

IN SEARCH OF ADVENTURE



Six level 1 adventures for 4E

IN SEARCH OF ADVENTURE

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KING DRETCH

By Aeryn "Blackdirge" Rudel

INTRODUCTION

King Dretch is a short adventure designed for five characters of 1st level. While characters can be of any basic character class, a strong melee-oriented group will have an easier time with the encounters in this adventure. See the "Scaling Information" section for ways to tailor this adventure to your group's unique style of play.

ADVENTURE SUMMARY

The adventurers are hired to investigate the ruins of a wizard's tower, or they simply stumble across it in the course of their adventures. Beneath the tower, in a dormitory set up for the wizard's apprentices, dwell a uniquely powerful dretch, his fiendish allies and servitors, and other deadly creatures. Further, the tower hides a terrible secret, a tiny Abyssal gate called a planar fissure. Fell energies have been leaking steadily through the planar fissure for several years, giving additional foul beings the opportunity to invade the world.

The dretch has been encouraging fiendish creatures to attack travelers on a nearby road, robbing and killing at his whim. It is up to the heroes to put an end to the dretch's predations. They will need to investigate the tower ruins and find the entrance to the dormitory beneath it. In the dormitory the heroes will battle the dretch's evil allies and eventually face the demon itself.

If the adventurers can manage to defeat the dretch, they will still need to close the planar fissure, a task that requires the recovery of a number of rare reagents and the casting of a powerful ritual. From the remains of the deceased wizard's notes, the heroes will be able to compile a list of these reagents; however, the recovery of these bizarre materials may entail a quest even more dangerous than facing a hundred dretches. At the very least, the heroes will need to find a way to seal off the area around the fissure to prevent other demons from emerging to wreak havoc.



GAME MASTER'S INFORMATION

1

To help the GM prepare, we have included a quick reference table showing all encounters at a glance. *Loc* – the location number keyed to the map for the encounter. *Pg* – the module page number that the encounter can be found on. *Type* – this indicates if the encounter is a combat (C), disease (D), hazard (H), puzzle (P), or trap (T). *Encounter* – the key monsters, traps, or NPCs that can be found in the encounter. Names in italics are classed NPCs. *EL* – the encounter level.

| ENCOUNTER TABLE | | | | |
|-----------------|----|------|--|----|
| Loc | Pg | Type | Encounter | El |
| 1-1 | 7 | C | Three abattoir wolves | 1 |
| 1-2 | 8 | C | Verrekrieth, Five dire rats | 2 |
| 2-1 | 9 | C | Two elite needlefang drake swarms Spitting drake | 2 |
| 2-2 | 11 | T | Stone bludgeon trap Deafening blast trap | 1 |
| 2-3 | 12 | C | <i>Senna</i> , advanced ghoul warlock | 2 |
| 2-5 | 14 | C | Two demonfang crocodiles | 1 |
| 2-6 | 15 | C | Four shadowfiend spiders | 1 |
| 2-7 | 16 | C | <i>Kuzgug</i> , advanced demonic acolyte dretch wizard solo | 5 |

SCALING INFORMATION

King Dretch is designed for five characters of 1st level, but may be adjusted to suit parties of different sizes or levels. When adjusting the module to suit your game, consider the following suggestions:

Weaker parties (4 or fewer characters): Remove one un-named creature from each encounter. Remove Kuzgug's advanced nature, making him a Level 3 solo.

Stronger Parties (6 or more characters, or higher than 1st level): Add one additional un-named creature to each encounter. Add two shadowfiend spiders to aid Kuzgug in area 2-7.



GETTING THE PLAYERS INVOLVED

King Dretch occurs in a nondescript, forested setting that can be dropped into nearly any campaign world. There should be an established road or trade route nearby, or even a small town or village – something upon which Kuzgug and his allies can prey.

The adventure begins with the heroes emerging from the forest into the clearing that holds the ruined tower and the dormitory beneath it. How they get to this point is largely up to you, but here are a couple of hooks that can get the PCs moving in the right direction.

- If one of the adventurers is a wizard, he may be seeking an apprenticeship with Numeshay, and has brought his companions along as protection or simply for moral support.
- The heroes are hired by one of the small towns that exist on either end of the road Kuzgug has been preying on, and are asked to investigate the disappearance of merchants and other travelers.
- A wizard in the party's town or village hires them to deliver a batch of arcane ingredients to Numeshay at his tower.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The great elven wizard Numeshay Odeken was an eccentric archmage whose passion was the study of extraplanar creatures. From his secluded tower, he would cast rituals to view and communicate with demons, devils, angels, and elementals, all in an attempt to learn more about the native fauna of alternate dimensions. However, Numeshay quickly tired of the limited durations offered by the established rituals, and he had no desire to open a planar portal, which could allow powerful entities from other planes to pass through. Instead, he turned his energies to the creation of a quasi-gate, a tiny crack between dimensional barriers, which he called a planar fissure.

The creation of the planar fissures aided Numeshay in his research immensely. Each rift allowed the fundamental energies of a plan to leak through, yet it was too tiny to permit any creatures to freely pass in either direction – or so Numeshay believed.

With his planar fissures, Numeshay was able to examine the nature of different planes and their inhabitants. He used rituals to communicate with and even summon extraplanar entities for study – tasks that might otherwise require more powerful rituals beyond even Numeshay's talent. He soon realized that removing the entities was more difficult. Only after containing them and casting another ritual to close the planar fissure did they return to their home plane. Because of the effort this involved, he only summoned minor creatures – imps, dretches, and minor elementals – and with increasingly less frequency.

In addition to his work with extraplanar creatures, Numeshay spent much of his time passing on the knowledge he had accumulated over the centuries. To this end, the archmage mentored up to four apprentices at any one time. He even constructed a dormitory beneath his tower to house them, supplying his students' living area with all the basic comforts and study aids they would need to progress as wizards. Although he did not teach his apprentices the method of opening a planar fissure, they aided him in his work and studied the planar entities he summoned forth.

Numeshay only took promising scions from noble elven houses as students, and if he had maintained his stringent requirement for selecting his apprentices, he would likely still be alive today. However, Numeshay's final crop of apprentices included a brilliant young drow elf outcast by the name of Hadrajhast, whom the archmage had taken under his wing at the urging of a fellow wizard. Hadrajhast had fled to the surface to escape the tyrannical oppression of the drow matriarchy, and Numeshay believed that the young dark elf had left the wickedness of his people in the underdark. Unfortunately, Numeshay grossly misjudged his ebony-skinned pupil.

Hadrajhast faithfully studied under Numeshay for a year without incident, learning all he could from the powerful wizard. The young drow was fascinated with the planar fissures, but to his dismay, Hadrajhast found that his master would not reveal the secret of the fissures' creation. Over the next year, Hadrajhast's resentment grew to the point that he decided to uncover the fissures' mysteries on his own.

Unbeknownst to Numeshay, Hadrajhast had been an accomplished thief in the underdeep before he began his training as a wizard, and he used these skills to steal into the tower above the dormitory and copy from Numeshay's own notes and spellbooks. About five years ago, after he had gleaned enough knowledge, Hadrajhast locked himself in the dormitory's arcane workshop and attempted to open a planar fissure to the Abyss. Unfortunately, he was successful. And in so do-

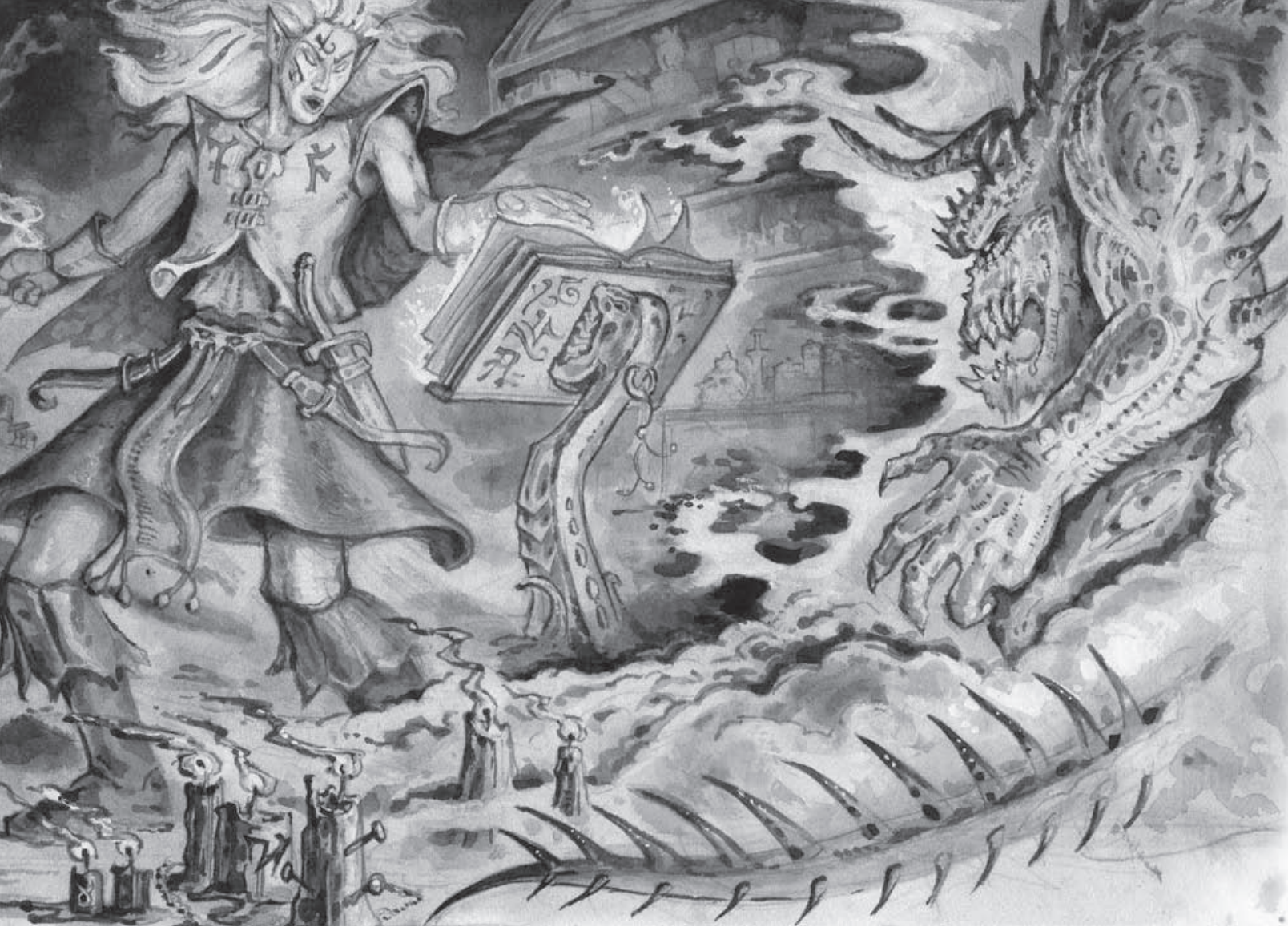
ing, he discovered a secret of the fissures that Numeshay only suspected: On rare and random occasions, creatures *could* push their way across to the other side.

Emboldened by his success, Hadrajhast hastily attempted another ritual to communicate with a minor demon, as he had seen his master do so many times before. But the inhabitants of the Abyss, with the patience born of immortality, had been waiting for just such an opportunity to test Numeshay's fissures. A hezrou and a supporting force of two dozen dretches quickly assembled against the fissure. The powerful hezrou pushed against Hadrajhast's fissure and – aided by the drow's flawed, rushed ritual – burst through! The hezrou and its dretches quickly slaughtered the foolish young mage. The demons then rampaged through the dormitory and slew Numeshay's remaining three apprentices in short order.

With the dormitory cleared, the hezrou and its dretches assaulted the tower proper. Numeshay, surprised by the demons, had little time to prepare, but still battled the invading fiends ferociously. In the end, realizing that he could not let the demons escape into the surrounding countryside, Numeshay broke the *orb of drastic resolution* that he had modified for just this possibility, triggering a tremendous explosion. The blast killed the archmage and the demons and shattered the tower, raining blocks of stone down upon the clearing in which it stood. Only one creature survived the destruction of the tower; and the ruins and the dormitory below passed into the flabby claws of a very unlikely master.

An exceptional dretch named Kuzgug – well, exceptional as dretches go – was part of the hezrou's invading force. However, unbeknownst to the other demons, Kuzgug was specially marked by the Hidden Lord, god of forbidden lore and secrets. After helping the hezrou slaughter Numeshay's apprentices, Kuzgug obeyed the dream messages sent to him by his shadowy master and slipped away from the hezrou and hid within the dormitory, while the remaining fiends ascended the tower to battle Numeshay.

After the explosive climax of the fight, Kuzgug found to his delight that he was the sole occupant of the dormitory; and without more powerful demons to bully him, he could do as he pleased. More intelligent than most of his kind, Kuzgug began to read the compiled arcane knowledge in the dormitory, and after five years of grueling study, he developed some minor wizardly abilities. He also discovered that the planar fissure in the dormitory's workroom improved the strength of fire spells. More importantly, the Hidden Lord's power granted him some degree of persuasion over the other demonic creatures that have since come through the fissure, regardless



of whether those fiends stepped through during the fissure's few weak periods or were drawn by Kuzgug's meager magical skills. Kuzgug has placed several of the less intelligent creatures in different rooms of the dormitory, ready to set them loose whenever he has need of them.

Kuzgug now has a small army of fiendish creatures to do his bidding. Although he continues his arcane studies in order to fulfill the Hidden Lord's mysterious goals, Kuzgug has begun to indulge his demonic appetites for destruction and carnage. He has attacked and kidnapped travelers on a nearby road, dragging these unfortunates back to the dormitory to torture and eventually consume. He has become quite the menace of late, and the towns on either end of the victimized road have begun to notice the unexplained disappearances of travelers and merchants making the journey between cities.

PLAYER BEGINNING

The adventure begins with the PCs walking through the forest and emerging into the large clearing that contains the ruins. Read or paraphrase the following to get the PCs started:

You have walked steadily through the forest for what seems like hours, following a trail that has seen frequent and recent use. The tall oaks and elms overhead press in, creating a dense canopy that diffuses the wan sunlight piercing the leafy ceiling above. There is stillness in the air, and the normal, wild sounds of the forest have been replaced by a wholly unnatural silence.

Suddenly, the forest gives way to a rough, circular clearing, spitting you out into a bare patch of forest that for all the world looks like nothing less than a massive scar in the wooded landscape. Squatting in the center of the clearing are the ruins of a stone tower. Only the bottom story of the structure remains, roofless and open to the elements, while

the upper stories appear to be strewn about the clearing in a jumbled mess of masonry and debris.

Even in the bright sunshine of the early afternoon, there is darkness here, and it rakes cold fingers of fear through your heart as you approach the ruined tower.

RUINED TOWER AND ENVIRONS

The clearing is roughly 150 feet across, and the ruins of the tower are situated in its very center. Debris covers the entire clearing, as if the upper stories of the tower simply exploded and scattered their remains over the entire area (which, in fact, is exactly what happened). This means every square in the clearing counts as difficult terrain.

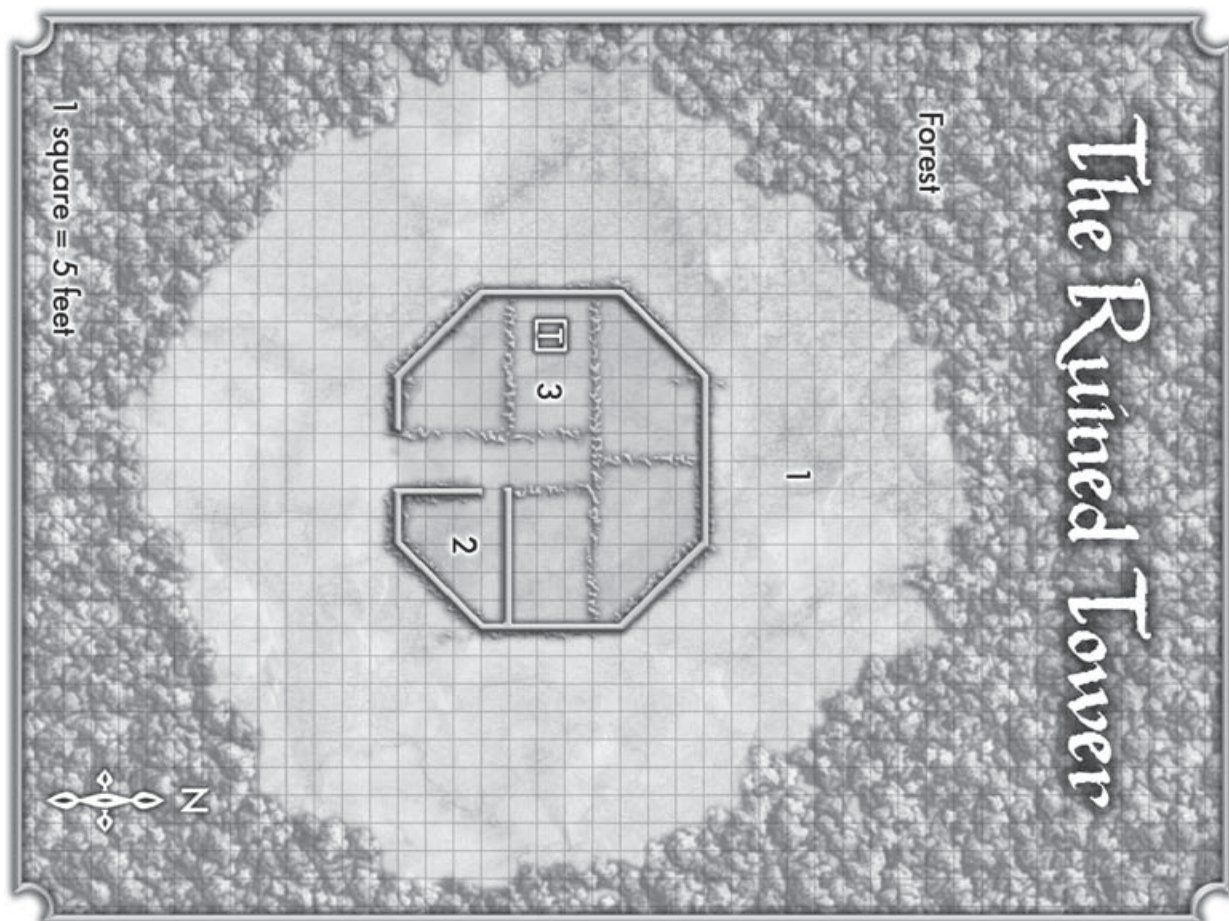
The remains of the tower consist of the foundation and a few crumbling interior walls. Like the clearing, the tower ruins are difficult terrain. A number of fiendish creatures have made their homes in the ruins, and will attack anyone invading their lairs.

Area 1-1 – Approaching the Ruins (EL 1): Read or paraphrase the following to the players:

As you pick your way across the clearing toward the ruins, you notice a peculiar smell hanging in the air. Over the piney scent of the woods there lurks a trace of brimstone, and something else ... a heavy animal musk that grows stronger as you approach the shattered tower. Suddenly, movement within the ruins catches your eye, and three sleek, predatory shapes glide from the deep shadows and out into the bright noonday sun.

At first, these three shapes cause little alarm – wolves are common enough in these parts – but these beasts send a shiver of horror and revulsion down your spine. Each has mottled yellow and gray fur, patchy and mange filled, with flashes of scabrous gray skin poking through in various spots. Their heads are gaunt, almost skeletal, and as their black lips pull back in a snarl, you see a forest of needle fangs, wholly unlike any wolf you’ve ever seen. The three wolves stalk slowly toward you, and you feel the dread chill of evil echoed in their low, hungry growls.

Development: The three abattoir wolves hide in the shadows of the tower ruins (Perception DC 12), waiting for the adventurers to cross half the distance between the tree line and the ruins. They know from experience that humanoids have difficulty negotiating the jumbled terrain of the clearing, and they wait for the heroes to become committed to crossing the clearing before attacking.



If the PCs spot the abattoir wolves from the tree line (Perception DC 22), they may use ranged attacks or powers on the wolves as they wish; however, it is unlikely that the heroes will notice the extraplanar nature of the wolves from this distance.

Tactics: The abattoir wolves are intelligent enough to use simple tactics, and attempt to flank and trip foes whenever possible. They focus their attacks on heroes who strongly radiate a good alignment, such as good clerics and paladins. These Abyss-tainted wolves are wicked and bloodthirsty; they fight to the death.

ABATTOIR WOLVES (3) **LEVEL 4 SKIRMISHER**
Medium elemental XP 175
magical beast (demon)

Initiative +8 **Senses** Perception +9, darvision
HP 55; **Bloodied** 27
AC 18; **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 17, **Will** 16
Resist 5 fire
Speed 8

⊕ **Bite** (standard; at-will)

+9 vs. AC; 1d6+4 damage, or 2d6+4 damage against a prone target.

Combat Advantage: If the abattoir wolf has combat advantage against the target, the target is also knocked prone on a hit.

↔ **Abattoir Breath** (standard; recharge 5 or 6)

Close burst 1; +5 vs. Fort; each target is weakened (save ends)

| | |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Alignment Evil | Languages — |
| Str 15 (+4) | Dex 18 (+6) Wis 14 (+4) |
| Con 15 (+4) | Int 3 (-2) Cha 11 (+2) |

Area 1-2 – Rat Run (EL 2): Read or paraphrase the following to the players:

As you enter the tower ruins, you notice that the destruction is almost total. The blast that leveled the structure left only charred stone and splintered wood in its wake, and little can be made of the remaining debris. Only one area of the ruins is recognizable for its former use: an alchemy lab by the looks of the shattered beakers, vials, and other twisted equipment that covers the floor. The walls of this area still stand, shielding the room from much of the devastation that claimed the rest of the tower.

The walls of Numeshay’s alchemy lab were made of reinforced stone, as his dabbling in the alchemical arts often led to fire, explosions, and other calamities that he did not want to spread to the rest of his abode. This reinforcement shielded the alchemy lab from some of the battle between mage and demons, and some useful equipment still survives.

Currently, a brutish demon called a verrekrieth resides within the ruins of the alchemy lab. The dis-

eased creatures relishes the filthy attention of a small pack of dire rats that obey his every whim.

Development: The verrekrieth and the dire rats are hiding in the debris of the alchemy lab (Perception DC 18), and wait for the PCs to enter. There is enough combustible liquid remaining in the lab that any use of a fire-based attack (*scorching burst*, *witch-fire*, etc.) in the room has a 50% chance of setting off a small fireball, which deals 2d6 points of fire damage to all creatures in the room and destroys any remaining potions (see below).

Tactics: The five dire rats rush in, using mob tactics on the party and focusing all of their attacks on a single enemy, preferably a paladin or good-aligned cleric targeted by the verrekrieth. As soon as they engage that target, the verrekrieth’s mandibles vibrate to unleash its *concussive drone*. It then utters an Abyssal curse and engages in melee combat. It uses its claws and sting, taking full advantage of its *stench of decay*. All of the creatures fight to the death.

Treasure: Searching the ruins of the alchemy lab will uncover a number of still viable potions. A Perception DC 12 check is needed to uncover a single potion, and there are four intact potions in the room: two *potions of healing* and two *potions of vitality*.

DIRE RATS (5) **LEVEL 1 BRUTE**
Medium natural beast XP 100

Initiative +2 **Senses** Perception +5; low-light vision
HP 38; **Bloodied** 19
AC 15; **Fortitude** 15, **Reflex** 13, **Will** 11
Immune filth fever
Speed 6, climb 3

⊕ **Bite** (standard; at-will) ♦ **Disease**

+4 vs. AC; 1d6 + 2 damage, and the target contracts filth fever.

| | |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Alignment Unaligned | Languages — |
| Skills Stealth +7 | |
| Str 14 (+2) | Dex 15 (+2) Wis 10 (+0) |
| Con 18 (+4) | Int 3 (-4) Cha 6 (-2) |



VERREKRITH**LEVEL 4 CONTROLLER**Medium elemental
humanoid (demon)

XP 175

Initiative +6 **Senses** Perception +7; low-light vision
Stench of Decay aura 1; living enemies in the area take –5 penalty to attack rolls.**HP** 52; **Bloodied** 26**AC** 18; **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 17, **Will** 16**Immune** disease**Resist** 5 variable (1/encounter)**Speed** 6⚔ **Claw** (standard; at-will)

+9 vs. AC; 1d8+4 damage.

Sting (standard; at will) ♦ **Poison**

+8 vs. Fort; 1d4+4, and the target takes ongoing 5 poison damage and is immobilized (save ends both).

⚡ **Concussive Drone** (standard; recharge 4, 5, or 6) ♦ **Thunder**

Ranged 10; +8 vs. Reflex; 3d6+4 thunder damage, and the target is pushed back 1 square.

👁 **Dominate Vermin** (standard; encounter) ♦
Charm

Close burst 10; targets rats, spiders, scorpions, and insects; +10 vs. Will; the target is dominated, and only the death of the verrekrit can end this domination.

Alignment Chaotic Evil **Languages** Abyssal, telepathy 10**Str** 15 (+4) **Dex** 18 (+6) **Wis** 11 (+2)**Con** 13 (+3) **Int** 9 (+1) **Cha** 15 (+4)

Area 1-3 – The Way Down: The entrance to the tower dormitory is a simple trapdoor. However, Kuzgug has concealed it by gluing leaves, dirt, and other debris on top of it, so that when the door is closed, it blends in with the rest of the mess that fills the ruins. It takes a Perception DC 15 check to find the concealed door. Once the door is found, the heroes will have to get it open. There is no lock, only a bolt that latches the door shut from the other side. However, the bolt is old and rusty, and will snap if sufficient force is applied to pull open the trapdoor (Strength check DC 15).

Once the PCs have the door open, read or paraphrase the following:

The trapdoor opens with a thin, metallic snap, revealing a shadow-filled aperture and a set of stone stairs descending into darkness. The thick, cloying smell of animal musk drifts up from the open trapdoor, and again, fear grips you with icy strength – you are sure that terrible evil lies below.

THE DORMITORY

Numeshay often had up to four apprentices training under him at any one time. These young mages lived in an area specially prepared for them beneath the tower: a dormitory of sorts, complete with a living area, a library, and an arcane workshop. It was here, that Hadrajast opened the planar fissure to the Abyss, hoping to use it as a tool to quickly achieve the power he craved.

After the hezrou stepped through the fissure, the foolish Hadrajast was the first to fall beneath the fiend's claws, followed by his fellow apprentices. The demon and his dretches dispatched the novice mages so quickly that very little damage was done to the dormitory, and for the most part, it remains in good condition, despite the passage of time.

There is no light in the dormitory except in the arcane workshop, where the planar fissure illuminates the entire chamber in an unhealthy red glow. The ceilings in the dormitory are 10 feet high, and the hallways are 10 feet wide. The walls are made of worked stone, and the doors are solid wood with good locks.

Also, the dormitory is saturated in Abyssal energy from the planar fissure. For all intents and purposes, the fissure acts as a wide-reaching Font of Power (see the *DMG*), granting a +5 bonus to damage from any attack with the fire keyword that is used within the dormitory.

Masonry Wall: Strength DC 35 to break.

Good Wooden Door: Strength DC 18 to break when door is stuck; if locked, increase DC to 20.

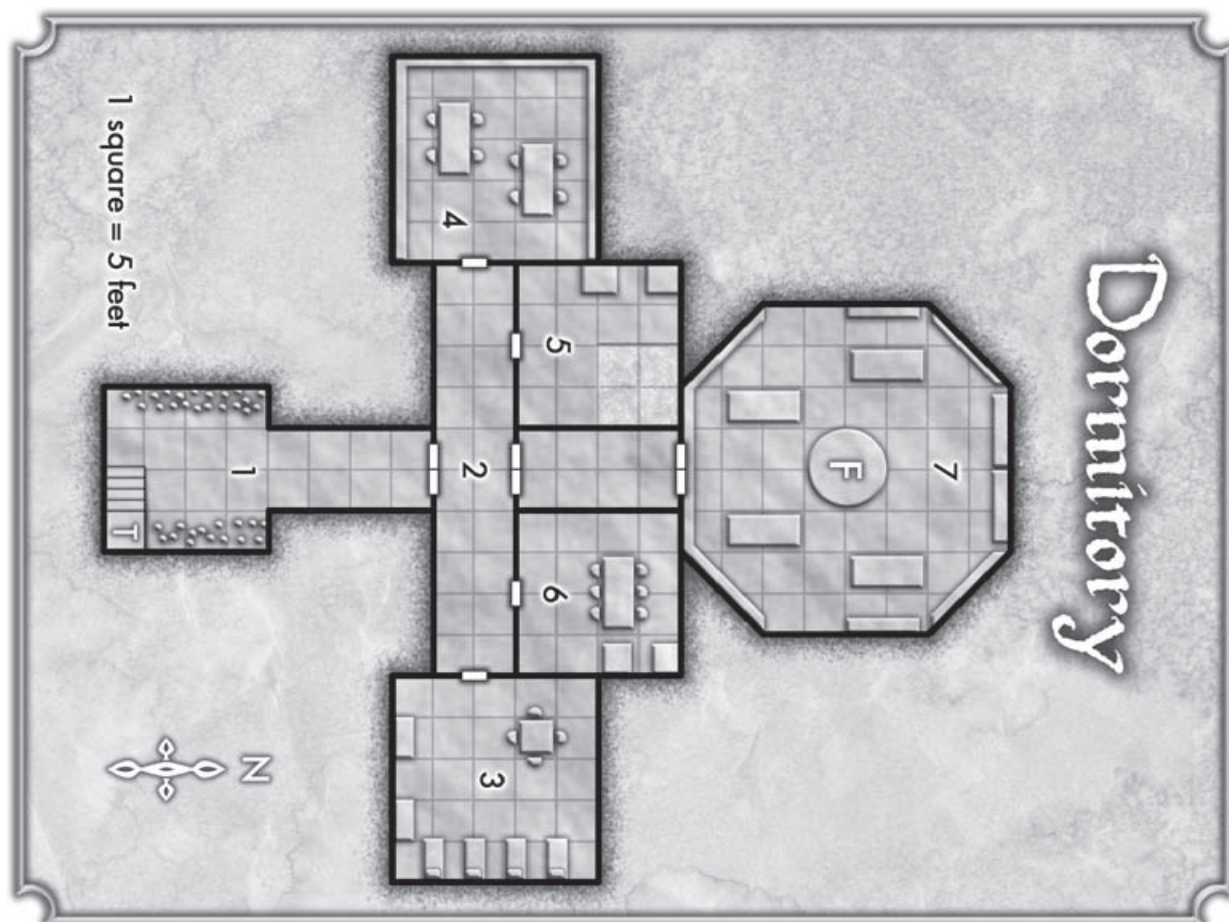
Area 2-1 – The Larder (EL 2): Read or paraphrase the following to the players:

As you descend the stone steps into darkness, the musky smell of beast intensifies, as if you had suddenly entered the lair of a large animal. However, there is another scent, a terrible odor that in your short adventuring career you have mercifully avoided: death – old and rotting death, to be exact.

At the bottom of the stairs, you find yourselves in a large stone chamber, with neatly fitted walls of masonry blocks and a wide hallway heading north into further darkness. Old barrels, crates, bags, and other storage devices line the walls, some of which have disgorged their contents – a collection of rancid cheeses, moldy grain, and dried meat now gray and foul with age. This was obviously a larder for those who once occupied the tower. And while the ancient foodstuffs are no longer usable, the room retains its former purpose, but in a much more ghoulish fashion.

You count four naked human corpses, in varying states of decay, lying on moldy burlap sacks in the center of the

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room. The corpses are missing large chunks from various part of their anatomy, primarily in the “meatier” areas of the buttocks and upper legs.

Suddenly, through the darkness, you hear a low hissing and the ominous scraping of taloned feet on the stone floor.

Kuzgug and his allies have developed a taste for the flesh of men, and the corpses of their victims are brought back to “season” for a day or two before consumption. The four corpses currently in the room are those of a small merchant party that had been on its way to trading cities in the north. All are male, and consist of two merchants and their two hired guards. The cause of death is fairly easy to ascertain, in spite of the terrible wounds inflicted post mortem. The throats of all four corpses have been savagely ripped out, the work of the abattoir wolves above.

Development: Numeshay had kept a spitting drake and a group of specially trained needlefang drakes, and he gave his apprentices the task of taking care of the creatures. When the hezrou first arrived, it ignored the drakes, opting to find and kill any spellcasters first. Kuzgug waited until the drakes were weak with hunger, then he drove them into this room. Not only does he feel that they would prove an obstacle for any intruders, but he delights in watching the slow degradation of these once-proud crea-

tures. Over the years, he has trained them to cower in his presence, and he has starved them to the point where they have become little more than ravenous beasts, eager to please him for scraps of food. Now the drakes act as a convenient disposal unit, greedily devouring the offal left by Kuzgug and his allies after they’ve eaten their fill from a particular victim.

Tactics: The needlefang drake swarms attack the moment the heroes set foot in the larder, rushing forward to attack the nearest target. They make no attempt to hide, so if the heroes have a light source or a member with darkvision, they may see the drakes from the top of the stairs. The spitting drake, meanwhile, has kept to the shadows of the ceiling, fearing for its own life if it gets too close to its hungry needlefang cousins. On the second round of combat, it flies down and strikes at the adventurer who appears least armored. The savage drakes are mad with hunger and will fight to the death.

Treasure: The mundane food in the larder is spoiled, and anyone who actually attempts to eat any of it becomes violently ill. However, some of the equipment carried by the merchants and their guards has been piled in the northeast corner of the room. Kuzgug has already removed any items of obvious value, such as gold, gems, or magical items, but he left the armor and