He points north towards **area 8**).
- “Prizners? Dunno bout dat. Maybe cross water road? Many Claws dere!”
- “Claws said dey wuz gonna ‘tack town! Said sumtin bout kill a traytor?”

7. THE DYING ROOM

The Crimson Claws filled this room with traps to catch any of the Moonbend Riders that tried to escape when they were in the Holding Cell (see **area 8**). The trap lethality is determined by the adventure level (see page 12), and their locations are noted on the provided map. When the characters enter the area for the first time, read aloud the following:

The floor of this cave is covered in mud and muck. A tunnel exits to the north, and a short ladder leads up onto a ledge that slopes up and leads south.

Trap: Punji Traps. These traps are well-hidden holes just big enough to be stepped into and filled with slime-covered metal spikes that deal damage as per the Trap Damage table below. A character with a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of (8 + APL of the party) or higher, or one who is actively searching and succeeds on a DC (8 + APL of the party) Wisdom (Perception) check notices the slight difference in the dirt covering of the hole. A character who steps into one of the holes takes the determined piercing damage and must make a

ADVENTURE LEVEL TRAP DAMAGE

5th	7 (2d6) piercing damage and 14 (4d6) poison damage
8th	14 (4d6) piercing damage and 28 (8d6) poison damage
11th	28 (8d6) piercing damage and 42 (12d6) poison damage

DC (8 + APL of the party) Constitution saving throw, taking the determined poison damage and becoming poisoned for 1 hour on a failed save, or half as much damage and not being poisoned on a successful save.

8. HOLDING CELL

Iron manacles hang from rings driven into the damp walls of this cave. The stench of death hangs thick in the air, coming from a rotting corpse chained to the wall, being gnawed on by a pair of rats. A winding tunnel that looks newly made exits to the north.

The Crimson Claws used this as a holding cell for the Moonbend Riders. They moved the captives to **area 16b** after a worm-like creature attacked them from the tunnels above (**area 9**), killing one of the riders. The beast was killed and eaten by the bandits.

The corpse is one of the captured Moonbend Riders, and The Soldier recognizes them from their past. If the lucky charm was found at the ambush site (see page 7), it belonged to this Moonbend Rider. If Dusaro is still with the party, he places the lucky charm (if recovered) with the body, wrapping it in his bedroll and vowing to come back for it once everyone is safely rescued.

9. CRUNCHY TUNNEL

The walls and floor of this tunnel are covered in the crunchy carapaces of the insects that lived off the ooze left behind by the worm creature.

Encounter: Sounds Like Fortune Cookies. Not all of the insects died after the worm creature was killed. Six **swarms of insects** are still living in the tunnels and eagerly attack the party if disturbed.

10. DEEP SHRINE

The cult that lived here excavated this cave long ago and used it as a shrine to the octopus creatures they worshipped. When the characters reach this room, read aloud the following:

This cave holds the remnants of crumbling wooden benches and a cracked stone altar. Embedded in the wall

behind the altar is a fossilized imprint of what appears to be a giant octopus. A skeleton dressed in ragged purple robes lies sprawled against the front of the altar, its skull cracked and lying a few feet away from the body.

Treasure. Searching the skeleton uncovers a ragged leather-bound prayer book and a silver necklace with an octopus medallion worth 200 gp. This medallion can be used as a key to the Vault (see **area 15**). The prayer book is written in code, but a character proficient in Religion who spends 10 minutes reading it and succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check can decipher the book. Much of the book contains the rambling thoughts and insane writings of a priest that believed the “great god of the deep will rise” and “those on the placid island of ignorance... shall drown in the horrors of the blackness.”

ADVENTURE LEVEL TREASURE

5th	1,200 gp, a silver chalice with ruby inlays (250 gp), and a <i>spell scroll of flaming sphere</i>
8th	2,700 gp, a gold-framed mirror worked in the shape of a dragon (450 gp), and a <i>mace of disruption</i>
11th	500 pp, 2,000 gp, a collection of maps with multiple locations marked with red circles, and a <i>bag of devouring</i>

11. OCTOPUS HOLE

Hidden beneath this section of the river is a giant sinkhole that the cultists used to cultivate and raise their giant octopus pets. The 80-foot-deep hole is still home to the remnants that survived over the years.

Encounter: Baby Deeps. A cluster of four **giant octopuses** feed off the fish and scraps the Crimson Claws throw their way. The leader of the Crimson Claws has an amulet that allows them to control an octopus through telepathy and call it to battle (see Crimson Confrontation, page 15). Characters with a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 15 or higher, or characters actively looking at the water who succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check, notice the darkened area in the river that hints at the depths below. The group of four giant octopuses assaults characters that attempt to wade through the river. These octopuses try to grapple the characters, pull them down into the hole, and fight them underwater.

12. STORAGE ROOMS

These two caves are filled with stacks of crates and barrels with similar contents to **area 5**. A character actively searching the boxes who succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check uncovers a slightly discolored stone in the floor covering a hidden



compartment. Inside is a large iron lockbox that can be opened with thieves' tools and a successful DC 18 Dexterity check. The leader of the Crimson Claws holds the key to the lockbox (see *Crimson Confrontation*, page 15). Inside is a collection of treasures determined by the table below, and The Soldier's former unit's ripped battle standard covered in old bloodstains.

13. CRYPT

This crypt housed the long-dead cult's more prominent dead, including their high priest, assassinated by his own pupils. The Crimson Claws are a superstitious bunch who avoid this chamber and have left it alone.

When the characters first enter the room, read aloud the following:

The ceiling of this crumbling chamber is covered in thick layers of soot. Iron sconces hold long-dead torches above rows of broken stone sarcophagi. A short flight of steps cuts into the cavern stone and leads up to a small platform holding a large stone coffin covered in an ancient script. On the coffin's stone cover is a bas relief of an octopus-headed bipedal figure.

The stone cover can be removed by a character who succeeds on a DC 17 Strength check or by a group of characters with a combined Strength score of 30 or higher. A character proficient in Arcana who succeeds

on a DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check recognizes the runes etched into the coffin as some type of containment spell, and a *detect magic* spell or similar effect reveals the coffin has an aura of abjuration magic. A *dispel magic* spell cast on the coffin removes the containment spell, releasing the undead priest trapped within.

Encounter: *The Deep Minded*. The former high priest of the octopus-worshipping cult was poisoned by his former pupils and laid to rest in this sarcophagus. However, the poison only gave the appearance of death, and the priest awoke to find himself entombed alive. His vengeful spirit has been trapped within the coffin, and the creature he has become is determined by the table below. Once the stone lid—the inside of which is marked with deep scratches and bloodstains—is removed from the coffin, the undead priest bursts forth with a power that also raises minions from the other coffins in the room, as determined by the Undead Priest table.

Treasure. A black leather-bound prayer book with a silver octopus medallion worth 200 gp embedded into the cover can be found in the coffin. This medallion can

UNDEAD PRIEST

ADVENTURE LEVEL ENCOUNTER

5th	1 wraith and 2 specters
8th	1 wraith and 4 specters
11th	1 mummy lord (the cavern does not count as a lair for the purposes of lair actions or regional effects) and 2 mummies

be used as a key to the Vault (see **area 15**). Contained within are spells written on dried seaweed pages that act as a *spell scroll* for each of the following cleric spells: *lesser restoration*, *spiritual weapon*, *dispel magic*, *spirit guardians*, and *raise dead*. Once each spell is used, its page turns blank, and it cannot be used for that spell again. Once all available spells are cast, the prayer book explodes in a burst of green light, dealing 18 (4d8) psychic damage to the holder.

14. DECREPIT TEMPLE

This long chamber was once the main temple for the cultists that built the complex. The Crimson Claws stripped the room of any valuables it once held and now use the temple as a sleeping hall. When the characters first enter the area, read aloud the following:

The rough cavern gives way to hand-worked stone and a cathedral ceiling arching high above a brazier-lit hall. A short flight of steps leads up to a long walkway leading to a massive verdigris statue of an octopus that dominates the western wall and overlooks a shattered stone altar. Each of its tentacles reaches out across every surface as if attempting to pull itself out of the wall. Decorating the tentacles are black banners hanging above piles of foul-smelling furs. Wooden doors exit to the north and south.

Treasure. A character spending at least 10 minutes searching through the furs and belongings finds a silver bracelet in the shape of a dragon worth 250 gp and a total of 27 (6d8) gp, 44 (8d10) sp, and 65 (10d12) cp.

CURSE OF THE DEEP

There is a lingering curse on the altar left over from the former cult's rituals. This effect triggers the first time a *detect magic* spell interacts with the altar. The triggering creature and each creature in a 15-foot-radius of the altar must succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw or fall under a *confusion* spell for 1 minute or until dispelled by a *dispel magic* spell or similar effect.

CONFRONTING THE LEADER

If the characters have rescued the Moonbend Rider captives from **area 16a**, then the next time they leave this location towards the eastern cavern, they are confronted by the Crimson Claw leader in the "Crimson Confrontation" (page 15).

15. ARMORY

The door to this room is locked (see General Features), and the key is held by an officer in the Officer Barracks (**area 16**). This room is currently being used as an armory, and the Crimson Claws gave up trying to get through the vault door. When the characters enter the room, read aloud the following:

Rows of weapon racks fill this chamber. Each weapon looks to be kept in pristine condition and is placed with military precision. A faded mural covers all four walls, depicting a stormy sea with a kraken-like creature crushing ships in its tentacles. A corroded copper door with no handle blocks an exit to the east.

A collection of mundane simple and martial melee weapons hang on the racks. The Soldier recognizes their old unit's crest emblazoned on the hilts of some of the swords. These were taken from the fallen and kept as trophies by the Crimson Claws.

Vault Door. The copper door is protected by an *arcane lock* spell that can be disabled by using one of the octopus medallions in **areas 10** and **13** or by speaking the passphrase "All Hail The Deep." The spell can be bypassed by someone who makes a successful DC 30 Dexterity check using thieves' tools or with a *knock* spell or similar effect. A character with a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 12 or higher or one that actively searches the door and succeeds on a DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check finds an almost imperceptible indentation in the shape of an octopus which acts as the keyhole.

15A. VAULT OF THE DEEP

The entire interior of this chamber is lined with 1-inch-thick corroded copper panels riveted together. Their age and condition makes them basically worthless, though they continue to protect the vault from divination magic. Rivals routed the ancient cult, and the remainder locked themselves in this chamber with their treasures. When the characters open the door and enter this room, read aloud the following:

The door screeches loudly on long-unused hinges as it opens to reveal a room completely lined with thick copper panels. Rows of wooden shelves line the walls holding a collection of neatly displayed objects. Skeletons dressed in ragged purple robes sit against the northern wall with the words "We Join the Deep" written in faded blood above them.

Treasure. Most of the random objects on the shelf are treasures the cult collected over the years that had some relation to the sea or octopuses, such as gold-inlaid fossils, shells, and other items. A character that searches the shelves uncovers a *trident of fish command* and a silver ring in the shape of an octopus with emerald eyes that enables an attuned wearer to cast the *darkness* spell once per day without needing components. The collection is worth a total of 500 gp times the characters' party APL.

16. OFFICER BARRACKS

After the breakthrough into **area 8**, the Crimson Claw officers moved the Moonbend Rider captives into a side

chamber (**area 16b**). The Crimson Claw officers made this chamber into their barracks. The officers now stand guard over them as they wait for further instructions from the leader. When the characters first enter the room, read aloud the following:

The winding staircase opens into a large room filled with flickering light and smoke from a pair of braziers. The sound of harsh laughter and a whetstone on a blade echo down the hall from the room's entrance. A pair of staircases lead down to exits in the northern wall.

Encounter: Crimson Officers. A group of elite warriors, as determined by the Crimson Officers table, stands guard here. They are fanatics that fight to the death, specifically taunting and targeting Dusaro throughout the fight. One of the officers holds a key ring with the keys to **areas 15** and **16b**.

16A. STORAGE ROOM

This room holds stacks of crates stuffed with food and supplies that the officers were keeping for themselves. All of the captured Moonbend Riders' weapons and gear are in a pile in one corner of the room.

ADVENTURE LEVEL CRIMSON OFFICERS

5th 1 hobgoblin **knight** (*New Trait: Martial Advantage*). Once per turn, the hobgoblin can deal an extra 7 (2d6) 1 **gladiator**, 1 **mage**, and 2 **weretiger** 1 **gladiator**, 1 **mage**, and 2 **weretiger** damage to a creature it hits with a weapon attack if that creature is within 5 feet of an ally of the hobgoblin that isn't incapacitated.) and 4 **hobgoblins** with max hit points of 18 (2d8+2)

8th 1 ogre **gladiator** (its size is Large, it has a movement speed of 40 ft., it gains darkvision out to 60 ft., and it has 127 (15d10 + 45) hit points) and four **berserkers**

11th A dragonborn **mage** and three **half-red dragon gladiators** (they gain resistance to fire damage, darkvision out to 60 ft., and *New Ability: Fire Breath (Recharge 5–6)*. The half-dragon exhales fire in a 15-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 24 (7d6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one)

16B. HOLDING CELL

The door to this room is locked (see "General Features"), and an officer in **area 16** holds the key. The surviving members of the Moonbend Riders—as determined by the table below—are shackled here. They are stunned to be rescued by The Soldier, but Dusaro quickly steps in, and there is a heartfelt reunion. The dragonborn quickly releases them from their manacles and hustles them out the door to escape. Regardless of what the characters decide to do, Dusaro and the survivors head directly for the exit with the excuse of needing to recover.

ADVENTURE LEVEL MOONBEND RIDERS

5th 2 **veterans** and 1 **cult fanatic**

8th 1 **gladiator**, 1 **mage**, and 1 **priest**

11th 1 **gladiator**, 1 **mage**, and 2 **weretiger**

CRIMSON CONFRONTATION

At the same time the characters were freeing the prisoners from **area 16b**, the leader of the Crimson Claws and their guard were returning from their raid using a raft to carry loot into **area 3**. This group is unloading crates and barrels off the raft when the characters next exit **area 14**. The table below determines the makeup of this group.

ADVENTURE LEVEL CRIMSON CONFRONTATION

5th Valgar One-Eye the **jack-in-irons** (see Appendix) and 4 **hobgoblins**

8th Konrad the Loud the **fire giant** and 4 red-skinned orc **thugs** (*New Trait: Aggressive*. As a bonus action, the orc can move up to its speed towards a hostile creature it can see.)

11th Riorsith the Young the **young red dragon**, 3 **knights**, 1 human **mage**, and 1 **half-red dragon gladiator** (treat as a **gladiator** that has resistance to fire damage, darkvision out to 60 ft., and *New Ability: Fire Breath (Recharge 5–6)*. The half-dragon exhales fire in a 15-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 24 (7d6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.)

If Dusaro and the Moonbend Riders left the characters behind, the party finds them engaged in a stand-off and conversing with the leader. If Dusaro is still with the characters' party, the leader addresses him from across the stream. Either way, the leader exposes Dusaro as a traitor and reveals the truth to The Soldier (whom the leader will recognize from the Battle of Kerlon's Well) about their alliance with the Moonbend Riders in both the far and near past. The exposure prompts Dusaro and his band to attempt to steal the raft in the river and use it to escape out of the cave, leaving the characters and the Crimson Claws to deal with each other. The Crimson Claws let the band escape, seeing the characters as the greater threat.

Encounter: The Crimson Leader. The leader uses an amulet in their possession that calls a giant octopus from **area 11** while the Crimson Claws take cover behind crates (providing half cover) using their ranged attacks. At the same time, melee fighters cross the bridge to keep the characters from escaping. The leader taunts the characters—The Soldier especially—for being duped by Dusaro the same as they were. The Crimson Claws are well-trained and move with military

precision, but the leader will not fight to the death. They attempt to escape once their hit points drop to a third of their total or if all of their soldiers are killed.

Treasure. The leader holds the key to the lockbox in **area 12** and wears a gold chain holding an onyx medallion with an amethyst octopus embedded in the center. This amulet enables a creature to cast a *dominate beast* (octopuses only) spell once per day that lasts for 1 hour without the need for components. The loot the Crimson Claws unloaded before Dusaro stole their raft consists of 100 square yards of fine silk, 100 square yards of linen, and 100 pounds of saffron and other spices worth a total of 3,000 gp. The Crimson Claws raided these trade goods from a caravan, and the merchant's mark is clearly displayed on the crates.

TRACKING THE TRAITORS

Dusaro and the surviving Moonbend Riders used the river raft to travel all the way back to the town of Clearwater. The wily dragonborn convinced the townsfolk that the characters betrayed the town and joined with the bandits. According to his tale, the Moonbend Riders were barely able to escape with their lives. Dusaro persuaded Mayor Tenblossom to give him the reward promised to the characters in order to hire mercenaries to protect the town from the coming assault of the bandits and the characters' party. He promised to return after his injured comrades were safe, and he hired warriors to come to aid the town. The traitors proceeded to escape to their hideout near Kerlon's Well to lick their wounds and lay low.

ARRIVING IN CLEARWATER

Once the characters return to Clearwater, read aloud the following:

The woodland road brings you once more to the gates of Clearwater. This time they are tightly closed with a dozen arrows on half-drawn bows peeking from above the palisade. The grizzled half-orc town sheriff stands glaring in the center. "You are not welcome here, traitors!" he barks before gesturing with his sword. "Leave now, or we will fire upon you!"

The palisade gives the dozen **guards** and the **veteran** Ukrugul Naz three-quarters cover. A character with a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 12 or higher notices that the guards are nervous and unsure about attacking the party. While Ukrugul believed Dusaro's story, he can be convinced by a character who succeeds on a DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check that the story was a lie. If the characters bring the stolen merchant's loot with them from the Crimson Claw hideout and show it to the guards or have some other proof they are not working with the bandits, the check is made with advantage.

If the characters fail to convince Ukrugul, they will not be welcome in the town until their names are cleared. Ukruguk threatens the characters to leave before the Moonbend Riders—the "real heroes"—deal with them. Any attempts to sneak into town will be dangerous. Still, the characters can learn from overheard conversations that the Moonbend Riders left in a hurry to seek help for the townsfolk against the bandits and characters.

If the party convinces Ukrugul that the Moonbend Riders are the real traitors, the guard captain brings the party to the mayor to tell their version of events. Mayor Tenblossom is furious at being duped by the fake adventurers not once but twice. She explains that the Riders took the reward initially offered to the characters and hastily rode off south to "hire help." The Mayor can be convinced to pay for the characters' supplies by a character who succeeds on a DC 17 Charisma (Persuasion) check. Otherwise, the only assistance and information the townsfolk have for the characters are that the Riders mentioned "going back to the beginning to recover."

BACK TO THE BEGINNING

The characters can easily find the Moonbend Riders' tracks in their haste to get out of town. They lead south out of town for an hour before cutting across the river and heading east. Once the characters pass over the river and determine the direction Dusaro's band was headed, The Soldier realizes they are heading to a familiar—and dreaded—location: Kerlon's Well. This small village was the site of the battle that started it all. By the time the characters reach the village, the Moonbend Riders are rested and at full strength, ready for the final confrontation.

KERLON'S WELL

This tiny farming village is little more than a cluster of huts and weed-choked fields. The battle fought here decimated the local populace and ruined the soil; they have yet to recover from the atrocities that occurred here. The locals are joyless, hollow husks with little hope for their futures. Any local can point the characters in the direction of the decrepit tower that was once The Soldier's former duty station and where the Moonbend Riders have made their hideout.

THE TOWER

This three-story, 50-foot-high, and 40-foot-wide square tower is barely standing after being partially destroyed in the attack that razed the village years ago. The upper floors have collapsed and left the interior wholly open and exposed to the elements. The lower half of the tower walls are all that remain, enclosing the space within, with only rubble and a few torn shreds of The Soldier's old unit banners. The Moonbend Riders have used the hidden underground cellar to conceal their treasures for years, relying on the remoteness of the

location for security. They have also repaired the portcullis at the front gate and are waiting for the characters' arrival. Outside of scaling the walls, the only way into the tower is through that front gate.

ROLEPLAYING THE RIDERS

Dusaro and the other Riders are unrepentant towards The Soldier and characters. They specifically express their bitterness at how they felt betrayed by their former commanders and show no regrets for their own deceptions. Dusaro brings up past loyalties between him and The Soldier in order to convince them to leave them alone, promising they will never hear from them again.

THE FINAL CONFRONTATION

The makeup of the Moonbend Riders is determined by the Dusaro and Moonbend Riders tables and the adventure level (see the tables on page 3 and 15). Some Riders are equipped with magical items, as detailed in The Moonbend Riders encounter described below. The traitorous group hides within the tower's walls and will not engage with the characters outside of shouted threats and pleas to be left alone. Instead, they wait for the party to enter through the front gate in order to drop the portcullis behind them and trap them within the four walls.

Encounter: The Moonbend Riders. The Moonbend Riders have their backs against the wall and fight with the appropriate determination and desperation that entails. They give no quarter and know that any surrender will lead to a life of imprisonment. If there is a cult fanatic in the group, they are equipped with a *dagger of venom*. If the group includes gladiators, one of them is equipped with a *spellguard shield*. If there are weretigers, one is equipped with a *sword of life stealing* (scimitar).

Treasure. The Moonbend Riders have stored their ill-gotten loot in the basement of the ruined tower. A trap door leads down into the chamber piled high with crates full of non-perishable trade goods worth 2,000 gp, as well as a chest full of 10,000 gp that includes the coins taken from Clearwater and other towns. Any magic items the Riders were using, as described in the encounter above, are also lootable. Dusaro has a journal that outlines the Riders' history of working with the Crimson Claws to swindle the local villages, along with a list of how much was made from each scam. This document can be used as proof to the town of Clearwater if the characters need to clear their names.

CONCLUSION

If the characters manage to defeat the Crimson Claws and the Moonbend Riders, the tale of their heroic deeds quickly spreads throughout the region. The shocking revelation of the betrayal of the fraudulent band of "heroes" brings each of the swindled towns and villages into an uproar. Representatives from each settlement begin to seek out the characters to try and convince

them to return the funds. The characters may also run afoul of other bandits who wish to get a hold of the treasure now in the party's possession.

If the Crimson Claw leader manages to escape the characters, they lie low while rebuilding their strength and gathering a new warband. This will not be the last time the characters hear from them as the leader swears vengeance upon them and now considers The Soldier to be their nemesis.

If the Moonbend Riders escape the party or the characters decide to leave them in Kerlon's Well, they do not remain quiet for very long. The Riders begin to impersonate the characters in an attempt to ruin their reputations and build support against them. Dusaro becomes obsessed with The Soldier and focuses his attention and wealth towards making their life as miserable as possible.

ADVENTURE HOOK RESOLUTION

If the characters were hooked into the adventure with the following hook, they are rewarded as follows:

Heroes for Hire. The Mayor of Clearwater pays the characters the promised reward if they return with the money the Moonbend Riders stole. As a prominent merchant in the area, she occasionally receives information that may interest the characters and promises to pass along anything she hears that may be useful. The characters' reputation in the local region increases drastically, and they find that people recognize their names and respect them for their good deeds. Ω



APPENDIX

JACK-IN-IRONS GIANT

These giants stand between 20 and 25 feet tall and weigh between 13,000 to 15,000 pounds. They are often dity, smelly beings with thick beards and tusk-like teeth. They are brutes that wrap chains around their bodies to use as armor and wield as weapons. Jack-in-irons take a particular pleasure in ambushing travelers and holding them for ransom. They typically can be found leading bands of goblinoids who admire the giant for their wicked and evil ways. Jack-in-irons see themselves as self-styled kings who will never admit defeat, even in the face of overwhelming odds.

JACK-IN-IRONS GIANT

Huge giant, chaotic evil

Armor Class 15 (chain scraps)

Hit Points 138 (12d12 + 60)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
24 (+7)	12 (+1)	20 (+5)	9 (-1)	12 (+1)	8 (-1)

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages Giant

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The jack-in-irons giant uses its shake the earth ability, and makes two club attacks and either a chain or fist attack.

Club. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (2d8 + 7) bludgeoning damage.

Chain. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d6 + 7) bludgeoning damage and the target must succeed on a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw or be grappled and restrained (escape DC 18) and the jack-in-irons giant cannot grapple another target. At the beginning of the giant's turn, it can smash a grappled target into the ground or another solid object within 15 feet of the giant, dealing 11 (1d8 + 7) bludgeoning damage.

Fist. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d6 + 7) bludgeoning damage and the target must succeed on a DC 18 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Rock. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 60/240 ft., one target. *Hit:* 23 (3d10 + 7) bludgeoning damage.

Shake the Earth. Creatures within 10 feet of the jack-in-irons giant must succeed on a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw or fall prone.

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