

Rescue at BoneBridge

WE DECIPILES OF SAMMASTER ARE LEGION. *We have hundreds of holdfasts and hideouts. When he returns we will quaff your blood and crack your bones.*

— Albrect Merwright, *Excerpt from his execution.*

The Orcs that kidnapped Lady Meliamne have retreated to a dry riverbed in the high desert. Sent by the Lady's brother, Lord Meliamne of Suntower, the heroes have tracked the band of orcs to this location and approach from the north.

Knochten Gorge

The Cult of Sammaster dug this network of tunnels and warrens to serve as a temple and a defensive stronghold. Hundreds of cultists sacrificed their lives to be reborn and serve as the cogs and gears of this now abandoned temple.

General Features

The walls of the gorge are 120 feet high and made of smooth sandstone, worn into soft curves by eons of wind and airborne grit. The interior rooms have 10 foot high ceilings. A scent of decay hangs in the air and lingers in the mouths of visitors.

Climbing. The natural sandstone walls are nearly impossible to climb. Inside the complex the walls have been carved with complex relief sculptures up to a height of 30 feet that can be climbed with a successful DC 10 athletics check.

Light. Rooms adjacent to the ravine feature dim light, areas deeper inside the temple are in darkness.

Tark the Reaver

The band of orcs that kidnapped Lady Meliamne is lead by an Orog named Tark the Reaver. Tark has secured his hostage in the central temple chamber (Area 11) and is awaiting the arrival of her brother, Lord Meliamne to negotiate for her release.

The Manticore

The Orc chieftain has recruited a Manticore named Skabrex to aid in his schemes. If an alarm is raised Skabrex attacks the intruders, but otherwise remains inside the room he has made his den (Area 7). Skabrex is afraid of the other temple chambers and will not peruse characters into them. He fights until reduced to below 20 hit points, then retreats to his den.

1. Ruined Statue

A massive skeletal foot partially buried under drifts of sand is all that remains of the monument to the vanquished litch king.

Two **Orcs** guard the entrance to the canyon and are expecting a negotiating party.

If the characters stage a direct assault on the guards, they

will blow a horn to signal the attack and take defensive positions behind the rubble, gaining half cover. Skabbrex will join in the assault; and the orcs in area 10 will defend their position with arrows and thrown rocks.

If the heroes approach peacefully, one of the orcs will remain at the statue while the other escorts the characters to parley with their leader Tark (Area 2).

Rounding the bend of the ravine you can see arched portals have been cut into both sides of the canyon at varying heights. Each entrance is supported by a flat stone balcony. Only one wide entrance to your right is at ground level. The walls of the canyon have been carved with relief sculptures depicting fantastical skeletal monsters terrorizing representatives of the humanoid races.

On the farthest and highest of these balconies a half dozen orcs eye your party with suspicion.

Characters that succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom (Perception) check will notice that one of the Orcs on the high platform is slight of body and wearing armor much too large for him.

2. Parlay with Tark

The two orc guards will escort the heroes to a position directly in front of the tallest of the platforms, the temple balcony. Tark the **Orog** will demand to speak with Lord Meliamne's representative, and demands the Lord surrender the lands east of the Celadon river to his horde.

When it becomes clear the heroes cannot negotiate on behalf of the elf Lord, Tark orders his men to destroy them.

There are four **orcs** (and one elf in disguise) on the temple balcony that unleash a hail of boulders and ruined masonry on the heroes. These boulders count as improvised ranged weapons, deal 2d10+4 bludgeoning damage and have a maximum horizontal range of 20 feet. They cannot strike characters underneath the temple balcony. From their position on the balcony the orcs have either total cover or three quarters cover from anyone attacking from the ground. Two of the orcs on the balcony are armed with longbows in addition to their standard equipment and will continue to harry the characters as they travel through the temple complex.

3. Temple Entrance

This rounded chamber holds drifts of sand and nothing else.

4. Corridor

This 5 foot wide corridor slopes steadily upwards.

Pit Trap. The last 5 feet of this hallway contains a hidden pit trap. Characters who succeed on a DC 18 Wisdom (Perception) check will detect the false sandstone floor that conceals the chamber below. Characters that step on this false floor fall into the pit taking 2d6 bludgeoning damage from the 20 foot fall and 2d10 piercing damage from the sharpened bone spikes at the bottom of the pit. Surrounding the bottom

of the pit are 4 **skeletons** crouched in alcoves. One minute after the trap is released the Skeletons wind the winches that reset the false floor.

Unlucky Explorer. Years ago an elven scholar of necromantic cults met his unfortunate end inside this trap. His corpse lies in the bottom of the pit, still clutches a rotting leather travel sack containing 25 gp, 40 cp, a **potion of healing**, and a well-preserved map.

The dead elf's map shows the surrounding region with notes on how to find Knotchen Gorge. Below the hand drawn map is a note written in common: "First bridge: three then four, second bridge: four then six"

5. Purification Room

This chamber contains a dented bronze brazier and shards of broken pottery. The relief sculptures on the walls depict Sammaster as a living man climbing a flight of stairs that represent his rise to power as a mortal. The staircase he climbs is made of skeletal arms and hands. This chamber is 15 feet above the ravine floor.

Skeleton Bridge. Characters who examine the relief sculptures will notice that one skeleton hand has only three fingers, and another has only four. These irregular hands are set on hidden hinges in the walls, and pulling on them in that order (three, then four) opens a hidden door to reveal 15 **skeletons**. The skeletons ignore any beings present and march in a straight line to the edge of the balcony. The first skeleton fits its feet into two small grooves on the balcony and kneels forward with its torso and arms outstretched, the second skeleton climbs on the first one's back and kneels as they link arms and legs. Each successive skeleton repeats this maneuver until all the corpses are linked, forming a staircase bridge that reaches the balcony on the other side of the canyon. This bridge climbs 15 feet upwards as it crosses the canyon. The hidden door can be discovered with a successful DC 16 Wisdom (Perception) check but cannot be opened by any other means.

6. Dormitory

Aside from a dozen rotting wooden beds there is nothing of value in this room. This room and the meeting room are both 30 feet above the ravine floor.

7. Meeting Room

This former cult meeting room has been repurposed by Skabrex, who will retreat here and fight to the death to defend this space. If the heroes took a short rest after the fight in the canyon, Skabrex will have regained 2d8 hit points.

In the southwest corner are the remains of Lady Meliamne's handmaidens that the Manticore has been given to feast on. Among the carnage is a jeweled bracelet worth 200gp.

8. Corridor

This 75 foot long corridor climbs steadily upwards.

9. Head Priest's cell.

A dust covered bedframe and desk hold nothing of value. This room is 45 feet above the ravine floor.

The walls are similarly decorated with relief sculptures depicting Sammaster's rise to power as a lich, climbing a staircase made of skeletal hands and arms. Examining the sculptures reveals one hand with four fingers, and one with six, and that these hands are hinged and can be moved.

Skeleton Bridge. Characters that pull the four-fingered skeleton hand, then the six-fingered hand, will activate the second skeleton bridge that connects this room to Area 10.

10. Antechamber and Balcony

Tark and his Orcs made camp within this small antechamber. This area is 60 feet above the floor of the gorge. A coiled rope ladder has been anchored to the lip of the balcony. When deployed it reaches the floor of the ravine.

The **orcs** posted here have watched the heroes ascending the stairs with growing concern. Once the characters have a clear path to their position, Tark will retreat to guard his hostage while the rest defend their position with all the weapons at their disposal. The Orcs fear Tark as much as the characters and will fight to the death here.

11. Temple

The central temple of undeath rises in a 40-foot high dome of blackened sandstone. A massive chandelier of bones and skulls looms over a modest stone altar. Dozens of skeletons leer down from alcoves throughout the ceiling.

Lady Meliamne, a terrified elf in a torn green dress, is tied to the altar in the center of the room. Tark the **Orog** stands behind her, his warhammer raised to crush her skull. The lady begs to be rescued as Tark demands that Lord Meliamne comes to face him and surrender to his demands.

Characters that succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom (Perception) check notice that Lady's Meliamne's bonds are not particularly tight. Characters that succeed on a Wisdom (Insight) skill check against Lady Meliamne's Charisma (Deception) skill (+6), realize that she is feigning her fear.

In truth, Tark and Lady Meliamne have been conspiring together for years and concocted this fake kidnapping as part of a scheme to ruin her brother. Their plan having gone awry, they are trying to improvise a way out of this situation.

Tark will try to follow Lady Meliamne's lead, but he remains a brutish and impulsive orc. If provoked, he leaps over the altar and fights to the death. Any character trying to free the hostage find the ropes were loose and untied.

If the characters call Lady Meliamne's bluff, she will rise and congratulate them. She has one last move to make. The Lady spent centuries studying this temple and knows the incantation that will unleash the 100 **skeletons** cocooned in the temple's chandelier and walls, which will attack everyone in sight. It is up to the characters to convince the Lady to let them live, or escape, or die trying.

