THE MAZE BENEATH THE MAIZE

“Be wary of blindly seeking adventure. Sometimes it finds you...” - Tarric the Elder

Introduction

This document is for the Dungeon Master. If you’re a player, read no further! It contains a complete Dungeons & Dragons adventure. It provides everything you need including: character descriptions, lore, maps and monster stat blocks.

Running the Adventure

The Maze Beneath the Maize is a 5th level adventure for four to five characters. If your group deviates, you will need to make adjustments. During the course of the adventure, the players may advance to 6th level. If you don’t use XP for your players, it’s recommended they level up at the end of the adventure. The adventure is set in the Forgotten Realms setting near the town of Stawford. Stawford is a sleepy little town with rich farmland between it and mines burrowing into the mountains to the north. We created Stawford as a blank slate for our adventures, so don’t feel like you have to go in as a Forgotten Realms expert. And if you are a Forgotten Realms expert, please forgive any mistakes. But do let us know so we don’t make them again.

Background

More than two centuries ago, a red wizard by the name of Houn made a discovery that shook the foundations of magic on Toril. Yet, due to a considerable amount of effort on his part, it never saw the light of day. The exact nature of this discovery is unknown but it involves the location of the skeletal fragments of an ancient being. The weave, which governs all magic on Toril, reacts strangely to the frag-

DM’S NOTE

Houn is part of our ongoing series, about the Aberrant Ancient. His actions led to the creation of the maze, and the players will meet him at the end of the adventure. You can find more details on Houn at: http://www.brokenknives.com/blog/the-aberrant-ancient

Revelations

This is a story with a mystery. Who built the maze and why? We’ve marked revelations about the mystery in the text with an exclamation mark so you’ll be able to easily know when to reveal information to the players and when to keep it to yourself. Try not to reveal anything to the players that they couldn’t get from in-game knowledge.
ments. More information existed before Houn destroyed his research and fled Thay. His current whereabouts are unknown but many of his peers have attempted to track him down and steal his research for themselves.

To keep his trail muddled, Houn hid his research in a room at the end of a labyrinth and left a Guardian to keep it well secure. His trail grew cold over the years but he enhanced each Guardian with slivers of the Aberrant Ancient’s bones. This meant they could stay active for millennia. Houn built his labyrinth near Stawford where the latent magical energy from the fragment of the Ancient seeped into the soil. This gave rise to huge crop yields for the Therayle farm built atop it. The labyrinth would have probably been forgotten until the Sundering happened. The region now

### Houn and Chorin

This adventure tells the tale of Houn Blackhand and his assistant Chorin Therayle. Both wizards met while training in Thay. Despite the fact that Chorin was a western outsider when they were young, they soon became friendly rivals. Yet, due to his painstaking study and natural talent, Houn soon became the more powerful of the two.

Houn was an obsessive person. He kept copious notes, perfect accounting and extensive archives of information. He cataloged everything he could discover about the mysterious shards of bone. When Houn reported his findings to his superiors, the response was overwhelmingly positive. His mentor assigned Houn his former classmate, Chorin, as his assistant.

But the more Houn delved into the pieces of the Ancient, the more paranoid he became. He found his thoughts turning more and more to concealment. If not his mentor, surely his Zulkir would seize this power for himself. How could Houn keep it secure? He soon devised a series of complex methods to obscure his research, entrusting the cipher only to himself and Chorin.

As more and more resources were siphoned into Houn’s research, the two wizards began scheming. With the help of some of the funds, they purchased land a few miles outside of Thay. They then built a storeroom deep underground and sealed it, making it only accessible by portal. Chorin had the idea to purchase a plot of land in the west, near Stawford, where he was born. Here they hid the corresponding portal. That plot of land would eventually pass to his ancestor, Hugh Therayle.

The research went well and Houn and Chorin discovered how to manipulate the power of the Ancient’s remains, greatly amplifying the magic through the weave. They also found that golems animated with fragments of the ancient were vastly more powerful than ones created by conventional means. All of this was of course hidden from Houn’s superiors. To his mentor and the rest of the council, the usually stringent wizard seemed sloppy, uncaring and forgetful. Houn’s regular reports became infrequent and full of redundant information. The Red Wizards called a conclave to question Houn and Chorin.
is in a state of disarray.

At the dead center of the chaos is the Therayle farmstead built on top of the labyrinth. The farm faces ruin and Hugh Therayle, the current owner, is at wits end trying to reestablish even a modicum of control over the disrupted land. Hugh has over forty laborers to reshape the land, and is one of the wealthiest farmers in the area. But when he saw the ancient doorway jutting up from the middle of his cornfield, he knew this wasn’t the type of problem a plow could solve.

Overview

The Maze Beneath the Maize is a standalone adventure that takes the characters into the wizard’s paranoid machinations. The maze protects the information leading to the resting place of the Aberrant Ancient. Once the characters enter the maze, they’ll need their wits as well as their might as they’re attacked by malignant oozes. If they make it to the pit and defeat the ancient ooze dwelling there, they’ll have everything needed to open the portal, assuming of course they don’t meet a grim fate trying.

The Adventure Begins

The adventure begins as the player characters arrive at Hugh Therayle’s farmhouse.

The Therayle Farm

Because of the high quality and quantity of crop yield, the farm has always been the subject of rumors. If the characters talk to the workers around the farm they hear the follow-

Adventure Hooks

It’s recommended that you work with your players to develop a strong and compelling reason why the party makes their way to the Therayle farm. Here are a few ideas that might help:

- Word has spread into the surrounding regions that Hugh Therayle, the wealthy farmer, is offering a 1000g purse for a simple task. He just needs some strong arms to kill a few slimes in a cavern beneath his farm.
- A wily merchant, by the name of Gregorio, that the players meet on the road has heard rumors of a great treasure. This treasure lies beneath some old farmland near Stawford. It’s just waiting there for someone strong enough to claim it.
- A contact of one of the characters has heard some stirrings. One of his informants has trailed a Red Wizard to the small rural town of Stawford. There has to be something going on.
- While passing the Therayle farm, the characters meet some of the laborers. The laborers, who are taking a break from the heat of the day, detail the issues the farm has been facing. They also speak of the strange finds in the fields, and their employer’s need for help.

DM’s NOTE

For more on Gregorio, check out http://www.dmsguild.com/product/180530/Gregorios-Traveling-Emporium-and-Menagerie
The farm was the product of an ancient pact between Hugh’s ancestor and some outside group. No one knows what the terms of the agreement were. (Hugh’s knowledge of this is described on page 9).

The farm is haunted. A couple of seasons ago, three of the farmhands saw a lady in a blue dress wandering around the fields at night. She then disappeared into thin air, seemingly swallowed up by the land. (This is Nula, described on page 11).

A beast wanders the farm at night. Several laborers have seen it. It appears to move unnaturally. Hugh has hired Runir Kundëni, an elven hunter, to kill it. (Runir is described on page 9).

Hugh Therayle

Hugh is a practical man. He’s not only a farmer but also a business man. Although he has plenty of other land now, his family built their fortune on this land. He’s determined to not let the farm fail during his generation, yet he does realize he’s out of his depth.

Luckily, he has plenty of coin to hire the problem out. He’s spread the word far and wide about the ancient doorway. His offer is simple, “Clear out the area of anything dangerous and take good notes, so they can fix the sinkholes” and he’ll give the party 1000g. He’s fairly firm on this but a hard Persuasion (Charisma) check (DC 20) can increase it to 1100g. If the party agrees he’ll provide a quality meal and coin for a bed at the inn for the night. In the morning he’ll hand over a rough map of the area (see handouts in

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READ TO PLAYERS

You knock at the door and a large man with a bushy black beard and piercing eyes answers. He takes a careful look at you before announcing “Ah, finally a group that looks like they mean business.”
Appendix C) and wish them luck.

When speaking as Hugh keep the following in mind:

- Hugh is a man who likes to get down to business. Years of hard work have left him intolerant of empty words. He indulges in basic pleasantries but hates small talk beyond that point. The exception is if you start talking about one of his two passions: growing crops and fine meals.
- Hugh is stressed out but tries to hide it with humor. He’s worried the family farm will fail with him.
- Hugh knows there’s something bad in the maze beyond simple oozes but he doesn’t want to let on it’s bad. He’s afraid the party will ask for more gold, or worse refuse the job.
- On Hugh’s Mantle is a golden bracelet. If asked he’ll mention it was found in the field by his father over forty years ago. He had it restored by an expert dwarven craftsman on a visit to Waterdeep a few years back. A successful history check (DC 15) will reveal it as a design of the people of Thay.

The Maze

This adventure doesn’t lend itself well to theater of the mind style game play, at least not the maze portion. It’s recommended you

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The Conclave

Houn spun a beautiful half-truth and admitted to his superiors that he had hit a dead end with traditional research but he had a plan. He requisitioned a massive divination ritual, requiring an agreement with Yaphyll, the divination Zulkir at the time. After weeks of negotiation, she reluctantly agreed to send five top-ranking Diviners to Houn’s laboratory to search for the source. The ritual used a piece of the ancient fragment as a conduit and was ultimately successful. The location of the massive skull of the Aberrant Ancient was implanted into the minds of all the wizards. Then, Houn and Chorin activated the myriad of contingency spells they had set during the weeks of negotiation. None of the diviners left the room alive.

Unknown to Houn, Chorin performed a magical rite after the slaughter, transforming a corpse to appear as his double. After all, Chorin knew Houn was imbalanced. His jealousy and nervous derangement made him prone to outbursts and deeply suspicious of everyone, including Chorin. If Houn went down, Chorin didn’t plan to be with him. After their crime, Chorin and Houn immediately began purging the records of their findings and took all ancient fragments with them. When the authorities in Thay came upon the gruesome scene the next morning they assumed that Houn had gone mad and killed not only the diviners but his assistant as well. When it was found that Houn had fled the city, a manhunt began. But it was too late, the two rogue wizards were long gone.
READ TO PLAYERS
As you enter the ancient doorway, there’s a musty odor in the air. The walls feel as though they’re closing in on you, leading to a stifling feeling. Now you have your first choice, which way to go?

use one of several methods to help the players keep track of where they are and not feel too confused or overwhelmed.

- If you’re playing with a digital tabletop that allows fog of war, you can use that feature. We provide a high-resolution version of the maze as part of this adventure.
- If you’re playing at an actual table, you can use a combination of good notes by the players (by design, the maze lends itself well to graph paper), and the “scraps of the map” handouts in Appendix C. Hugh provides the first fragment.

Environment of the Maze
Houn’s maze is a dry and desiccated construction deep under the Therayle farm. The presence of the oozes keeps the halls very clean and sterile. A lack of moisture and insects makes the maze an almost clinical seeming place. Houn used magic to carve the maze, giving the walls a seamless, smooth texture throughout. The maze is mostly dark, though a phosphorescent fungus that grows in dry environments flourishes in sections where he can find nutrients, such as in the presence of oozes or near the bodies of their victims.

The Escape
Houn and Chorin made their way west to the Therayle farm to access their study and retrieve the research they had hidden there. Journeying through the maze they used the portal to enter the study below Thay. Once there, realizing that they had escaped Thay with knowledge of the Aberrant Ancient’s skull, Houn was happy for the first time in ages. Chorin used the opportunity to kill him.

Taking the most important research, Chorin headed to the location of the Ancient skull entombed in the heights of the Spine of the World.

The manhunt for Houn continued for years until the maze was discovered. But a massive guardian, powered by a shard of the Ancient, protected the portal. After the first few attempts were unsuccessful, the Red Wizards were fragmented and thrown into disarray during the Szass Tam incident. The tale of Houn and the strange magical effects he discovered was all but forgotten. The reference to the manhunt and the hinting of great power would occasionally entice a wizard to go searching for information on Houn but all lost the trail at the maze.