



A Tourist's Notes and Maps

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For Loris and Clio
and any others who may find it helpful

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General

I like *Hordes of the Underdark*. I like it better than most of the other modules available except perhaps for *Kingmaker*, *The Aielund Saga* and *Eye of the Beholder I*. I find it highly imaginative, interesting and engaging. More than that, it can be a quite different game, within the overall plot line, each time one plays it. This is because there are different storyline branches that can be taken by a character at several points, with different consequences for future game play.

As well, there are branches and story lines that can be followed only by certain character classes and specific alignments. I haven't explored them all simply because I haven't had either the time or the inclination and I generally like being a (generally good) Paladin. I don't pretend to understand game design, but this one works.

In the notes at various places, I do record what happens and what XP or good loot is earned in some of the branches that I chose not to follow through to the end.

There are several good walkthroughs of this game available on line. I don't pretend this to rival them, to be complete or even a walkthrough as such. This is simply a notebook based on my second or third (or is it fourth?) run through of the game. I played it using an lovely fast Acer Predator laptop with good graphics, running Windows 11.

I've organized this as a running commentary with the maps at places I thought most appropriate or useful in the text. There are spoilers and solutions to the numerous and various puzzles of the game, but for the most part, I have put these in the footnotes. Consult them as you may wish or need to do.

Character & Henchman Management

I started this game by creating a new character, a female, Half-Elven Paladin named Kalia iAutone. Starting with a new character lets you go through 15 levelling up sequences before starting the game, which gives you a lot of freedom to develop your character to suit you best. After the first level of Paladin, I switched Kalia to a Rogue in order to get the 30 attribute points to distribute at each level up sequence. After reaching a level 8 Rogue, I switched back to Paladin. I did that because the game seems to refer to you throughout as if you are in your first chosen character class.

Note that unlocking rooms and taking items from private chests moves your character's alignment toward chaotic. At least in the first part of the game. That is something to watch for if you think you may want to become (or stay) a character that requires specific alignment levels.

Henchman management in the game is the same as in *Shadows of the Undrentide* (SotU), i.e., you get to manage your henchman's inventory, talk to him/her, etc.

In the first chapter, you will meet up with Linu, Tommy, Daelan and Sharwyn, first met back in the *Neverwinter Nights* (NWN) Campaign game. Your only real choice, however, is Deekin Scalesinger (a Chaotic Good Reptilian Bard), whom you can find down in the Inn's Well room.

Deekin, once you get over the fact that he is a Kobold, slowly reveals himself to be a Bard

with a lot of character, smarts and judgement, as well as being a good fighter in a pinch. And he has a wicked sense of humour. I liked him almost from the start and took him on as soon as I could, even though any of the others would have been stronger companions in a knock-down drag-out fight.

It may be possible to take on the other NWN NPCs in the first part of the game, once you have brought them back to life. I never tried very hard because I like Deekin so much and because you are allowed only one henchman until you get to Part III.

Once you get to Lith My'athar, you will be able to have either Valen Shadowbreath (a Tiefling) or Nathyrra, and Ellestrae Drow to come along as a henchman as well. Both are good fighters and valuable companions in a fight. I chose Valen rather than Nathyrra in part because he was male. But mostly because the previous time I played the game, I really enjoyed the exchanges between him and Deekin (some of the very best done understated humour I have seen done in a game). Also, he is a challenge to win over completely but very much worth the effort. It is interesting to see both he and Deekin develop into almost believable real characters over the second half of the game. And, it is especially gratifying if you are able to establish a close enough relationship with both so that they side with you at the climax.

Unlike the NWN Campaign game, you have much more control over your henchman. First, you can choose what equipment he/she will use, often allowing you to make him/her just as powerful as yourself.

Another thing to bear in mind is that you do share XP with your henchmen, so accumulation of XP will be slower with two than with one. This is why you will sometimes find that you get different XP for the disposing of the same kind of monsters. I never found this disparity a serious problem and appreciated the help of the extra weapons or spells cast in many a melee. The same thing seems to apply to the awarding of GP for combat. And the game engine can be quite idiosyncratic sometimes in its awarding of XP and GP for doing away with monsters.

Sometimes, also, the contents of chests, armoires, remains, bone piles, etc., may be determined randomly. So some of the items listed in the text may differ when another person plays the game or if the same person plays the game at a different time.

Difficulty of Play/Play of the Game

I played the game using Hard Core D&D rules as the difficulty level in the game set up screen and managed just fine for the most part. Starting out as a level 15 character does give you an advantage, although you still have to scrounge up adequate kit to equip yourself properly.

I have noticed that the XP rewards and loot can change idiosyncratically in many areas, while in others they are always the same. I think it must be part of how the game algorithm apportions rewards. I suspect it all balances out in the end. Or it just may be the luck of the draw.

Quests & Secondary Quests

I didn't pay a lot of attention to the titles of the secondary quests were or take the time to describe them in any detail. I think, however, that I hit all that are possible for a Rogue/Paladin

character and I do point out the XP gained for completing them, either in the main text or a footnote. Some quests may be available only to certain classes of character or alignments. I suspect this to be the case because I have found there are parts of one or two of the sections of the dungeon to which I was not able to gain access, even though I could tell they existed.

Maps

I made the maps by taking screen shots of what appeared on my monitor and then adding legend markers in Photoshop. The numbering and legend on each map generally reflects the order in which I played that area. But not necessarily always. I have placed them in the body of the walkthrough rather than as an annex because I thought that better than having to jump back and forth in the document.

Walk-Through

I. WATERDEEP

1. The Yawning Portal - Upstairs

On opening the game, you are in your room in the Yawning Portal Inn. You get to go through the levelling up process until your character reaches a total level 15. If you start with a new character, you will find you have a few possessions in inventory or your chest. Whether your character is new or pre-existing, if you have a weapon you like, you should equip it before doing anything else.

After all the levelling up, you have to rest before you can do anything else. and, while doing so, have a bad dream featuring an evil baddie. Not only that, you are awakened by Drow thieves in your room. When you despatch them, you find they have stolen all of your possessions except for your weapon. If you started with a pre-existing character who had lots of good possessions, you will find yourself stripped bare. So all characters start with next to nothing but their underwear, a weapon, a *Relic of the Reaper*¹, some Rogue Stones (useful for teleportation) and a book written by D. Scalesinger which relates your previous exploits in exaggerated fashion. Searching dead Drow can get you a blue *Ioun Stone* (+2 Intelligence), a dagger and a crystal of some sort.

Luckily for you, Tamsil, the daughter of Durnan the Innkeeper, rushes in to see if you are all right. She can tell you a lot about goings on in Waterdeep. She will point you to the Armoury, which has some fair weaponry, armour and miscellaneous stuff. So you don't have to start out naked and exposed.



1. Your Room
2. Armoury
3. Common Room
4. To/From Ground Floor (1)

There are a couple of doors off the hall which you can unlock and check out inside for useful loot. Doing so, however, moves your alignment one step toward chaotic for each room you enter.²

In the Common Room, you can meet an old man named Tanarell who claims to be one of the few to have entered the Underdark and to have returned. He will be quite chuffed if you ask him to

¹ This is a kind of teleportation relic. Examine it closely. Note you couldn't get rid of it if you wanted to.

² Most of the things you will find are piddling loot, so open the door and chest only if you don't care about alignment shifts.

help you by telling you of his experience.³ Also in the Common Room is Cyphus Ordinae, a monk of the Guarded Mind Order. He will tell you why he has come to Waterdeep (to investigate assassinations and learn about the dangers from the Underdark) and suggest you see Durnan urgently, but is not much help otherwise.

With nothing else to do on this level, the next step is down the stairs to the Inn's tavern area.

2. The Yawning Portal - Tavern

Down the stairs, gathered in the centre of the tavern are all of the usual suspects that you met in the NWN campaign game: Linu La'neral, Tommy Undergallows, Daelan Red Tiger and Sharwyn. Not sure what became of Bodyknock Glinkel, however. They all tell you that you need to go see Durnan in the next room for more information about what is happening.



1. To/From Upper Level (4)
2. Durnan
3. To/From the Well Room (1)
4. To/From Waterdeep (1)

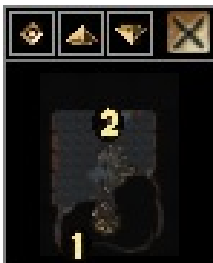
If you look around, you should see several refugees, but also a female druid named Parley. Parley is a good hint as to what you should do with her. If you speak to her just right, she will gift you extra strength for the rest of the day. You may well expect that to be helpful, given that something bad is likely to happen soon in any adventure. Off toward where Durnan is supposed to be, you can have an exchange with Dreezy, a drunken dwarf who will tell you a tale about his experience with a dragon in the Underdark. And then pass out after telling you he may show up later to help you out if you go down into the Underdark.

In the next room, the kitchen, you find Durnan who welcomes you, as well as the other henchmen characters you thought you had just left behind. Durnan explains what has been happening, about the Underdark and about the quest before the adventurers who have gathered at the Inn. Before he finishes the briefing, the Inn's tavern area is attacked by a troop of Drow. Durnan and the lot of you rush out to battle them. Once the main assault is turned back, White Thesta comes into the tavern and heals the wounded. Several adventurers, including Parley, all say they have had enough and are going home. Durnan and the bunch you knew from Neverwinter have charged down into the well room in pursuit of fleeing Drow. You can follow immediately or spend a few moments speaking to those left behind and picking up whatever strikes your fancy in the kitchen.

2. The Yawning Portal - The Well Room

³ Depending on your exchange and how you treat him, you can earn 150XP+50XP.

You enter the well room at the top of the stairs down and are, almost immediately engaged in a cut scene. You find that your wounds from the fight upstairs are all healed and you can participate, to a limited extent, in the continuing battle with the Drow down here. After the Drow flee and you are catching your breath, a Beholder appears from the well hole and Durnan gets knocked down. The other four Neverwinter adventurers chase off after the Beholder, disappearing down the well hole elevator.



1. To/From Tavern
2. To/From Underdark

When they have left, Durnan gets up, dusts himself off and is clearly upset by what he considers the foolishness of the others in charging off without knowing what they are up against. He will ask you to go down, but only after you have properly prepared. He tells you White Thesta can supply a lot of kit and has a special item for you. He will also answer any questions you may pose. He is a font of knowledge on the Underdark, some of which will help you survive. If you ask him about where you can get supplies, he will tell you about the stores of Argali Silth and Sobray in Waterdeep. (This will permit you to go outside the tavern if Grayban has previously blocked you from doing so.)

If you decide to look about the well room before speaking to Thesta or going out to the Waterdeep merchants, you can pick up a bit of sellable loot. But more important, you will meet Deekin Scalesinger, chronicler of great adventures in Undrentide. Not just a silly, simple Kobold, Deekin has a lot going for him and anyone smart enough to take him along as a henchman.

You definitely do want to speak to Thesta. If you noticed back up in the Tavern, she was able to resurrect many of the adventurers killed by the Drow. The item Durnan said she had for you is a *Rod of Resurrection*, something you will need if you want to get very far along in the adventure. She is also a merchant and a healer.

3. Waterdeep

Coming out of the Tavern, you will meet a city guard and also, perhaps, run into some marauding Dueregar, which you should be able to handle.



1. To/From The Yawning Portal (4)
2. Argali Silth (Arms Merchant)
3. Sobray (Potions and other items)
4. The Empty Keg Inn (Closed)
5. Barricade (No Exit)
6. Portal To/From Level 2E (2)
7. The River Gate (No Access)

Exploring, you will come to the shop of Argali Silth. She is an armorer and has some quite powerful items, if you can afford them. I couldn't. The shop of Sobray, a mage, will at first appear closed and locked, but he will open up on learning who you are. He will tell you the story of how the University was attacked by the Drow and of his not so miraculous deliverance from danger. You can get a first hand view of that attack by looking in his telescope. He is a fast talking mountebank. He has quite a good selection of goods for sale, but most were quite expensive, well beyond my resources. The least unreasonably priced were a few potions that I thought might be helpful.

Don't bother to engage with his pedestal unless you are a sucker for punishment. No good comes of it. There are a couple of doors in the city that you can unlock and check out for loot if you don't mind the alignment shifts. There is a barricade on the West, near Sobray's which you cannot pass. The Empty Keg Inn is closed for the duration. And, although the map suggests that there is something that can be done at the River Gate, there is no way for you to get access to it.

So, back to the Well Room in the Yawning Portal. Buy anything you might want from Thesta and tell Durnan you are read to descend into the Underdark. Then pull the lever, go into the elevator and Durnan will send you down.

(Before going down, I used one of my Rogue Stones to set up a portal arrival place near the elevator, in case I ever had to get back up quickly.)

XP earned in this area:

Rat, Dueregar: @50XP

II. THE UNDERMOUNTAIN

1. The Entry

When you arrive below, you are approached by a goblin called Grovel. And grovel he does. He is informative about the Underdark and will beg you to help him escape. If you decide to do that, pull the chain and Durnan will take him up to the Well room⁴.

Then I mapped out the area and came to the entrance to the Undermountain, although I had to deal with a Skeleton Warrior before I could go any farther.



1. To/From Inn Well Room (2)
2. To/From Undermountain (1)

⁴ If you return up the well later and persuade Durnan to let him stay but keep an eye on him by putting him to work as a cleaner, you get an alignment shift +3 to Good.

XP earned in this area:

Skeleton Warrior: 50XP

2. Undermountain - Level 1C

On entering, the first thing I saw was a pile of bones on which there was a scroll of *Lesser Spell Breach* and a bit farther on a torch. Proceeding, I found the body of Sharwyn and brought her back to life with the *Resurrection Rod* White Thesta had given me. I never liked Sharwyn but figured, what the heck, I couldn't leave her there just to rot away. With a bit of questioning, I found out what had happened to her. The others were nowhere in sight and she didn't know where they had gone. I asked if she wanted to come along with me, but she clearly had had enough. So I didn't press the point and she went back up to Waterdeep.



1. To/From Entry (2)
2. Lever Array
3. Hall of Sitting Kings
4. Hall of Mirrors
5. Ogres & Harpies
6. Dueregar & Drow
7. Old Blue Dragon
- 8a/b. To/From Level 1S (1a/b)
- 9a/b. To/From Level 1N (1a/b)
10. To/From Level 2C (1a)

- c. Chest (Portal)
 p. Portal (to random Location on Level 1)
 S. Secret Door

Beyond where she had fallen, I saw some levers and was going to check them out when a rat scurried in front of me, to the North. I chased it and did it in. After tallying up my XP, I noticed a secret door that opened to the West. In the room behind it there was a booby-trapped and locked chest, on which I used my rogue skills successfully. That netted 950GP and a couple of Healer's Kits+1, plus a Phenalope. There being nothing else in the room and no other doors, I went back out and returned to the levers.

Looking at the lever array, I discovered the levers needed some kind of control rod to be usable. Beyond the lever array was a sort of causeway blocked by a bunch of columns of different colours. "Aha!" I said to Deekin, "A puzzle that needs solving." And we decided we had to find the four levers needed to get those rods moving.

Because the rat had run to the North, that was the direction we decided to explore first. Following the hallway North and westward, we came to a couple of sets of bones, an ogre protecting a chest and a portal spot which I decided to skirt around until I had a better sense of the place. Past the portal to the North, I found another secret door. There was not much in the room other than another secret door that opened to a large chamber to the North.

XP earned in this area:

Drow Marksman: 33XP
Rat, Ogre, Drow Commando: 50XP
Hook Horror: @62XP

The Hall of the Sitting Kings

That was, I discovered soon enough, the Hall of the Sitting Kings. It was called that because in it were nine thrones, seven of which were occupied by a statue-like cadavers whose eyes had a malevolent glimmer. I picked up a bit of loot from the bones on the two unoccupied thrones and then inspected each of the others carefully. Each had a malevolent air but were immobile. It was not until I came to the throne of Chief Udon, in the Eastern end of the chamber that anything happened.

At it, a talking sword (*Enserric*), told me of its history and magical enhancements. It persuaded me to take it from the statue, despite the slight catch it mentioned. The catch was more than slight, however. When I took possession of the sword, all of the statues came alive and attacked me. Luckily, there were only two active early on and I was able to despatch them relatively easily.

I found, though, that the others came on strongly and almost en masse. When I started to weaken and take damage, I had to duck and weave and dodge them and run back into the secret room in order to get away from them before being killed. That quick exit let me get to a spot where I could rest up, recuperate, recharge my spells and equip *Enserric*. Before going back and trying to deal with the remaining ghouls in the chamber. The sword had a +4 enhancement and a Vampiric regeneration which gave me a bit of an advantage. Not much, however. I found I had to use the quick exit and rest up several times and that I had to time my exits carefully to avoid getting killed.

The effort to kill all the ghouls was worth the trouble, however. The loot was good. Besides *Enserric*, I picked up a *Full Plate Armour*+4, *Bracers of Dexterity*+3, a *Staff of Defense*, a *Double Axe*+2, a *Katana*+2, not to mention a *Blue Rod* (clearly intended to help solve that puzzle) and a *Skull Key*, the use of which I had yet to discover. Rather than lug all that loot along, I decided to take a break, head back up to the Inn and flog off all the stuff I didn't want to carry to White Thesta. Then I had enough GP to buy a bunch of useful potions After which I went back down to where I had left off, the door at the Northwest corner of the Hall of Sitting Kings.

That opened on to a hall that led West to where I had to choose between heading South or Northwest. I followed the later and entered a hallway that ended North to a door (to Level 1N). To get to the door, I had to skirt another portal. I left that portal, too, to explore later, after I had cleared this part of the level.

Moving back South, there was a short hallway leading to a door that opened on to another long chamber.

XP earned in this area:

King Krolon: 489XP
Lady Fensor, Revisionist Balothon: @1036XP
Chief Udon: 1141XP
Sorceress: 2167XP

The Hall of Mirrors

It quickly became evident that this was the Hall of Mirrors: Along each of the East and West walls, a half dozen mirrors stood. At the south end, I found the body of Daelan Red Tiger and resuscitated him. Alive once again, he related what had happened to him in the hall area. Like Sharwyn, he was not keen on joining Deekin and me in going forward, but he did give us a warning about the one mirror that had brought him down. Then he ran back up to the Inn.

I checked out the mirrors on the West wall and got some good stuff. I found, however, that it was worthwhile being very choosy about which of the items available in each mirror to take first, because only one can be taken into inventory. The rest disappear. On the east wall, one of the two mirrors in the centre part was the one that brought a mirror image of me to life. That image proceeded to try to do me in. Forewarned by Daelan's tale of woe, I was careful to wait until the other me attacked before I took a few buffing potions (and Deekin did his bard song). That gave me enough of an advantage that I was able to polish myself off quite handily.

XP earned in this area:

Bring Daelan Red Tiger to Life: 500XP

Kill Mirror Image of yourself: 50XP

Ogres, Harpies, Dueregar, Drow and an Old Blue Dragon

From the Hall of Mirrors, I checked out a chamber to the Southeast, avoiding the portal located there and then went through a door to the South. There, I saw a bunch of Ogres and harpies fighting each other. I was going to watch and let them wear themselves down and thin out their numbers before taking any of them on. After the Ogres had finished off the Harpies, they came after me. We took them in our stride and then plundered the several locked and booby-trapped chests in the chamber in which they had been fighting. There was quite a lot of good loot there, including a *White Rod*.

Moving along Eastward, I came to a chamber where quite a few Dueregar and Drow were in conclave. They all attacked us, of course, and it was touch and go for a few moments. Then I managed to bring down the Dueregar Battle Cleric and Drow Diviner one after the other and the rest were a piece of cake. Plundering the remains afterward, there was a *Leather Armour+3*, a *Small Shield+3* (which I gave to Deekin) and a set of *Goggles of Minute Seeing* (which I equipped, giving my old *Spike Helmet* to Deekin). There were several chests in the chamber also, filled with potions and other miscellaneous stuff.

From there, I went down into the Southeast corner where I found an Old Blue Dragon guarding its chamber. It was quite a challenge, but with the help of Deekin's Bard Song and potions of Bull's Strength and Speed, I got him down after a bit of cut and thrust. Good XP from him and in a chest in the little room where he kept his hoard, there was some really good stuff: the *Nameless Light Bastard Sword*, *Storm Armour*, a *Hearth Shield*, gems, scrolls and GP, as well as a *Rogue Stone*. Also, I found Halaster's Magnifying Glass, though I couldn't figure out what it did. There was so much I was slowed and knew I had to get rid of some of the loot.

I decided that I would check out how the *Relic of the Reaper* worked. It brought me to a sort of ethereal portal area called *The Gatehouse*, where I met up with the guy who seemed to be in

charge there, who called himself *The Reaper*. I didn't get a lot of joy from him, but I did find a portal area that zapped me back to the Inn's well area. So I found out successfully how the *Relic* worked and that it worked. I divested to White Thesta all of my superfluous loot.

Lighter and richer, I made my way back down to the Undermountain via the well. There, I was able to check out and map all the rest of the central area without any significant bother, apart from a few more Drow. I began to try to map out where those portals would take me, but quickly discovered that they were teleports to random areas in any of the three sections of Undermountain Level 1 (Central, North, South). There was no point in trying to record where they took me because the arrival point changed every time. So I decided to check out the South section of Level 1.

XP earned in this area:

Noxious Ogre, Raging Ogre: @50XP
 Dueregar Heavy Infantry and Spellbinder: @50XP
 Drow Marksman, Skirmisher and Commando: @50XP
 Dueregar Battle Cleric, Drow Diviner: @165XP
 Old Blue Dragon: 2167XP

3. Undermountain - Level 1S

I went to Level 1S through the door at the end of the Southeasterly hallway. No sooner had we entered than we were attacked by a bunch of real and conjured Frenzied Harpies as well as an Evil Nymph. At the end of that fight, I found myself drained of a level and went back out to Level 1C, to the Entry and up the well to White Thesta for a healing session. Then back down to explore the area we had cleared. In one corner there was a chest containing a *Belt of Agility*+4 (which I immediately equipped), a *Rogue Stone*, a *Potion of Lore*, a *Healer's Kit*+8 and a *Phenalope*. To the South opened a hallway and I noticed a secret door that opened to the East. Of course I took the secret door and then almost immediately noticed another secret door.



- 1a. To/From Level 1C (8a)
- 1b. To/From Level 1C (8b)
- 2. Bomb Maker
- 3. Three Puzzling Statues
- 4. Fairy Sorceress

- p. Portal (to random Location on Level 1)
- S. Secret Door

The Bomb Maker

That opened into a chamber, or rather a peninsula surrounded by a lake of fire. In the middle

there was a fairy Bomb Maker and a skeleton carrying a bomb appeared walking toward me. I knew immediately that more would continue to appear unless I did away with the maker first. (That's what Bomb Makers do: Make bombs.) So I went straight to it and despatched it. Luckily, we only took a bit of damage from the few bombs that did go off. Looking around afterward, I found a *Yellow Rod* and a *Pixie Lance* dagger on the bomb maker's remains.

Leaving the Bomb Maker's area and proceeding South, I spotted a secret door on my left. Behind it was a chamber with a sarcophagus that contained some minor loot. Back out in the hall, I continued South and skirting a portal, went East. At the end of this dead end passage, I found a corpse on which there was a *Yellow Rod* and a Sapphire.

Puzzling Statues

Skirting the portal again and going back North from it, I spotted another secret door to the West, opposite the one opening to the sarcophagus. That got me back into the hallway that opened off the chamber we entered on first coming into Level 1S. Heading South, we came to a chamber with a bunch of Duregar, all of which we despatched fairly handily. Poking around afterward, I found in a chest a *Green Rod*, a *Healer's Kit+3*, a *Potion of Bull's Strength* and an Amethyst.

West from that chamber, across a narrow causeway, we came to an area with a locked door and three statues with levers beside them. Nothing normal I tried would unlock the door. It didn't take a genius to figure out that those statues and levers had something to do with unlocking the door. What, precisely, took a long time for me to figure out. It was pretty evident also that the three statues had to be pointed at the door to open it. (A beam appeared when one was directly aligned with the door.) Eventually it dawned on me that to move a statue so that it faced the door, I had to "use" it. And to lock it in place, I had to "use" the lever as soon as the beam appeared. With the third beam activated, the door burst into pieces.

Behind the door was a small chamber with a chest in it. Inside was a *Copper Helmet*, a *Canaith Mandolin*, a *Gemsword* and 5000GP. I gave the helmet and mandolin to Deekin. He could use them and I could not. Besides which, I had promised him first dibs on loot in our next find. He was quite pleased and besides, to my advantage, it made him a better henchman and companion.

There was not much else down in the Southeast so we made our way back up the hall leading North. I went into detect mode because I couldn't believe that there was not more to this part of the Undermountain. That turned out to be a good decision because in one corner of what had previously seemed like a *cul de sac* turned out to have a secret door at the end of it. Through that secret door was another chamber, which seemed to have nothing but another of those portals that teleported randomly. The detect mode worked so well previously that I tried it again and found another secret door out of the chamber, opening to the Southwest.

It opened on to a long narrow room with several cocoons scattered about. I checked a couple, uncovering some minor loot. At the second, we disturbed several Wraith and Dire Spiders, which we were able to handle quite easily. After them, however, came a Queen Spider which was not so easily despatched. We did so, however and were able to pick the meagre loot without further interruption.

The Fairy Sorceress

Looking about at leisure, I spotted a door that opened to the South. Going through it, we were attacked by Frenzied Harpies, Evil Fairies and Fairy Minions. At the far end, concealed by some spell or other, I spotted a Fairy Sorceress and went right at her while Deekin dealt with the others. She was quite a handful and we exchanged blows for quite a while. Eventually, when it became clear to her that she was on the losing end, she begged me to let her surrender. I decided to do that, which was also a good choice because she gave me some good intel on what had been happening in the Undermountain and specifically told me about what I might expect in the North part of the level we were on. Apparently some big mother of an ogre was her nemesis and chief opponent for control of that part of the underworld.

For letting her go, she gave up her belongings in a little room off the chamber. Passing by a vine growing over two altars, I picked up a *Branch of Giving*. It, apparently could only be used by Druids and Rangers on animals. So it was not of much use, as far as I was concerned. In the chests (one of which was booby-trapped), I found a *Wail of the Banshee* scroll, a *Hide Armour+4* and a *Potion of Lesser Restoration*, mostly small beer. There was also a barrel of *Alchemist's Fire*. I wasn't sure what to do with it but figured something like it might come in handy. (Why else would it have been put there?) It was heavy, though, so I asked Deekin to lug it. Better he should be slowed than I.

We made our way Northwest though the spider cocoon chamber and opened the door to the North. There we saw a bunch of Ogres fighting a bunch of Frenzied Harpies. Once the Ogres had done with the Harpies, they came after us: A big mistake on their part. After finishing with them, I opened us the chests in the room. One contained a *Fire Agate*, a *Yellow Rod* and 449GP. The other had a *One with the Land* scroll, a *White Rod*, a *Potion of Clarity* and 1340GP.

Two doors opened to the North of this chamber, on to a narrow rectangular chamber in which there were three sarcophagi and three Zombie Protectors. Once we had done with the Protectors, we found there was nothing in the sarcophagi. Looking around, I found a secret door to the West, leading to a long chamber to the South. There was nothing much in it other than a door at the end which opened West into the room where we had fought the Ogres a while back.

With nothing else to see or do in this area, we went back out to Level 1C via the door in the Zombie Protector chamber, made our way back up to the Inn's well room, flogged all of our excess loot to White Thesta, rested and then went back down the well. From the Entry area, we went Northeast and through the door that led to Level 1N.

XP earned in this area:

Frenzied Harpy: @50XP

Evil Nymph: 525XP

Dueregar Cleric, Spellbinder, Heavy Infantry: @50XP

Wraith Spider, Dire Spider: @50XP

Queen Spider: 1087XP

Evil Fairy, Fairy Minion: @50XP

Allow Fairy Sorceress to Surrender: 2000XP

Allow Fairy Sorceress to Live: 50XP

Raging Ogre, Noxious Ogre, Troll Bodyguard: @50XP

4. Undermountain - Level 1N

Through the door from Level 1C, we started North. Ahead of us in the hallway, I saw a corpse on which I found a *Green Rod*, a set of *Thieve's Tools+3* and a Greenstone. In a cul de sac nearby, after fighting off a Raging Ogre, I found a chest with a *Two-bladed Sword+3*, an Emerald and a *Healer's Kit+10*.



- 1a. To/From Level 1C (9a)
- 1b. To/From Level 1C (9b)
- 2. Disappearing Chest Chamber
- 3. Maze Trap Chamber
- 4. Chamber of the Disappearing Chests
- 5. Drow & Dueregar
- 6. The Mummy Lord
- 7. Olgin Hasterian
- 8. To/From Level 2C (1b)

- p. Portal (to random Location on Level 1)
- S. Secret Door

Tricks & Traps

Instead of going farther North, I turned back and followed the hall where we had entered to the West. Just before it turned North, I noticed a secret door to the South and we went in. Inside, there was a chamber with a chest at each end. For a moment there, I was taken aback: When I approached each chest, it disappeared before my eyes. Then I noticed there was a pressure plate in front of each chest. I led Deekin over to one of the chests and told him to hold his position there on it. Then I went to the chest at the other end of the room and was able to open and loot it (*Composite Longbow+3*, *Scarlet & Blue Lesser Ioun Stone*, Emerald). Moving Deekin over to the other pressure plate and repeating the process, I found a *Composite Shortbow+3*, a *Dusty Rose lesser Ioun Stone*, 2600GP, a Fire Opal and a *Potion of Cure Critical Wounds*.

Coming out of the chamber, we headed North and promptly ran into an other Ogre or two and an Orc Dart Master, before spotting a short hallway and door on our left (West). Beyond that door was a large chamber that appeared to be one big trap maze. Not only were there traps all over the floor, there were two towers that began sending out quite debilitating zap rays, there were also a couple of Drow Marksmen at one end of the room shooting away at us. I ducked back out the door and told Deekin to hold fast there while I figured out what to do. He was just too likely to run in and

get himself killed tripping traps, getting zapped or shot.

Another quick peek in and I saw a lever behind each of the Drow. Putting two and two and two together, I came up with a plan: Get through the maze, kill the Drow and throw the levers. Easy to plan. Not so easy to do. I thought I saw a path through the maze and started through it. I got most of the way to near where the Drow were, taking a few hits, when I decided to charge right at them. When I got to them I was down to my last few HP so gulped down a couple of *Cure Critical Wounds* potions. That got me enough strength back, barely, to be able to kill the Drow and throw the levers. As I thought, throwing the levers shut down the zapping towers and defused the trap maze.

I called Deekin in and over, rested up and then checked out the room. In a chest at the North end, I found an *Adamantine Breastplate*, a *Throwing Axe+6*, a *Scroll of Find Traps* and a *Gem of Brightness*. I was tempted to equip the breastplate because it had a good damage soak capability but decided to stick with what I had and gave it to Deekin to carry, in order to distribute our loot load a bit better. I gave the Gem to Deekin thinking he might be able to use it in a pinch. At the South end of the room, a door led back into Level 1C.

Back out through the East door we had first entered by, I found another secret door on my left. It opened on to a winding hallway strewn with cocoons. Skirting another of those portals, I rifled a cocoon that had a *Nymph Cloak+3*, which I gave to Deekin. (A kobold can always use extra charisma.) I kept the 841Gp and the other small loot for myself. As we moved through the place, a Dire, Wraith and Queen Spider came at us.

XP earned in this area:

Raging Ogre, Noxious Ogre, Troll Bodyguard: @50XP

Drow Marksman, Orc Dart Master: @50XP

Dire Spider, Wraith Spider: 50XP

Queen Spider: 1087XP

A Conundrum, Ogres & Other Bad Things

Emerging from the spiders' lair, we went North. At the first crossways, we turned left and at the end of the passage saw a door on our left. Inside, there were several chests, all of which looked very inviting. But I remembered more than one of the creatures or people with whom I had spoken had said that not everything in the Underdark was what it seemed. I tried using a *Dispel Magic* scroll, but apparently my ability to use magic items was not high enough because that ended in failure. I decided in the end to leave the chests and come back later perhaps.⁵

Dejected at our failure to figure out the chests conundrum, we left. Only to run into a bunch of marauding Ogres and a Drow. We polished off the Ogres and followed the Drow who ran off into an chamber to the West. That landed us in the midst of a gaggle of Dueregar and Drow and, of course, a melee ensued. This, at least was a battle with some reward at the end. We picked up

⁵ If you try to open a chest, they all disappear and you are left with nothing. I tried the *Dispel Magic* scroll, but the skill level needed to break the destructions spell on the chests was 26, The highest I could manage was 15, so I failed miserably. I thought I might increase my ability to use magic items at the next leveling up and then perhaps return later to loot the chests. I remember vaguely from a previous run through of the game that there was a little good stuff there, I can't remember, however, what it was now.

afterward a set of Greenleaf Armour which I gave to Deekin. I equipped the *Boots of Striding*+4 and the *Cowl of Warding* myself. Also among the bodies was a *Red Rod*, a *Rapier of the High Road*, a *Drow Longsword*+2, several gems and healing items.

Leaving the chamber, we proceeded Eastward, passing what looked like a moveable wall on our left. Clearly a gateway to somewhere. I decided to leave it for the moment and we went to the door at the end of the hallway. That opened into another filled with Orcs and Dueregar. When it was all over, we rifled the remains and chests. There was not much: The most valuable things were a pair of *Gloves of the Hinn Fist*+5, a *White Rod* and 441GP. At the North end of this chamber there was a door that opened into a smaller chamber with a sarcophagus in the middle. Deekin said he didn't have a good feeling about rifling it, but I went ahead. That netted a Greater Amulet of Health, an emerald and a fire agate. It also caused a Mummy Lord to rise up. He was not easy to put down, but we did it.

With nothing else to find in that area, we went back to that moveable wall we had passed earlier. It opened without any problem. The problem was apparent after we went in: A veritable horde of Raging and Noxious Ogres. Eventually, we reduced them to rubble, picked through the remains and chests in the room and found a door at the end of a short hallway to the West.

I had a sense that we were coming to the end of this area. And the sight of all those Ogres we had just disposed of brought back to me what the Fairy had said about a big Ogre in the North. So, before entering, I buffed us up with *Bull's Strength* and *Speed* potions and a few other spells. A good thing too, because inside we ran into Olgin Hasterian, the big Ogre himself. That was quite a battle. I just about had him down when he disappeared. A Summoned Dire Bear came charging at us from the West corner of the chamber and I ran toward it and past it, which brought the Ogre back into sight. I left the bear to Deekin and went at Hasterian. I just about had him down again when he begged for a truce.

At that point, I had several options: Kill him outright, Accept the Truce and Speak to him to find out what he knew, and then Let him go or just Kill him anyway. I figured that I had nothing to lose by hearing what he had to say and then deciding what to do with him.⁶ A good thing I did that: He told me about how to clear away the boulder barrier to the door that led down to the next level of the Undermountain.⁷ After I had got all the intelligence I could out of him, I decided to kill him. Fairies generally did not do a lot of harm, but you can never trust an Ogre, especially an intelligent sorcerer ogre.

With the Ogre gone, I decided to use the *Barrel of Alchemist's Fire* to blow the boulders away from the entrance down to the next level. So I lit the fuse and deekin and I hid around the corner until it blew them all to smithereens. That, indeed, opened the way down.

⁶ By accepting the truce, talking to him and learning about the way down to the next level and then killing him instead of letting him go, you will get the maximum number of XP. Doing it that way also gets three valuable pieces of kit from his body. These are a set of *Dragon's Slippers*, an enhanced weapon and an enhanced capability belt or some other enhanced item. What these are seems to be based on the luck of the draw in the game algorithm. The boots are the only constant. I went through the routine a few times until I got the *Belt of Fire Giant Strength* (Strength+5) that I wanted and a nifty sword.

⁷ That Barrel of Alchemist's Fire that I found after releasing the Fairy back in the South was exactly what was needed to blow up the boulder blockage.

Then I remembered those levers we saw back when first coming into the central area. I still had the Red, Blue, Green, Yellow and White rods I had picked up along the way and thought I should see what they did with those levers and the various coloured pillars that had blocked the way straight forward. So I went back and experimented a bit and then figured out how to reduce all the coloured pillars to nothing and open the way to another entrance to the next level down.⁸

XP earned in this area:

Orc War Priest: @41XP
 Raging Ogre, Noxious Ogre, Troll Bodyguard: @50XP
 Drow Marksman, Orc Dart Master: @50XP
 Dueregar Battle Cleric, Spellbinder and Heavy Infantry: @50XP
 Mummy Lord: 360XP
 Kill Hasterian in battle: 1398XP
 Accept Truce with Hasterian: 2000XP
 Kill Hasterian after Truce and Intelligence Tap: 2000 to 3000XP
 Use *Barrel of Alchemist's Fire* to blow up boulder blockage: 2000XP

5. Undermountain - Level 2C - The Challenge of the Chains

Whichever entrance to Level 2C I used, we entered either at the North or South end of a hall which opened to the East. As we entered the hall, a cut scene started in which a Flesh Golem was being chased by Drow and escaped through a door that locked magically behind him. In front of the door, he went through there was a set of four coloured chains. "Aha!", I thought, "Another puzzle to solve!" After the cut scene, we were back at the start of the hall to the East.

Before taking another step, I noticed a secret door on my left (North). Once through it, I found a chamber with another bunch of chests that reeked of magic protection in the centre. Unfortunately, I still did not have enough use magic item ability to break the spell, so I left these chests for later.⁹

Back in the hall, we went through a door where a Goblin and then a Drow Lookout came at us. After despatching them, I found on their bodies several potions, a hundred or so GP, a crossbow, bolts and arrows, a small key, a *Yellow Chain* and a Bastard Sword.

⁸ Each lever will have an effect on one of the four rows of pillars. The lever on the far left is for the first row, the next is for the second row and so on. You have to insert into the lever a rod of the colour of the pillar you want to reduce, then shift the lever, then wait and watch as the pillar pulsates through its reduction throes. You can clear a narrow path if you are in a hurry to get through or else just clear the whole lot of pillars away. I did not get any XP for solving the puzzle. I might have, perhaps, if I had not blown up the boulders in the North, but I did not bother to go back to an earlier saved game to see whether that was, in fact, the case.

⁹ The spell on the chest requires an ability score of 28 to break. The best I could manage with potions of *Clarity*, *Owl's Wisdom* and *Fox's Cunning* was 18.



- 1a. To/From Level 1C (10)
- 1b. To/From Level 1N(8)
2. Magically Protected Chests
3. Pond of Colours
4. To/From Level 2S (1)
5. To/From Level 2E (1)
6. To/From Level 2N (1)
7. To/From Level 3C (1)

S. Secret Door

Through another door, we came on to a parapet in a vast open chamber. To our left (North) I spotted several piles of treasure. “Easy pickings!” I thought. Until a Mummy Lord and a couple of followers appeared and took exception to our plundering. Afterward, we picked up several gems, a few hundred GP, some potions and a *Tasha’s Hideous Laughter* which I gave to Deekin. He, as a Bard, could use it.

Following the parapet South and East, we passed a statue of King Jonah the Unlucky, another of King Ugbash the Unwashed and came to the area that had appeared in the cut scene. Two Drow Commando were at the door the ogre had gone through, but left it and attacked us. Once we had done with them, I could see that the door had been magically locked. In the area in front of the door, there was a Pond of Colours with four pillars around it each emanating a different colour (yellow, green, red and purple).

It didn’t take superhuman intelligence to work out that the pillars and pond had something to do with opening the door. I remembered the Yellow Chain I had picked up and took it over to the yellow-lit pedestal. Sure enough, the chain winched itself up from the pedestal. I looked in the pool but all that was there was a bunch of colours swirling around. It would be too simple just to have to get and winch up the other three coloured chains to open the door, but I knew that getting them was key to doing so. So, off we went in search of the other chains.

Retracing our steps South, in front of us was a door. It opened into Level 2S.

XP earned in this area:

Drow Lookout, Drow Commando, Mummy, Rat: @50XP

Mummy Lord: @280XP

6. Undermountain - Level 2S

Spotting footprints ahead of us, we went through the door to which they led. And there were attacked by a mob of Dueregar and Drow Marksmen. Looking around afterward, I found an *Ice*

Talon dagger, several gems and other miscellaneous minor loot in a couple of crates. There were more footprints going to a door that opened to the East. So we rested up and then went through it.



1. To/From Level 2C (4)
2. Drow Sub-Commander HQ

It opened to a chamber with more Dueregar, including a Battle Cleric that refused to die for the longest time. He must have had a lot of healing spells and potions. With them out of the way, we followed more footprints to yet another door. Through It, I heard some Drow saying they had a chain and were preparing to go find the others. I decided we should go in and relieve them of their burden. As we entered, one of them cast a spell of Darkness, but we were able to get them all in relatively short order. Afterward, there was some minor loot in a couple of crates and on some remains, a small red key.

We went through the door on the East wall and ran into a Hobgoblin Shaman, a Drow sub-Commander and some summoned Dire Spiders. This was not an easy battle. I was kept so busy I didn't get a chance to use any of my healing potions. When we had finally done this bunch in, I realized that I was only a whisker away from death myself and Deekin not much better. Luck was with us, however, and we were able to rest and recover before looking around.

I went to the Drow Sub-Commander's corpse and relieved it of its set of *Mirrored Armour*, *Commander's Ring*, *Headband of Intellect*, *Scarab of Protection+4*, *Dagger+3*, *Green Chain* and *Drow Commander's Key*. Then I noticed the booby-trapped chest behind the corpse. After disabling the trap, I found inside a Djinni Bottle, which contained Volkarion, a merchant.

Volkarion was a veritable and very welcome merchant. I summoned him and after a bit of back and forth, he gave me an activation stone for a portal in Level 2E that could transport us to and from Waterdeep. After a bit more talk he suggested that the Drow might have had something to do with Halaster's disappearance. Finally, he offered me access to his store. Which I gladly accepted, if only to be able to offload excess loot without having to travel back to deal with Waterdeep merchants. Besides, Volkarion had some really good stuff: Lots of healing potions, not to mention a *Rod of Resurrection*, a *Bag of Holding* and a *Greater Magic Pouch*, all three of which I bought.

After getting over my joy at finding Volkarion, I looked around and saw Tomi's corpse. I decided to resurrect him and see what he had to say. He told me that Linu had gone missing in the Eastern part of the level after she had taken pity on some dubious slaves. He himself had been killed trying to steal Drow jewellery while they were wearing it. Not the smartest of tactical decisions. Nonetheless, I took him on as an additional henchman, for old time's sake, although I wasn't sure we

needed him. If nothing else, he could take some of the melee load off Deekin. I thought I would see how it worked out and decide a little later.

In a couple more chests in this chamber, I found a *Dove's Harp*, a *Gust of Wind* scroll which I gave to Deekin. The *Rogue Stone* and the *Golden Chalice of Lathander* I kept myself, putting the latter into a quickslot, just in case we might ever all need some healing at once.

We made our way back out to the parapet in Level 2C and moved East and North, past the statues of Black Jack 'The Butcher' and Kelvin Blackstaff until we came to a door in the middle of the East wall. Through it we went.

XP earned in this area:

Dueregar Heavy Infantry: 41XP or 50XP

Drow Diviner, Magus, Marksman & Veteran Scout: @50XP

Dueregar Spellbinder & Battle Cleric: @50XP

Drow Sub-Commander: 554XP

7. Undermountain - Level 2E

Through it we went. And found footprints leading to another door. Behind that were Rakshasa in abundance. And not very welcoming. Among the remains afterward, we found a *Mirror Shield*, *Kumakawa* Armour and a *Sickle*+3 as well as a *Nymph Cloak*+5 and a brass key.



1. To/From Level 2C (5)
2. Portal To/From Waterdeep (6)
3. Sarcophagus

We followed footprints to the other door in the room and came into a larger chamber where an apparent slave called Shareesh and spun us a tale of enslavement and helping us to find a portal to Waterdeep. Well, I already knew about the portal from Volkarion and Tomi had told me about how Linu had gone missing after agreeing to help slaves. This guy's story sounded more than a little fishy to me and adding to my suspicions was the fact that he used a Rakshasa name. So I played along, telling him I had the portal activation stone he wanted, but instantly ready for a fight.

Rightly so, because as soon as I had said that Volkarion appeared and unmasked Shareesh for the Rakshasa he was. And the fight began. I took care of Shareesh first and then went after the Rakshasa First Born in a corner. With the heavy hitters out of the way, the others eventually succumbed. Picking through the remains afterward, I found a pair of *Boots of the Sun Soul*+4, another *Rogue Stone*, a two-bladed sword named *Honour & Death* and a *Red Chain*. Also a bunch of Rakshasa eyes, whatever their worth might be. In a couple of chests were a *Finger of Death* scroll and some GP.

I was going to put the activation stone into the portal that Volkarion and Shareesh had mentioned, but I decided to hold off for a bit. I wasn't sure I wanted any creatures other than ourselves having ready access to Waterdeep and those Drow and Rakshasa certainly wanted it for something nefarious. A good thing too, because in the next chamber were more Rakshasa First Born and Adepts with whom we had to deal. With them all done for, I opened the sarcophagus at one wall and found Linu's body.

After bringing her back to life, we learned her version of events. I asked if she wanted to come along with me but she said I already had as many as I could handle with me and went back off to the Inn in Waterdeep. I almost would have preferred to have her with me rather than Tomi. But she was always calling me "Dear" and that grated after the first three times, so I was glad to see her go. I could live with Tomi's impetuosity and coarse humour, but Linu's goody-goodness was just too much for this Paladin.

There was not much in the chests around the chamber: Some GP, scrolls of *True Strike* and *Summon Creature II* and other piddling stuff. I gave the cloak we had found earlier and the two scrolls to Deekin. Tomi seemed to be doing just fine with what he had and I certainly wasn't going to give him any booze.

With all that over and done with, we went back to the next room and I put the activation stone into the portal. A quick check proved that it worked and transported us back to Waterdeep. After selling some excess loot and buying some healing potions, we returned back down to Level 2. The portal remained open and there was no way that I could see to close it. So I made a mental note to make doubly sure that we left no monsters behind us as we progressed who might make their way up to Waterdeep through the portal.

XP earned in this area:

Rakshasa: @133XP, @156XP
Shareesh, Rakshasa Adept: @234XP
Rakshasa First Born: @462XP, @630XP
Bring Linu back to life: 500XP

8. Undermountain - Level 2N

Back out on the parapet, as we moved Northward, we had to clear several booby-trapped areas. Passing the statues of Gregor the Unshaven and Birtron the Magnificent, we came to a door opening to the North. Behind it was an empty chamber with another door to the North. Using the small key I had picked up previously, I opened it and faced a chamber full of Goblin Pickets. These were not hard to kill, just pesky and persistent. On their remains I found a few GP and a potion of *Endurance*.

A door on the West wall opened into a chamber patrolled by a Stone Giant "Stoney". He was surprisingly easy to overcome. On his remains, I found a pair of *Boots of Speed* and a set of *Red Dragon Armour*, both of which I equipped. There was also a *Double Axe+2* and a *Stone Cold Club*. In a couple of crates I found 305GP plus some other loot, but no *Purple Chain*. I wondered whether I had missed something coming to this point and began to worry.



1. To/From Level 2C (6)
2. Stoney
3. Argo Blacktooth

So I backtracked. Sure enough, rushing into that second chamber, we were so distracted by the Goblin Pickets on our way in that all three of us entirely missed a door that opened to the East. Behind it was another mob of Goblins we had to suppress. Quality again prevailed against quantity. Moving forward, we had to fight more goblins and avoid several booby-traps they had laid for us. Then we came to a narrow bridge barred by two locked iron grates and guarded by dozens of Goblin Pickets. It wasn't easy unlocking those grates under fire from the Pickets and the two Ballistas, but we did it. In retrospect, it would have been smarter to pick off the goblins using our ranged weapons. Still we got through with minimal damage. There was not much on the remains, only a few GP and a pair of *Gloves of the Long Death*+5.

Behind a locked and booby-trapped door off this area, we found Argo Blacktooth, apparently in charge of three levers (Red, Green, Yellow) with magical properties. I didn't get a chance to question him because he fought stupidly. Afterward, I found on him a *Purple Chain*, a *Blue Dragon Armour*, a *Belt of Hill Giant Strength*, a *Planar Mace* and some miscellaneous small loot and a few GP. I was not sure what to do with those levers, but I figured if they were turned on it was for no good reason, so I turned them off. Or if not off, then at least discharged some of their magical properties.

With all the chains in hand, we charged back to the Pool of Colours. I was very pleased with my new *Boots of Haste* and how quickly they enabled me to move.¹⁰

XP earned in this area:

Goblin Picket, Elite, Shaman: @41XP

Argo Blacktooth: 396XP

Stoney: 462XP

9. Undermountain - Level 2C (Reprise)

Back at the pool area, I spent a long time trying to figure out what to do. First, I winched up

¹⁰ Back at the pond, Tomi initiated an exchange in which he told me that the door had been magically protected with chains and that when it had been opened they had flown off to different parts of the level. I suspect it may have been intended that this conversation take place before we had gone through the South, East and North sectors. It just confirmed what I had thought on first seeing the pond and pillars: A puzzle to be solved.

all of the chains above their respective pedestals. Then I tried pulling the chains at random, to no avail. Eventually, it dawned upon me to check out the swirling colours in the pool, i.e., “use” the pool. At first, I didn’t notice that the four different colours then appeared in a sequence of six above the pool. But when I did, I made a note of the sequence. [It didn’t help that I tend to be Yellow/Green and Red/Green colour-blind. Eventually again, I was able to position myself so the the colours showed themselves against a black background and was able to make them out.]

With the sequence noted, I tried to go to each pedestal and pull the chain (“use” the pedestal) in proper colour sequence. There were many failures in this procedure because a Wyrmling Red Dragon kept appearing and attacking while I tried to do the chain pulling. Although Deekin and Tomi usually took care of the wyrmling quite handily, there seem to have been many failures because I had not been able to pull all the chains before the time allotted for the sequence expired. Finally, after a night of frustration, I managed it and the magically locked door opened.

As we entered the chamber behind the open door, we met the Flesh Golem we had seen the Drow chasing in that cut scene back when we entered the area. He told us he was Berger, and claimed to be Halaster’s son. He told us Halaster had been taken captive by the Drow but that they were afraid to kill him for fear the whole Undermountain would collapse. We did not get a lot more intel from im because, frankly, he was too stupid to have anything more.

I thought of killing him, just to rid the world of another waste of air, but he seemed harmless enough and I had no doubt he was stupid enough to stay right where he was for the indefinite future. So we left him and proceeded down the stairs to Level 3C.

XP earned in this area:

Red Dragon Wyrmling: @41XP

Open magically locked door: 500XP

10. Undermountain - Level 3C - The Hunt for Halaster Blackrobe

Down the stairs and through the door we came to a cave-like area and were immediately spotted and attacked by a few Drow Skirmishers. With them out of the way, I looked around and saw two possible exits from where we were: There was a door to the South and an opening to the East. Taking the path of least resistance, we were immediately stopped by a female Drow who claimed she meant us no harm and wanted to help me. She clearly did not trust us any more than we trusted her, but I figured we had nothing to lose by hearing her out.

Her name was Nathyrra and she claimed she was part of a group of rebel Drow who did not share the enthusiasm of a Drow leader called the ‘Valsharess’, Matron of the Drow Kilrath clan, for destroying Waterdeep and Neverwinter. She also offered some pretty good intel on where Halaster was being held (under heavy guard in the North), on possible allies (the Formians, enslaved by the Drow in the Southwest), on what we were up against (the *Red Sisters* assassins). All that was potentially good stuff, so I decided to give her the benefit of the doubt and follow up. I offered her a place in our group, but she declined, saying we would meet later when there might be a bit more mutual confidence building.



1. To/From Level 2C (7)
2. Nathyrra
3. Enslaved Formians
4. Formian Queen
5. Drow Camp
6. To/From Level 3N (1)

I decided it was better to line up allies before confronting the main Drow force, so we went back out and through that door to the South. We were able to handle the Drow Mine Guards easily enough, but the Drow tactician and the Minotaur Brute were a little more difficult. I was surprised that, when I freed the Formian Queen, she ran off so quickly and so little ceremony. At least she did say we would meet later and be able to speak when she was back with her hive.

Picking through the remains in the area, I found a *Staff of Command*, *Bracers of Dexterity*+4, a *Dagger*+1 and a few gems. In another pile I found a set of *Red Dragon Armour*, a *Laughing Blade Scimitar*, *Bullets of Smiting* and a pair of *Gargoyle Boots*. Finally, on another, I found a set of *Armour of Command*, a *Sandstorm Greataxe* and a ruby.

With the easy work done, we retraced our steps to where we had met Nathyrra and went into the chamber behind that door. In there the Formian Queen and a few others appeared. She told us that they had dug a tunnel that would let us avoid the high powered Drow encampment. When I said that I preferred to fight them rather than skirt about them, she said she and all her hive would attack with us. It just goes to show that it is better to make friends than enemies.....

So we went up to the door. I had Deekin sing his bard song and buff us all up with everything he had, used a couple of my own buffing spells and in we charged. It ended up quite a *Bataille royale* for precious little reward: A scroll of *Melf's Acid Arrow*, a *Harp of Charming* and a few gems. Oh yes, and 3132GP. And the Formians were as good as their word. They all came and fought valiantly. After we cleared the encampment, no other Drow or Dueregar appeared, and we made our way to the North.

XP earned in this area:

Drow Mine Guard, Magus, Expert Marksman: 35XP or 41XP

Dueregar Battle Cleric, Heavy Infantry: @41XP

Drow Lookout, Marksman, Commando: @41XP

Drow Head Curate: 335XP

Drow Tactician: @492XP

Minotaur Brute: 630XP

11. Undermountain - Level 3N

We came through the door and looked around. As we did, Nathyrra came up to us again and warned us about another strong Drow encampment ahead. She told us about a way to avoid an initial head on confrontation and to us two of the Drow's own powerful weapons against them. That sounded like a good idea, so we followed her advice. I was beginning to like that girl.

We skirted toward the North and East, finding a path hidden from view of the Drow camp. As we made our way West, we ran into a Beholder Lookout, but managed to put it down before it could alert the Drow. Then we found the hidden passage leading to the rear of the Drow War Cannon emplacements.



1. To/From Level 3C (6)
2. Pile of Rocks
3. Drow War Cannon
4. To/From Level 3W (1)

I decided that getting control of the weapons required finesse, so I ordered Deekin and Tomi to stand fast while I cast a *Bull's Strength* spell on myself and drank an *Invisibility* potion. Then I went up to the Drow Weapon Master at each of the two cannon and killed them before they knew what hit them. Then I ran back to Deekin and Tomi, buffed them up and went on the attack. We did eventually prevail, but it was not easy and I had to use one of my heal potions at a point when I was *in extremis*.

After resting up and healing our wounds, I systematically despoiled the camp. In one chest, I found a potion of *Heal* and one of *Speed*, and an Emerald. In another. I found a *Longsword*+3, a *Noble Outfit*, a Pot Helmet, a Short Sword, a *Ring of Protection*+3 and three potions of *Cure Light Wounds*. There was also a Drow Note that read:

This is the equipment taken from the Red Sisters' latest victim. When our mistress arrives, she will want to inspect these items herself.

I packed it away, just in case it might be useful. In a nearby crate there was a *Healer's Kit*+1 and a few hundred GP. Among the remains, there was some assorted minor loot, but the most important piece was a *Chainmail of Speed*.

With nothing else to pick up, I carefully examined the walls of the encampment and found a Cave entranceway to the South.

XP earned in this area:

Beholder : 252XP
 Drow Expert Marksman: @41XP
 Dueregar Battle Cleric: @41XP
 Drow Weapon Master: @142XP

12. Undermountain - Level 3W - Halaster Unleashed

We entered and, again, Nathyrra appeared to warn us of what lay ahead: Halaster kept captive by a magic field created by three stones. She suggested that only Halaster himself was powerful enough to overcome the Drow in the area and that we free him to do so by destroying the stones.



1. To/From Level 3N (3)
 2. Halaster Blackrobe
- p. Portal to the Underdark

So we buffed up and through the South passage we went. Nathyrra joined us for the fight this time. A true confidence-building measure, assuming we survived.

There, we observed a cut scene in which a group of Drow were, indeed, torturing Halaster. At least until they noticed us. Then they all came at us. After we had disposed of the lot, I picked about at the remains. I found in one pile a *Mithral Shield*. In the other pile there was a *Robe of Vecna*, a pair of *Boots of Striding*+3 and a couple of potions of *Cure Critical Wounds*. That was not a lot of loot to be got from such a powerful bunch. Two barrels held some *Bullets of Smiting*, a few pieces of

Farel's Gold and a potion of *Lore*.¹¹

After a rest and recuperation, we went over to Halaster, still trapped. He did not seem overly happy to see us and just asked whether we were going to free him or just stand around like dummies. I was tempted just to leave him there to stew for a while longer. But the adventure had to move on.....

So I smashed all three stones to bits and he became free. Just as he did so, however, a force of Drow arrived and attacked. Before I had a chance to react, Halaster let fly a magic spell which felled the whole lot of them.

In the aftermath, a second Halaster appeared and both began to argue about which was real and about the Valsharess and how to deal with her. It didn't matter much to me: However I tried to deal with the situation, it ended up with one of the two Halasters putting a *geas* on me and transporting me, Deekin and Nathyrra down to the Lower Undermountain to deal with the Valsharess. Apparently, only when I had done with her would the *geas* be lifted.

Halaster took an instant dislike to Tomi (Well, who wouldn't) and sent him back up to Waterdeep to relay the message that the city was safe from the Drow now he (whichever one he was) was back in charge of the Undermountain. I didn't really mind. I was getting quite tired of the bickering that was going on between Tomi and Deekin. And Nathyrra had proved herself quite satisfactorily, so her being sent down with me was a welcome development.

Anyhow, it was a good thing I had thought, before speaking to Halaster, to retrieve the loot and kit I had given Tomi to that point. The crazy old wizard gave us no time to do anything before he shipped us off through the portal to the Temple of Lolith in Lith My'athar.

XP earned in this area:

Drow Marksman, Commando: @31XP or @35XP

Drow Mage: @62XP or @71XP

Drow Handmaiden: @1071XP

Free Halaster from the stone trap: 7500XP

III. THE UNDERDARK I - LITH MY'ATHAR & ENVIRONS

1. The Temple of Lolith

Before we knew it, Nathyrra, Deekin and I were teleported to the centre of a dark temple and surrounded by Drow. We were at weapons drawn all around when the head of the temple, called "the Seer" recognizing Nathyrra, ordered all to stand down. After introductions all around and a briefing on the current situation in Lith My'athar, it was clear that I had to play my part in dealing with this Valsharess. And not only because that was the only way I was going to get free of Halaster's *geas*.

Apparently, the Valsharess was on a power trip to rule over all of the Underdark and the surface and had managed to get some kind of devil bound to her service as well as potential other

¹¹ I think the loot found on the remains and in the barrels changes according to the vagaries of the game algorithm. Others may find other stuff.

allies. The Seer offered that those other evil allies (Illithid, Beholders and Dueregar) had to be neutralized before any confrontation with the Valsharess herself, if we were to have the faintest hope of success. She told me that both Nathyrra and Valen Shadowbreath would offer help and insight into how to go about doing that.

As the Seer was telling me of potential allies on our side (the Drow House of Maevir), Valen Shadowbreath, a Tiefling who had apparently done much in the service of the Seer, voiced strong suspicions of me and doubted what I might be able to do to help. In the end, the Seer got him to suppress his mistrust and got him to agree to work with me in weakening those potential allies of the Valsharess. He told me of a island to the East where potential golem allies might be sought and of another island where strange things had happened and a useful artifact might be found. He said that Cavallas the boatman, mysterious as he might be, was our way to gee to those places. Nathyrra, when I spoke to her, told me of the Illithid, Beholders and Dueregar and how we might be able to neutralize them.

I found myself in somewhat of a quandary. Both nathyrra and Valen were willing to come into my party, but I could not take both if I wanted to keep Deekin. I liked Deekin and was not prepared to give him up. Kobold or no, he and I were linked in more ways than just friendship. Besides, he had proved himself extraordinarily resourceful in combat situations. In the end, I chose to take on Valen instead of Nathyrra. She was a good fighter and I thought it best to leave her with the Seer. I never shrank for a challenge and I suspected that Valen would prove one.

So, the three of us, a half-elf, a kobold and a tiefling, left the temple and went into Lith My'athar.

2. Scoping out the City



1. The Temple of Lolith
2. Commander Imloth
3. The Corral
4. Maevir Public House
5. To/From West Environs
6. Drow Maevir Sergeant
7. Tavern
8. Merchant Quarter
9. Rizolvir
10. Lith My'athar Public House
11. House Maevir Tower
12. Cavallas the Boatman

Coming out of the temple, we noticed Commander Imloth training his troops in the Southeast corner of the city. He found time to talk to us and to give us some good intel on the Illithid,

Beholders and Undead to the West of the city, all of whom were likely to ally with the Valsharess. He had some good advice on how to deal with each of them, all of which I salted away in the back of my mind. I wanted to learn the ins and outs of the city before I decided which I would try to do first: Secure allies or deal with the Valsharess's potential allies. That was a decision I would make in a bit.

In the far Southeast corner of the city, I found a corral full with Deep Roth. I wasn't sure what the animals were for or what use they might be in the future, but it was worth knowing they were there. The herder guarding them was not much help one way or the other. Moving West along the South shoreline, we came to the gate to the Western Environs.

Moving North along the western wall, we came to a Maevir Sergeant, drilling some Drow Archers. He was not very complimentary to the Ellestrae Drow, which did not bode well for allied cooperation against the external threat. I saw the Maevir Public House behind him but decided to give it a pass until I got a better lay of the land in the town.

I made my way North toward a tavern of sorts. Outside a couple of Drow were forcing a Swifneblin servant to drink, in some kind of sadistic contest. I could see that the goblin had had way too much to drink and that any more would kill him. I was going to try to persuade the two Drow to let the creature alone but I did not like the bullies. So I told them to bugger off and they did. Valen seemed a bit impressed that I had decided to stand up to them. We left the gnome to sleep it off. He would have one big hangover later but at least he would not die from alcohol poisoning.¹²

The Bartender at the tavern was not very welcoming, so we passed it by, as we did the House Maevir, for the same reason we gave the Maevir Public House a pass. For the moment. Beyond the House Maevir, I found a couple of merchants. One did not have anything to sell. Another was a high wizard named Guthrys, a self-serving cad, but he had a store of good items. I bought a *Cloak of Protection*+5 from him and gave my own *Cloak of Protection*+3 to Valen. Guthrys also had a really good store of potions, especially potions of Heal, which I was pretty sure might come in handy.

Near a rather forbidding tower, there was another merchant, an armourer named Rizolvir, not a bad guy. He had mostly weapons for sale but the best thing he sold was his ability to upgrade or enhance weapons. He was not cheap, but he explained that the gold was not for himself but rather for the fire needed to enhance a weapon. I had spent most of my GP on the Cloak from Guthrys, but I had enough to get *Enserric* made keen. I promised myself that I would return to Rizolvir when I had more cash and have more work done, bot for myself and for the weapons Valen and Deekin bore.

A little to the West of Rizolvir, I spotted the Lith My'athar Public House. There was not much of note inside other than an old Drow, Brizafae, the matron Mother of the Drow House Deani. She and her two guards were the last remnants of her house and she was a very bitter old thing. She nonetheless proved to be a font of good intel on the nature of the Drow and especially the infighting between Myrune, the Matron Mother of the House Maevir, and her daughter Zesyrr. According to Brizafae, the matron mother was holed up in that tower I had passed earlier, while the daughter had

¹² Persuading the Drow to leave the gnome alone earns 500XP and a shift of +2Good. Deekin compliments you on your intervention. Intimidating the bullies earns the same reward, but also the approval of Valen, if you have taken him on as a henchman. Taking part in the 'sport' with the Drow moves your alignment +5Evil and an expression of utter disdain from Valen. If you ignore the scene, the servant dies and you get nothing.

been exiled to the Maevir Public House. After listening to her, I decided it might be time to follow up with the one or the other.

I made my way back to the tower where the mother apparently was located, but got nowhere with the guards when I tried to get to see her. So I decided to go back to the Maevir Public House and see if I could have a word with the daughter. Zesyrr, the daughter was receiving and very quickly came to the point in asking me to assassinate her mother. She made a quite compelling case for taking her part and, in addition to a 20,000GP fee, pledged the full cooperation of the House Maevir in the fight against the Valsharess. Given what Brizafae had said about the mother, I was inclined to accept the daughter at her word. After a bit of soul searching, I agreed to her offer. She gave me her signet ring which, she explained, would secure me access to the Tower Maevir and her mother.

Back at the Tower, I had no problem gaining entry with Zesyrr's ring. After a hello of sorts, we quickly had at it with Myrune and her major domo, Captain Tebimar. Afterward, Zesyrr showed up and cleaned away her mother and the assorted mess in a cut scene. Then she gave me the promised 20,000GP (plus *Tebimar's Scythe* when I asked for more and used my skills of persuasion). I reminded her of her commitment to fight the Valsharess and we left the premises.¹³

After having *Enserric* enhanced a bit more by Risolvir, I thought we had time to try to secure some allies of our own before trying to deal with the potential allies of the Valsharess. So we made our way over to the docks and found Cavallas the Boatman. He was, as Valen had suggested, willing to help us and, in addition, informative about which islands we should try to get to and for what.

XP earned in this area:

Drow Maevir Guard: @28XP

Tibomar: 116XP

Matron Mother Myrune: 336XP + 5000XP for completion of contract

3. East in Search of Aid - The Isle of the Maker

Cavallas had suggested that we might be able to get Golem allies on the Isle of the Maker, so I asked him to take us there first. After an uneventful boat trip, we arrived at a jetty on the South side of the island. Moving inland, we came across a Dueregar camp. Speaking to their leader, Dahanna, was a mixed experience: He told us about the Golems and their maker, but refused to consider becoming an ally against the Valsharess. There was also a merchant among them, Dwelver. He was considerably more friendly than Dahanna but toed his leader's line faithfully. He didn't have a lot of interest to sell, but I did buy his one *Bag of Holding*.

¹³There are several ways of dealing with the situation. You can just go in and do the job, in which case you receive 5000XP and the agreed on fee of 20,000GP from Zesyrr. Of course, you do all that and then ask for more as a reward. With reasonably good skills of persuasion, you can get her also to give you *Tebimar's Scythe*, worth 10,000GP at the nearest merchant.

Another way of approaching the situation is to tell the Matron Mother what you are all about and agree to kill Zesyrr for her and ask for a reward for doing so. Doing that gets you an *Amulet of Will+8* (worth 10,000GP), plus a negative comment from Valen. (If you ask for more, she orders Tebimar to attack you.) Then, if you change your mind, make good on your deal with Zesyrr and kill Myrune, you can get the same rewards as above from Zesyrr.

I didn't try to go back and kill Zesyrr for the Matron Mother. I just could not make myself that evil or that much of a turncoat. I suspect there is a cost in alignment shifts for being such an unreliable contractor.



1. Cavallas
2. Dueregar Expedition Camp
3. Entrance to Maker's Dungeon

The Ruins - Level 1

We entered the Ruins and almost immediately, saw a door on our right (East). It was barred from behind and I could not open it. I decided it would have to be dealt with it later and continued hallway North to a T-Junction, noticing several dead Dueregar as we went. At the T, There was a Stone Golem to our left (West) and an Iron Golem on our right (East). Valen and I took on the Iron Golem while Deekin held off the Stone Golem until we could get over to help him. With them disposed of, we moved East and, after clearing a booby-trap and rifling a corpse in the way (on which there was the short sword *Unmaking*. I equipped it as my second hand weapon because of its special enhancements against constructs. Moving Northward, a door on our right opened into a store room with three Minogon guards. Fortunately, none of us were susceptible to their mind blasts and we cleared them quite easily. Then a Clay Golem attacked before we were able to look around. When we were, there was a chest in which there was some kind of special *Blue Powder*, a Sapphire and a *Healer's Kit+6*.



1. To/From the Surface
 2. Library
 3. Experimental Chamber
 4. Control Room
 5. Golden Armour
 6. Small Library
 7. Guardian Golem & To/From Dungeon Level 2
- a. Alchemist's Apparatus
p. Portal To/From Level 3 (4)

Continuing Northward, the next room on our right, guarded by another Stone Golem, contained a chest which has some minor loot and a *Magic Crystal*, whose use I was going to have to discover in due course. After healing Valen up with several of my Healer's Kits, we went back out in the hall and a few steps further, opened the door on our left (after disposing of another Minogon). This was a library, a veritable trove of information, the most important of which were two books

written by the Maker. One, the *Scriptures of the Created* described how to make three items that effectively controlled Golems. The other, the *Lexicon Arcana*, was a listing of special names and numbers also used in some way for controlling Golems. The former revealed the use of that *Magic Crystal* and the *Blue Powder* I had picked up earlier. In addition to 1236GP, a Sapphire and some more minor loot, I also found the *Golden Rod* mentioned in the *Scriptures*.

Moving North again, we came up against more Minogons and Stone Golems, not to mention something new, a Scavenger Golem. Attacking the Scavenger Golem accomplished nothing except making it run away. I suspect the scavengers picked up the parts of the golems we had destroyed and were turning them into newly functioning constructs. That must have been why Golems and Minogons kept appearing and bothering us.

The next room on our right had a booby-trap in the middle that I could not defuse. It didn't matter much because I was able to get to a chest that contained a *Red Powder* and a *Yellow Powder*, and to edge over to a table of Alchemist's apparatus that had nothing.

The next room we came to had a sign reading "Experimental Chamber - Do not Enter". Of course, that was like a red flag to a bull and in we went. Then a *Weapon Spirit* attacked us. It took a bit of doing but eventually it succumbed to our ministrations. That left us free to go through all of the remains in the room. The first thing I noticed was the body of the famous Gnomish warrior Merkel Thunderfist, on which there was a set of *Merkel's Plate* and a *Blue Powder*. Beside the body was *Merkel's Hammer* and, nearby, *Merkel's Helmet* (which conferred upon the wearer immunity from mind control or bending). I thought it might be useful for when we came up against those Illithid and Beholder allies of the Valsharess when we came up against them. Also strewn about were a Handaxe, a Bastard Sword, several Dwarven War Axes (one +3), several short swords, a Greataxe, a Longsword+2 and a Greatsword+1. On a skeleton was a gold necklace.

All of a sudden I noticed that *Enserric*, my main weapon, was missing from my inventory. I kept my head, however, looked around at the other remains and found it on those of the Weapon Spirit. It had evidently been taken from me during that initial fight. Luckily, I had my side weapon and two henchmen who helped prevent that first fight being fatal. Feeling rather bogged down with the weight of all that loot, I called out my Djinni merchant and flogged off everything but Merkel's Helmet, Plate and Hammer. I wasn't sure what use I might make of the latter two, but I wasn't ready to part with them just yet.

Proceeding Westward, the next door we came to had a sign that read "Control Room" beside it. After dealing with an annoying Minogon, I decide I should rescan those book I had found in the Library that had dealt with controlling golems. Before going inside, I gave Deekin and Valen a *Speed* potion and cast a *Bull's Strength* on myself and Valen. Inside, there were four Iron Golems that were a real bear to handle. I attacked one golem, while Valen took on another and Deekin somehow kept the others busy until we could finish off our chosen foes. I had to use a couple of heal potions while fighting to be able to continue, but we succeeded in killing them all off without incurring critical damage ourselves.

Afterward, I tried resting but couldn't so I looked around the room and found three control panels. When I was fiddling with out the one on my left, the number 1 appeared above the middle panel. "Hm...", I thought. Then I went over to the panel on my right and fiddled with it a bit. The

number 1 appeared to the right of the other number one. “Aha!” I thought, and went to the centre panel and “used” it. Nothing happened. Then I remembered the scavenger golems intoning “Sinth Thest” as they moved about. A quick recheck of the *Lexicon Arcana* revealed that to be “54”. So I went back to the first panel and dialled up a “5” and to the second panel and dialled up a “4”.

With “54” glowing above the centre panel, I “used” it again. “EYPHKA!”, I shouted as an electrical wave exploded and the creation of new golems was ended.¹⁴ I tried resting again, to no avail. A quick check of the room revealed a couple of chests with a few healing potions, gems and spell scrolls. There was nothing for it but to press onward and trust in my companions and in my healing kits to get us to where we could rest and restore ourselves again. After getting us all up to near full strength with my healing kits, out into the hall and Westward we went again.

We passed, but left for later, a hall that led North and then I had to defuse a booby-trap at the next corner. The next door we came to opened into a room where there were, mercifully, no monsters, only a golden set of armour and helmet at the centre of an obviously trapped square. I was not able to defuse the trap, so carefully made my way around the edges of the chamber. On the East wall I found a *Ring of Spell Battle* and a couple of gems in a pile of rubbish. Turning around 180°, I saw a lever that had been hidden from view at the door by a pillar. I pulled the lever and that shut down the trap around the armour at the centre of the chamber. It turned out to be a *Searing Armour* and *Searing Helmet*.

At the centre of the North wall there was a door that opened on to a small chamber where another Iron golem stood guard. The three of us together made short work of it. In a chest was a Topaz and potions of *Barkskin* and *Owl’s Wisdom*. At the end of the chamber was a desk with Alchemist’s Apparatus, but again with nothing inside.

In the next room down the hall to the South, there were three Minogons we had to deal with before checking out the chests and bookshelves. In a chest, we found a *Thunderstone*, a *Potion of Owl’s Wisdom*, a Fire Opal and a *Mithral Statue*. On the bookshelves there was another copy of the *Lexicon* and of the *Scriptures*. Scanning the latter again, I noted that I had each of the items needed to create those Golem management tools, but I was still missing two *Blue Powders* to be able to make all three.

Back out in the hall we started South again and we were about to open the door to a probable store room, when two Iron Golems came at us from the spot where we had started in this hallway. We had come full circle. I was sure we had killed these things off at least twice already and hoped this would be the last time we had to face them. They were tough buggers.

But we managed and went back to that unopened door. Inside were three Clay Golems, considerably easier to fight, if you have to fight golems. Once we had done with them, I looked around and found, in a chest, the two more *Blue Powders* I needed plus some other small loot.

With all the wherewithal in hand, so to speak, we went back up to that little chamber with the empty desk and Alchemist’s Apparatus. Following the directions in the *Scriptures*, I was successful in creating each of the three tools: A *Golem Crusher*, a *Binder* and an *Attractor*. We then went back

¹⁴ This netted me 1500XP.

through the hall retracing our steps and clearing out the many Golems and Minogons that had been rebuilt before I destroyed the Control Room electronics.

Finally, with them all cleared, we rested, healed our wounds and went back to that Northward leading hallway we had passed by before. I didn't have a good feeling when we came up to a door in it, so I told both Valen and Deekin to hold their ground and went forward myself to check out what lay behind. It was a good thing I did because, around the next corner, there was one big honking Guardian Golem. I foolishly tried to take it on but quickly realized I was no match for it.

While we exchange a few parries, I heard it intone "Laz Zand". I wasn't sure what that meant at first, other than 'You Dead Meat', but then I remembered both words had been in the Lexicon and I knew what I had to do: Run. Luckily, it didn't follow me.

Back in the Control Room, I used the right and left control panels to dial up "79" and then 'used' the centre panel again. That brought the Guardian Golem right back in front of me. But only for a moment, because the next it had crumbled to bits.

XP earned in this area:

Clay Golem: @24XP or @56XP

Stone Golem: @150XP

Minogon: @150XP or @176XP

Iron Golem: @408XP or 476XP or 571XP or 714XP

Guardian Golem: 500XP

Use control panel properly: 1500XP

Weapon Spirit: 1512XP

The Ruins - Level 2

When we descended to the next level of The Ruins, we witness a cut scene in which two groups of golems were facing off. One side called on the other (apparently followers of some "Ferron") to cease its rebellion and follow Aghaaz (whoever that was). The other refused, saying Aghaaz ruled only for Aghaaz. And so I watched them duke it out. Valen and Deekin couldn't resist joining in the melee. Although I would have preferred they stay out until it was over, I couldn't have stopped them if I had wanted to do so.

After they were all finished, I gathered my guys and we went through the door on the South wall of the area we had entered. Just as Valen was expressing some sympathy for the golems without their master, a sea of Bronze golems with a few Silver golems among them attacked us. It was quite a battle, but eventually, we suppressed the bunch. As we started exploring in the aftermath, a bronze golem came up to me and asked to broker a peace, saying we were not their enemy, so he could take us to Ferron, their leader. Although suspicious, I agreed.

Ferron turned out to be a well spoken construct, even intelligent for a golem. He described himself and his followers as "sentient golems". I thought to myself, "Well, that would certainly be a first." It appeared that the maker, a wizard named Alsigard, had taken his development of golems a long way. Ferron described their situation and asked my help in their fight for their freedom. He told us about Aghaaz, who had been the High Priest to the Maker and apparently now sought to keep all

of the golems under his own dominion by controlling some kind of power source. Ferron and his bunch needed me to get them that power source in order to secure their freedom. I'm always in favour of freedom and tend to like those who care enough about it to be willing to fight for it. Especially when they seem to have a grasp of the kind responsibility that comes with freedom. Ferron seemed to have just that and he won me over when he committed himself unreservedly to coming to our aid in the fight against the Valsharess. It didn't hurt that both Valen and Deekin seemed to have a great deal of sympathy for Ferron and his followers and what they wanted to become.



1. To/From Level 1 (7)
2. Ferron
3. Aghaaz
4. The Power Source
5. To/From Level 3 (1)
6. The Apprentice's Hide

After shaking hands on our deal and before leaving Ferron's chamber, I looked around. In a chest, I found 3969GP, a *Banded Mail*+6, several spell scrolls. In another, I found a *Helm of Brilliance*, some more spell scrolls, a Diamond and a book of *Lab Notes* which explained to me why the Maker had left the island and the golems he had made. All of Ferron's golems were busy doing their thing and didn't seem to mind our nosing around in the rest of his area, or even when we took some of the minor loot that was there for the taking.

In the Southeast of Ferron's area, I found a door that led down to the Maker's Lower Sanctum. I decided to leave that until I had sorted Aghaaz and his bunch. Back, off to the North we went. In the chamber in which we first arrived, there were four doors. One (West) led up to the first level of The Ruins, the one behind us (South) led to Ferron, another (East) led down a short hallway. I decided to leave that til later. Behind the door to the North was a chamber where a bunch of Clay and Flesh Golems tried to bar our passage.

Once we had dealt with them, I found in a chest a sheaf of spell scrolls, most of which I gave to Deekin. But also there was a Lab Notebook, older than the one I had found in Ferron's area. Its contents were also much less conclusive than the other too, it only went about half way in the other's reasoning. Clearly, this was written at an earlier stage of the Maker's experimentation.

Taking the only door that might lead us forward, we were met by a Flesh Golem, an emissary from Aghaaz who wanted to parley. I figured that we had given Ferron a chance to talk, so why not Aghaaz too. We were transported immediately into the presence of this great demon-like golem who, indeed, was Aghaaz. He put a completely different spin on the situation between his bunch and the

other golems led by Ferron. The more we talked, the more I became convinced that this guy was a *bona fide* religious fanatic. He spun a plausible tale, but when he asked me to bring back the head of Ferron in order to get his help against the Valsharess, I knew for sure that I was dealing with a fanatical manic. And an willfully ignorant one, too, if I credit the conclusion I took from the Maker's Lab Notebooks.

Most religious nuts are harmless. Most of them can be left to live their fantasies without causing harm or hurt to others. Fanatics are another thing altogether. I hate religious fanatics. They clothe their fantasies in a wrapping of certainty that nothing, well virtually nothing, can penetrate and become determined to foist their mania on every other living being. The stronger and more powerful they get, the crazier they become. Such maniacs are downright dangerous to any thinking, sentient being.

So I let Aghaaz ramble on. He agreed to assist in the fight with the Valsharess but there was more than a little in his demeanour when he did that made me think he would be more comfortable on her side. Then I said I had to be going. (I really did, his ranting blather had made me sick to my stomach.) But then I decided that I had heard enough. There was only one way to deal with this monster. And I buffed up my group and turned around and went at the big bully straightaway. It wasn't an easy fight, but in the end I brought him down while Valen and Deekin fought off the Clay and Flesh Golems that tried to come to his aid. And with that, the ugly pile of bombast dissipated leaving only a *Scroll of Greater Sanctuary*. Sanctuary was decidedly not where he had gone.

In one of the chests beside his ugly throne/altar, I found a *Longbow+6* and a pile of spell scrolls, most of which I, again, gave to Deekin. I wasn't certain how wisely he was using all the spells I had given him, but at least he was using them. I didn't have the time when we got down to the knuckle work with the bad guys. In the other chest, there was another lab notebook exactly like the other I had found when we first entered Aghaaz's domain, a *Potion of Heal*, an Emerald and a *Small Shield+6*, plus some other minor loot.

But we still hadn't found that power source. Nor were we able to rest up. Which meant that there were still bad guys around. So I used more of my Healer's Kits to get us all up to strength and looked around for the next logical place to go. In the Northeast corner of the chamber there was a door. When I tried it, it was locked. Not a problem for an accomplished ex-rogue, but I could make out behind it the glow of a booby-trap. I opened it very carefully. While I tried to disable the trap, four Greater Minogons came at us. I decided discretion, once again, would have to be the better part of valour and dashed back to the door. At least there, I thought, I could fight them one by one. That turned out to be a wise decision. Ensemble, they were almost unbeatable, but one at a time, they were each quite manageable.

I was unable to disable the trap, but Valen stumbled on it, setting it off and we all had to retreat quickly to get away from the poison clouds that exploded around us. After the clouds finally dissipated, we were able to go into the chamber and pick over the remains (two bars of iron). And find another door that had to be opened. I was beginning to despair, but we were finally able to get a bit of rest and that inkling of depression went away quickly.

Refreshed, I went over to the door, disable the booby-trap that had been set on it and unlocked it. Quite to my surprise, there was nothing lurking behind it. Down a hallway and there, surrounded

by four huge statues was what had to be the *Power Source* that Ferron needed. I went up and picked it up from its mount, fully expecting to have a fight on my hands from the statues. But nothing untoward happened. We seemed to have got our objective and dealt with all the bad guys. All we had to do was just get it back safely. Piece of cake!

Unfortunately, as we moved West and South out of Aghaaz's reception chamber, we managed to set off a couple of booby-traps and were, as well, set upon by Iron Golems. We had to retreat and rest up after finally disposing of them. Rested and wounds healed, we went through the next door Southward. And turning a corner, came to another trap and two Stone Golems. This time I was fast enough to disable the trap. And the Stone Golems went down like piles of stone. With nothing left to stand in our way, we made to return to Ferron with the *Power Source*.

On our way back, I checked out that hallway behind the door to the East in the main entry area. There were two rooms off it with Flesh Golems on the North side and Bronze Golems on the South. Probably because we had done in Aghaaz, the Flesh Golems attacked us. The Bronze just let us go about our business picking up whatever minor loot there was in the chest in each room. At the end of the hall was a locked and booby-trapped door which seemed to lead to somewhere. I tried both unlocking it and disabling the trap, but failed. There was a rat by the door that seemed to be able to offer some useful help in getting past the door. However, but I couldn't communicate with it, so it was no help at all. The only thing for it was to try to bash it down, which was unsuccessful, or to go back to Lith My'athar and buy back one of those Thieves tools+10 that I foolishly had flogged off. So I decided to leave this mysterious door for a bit until my subconscious worked on the problem of how to get past it.

Back at Ferron, he was exceedingly grateful to get the *Power Source* and made haste to get himself and his followers up to the surface.¹⁵ I reasoned then was the time to check out that door to the level below.

XP earned in this area:

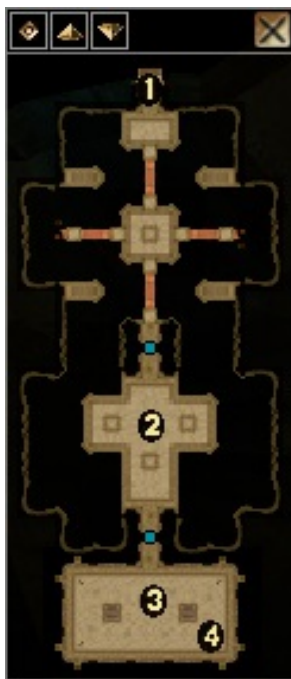
Flesh Golem: @28XP or 106XP or 124XP
 Bronze Golem, Stone Golem: @84XP
 Silver Golem: @99XP or 192XP
 Clay golem: @24XP or 106XP
 Aghaaz: 1568XP
 Greater Minogon: @1568XP

The Ruins - Level 3

Down through the door we found ourselves facing couple of parapets, surrounded by a deep, dark chasm, with a narrow bridge between each. The first of these had a tall tower on its East and West side and seemed to have a mirror a little ways distant in the dark off each of its four corners. It looked innocent enough, until I ventured forth to check out a set of remains on it. As soon as I picked up the sling and bullets from the remains, power fields seemed to charge up at each of the mirrors. I

¹⁵ Giving Ferron the *Power Source* earns 2500XP. I'm not sure what the reward might have been if I had, instead, delivered Ferron's head to Aghaaz, but I didn't lose any sleep over that. I didn't like - or trust - the goof well enough to take his side whatever his reward might have been.

didn't like the shivers I was getting down the back of my spine and, sure enough, before I knew it, Taser beams from the two towers zapped me back to where we had first entered.



1. To/From Level 2 (5)
- 2.
3. The Maker
4. Portal To/From Level 1 (p)

It was evident, we would not be able to go forward unless I could disable those zapping towers. I thought it pretty obvious that the sling and bullets had been put there as a means of breaking the mirrors. I never liked slings because I was never fast enough with them. But, I knew that if I were to equip the Elven Bow and the arrows I had picked up in the Undermountain, I stood a good chance of destroying the mirrors before they powered up the zappers. And so it was.

That allowed us to move South toward the next parapet in which stood two Mithral Golem Statues and a ball of light that demanded a password. Unfortunately, I didn't have one. (I wondered if there might be something behind that locked door I had left up on the second level that might have helped me learn what the password was. And at that point it was too late. The statues turned into live Mithril Golems that were bent on our destruction.

I had to think quickly because it was plain to see that we were going down very quickly if we tried to duke it out with them both where we were. So I quickly retreated back to just beyond the end of the narrow bridge, calling Deekin and Valen after me. Luckily the golems were not fast movers and even more luckily, only one at a time could bring damage to bear on when they were on the bridge. And, most lucky of all, I had had the forethought to put the *Golem Holder* and the *Golem Crasher* in quickslots and ready them for action. The smartest thing I had done so far was not to use the golem control tools on the golems on the previous level. Because, I need almost all of the charges each had to be able to bring down the Mithril Golems. Without them, I doubt we had enough healing potions or would be able to use them fast enough to survive.

Bringing down the golems, however, did not permit us to proceed. Ahead of us was a wall that would not be opened by normal means. Then I noticed a pillar on either side of it. Two pillars: Two golems. Going back to check their bodies, on each there was a *Golem Seal*. I picked up the seals and place one on each of the two pedestals. That opened the wall up and we ventured forward.

Into the sanctum of the Maker, a disembodied head that was waiting for us. We had a bit of a chit chat with it. In which we learned, among other things, that the maker had transformed himself into a Demi-Lich and that he abandoned his creations because he thought they had no possibility of developing into a fully sentient and sustainable class of being. But then he had enough of being nice and attacked us. That was a poor tactical decision, because the three of us were able to handle him fairly handily.

Looking around afterward, there was an abundance of loot to be had. I a couple of big bookcases, there was a swath of spell scrolls, most of which I turned over to Deekin for use at his discretion. On a workbench among the Alchemist's apparatus were several potions, most notable of which was two vials of *Death Armour*. Three locked and trapped chests yielded a *Withering* staff, a *Lichskull* helmet, *Epic Gloves of Concentration*, several precious gems, scroll and potions and 4753GP. There was also a set of *Thieves Tools*+10 which I thought might, just, get me past that door on the previous level.

At the centre of the South wall of the chamber was a *Golem Construction Machine*. On the remains of the Maker, I had found a *Golem Machine Activator*. I suppose I could have figured out how to make golems for our use. Clearly though, parts were necessary and I hadn't found any, even though we had assiduously checked out the remains after every melee. Nor did I have any idea if or which spells might be necessary or how to activate the machine. Besides, I was not in the Golem making business. So I left the machine where it was.¹⁶

There was also a portal in the Southeast corner of the chamber. I was going to check out where it would take us when I remembers that locked door on the previous level and that I now had, perhaps, the wherewithal to get past it. So back up we went. Unfortunately, even though I was able to unlock the door, I did not have a high enough trap disabling ability to let us open the door.

So that was an avenue I chose to leave behind us unexplored. After all, we had secured Golem allies in the battle against the Valsharess and that is why we came to the island.¹⁷ So, we beetled it back down to the Maker's sanctum and went into the portal in the Southeast corner.

That brought us up to the room behind that locked door we passed up at the entry to Level 1. I pulled the lever in front of me and the door opened. We then proceeded up and out of The Ruins.

XP earned in this area:

Mithral Golem: @1568XP

The Maker: 1344XP

¹⁶ I understand from other walkthroughs available on line that there is a way to construct golems on the machine. However, search as I did on the two previous levels, nowhere did I find any parts from which to make a golem. Perhaps a different character class or alignment might be able to do so.

¹⁷ The door requires an unlock and disable trap skill level of 42. While I could get past 42 with my Thieves' Tools, I could not boost my disable skill above 35. I understand from other walkthroughs on line that the maker's assistant is behind the door and can be either persuaded or made to reveal the password needed over at the Mithril Golems. So that is one way to avoid that fight. Personally, I rather liked the challenge. I don't know what the XP reward might be for going the password route. I understand also that the rat beside the door might help a Druid or character with high enough animal empathy to get through it to the Assistant.

The Surface Again

As I walked out, the first thing I saw was that the Dueregar had surrounded the exit and stood with bows and arrows aimed at us. Suspecting trouble, we ducked back in before they realized we were there. Again suspecting trouble, I had Deekin buff us up and used my *Bull's Strength* and enhance weapon spells on Valen and myself. Then, ready for whatever presented itself, we emerged again.

My first instinct was right: This was trouble. No sooner were we out than the Dueregar attacked. At least the precautions we had taken enabled us to make short work of them. Once I had bested Dahanna, the others fell like flies. In the remains, there was a *Dwarven Waraxe+2*, various healing potions and assorted spells. On the body of the Merchant was a *Morningstar+3*, a *Kossuth's Belt of Priestly Might* and an *Amulet of Natural Armour+3*. On Dahanna's body, there was a *Ring of Resistance+3*, Potions of *Bull's Strength* and of *Cure Critical Wounds*, a *Dueregar Full Plate+5*, a pair of *Greater Gloves of Discipline*, a *Greater Brawler's Belt*, a *Tower Shield+4* and a bastard sword *Bloodletter*. Not a bad haul of loot from some nasty little buggers.¹⁸

There was nothing else to see or do on the island, so we went down to the jetty and hailed Cavallas.

XP earned in this area:

Dueregar Merchant: 24XP
 Dueregar Warrior: @28XP
 Dahanna: 421XP

4. East in Search of Aid - Shaori's Fell

We had Cavallas take us to the island of Shaori's Fell because that is where the mysterious artifact that might help our cause against the Valsharess might be found. Disembarking at the jetty, we had to go through a cave entrance to gain the rest of the island.



1. To/From Shaori's Fell
- c. Cavallas and the Docks

We had not gone far when we stumbled on to a Drow Camp. A mob of Drow Warriors and Red

¹⁸ If, rather than retreating immediately and buffing up as we did, we had taken the time to speak to Dahanna, we might have been able to persuade or intimidate ourselves out of the shakedown. Unless you are very persuasive or intimidating, the only way out of the situation will be to pay the 10,000GP Dahanna demands. As I may have mentioned previously, I hate bullies and derive a certain satisfaction from giving them back what they dish out, with interest.

Sisters attacked us immediately. Soon, I found myself fighting the leader, Sabal, and I had her defeated when she fled, vanishing and saying “We will meet later.” The rest were no serious challenge.



1. To/From the Docks
2. Drow Camp
3. Drow Merchant
4. Cave of the Recluse Queen
5. The Library
6. The Castle
7. The Temple of Talana
8. The Wizard's Tower

Shortly thereafter we met us with some Drow with wings who seemed really out of it. They asserted that this place was lovely, apparently unaware of what a dreary hole it really was. When I pressed them they seemed to sense something was amiss and suggested that we speak to their recluse Queen in her cave in the Southeast part of the island. Deekin also offered some interesting historical background on the place.

As we started to make our way toward the Queen's cave, we came upon a strange merchant who would only trade down for items. He said the only thing he had of any value was a broken. For a lark, I tried to persuade him that I had a fake gold coin to offer him, but he didn't bite. As there was no more point in speaking to him we went off after the Queen again.

The Recluse Queen

Approaching her cave, we found and were able to ambush a bunch of Drow heading back up the way we had come. These were led by that Sabal Red Sister again, and again with the same result. When we were able to enter the cave, we found the Queen without problem but she was not much help. However, from her babblings, we learned that she and her city had been taken down to this place by something to do with a mirror she had used to watch over her people. Apparently, something had broken the mirror into shards and after the city had been brought low, nothing seemed to matter any more.

She had no idea where most had gone and didn't care. She said that she had just given the one shard of the mirror she did have to Sabal. Apparently, she had lost most of her focus and was totally apathetic to anything to do with proper or good governance. Valen observed at one point that something very strange was going on and that some sort of enchantment had occurred.

I realized that mirror was something quite important if we were to find the important artifact

this island was supposed to hold. I did manage to learn from her that possessing all of the *Mirror Shards* was pointless without also having the mirror's frame, which was in the castle. If that Sabal was looking for the *Mirror Shards* that meant that she - or rather the Valsharess - thought the mirror important to her cause. If Sabal already had one, it would be important that we try to get the other pieces before she did and before she found out about needing the frame as well.



1. To/From Shaori's Fell (4)
 2. To/From Shaori's Fell (5)
- b. Burnt Book
s. The Recluse Queen
w. Medusa Ward Potion



Merchant and Medusa

That meant another try at that merchant. So back to him we started. On our way, however, I noticed a library we had passed on the way previously and thought I should check it out. Just in case. As we entered, we were greeted by Ulithar who said the Library was closed and no one could enter. He didn't make much sense at first, but with a little gentle prodding, he opened up and told me it was closed because his wife, (Quathala, the former librarian) had been transformed into an insane Medusa by some kind of curse when they had arrived on the island. He was keeping people out because it was not safe for anyone to enter.

He had, however, indicated that he had been able to speak to her. With a little more gentle prodding, he said her makeup had been transformed into a Medusa Ward Potion, a cruel joke that allowed one to view the medusa without being petrified. He let slip that there was only a very little left in their old bedroom and was resigned to having to keep others away for their own safety. After that, I left him, stepped back and told both Valen and Deekin to hold in their places. Then, I slipped by Ulithar, into the library and into their room, where I found what was left of the potion.

Using it, I went back into the library and found the Medusa methodically burning the books in the library. She did not make much sense, but did let slip that she had a *Mirror Shard*. When I said I needed it, she offered to part with it if I would play a riddle game with her. I agreed, as an alternative to trying to intimidate her (which probably would not have been successful) or just having at her (which, for some reason, I eschewed at that moment). I caught on to the trick at her second riddle and she was as good as her word and gave me the *Mirror Shard*.¹⁹

She then went back to burning books. I thought for a second, "That's not right, ever." and

¹⁹ Everything else about the library seemed to be a case of opposites, so I spotted that the correct answer to her riddles was the only one that would not make any sense, e.g., mud and a source of light. Getting the *Mirror Shard* peacefully earns 1000XP. It is also possible to persuade the Medusa that she doesn't want it, for the same XP. Just killing the Medusa outright also gets the same XP. (Killing her, either outright or after riddling or persuading, also gets an additional 360XP for the fight.)

decided that she had to be stopped. That meant a fight with her before the potion wore off. Which I proceeded to do. At least the remaining books would be safe and the library safe for others. Assuming that any others in this goofy place read books. Looking around afterward, there was nothing else to pick up except a *Burnt Book*. I thought that the merchant might be persuaded to accept it for his shard, so I picked it up. At least I had a *Mirror Shard* now. One of how many, I wondered.

Returning to the entryway, I gave Ulithar the bad news as gently as I could (and without telling him it was I who had done the deed). He took it as well as might have been expected. He seemed to realize that there was no other way for their misfortune to end, despite having had faint hopes. With that, I bade Valen and Deekin follow and we left him in peace with this thoughts.

Back at the merchant, after a short preliminary negotiation, I offered him the *Burnt Book* I had found. After a little hemming and hawing, he accepted. He couldn't tell me exactly where his *Mirror Shard* was because he couldn't remember. That was par for the course for memory, not to say the wits, of most of the denizens on the island, unfortunately. He did, nonetheless, to make good on the deal, give me a compass that he said, once activated, would flash more the closer it came to the shard. So I took it, left him and activated the thing. I took a few steps in each direction and noticed that it flashed as I moved to the East. With each step we took back toward the Library, it flashed noticeably faster. Following the faster flashing, we ended up at the Southeast corner of the Library's exterior and in a pile of rubbish found the shard.²⁰ That made two *Mirror Shards*. If nothing else, that Sabal would have to come through me if she wanted the *Mirror Shards* I now possessed.

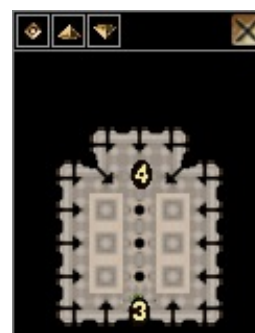
I wasn't sure where to go or what to do next, but the Queen had mentioned the mirror's frame in the castle, so I thought that would have to be our next step. We made our way Westward and, just as we were approaching the castle, we were ambushed by Drow and Red Sister Rogues on the cliffs above the narrow valley through which we were passing. There were a lot of them, but they were all mostly patsies, except for Sabal. Again. And again the same result when I just about had her. Slippery creature that!

The Castle - I

We entered the castle through the front doors and were, almost immediately beset by Driders led by a Drider Chief. These were a handful but we managed to beat them after a lengthy melee. We had to retreat afterward toward the entry doors in order to do a rest and recuperate. Valen, especially, needed it by that point.



1. To/From Shaori's Fell (6)
2. To/From Throne Room
3. To/From Castle
4. The Fool



²⁰ Finding the *Mirror Shard* earns another 1000XP.

We had to fight our way past more Driders to explore the other chambers and store rooms on the level. When we picked at the remains and in many cocoons, there were a few Rubies and other gems. But the big thing for me at least was right at the start. Carried by the Drider Chief was the powerful short bow *Assanti*, which I took to replace my *Elven Court Bow* and packed away in one of my bags. There were lots useful potions, Rubies, Sapphires, Fire Opals and other gems, a *Healing Kits* of various enhancements, *Thieves' Tools*+6, a *Dagger*+4, the dagger *Risktaker*, 1313GP and other minor loot.

With the castle cleared, we went through the door at the end of the hall that led North and entered the Throne Room. On the Throne was Elicid, who had previously been the Queen's court jester. Except that here he had become wise and all knowing. He explained what had happened to the city and why things were as they were in Shaori's Fell. To make a long story short, the queen, Shaori, had used a magic mirror to spy on other powerful beings to keep her city in the Lost peaks safe. Halaster did not take kindly to being spied upon and, using, counter-magic had caused the city and all in it to be drawn into the Underdark and all to be reversed, beauty and good to ugliness and evil, wisdom to folly and knowledge to ignorance.

Well, that certainly explained all of the crazy stuff we had run into, except Sabal and her Drow. Elicid also explained that the mirror had shattered into five pieces when Halaster had worked his magic and that things could not be returned to normal until the mirror was whole again in its frame. The Fool had the frame and needed someone to bring the *Mirror Shards* back to him. He said he would give the mirror to me to help fight the Valsharess if I managed to bring the shards back. (That way we would both win: He would have everything normal again and I would have the powerful artifact.)

I agreed and he told me where he thought each of the *Mirror Shards* would be. Well, I knew that Sabal had the Queen's shard, but I had the two I had got so far. The other two, he suggested might be in the Temple and in the Wizard's Tower. I figured we had better get both of those before Sabal. That would leave us only her to deal with when we had them. How we would deal with her, I thought, I would figure out later.

The Temple

We turned South on leaving the castle and, after fighting off another couple of Drider, came to the Temple. Inside, we met a priest or monk or some such thing named Lomythrar. No sooner had I laid eyes on him, but he put some kind of poison spell on me. In his warped mind, he decided that I had to demonstrate my worthiness to the Goddess, Talona, whom he worshipped. That had to be done by a test, fighting a monster in the altar area of the temple. Only if I passed the test would the poison spell be removed from me. As an added incentive, he offered to give me a shard of a magic mirror - clearly the one I had come for - if I succeeded.

I didn't think that I had much choice at that point but to take my chances. So I pulled the nearest of his chains, was transported into the fighting area and facing a Diseased Troll. After despatching the troll, I was transported back out to the guy. He then proceeded to renege on his deal, telling me that I had to go on to the next stage of his little game. I didn't like it, but again didn't think I had a lot of choice. Besides, out of the corner of my eye, I spotted a corpse in the fighting area that

looked as if it had something valuable on it. So I pulled the second chain.



1. To/From Shaori's Fell (7)
- a. Lomylithrar
- b. Barrier
- c. Chains
- t. Test Monster

Back in the pit, I was facing a Dire Spider but took the time to rifle the corpse and pick up a *Halberd+4* and a *Potion of Cure Critical Wounds*. The Spider was a challenge because I was growing weaker but I beat it. Only to find out I had to do yet another stage. On the third chain pull, I faced a Ghoul Ravager. On the fourth, another Dire Spider. Somewhere along the line, I lost track of how many stages there had been, four or five, but finally the goof admitted I had passed the test, gave me the antidote to his poison and the *Mirror Shard* in his possession.²¹

I took the antidote and the *Mirror Shard* and rested. When I got up, I decided that it was bad enough that I still had Halaster's *Geas* on me, but I had had enough of this jerk making me fight for his perverted pleasure. I asked him to ally himself and his creatures with us against the Valsharess and he refused, citing some kind of tenet. I decided enough was enough and this guy was a waste of air. And took him out. On his corpse, I found *Vestments of Faith*, *Dragon's Slippers*, a *Brawler's Belt* and a *Staff of Ascension*. I figured all that would just begin to compensate me for the bother he had put me to, I addition to the satisfaction of ridding the cosmos of his pestilent presence. I gave the *Dragon's Slippers* to Deekin to improve his kit and because I thought it was appropriate for him to have them.

I now had three of the five *Mirror Shards*. Not counting the one Shaori had given to Sabal, that left only the one in the Wizard's Tower to find before dealing with Sabal once and for all.

XP earned in this area:

Drow Warrior: @26XP
 Drider Warrior, Cleric, Wizard: @26XP
 Red Sister Warrior, Cleric: 33XP
 Diseased Troll, Dire Spider, Ghoul Ravager: @40XP
 Lomylithrar: 300XP
 Quathala: 360XP
 Drider Chief: 666XP
 Mirror Shard Found: @1000XP
 Talona Worthiness: 1500XP

²¹ Passing the test and proving my worthiness was worth 1500XP, in addition to 40XP for each monster and the 1000XP for getting the *Mirror Shard*. It is possible to end the test earlier just by refusing to go and killing Lomylithrar, but then you don't get the 1500XP.

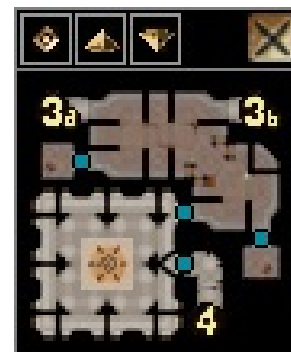
The Wizard's Tower

We made our way back North and East to the Wizard's Tower entrance without incident and there met a Winged Drow Wizard named Petyr Trenkhold. He was awfully friendly and helpful for a wizard. He warned us about the dangers of going into the tower. He said that he had given up wizardry when the city came down but his apprentice had refused to do so and was still in the tower seeking to practice magic. He also confirmed he had found a *Mirror Shard* when the city had come down but had given it to his apprentice when he left the tower. This was passing strange: a friendly wizard who had given up wizardry and an apprentice who disobeyed. It fit right in with everything on this island being the reverse of what you might ordinarily expect.

Well, the *Mirror Shard* was what we were there for so in we went. On entering we were attacked by a whole lot of Drow Warriors and Vrocks, led by a Balor. There was nothing left when we had cleaned them all out. The only thing I found left of them was a feather in a corner of the chamber. There was another Vrock and a Hell Hound to deal with before we had explored and mapped the floor we were on, but nothing else of note.



1. To/From Shaori's Fell (8)
- 2a. To/From Level 2 (3a)
- 2b. To/From Level 2 (3b)
- 3a. To/From Level 1 (2a)
- 3b. To/From Level 1 (2b)
4. To/From Level 3 (1)



When we entered the second level, we were in a library and were welcomed by another Balor, and more Vrocks and Drow. All of whom we put out of their misery. In the bookshelves, there were quite a few attack spells, which I gave to Deekin and a few ordinary books, but nothing else. Three doors led out of the Library. The one farthest West opened on to two Qualits. Behind the one to the South, there was a small chamber occupied by a Succubus. Behind the one to the West nearby, there was a larger chamber where a Balor Lord was holding court before he made the mistake of attacking us. On his remains was an *Talisman of Pure Evil*. Behind a door in this chamber was a hall that led to stairs up to the next level.

I decided to go back and check out that third door in the library first, however. It was just a small chamber occupied by two Qualits. In a desk in the chamber I found a Fire Opal, a *Potion of Owl's Wisdom* and a few more spell scrolls which I gave to Deekin. I thought he would especially like using *Infestation of Maggots*.

As we entered the third level, we were attacked by a mob of Green and Gray Slaads, as well as a Death Slaad. That was a fight that I would not have survived had I not swallowed a precious *Potion of Heal* in timely fashion. Deekin and Valen lasted until the slaads were all done in, but they were in bad shape too. So we limped back down to the last level and rested up to heal our collective wounds.

Back up on the third floor, there was nothing on the remains but Slaad's tongues, as usual. There were, though, a couple of chests in the room. They contained several assorted potions and spell scrolls and a Fire Opal. The spells I gave to Deekin again.



5. To/From Level 2 (4)

j. Jamsil, The Apprentice
t. Blade Pendula Trap

A hall running North/South opened off that chamber. We first went South and opened the door on our right, where we found a room filled with scores of Zombies, but not much else. Back out again and heading North, carelessly unfortunately, we were surprised by a trap in which sharp blades passed and repassed over us like a pendulum. That could have been fatal had we not managed to duck out of the way before serious damage was done.

When the blades stopped swinging, we followed the hallway we were in North and at the end found another door to the East that opened on to a small chamber with a couple of Qualits in it. After dealing with them, we retraced our steps back to the hall that led off West where the trap had been. At its end, there was a locked and booby-trapped door on our right (North) and an unlocked door ahead (West).

Taking the path of least resistance, we burst into a room where Jamsil, the Wizard's Apprentice was cowering in a corner. He gave up after a short show of resistance and begged for his life.²² I told him that I never (well, almost never) killed my prisoners. In abject gratitude, he gave me the *Mirror Shard* in his possession. When pressed for more, he said we were welcome to anything we found in the tower. There was only minor loot in a chest in his room, so we left him and went back out to that locked and trapped door.

Neither the lock nor the trap were hard to crack and inside, we found a veritable bonanza of loot. This must have been the tower treasury because in the various chests inside, there were many precious gems, a large variety of excellent spells scrolls and potions, *Gloves of the Hinn Fist*+7, a *Wand of the Stinking Cloud*, a pair of *Boots of Reflexes*+6 and 1682GP. Thus weighed down, we made our way back down and out of the tower. Outside the old wizard greeted us and gave a warning about using magic.

²² If you tell him you only fight to the death, you will get the *Mirror Shard*, as well as a *Courtesan Blade* and several food attack spell scrolls and 1000XP for getting the shard. Plus a lot of good stuff and 4000+GP in the chest behind him. Sparing Jamsil's life earns an additional 1500XP over and above the 1000XP for getting the shard but you don't get the *Courtesan Blade* or the spells he carries, and the chest behind him has less good stuff. If you decide to kill him after sparing him, you get an additional 26XP and whatever he is carrying, but your alignment moves +5 Evil.

XP earned in this area:

Drow Warrior, Vrock, Succubus, Grey & Green Slaad: @26XP

Balor: 133XP

Death Slaad: 300XP

Balor Lord: 1166XP

Mirror Shard Found: @1000XP

The Castle - II

As we approached the Castle again, a Drider attacked us. That set our warning instincts on high. Inside all was quiet at first. Then we got to the Throne Room and found Sabal beside the Fool. To cut to the chase, Sabal said I would get the shard she possessed only over her dead body and we had to fight.

Luckily, the Fool explained that there were rules to fighting in the Throne Room. Six glowing pylons defined the fighting area and, when a *Mirror Shard* was used on a pylon it gave the possessor significant extra powers. When she realized that I had four shards to her one, Sabal tried to back out or delay the fight. No such luck. The die was cast and with my shards to boost my effort, she was soon enough despatched. From her corpse, in addition to the fifth shard, I retrieved a *Belt of Fire Giant Strength*, a *Ring of Major Electrical Resistance*, a healing potions and *Sabal's Flail*. The belt and those *Boots of Reflexes+6*, I gave to Valen. He was a pretty good fighter and I thought those would improve his kit.

I brought the five shards to the Fool and he showed real integrity by being ready to give up his powers and position to bring the city back to what it had been. After a bit of chat, he began his incantation and the five shards were reassembled into the *Mirror of All Seeing*. He gave the mirror to me and we were immediately transported to the cave of the reclusive queen. There the recluse had been restored to Shaori, radiantly the Queen of the Alvariel. She thanked me for restoring the mirror and said the city had been restored to its place in the mountains of the High Peaks and she was about to return. I asked what would happen to the Fool, who now appeared to be returned to his natural state of inanity. She said, regretfully, there was nothing to be done but his actions would be recognized and he would remain with her, cared for and appreciated.

We left the cave and saw the island had been completely deserted, all having returned to the city in the High Peaks. It was time to try to address the problem of the potential allies of the Valsharess. So we got Cavallas to ferry us back to Lith My'athar.

XP earned in this area:

Sabal: 1166XP

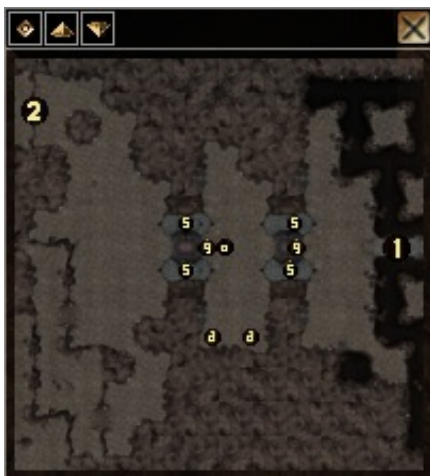
Mirror Shard Found: @1000XP

Acquire *Mirror of All Seeing*: 1500XP

5. West - On Offence at Last

On arrival back in Lith My'athar, we witnessed a cut scene in which the Valsharess was upbraiding a bound Mephistopheles for his failure to tell here where I was. In the flow of her rantings, I got the distinct impression that we had managed to do her some real damage. And that she

wanted me, in particular, destroyed totally. I reflected that that was no way to make friends and influence people.



1. To/From Lith My'athar (5)
2. To/From the Badlands (1)
 - a. Alchemist's Fire stores
 - g. Gate
 - o. Sergeant Ossyr

I went back to the Temple of Lolith and reported on our progress to the Seer. She was somewhat diffident about my having helped Zesyr overthrow her mother, but concluded that the Maevir could be more reliably counted as allies as a result. She was pleased to hear about the commitment of the Golems to help when needed. When we discussed the *Mirror of All Seeing*, I gave it to her, thinking that she could - and probably would - make better use of it than I.²³

Then, laden with loot and more or less flush with GP, I decided to go over Rizolvir again and get some more work done on my weapons. On our way there, we ran into a couple of maevir bullies who tried to intimidate us. It didn't work and they scurried off, trying to make their scurry look like a saunter.²⁴ When I had spent most of my cash on getting my weapons enhanced, we visited Guthrys for some Healing Potions. And then went out to the West Environs.

As we approached the outer gates, we met up with Sergeant Ossyr, who gave us a quick briefing on what was happening beyond the gates and then let us out. After checking out most of the environs, we made our way to the cave entrance in the Northwest. Listening to the conversations that Deekin and Valen were having to be quite fascinating and sometimes hilarious. Deekin is a lot smarter than most give him credit for and I've noticed Valen shaking his head in incredulity more than once.

The Badlands

Through the cave, we emerged into a foul-smelling and foul-feeling place in the Badlands West of Lith My'athar. As we cautiously moved forward, we found noxious fumes coming up from a bunch of sinkholes in the Northeast. Leaving a closer look at them for later, we found ourselves in a narrow gully and there four Umber Hulks attacked. As we oriented ourselves, more Umber Hulks

²³ Giving the mirror to the Seer earns 1000XP. I didn't bother to check out any other options mainly because I thought I had enough kit as it was. Besides, you can only do so much by yourself and delegating appropriately is a necessary skill for successful leadership (and conflict management).

²⁴ Seeing the Drow off earns 500XP.

and Harpies came at us, all of whom we were able to despatch with relative ease. Thanks to the enhancements to both my weapons, I was able to redistribute some kit and make both Deekin and Valen stronger and faster.



1. To/From Lith My'athar West (2)
 2. To/From Dreading's Deep (1)
 3. To/From Chasm of the Eye Tyrants (1)
 4. To/From Zorvak'Mir (1)
- a. To/From (a)
 - b. Bridge Control Panel
 - c. Cave
 - e. Natural Drain Exit
 - s. Sinkholes

We came upon a cave in the Southeast corner of the area. There was nothing alive in it, but on a corpse. On it, there was *Nasher's Cloak of Protection*, a couple of pieces of dried meat, some rags and a *Potion of Cure Critical Wounds*. Afterward, for some unfathomable reason, I decided to go back and check those sinkholes we had seen and smelled earlier.

That was not one of my smartest decisions ever. Before we knew it, we had fallen down one and found ourselves in a cut scene, taunted by a Drow Scout. Before the Drow got too far into his spiel, he was overwhelmed by a green Huge Gelatinous Cube. "Serves him right!" I thought. Until the cube came after us. That was not a pretty fight, but we did prevail with only a little damage. On the remains of the cube, I found a *Ring of Major Acid Resistance* and a few gems. On the remains of the Drow Scout, I found a *Lesser Amulet of the Master*, which I put in my bag for further use as and when I might need a boost to my Rogue skills.



- a. Arrival spot
- d. Waterfall & Natural Drain

As we moved forward (East) in the narrow gully, at a crossways red Huge Gelatinous Cube came at us. On its remains was a *Scarab of Protection*+4. Continuing Northward, we came to an underground waterfall. In a corner near it, there was a pile of bones in which I found a *Platinum Helm*. I gave that to Valen as well as the *Boots of Reflexes*+6 he had had earlier. That way, his kit now not only hasted him, it also restored his reflexes boost. Then I noticed the water from the falls was flowing into a natural drain. There seemed no other place to go in this warren, so I went over to the drain and checked it out.

Emerging from the Natural Drain, I spotted a pile of skulls on a highland that was inaccessible from our location. Looking for a way to get up there led us South to a cave entrance outside of which were poles with skulls stuck o them and a sign that read "Freedom". A little bit of closer examination revealed this to be the entrance to Drearing's Deep. That had to be the hangout of at least one of the Valsharess's potential allies, so I knew we would be going in there sooner or later.

I decided that I wanted to check out that pile of skulls before entering Drearing's Deep and so we headed North. It was pitch dark and none of our light enhancements seemed to work for more than a few feet in front of us. Eventually, I found a hill we could get up to where the bone pile was and look through it. There wasn't much in it other than an old Paladin's helmet. Not good for much other than selling off.

On our way back to Drearing's Deep in the dark, we stumbled on to some kind of control panel which, upon closer examination, had eleven buttons all marked in strange characters. Luckily, my intelligence and lore skills were high enough that I realized they were in an Beholder dialect that I knew.²⁵ Pressing the proper buttons, I was able to use the panel to reveal a bridge that led to the Chasm of the Eye Tyrants.²⁶ Doing that also lit up several source lights, brightening the area so I could tell that we were almost at the Western edge of the Badlands.

At that point, I knew where two of the Valsharess's potential allies might be found. That raised a strategic question for me: Go at the ones whose locations I had determined already, or look for the third group before starting at any. I chose the former. A bird (two, in this case) in the hand is better than any number in the bush. So, back to Drearing's Deep we went.

XP earned in this area:

Umber Hulk, Harpy: @26XP

Gelatinous Cube: @142XP

6. Drearing's Deep

Entering the settlement, we were met by Cordigan the Rock Gnome, apparently the elected leader of the place. But he was not much of a leader, nor did he make a lot of sense. He did tell us this was a settlement of escaped slaves, but escapees who were "not quite free". Most of the rest of what he said was gibberish, except he - as well as most of the other people (all originally taken from

²⁵ Examining the panel closely and successfully determining that the markings are a Beholder dialect earns 500XP. Deciphering the characters and using the buttons in the proper order to reveal the bridge earns 1500XP.

²⁶ It is necessary to align all of the vertical bars on the panel display to reveal the bridge. The buttons move the four vertical bars right or left on the display. The following are the functions of the buttons on the panel:

1. Align the bar in Row 1 to the left
2. Align the bar in Row 1 to the right
3. Align the bar in Row 2 to the left
4. Align the bar in Row 2 to the right
5. Align the bar in Row 3 to the left
6. Align the bar in Row 3 to the right
7. Align the bar in Row 4 to the left
8. Align the bar in Row 4 to the right
9. Press glowing Button
10. Try something else
11. Do Nothing

If that is not clear enough to help you succeed, see the last page of this document.

the surface by Drow raiders) - appeared to exist in fear. Talking to other escaped slaves and to a Dueregar merchant, I pieced together a picture of a place where most lived apparently free but in constant fear for their respective lives.



1. To/From The Badlands (2)
2. Dueregar Merchant
3. Gong
4. Temple of Vix'thra

They all referred to a “ceremony” with trepidation. Apparently one of these occurred once a month and occasionally more often. And that the “ceremony” was initiated by ringing the gong in front of the temple of Vix'thra. Cult Knight guards in front of the temple told me that the only way to see the head priest (one Sodalis) was to initiate a ceremony. Looking closely at the gong, I made out that it was in Old Draconic and referred to ritual human sacrifice. After scouting out the whole area and killing off a few bats for sport (I didn't like the look of them), I decided I had to check out the ceremony thing if we were to get to the bottom of things in this place.

The Temple

So I rang the gong and, in a cut scene, the High Priest Sodalis emerged asked who would be the sacrifice. I seemed to have a choice of volunteering, going right at him or cowering, so I chose the first.²⁷



1. To/From Drearig's Deep (4)
2. To/From Level 2 (4)
3. To/From Level

Then, we were transported into the temple and in a cut scene, Sodalis told his guards to strip me and take me to his quarters and disappeared. Well, I wasn't having any of that and made it clear by flattening them. After which I cleared that level of the temple of the rest of its Cult Knight guards

²⁷ Ringing the gong earns 500 XP and saying “I will.” in response to Sodalis earns another 1000XP. I didn't pick the option of just fighting him. I suspect it would produce the same result, though perhaps without the extra XP for volunteering. He would have fled, leaving me to fight his guards and then my way through the temple.

and a few Skeleton Devourers. There was not much reward for that effort: an old Cult Knight's Helmet, a Scroll of Vampiric Touch and a Potion of Fox's Cunning. A door at a set of stairs leading down would not open without a specific key, which I guessed I would have to find. Another door was at the end of a set of stairs going up, so I opened it.

That took us in to Level 2 where we were attacked by several Skeleton Devourers, Cult Knights and Shadow Fiends. In the middle of the chamber was an altar and behind it an engraving of a figure putting a black gemstone on an altar and waving a sword triumphantly. That suggested what I might need to open that door back on the first level was such a black gemstone. Two doors opened off to North and the South at the East end of the chamber.

Behind the one to the North was a whole lot of Skeleton Devourers. After we had finished them off and had a chance to pick through a couple of piles of bones, we found Sapphires, a *Scroll of Balagorn's Iron Horn*, a Scroll of Stone Bones, a few potions and some small stuff. The door to the South was locked but I opened it without problem. Inside we found a veritable bonanza of loot without anything guarding it. In one chest, there were 1342GP, Thieves' Tools, a *Katana+4*, a *Kama+4*, a couple of potions and a *Scroll of Darkness*. In another were a couple of gold rings and spell scrolls. . And in booby-trapped chest, there was 1365GP, two *Black Pearls*, a *Healer's Kit+6* and some small stuff. In another booby-trapped chest, there was 1285GP, *Studded Leather Armour+6*, six Alexandrites, a *Potion of Aid* and another *Healer's Kit+6*.



4. To/From Level 1 (2)
5. To/From Level 3 (6)
6. To/From level 2 (5)
 - a. Altar



Leaving the chest room, I went to the altar and was about to put a *Black Pearl* on it. Immediately Shadow fiends emerged and we had to fight them off to try to prevent that happening. They failed, of course. When I did put a black pearl on the altar²⁸, Enserric went all cold to the touch. When I examined it closely, I found that it had been enhanced with an ability to effect an ability drain upon hitting an opponent.

I tried to do the same for Valen's weapon, but he would not give up his Devil's Bane, even temporarily. Deekin gave me his Pixie Lance, which I equipped and then put the second pearl on the altar. Deekin was overjoyed when he got the dagger back and discovered the same enhancement had occurred to it. I could tell he loved becoming a more formidable fighter as well as bard.

That seemed to be about all we could do on the level, so we went over to the stairs and door in the Southwest and went up again. Through the door and up more stairs, we were met by a Cult Elite Knight. Elite he may have been, but he could not stop our progress. Checking his remains, we found *Half Plate+5*, *Greater Gloves of Discipline*, and the greatsword *Blade of Shadows*. To the left

²⁸ Each act of putting a *Black Pearl* on the altar to enhance a weapon earns 500XP.

at the top of the staircase was a door that opened on to a store room that had a bit of minor loot. To the right (North) was a locked and booby-trapped door. I had no problem disabling the trap, but I had to use a set of Thieves' Tools to get the lock open. I was pretty sure there was something major behind that door.

When we opened it Sodalis was there and I attacked him straight away. He countered by siccing Fire Elementals on us and running away, but I left Deekin and Valen to deal with the elementals and chased after Sodalis. He managed to get off a *Time Stop* spell and after that unleash a *Bigby's Crushing Hand* as I pursued him. I managed to keep up with him despite statue traps and, with the help of a strategically-timed *Potion of Heal*, finally punched his ticket. Eventually, his spells all expired and we had a chance to recover and look around.

On Sodalis's remains, I found his magic *Staff*, a *Ring of Major Fire Resistance*, *Bracers of Armour+5*, a *Cloak of Protection+4*, *Boots of Reflexes+5* and, most important, a *Lower Crypt Key*. In a room with three chests, we found a Ruby, an Emerald, a *Rod of Thunder and Lightning*, *Gloves of Spellcraft*, an assortment of pretty powerful spell scrolls, a potions of *Death Armour*, *Heal* and *Bless* and an *Amulet of Will +6*. Fighting our way in we had not been able to look at leisure. Now, on our way out, we rifled a couple of desks of Alchemist's Apparatus, a cabinet and bookshelf and found Garnets, a Sapphire, several potions and spell scrolls, a *Wand of Stinking Cloud* and a *Wand of Lesser Summoning*.

XP earned in this area:

Bat: @26XP
 Skeleton Devourer: @22XP or @26XP
 Shadow Fiend: @142XP
 Cult Knight: @142XP or @166XP
 Elite Cult Knight: 857XP

The Crypt

With the *Lower Crypt Key* in hand we went back down to level 1 and tried it out on that locked door we had to leave earlier. Once past it, we came into a sort of gallery opening on to a dark pit. There, three Bone Golems attacked. Having put them down we could explore without interruption and found a chest with a rope in it. We could not proceed beyond the pit edge, but the rope permitted us to escalate down from it.



1. To/From Temple Level 1 (2)
2. Edge of Pit

We descended the rope into what appeared to be an anteroom to the Crypt proper. There we were confronted by a Cult Monk flanked by two Bone Golems. The monk was a long-winded creep named Zeremund who appeared to be under the impression that I was there to submit to him and his master Vix'thra. I gathered from his mug, self satisfied babbling that he was in charge of the sacrifices. It seemed his master, Vix'thra (whoever or whatever it was), got the bones and the cult monks took the blood of victims. It was pretty clear by now that we were going to be dealing with Vampires down here. No wonder there were so many bats flying around outside the temple.

When I demurred at submitting to his little game, he and his golems attacked. We managed them quite handily. I noticed that when the monk went down, a gaseous form went zooming off to a little chamber to the South of the one we were in. In there, to my right was a sarcophagus in which a quite revolting creature lay. I knew I needed a stake to run into the thing but didn't have one. Turning around I saw a door that opened to a small closet in which there was a chest. I eschewed playing with the lock and just smashed the chest. That gave me a wooden stake (and 224GP). I returned to the sarcophagus and drove the stake through the thing's heart.²⁹ Like all good vampires, it dissolved to dust immediately. "One down", I thought, "How many more? I hope I can find some more wooden stakes or else were are in for a long day/night."



3. Rope to Upper Crypt (2)
4. Valoera
5. Sodalis (Again!!)

- c. Coffin
- o. Orb Pedestal

Then I noticed a *Monk's Key* in the dust pile. Of course I picked it up. Back in the room where the rope hung, in a pile of remains, I found an kind of Energy Orb. Off to one side, I spotted an empty wooden crate which I smashed, rendering three wooden stakes. I thought, "A start, at least." There was nothing else in the area but a door to the North. That had to be next.

The Monk's key unlocked the door without problem. It opened on to a large chamber that had in the middle some kind of energy ray that shot out electrical energy rays at randomly at random

²⁹ Driving a stake or wood splinter into a Vampire's heart earns 500XP.

intervals. Exploring the room I saw gated entryways to the West and East and a wall/gate in the North. I tried unlocking them to no avail. As I was doing that the ray started to home in on me so I figured we had to do something pdq or we risked taking serious damage. Then I noticed the pedestals. There was one facing the West grate, two pedestals lined up facing the East grate and three to the North. It didn't take long to reach the conclusion that that energy orb had a use and there was only one place to try it out.

When I put it on the pedestal across from the West grate, an lightning beam opened the way for entry. In through it we went, fast away from the random rays behind us, and through an unlocked door. Where we were met by five unfriendly Cult Monks. These guys kept coming back at us almost as quickly as we killed them off. Until I got a moment or two of respite and was able to find several apses with coffins and chests in them. In the coffins that had corpses in them, I drove a stake through the heart to destroy the vampire forever. With each one I destroyed, the number of Cult Monks coming at us decreased until we had wiped them out.³⁰

With them all gone, I rifled the chests in each of the apses and got a pile of precious gems, lots of good spells a couple of wands (*Stink Cloud*, *Lesser Summoning*, which I gave to Deekin), some GP and other assorted small loot. In the South wing, there was a library where the bookshelves were loaded with excellent assorted spell scrolls, potions, Healer's Kits and precious gemstones, as well as over 1000GP and a couple of books, including a *Tome of the Vix'thrite Elders*.

When we went through the door that led off the North wing of apses, we were attacked by a Cult Elder Monk. He was a cut above the other monks we had fought, by we cut him down nonetheless. Another gaseous form zoom away from its corpse, through a wall into a small chamber the way to which was barred by a locked and booby-trapped door. Not one beyond my skill levels, however, and we rushed in, found the vampire in its coffin and did the stake thing. That put paid to the rule of the cult monks in this area, at least.

Making our way back out, we rifled every chest and piece of furniture we saw and got a very good haul of loot. There were several thousand GP in total, at least a score each of powerful potions and spell scrolls, many *Healer's Kits*+6, many precious stones, a *Quarterstaff*+4, *Gloves of the Hinn Fist*+6 and a *Warlord's Breastplate*. On the remains of the elder monk's body, there was another *Energy Orb*. Well, I knew what to do with that. And. As there was naught else to do in this part of the crypt, we took a moment to rest. And I called up my Djinni merchant and flogged off the load of loot I was carrying.

Then we went back out to the large central chamber where I took the orb off the single pedestal. I carried over to the East side, where I put it on one of the two pedestals and the orb I took from the Cult Elder Monk on the other pedestal. As I expected, that opened up the grate to the East wing. We followed a short hall that opened into a large chamber where six Bone Golems came at us.

³⁰ For each monk killed, you earn 300XP. When you drive a stake through a vampire in its in its coffin, you earn 500XP. Note that the monks will keep regenerating and attacking you until you have driven a stake through the corpse of each. If you are in search of XP and your party is strong enough, you can just keep killing them until you have enough XP or you get bored, do the stake though the heart thing and go forward in the game. For driving the stake through the heart of the Cult Elder Monk, you earn 1000XP.

With them eliminated, I looked around and saw a fairy like creature captive on some kind of torture apparatus. She was in really poor shape when I spoke to her, but she was able to explain that her name was Lavoera, that she was a Hospitaler for the Astral Plane, had been taken prisoner and her blood used to create golems for the Drow. That explained the piles of bones that littered the chamber. She begged me to get her released from the infernal machine in which she was held and I promised to do so.

In a corner of where she lay there was some kind of magical apparatus. I could see that there was a crystal in it, a lever and a slot for a rod.³¹ Lavoera had mentioned some kind of rod needed to free her and I figured that was where it had to go. All I had to do was find it.

Exploring to the North, I was about to look in a couple of cells when we were attacked by the Shadow Master. After exchanging a few blows, he tried to flee up a hall to the West, but I caught up with him and managed to kill him.³² Another one of those gaseous forms flew from the corpse, so I knew we were dealing with another Vampire. I charged off after the form, up a hallway to the North and into another chamber where I set off a booby-trap but was unscathed. The form went through a wall at the North end of the chamber on which there was a locked and booby-trapped door. I unlocked it and disabled the trap, went inside and quickly saw the coffin at the West end of the room. In a flash I had out another stake and used it on the body inside. That took care of that Vampire.

In the coffin chamber, there was a chest which contained a *Nullifier Rod*, a *Lavoera's Wrath* mace, another *Energy Orb* and a *Belt of Priestly Might and Warding*. In the other chest in the chamber was a *Ruby*, a *Dire Mace+4*, a *Scroll of Meteor Swarm* and another of *Wail of the Banshee*. There were a few pieces of minor loot in the furniture in the anteroom, and some *Bolts+3* in the weapon racks. On the body of the Shadow Master, where it fell in the hallway, were a *Crossbow of Murder*, a *Cloak of Elvenkind*, *Boots of Elvenkind*, a *Scarab of Protection+3*, *87 Bolts of Negative Energy* and the *Kukris Hatred and Strife*.

After despoiling the corpse, I opened a nearby door to the East and was attacked by four Bone Golems in the little chamber. Then I opened another nearby door to the North and found a much larger chamber overflowing with Drow, Drow Elite Warriors and Wizards and another Bone Golem. After all was said and done, I found on one pile of remains a *Drow Full Plate+3*, a *Katana+4* and a *Belt of Fire Giant Strength*. On the remains of a Drow Handmaiden, a *Large Shield+4*, a *Flail of Destruction*, an *Amulet of Natural Armour+4*, three potions of *Cure Critical Wounds* and one of *Bull Strength*, a *Ring of Protection+3* and a *Ring of Major Acid Resistance*.

The Drow Handmaiden was evidently a messenger from the Valsharess to the Shadow Master because she also carried a letter upbraiding him for failing to deliver the agreed quota of Bone Golems for her campaign against Lith My'athar. "It is a moot point now", I thought. Finally, in a locked and trapped Drow chest, there were 10 Topaz and 5000GP. I checked out the chamber the handmaiden

³¹ Grabbing the crystal causes quite severe damage to you, unless you have a high resistance to magic. Pulling the lever extracts blood from Lavoera and that gets you a vial of it. Inserting the lever, if/when you get it, releases Lavoera from the hold of the machine.

³² Killing the Shadow Master in the hall earns 833XP. Putting a stake through his heart in his coffin in the room beyond is worth 500XP.

came out of and in it were a chest and an armoire. In the chest were the spell scrolls *Word of Faith*, *Divine Power* and *Flame Strike*, several potions, a Fire Opal and an Alchemist's Fire. In the armoire, there were a couple more potions, a Fire Bomb and 1244GP. In one of the other bedchambers was a chest with a Sapphire and a few scrolls. Quite a haul, all in all.

Then, no more bad guys to sort in this wing, we headed back to Lavoera. On the way, I checked the two holding cells off the hallway, but there was only a *Bone Ring* to be found in a pile of rubbish in one of them. Back a Lavoera, I put the *Nullifier Rod* in the *Magical Apparatus* and that released her from bondage.³³ She was in woeful shape physically, but even worse mentally, literally distraught at having failed in her mission. It took a little bit of talking and persuasion, but I finally got her to see that she was still able to do some good. I suggested that she head back to Lith My'athar in order to help protect the city when the Valsharess's assault came. That brightened her up and she recovered rapidly and went off to the city.

She left her *Lavoera's Wrath* behind, so I gave it to Valen because I was sure that we were still going to come up against more undead, against which it was especially effective. And he was particularly good in a melee. As it was equipped as a one-handed weapon, I also gave him the Mithral Shield I had tucked away earlier, just to give him a little better protection in fights to come. After resting to recover all our HP, a quick look around revealed that the magical apparatus had disappeared and in its place was a *Crystal of Undeath*. That was not much use to us, but I kept it anyway, to flog off later.

We made our way back to the large chamber, where I retrieved the two orbs from their respective pillars. With them and the one I had got geom the Shadow Master's room, I was able to open the wall gate in the North.³⁴ When we went through the gate, who should reappear but Sodalis in a cut scene. Of course! I should have expected that he would reappear. He was a Vampire, after all! I hadn't done the spike thing up in the temple because we didn't know about the vampires then and there was no obvious gaseous form or coffin up there.

After we attacked and killed him again, his gaseous form zoomed to a coffin nearby. I still had a plentiful supply of wooden stakes and I used one on the body in the coffin.³⁵ That made sure the high priest would not be coming back again. We went through the cave entrance behind which Sodalis had stood, at the North wall.

XP earned in this area:

Bone Golem: @22XP or @26XP

Cult Monk Zeremund: @257XP

Cult Monk: @300XP

Cult Elder Monk: 1000XP

Shadow Master, Sodalis: 833XP

Drow Warrior, Elite Warrior, Wizard, Handmaiden: @22XP or @26XP

³³ Potting the *Nullifier Rod* in the apparatus earns 1500XP.

³⁴ Opening the wall gate was worth 1000XP. (I never noticed any reward for opening the other two gates.)

³⁵ The stake through Sodalis's heart is worth 500XP.

The Hall of the Sacred One: Vix'thra

On entering all we saw were bunch of dragon and golem bones. Before we knew it, however, the dragon Vix'thra came to life in a cut scene, as did two Bone Golems. What followed was a major, major battle. In the end, we prevailed but it was no easy task and took both strategy and luck to accomplish killing the dragon three times over.



1. To/From The Crypt (5)
 - h. Vix'thra's Hoard
 - p. Vix'thra's Phylactery
 - s. Secret Door
 - v. Vix'thra

Luckily, it took the dragon a few seconds before it started to attack us, and a few seconds after that for the two golems to follow it. The first thing I did was buff up both all three of us with Bull Strength potions or spells, plus use my *Magic Weapon* and *Bless Weapon* and then Aid and as many others as I could manage before Vix'thra reached us. The second thing I did was leave Valen and Deekin to occupy Vix'thra while I went after and killed each of the Bone Golems in turn. Then I returned to help my cohorts against the dragon. Valen had Lavoera's Wrath so that made him quite powerful in the melee.

We were overjoyed when we prevailed and the dragon seemed to disappear. We could not rest up for some reason and I took the opportunity to heal Valen and Deekin using my healing Kits and potions. The reason we could not rest became quickly evident when Vix'thra's bones started to glow and pulsate and it came to life and attacked us again. It was alone, however. The Bone Golems were gone for good. And the dragon seemed ever so slightly weaker as we turned to meet it.

Once again, we managed to kill it, but we were not so innocent this time to think it was done for good. Quickly, I used healing potions and as many buffing spells as I could manage on us again. And it was just in time, as the dragon came at us in a fury for a third time. Once again, good fortune was with us, our blows hit home quickly and well and we downed it a third time. Third time lucky, I dared to think. And so it turned out.³⁶

We could not, however rest and recover, so that told me there was still a problem in this area. Using more of my remaining healer's Kits and potions, I got us into good enough shape to look around some more. Moving to the North, we came to a gully and could see a vast hoard of treasure in the distance. Deekin and Valen were about to charge ahead when I held them back. I had three successive booby-traps to disable before we could proceed. As we approached the piles of gold, two more Bone Golems showed themselves. Apparently they had been set to guard Vix'thra's treasure

³⁶ No XP are awarded for killing the dragon the first two times. After the third, when it is dead for good, you get 833XP, plus 2500XP for completing the quests entitled *Drearing's Deep* and *The Undead Army of the Valsharess*.

hoard. They were not easy marks, but after the dragon and the other two, we were not going to let these turkeys stop us. With them out of the way, we saw the horde and could only goggle at the extent of it.

By the time we had finished picking up and counting all the gold pieces, I counted a total of 11,136GP.³⁷ In addition to the piles of treasure, there were chests on which I had to disable booby-traps to get access. In the first chest, there were *Bracers of Armour*+6, a *Rod of Fire*, an Emerald, a *Potion of Bless* and a *Scroll of Flame Strike*. In the next, there were a *Death's Handmaiden* scythe, a *Greatsword*+4, another Emerald, a *Potion of Cure Critical Wounds*, *Scrolls of Improved Invisibility* and *Slow* and a vial of *Holy Water*. In the next, there were a *Dwarven Waraxe*+5, *Great Wyrms Gauntlets*, a scroll of *Greater Stoneskin*, a Diamond and potions of *Aid* and *Owl's Wisdom*. In the fourth chest were another Diamond, a *Morningstar*+4, a set of *Red Dragon Armour*, a *Healer's Kit*+10 and a *Potion of Heal*. In the fifth (and last) chest were eight necklaces (Glittering, Copper and Gold), four rings (Copper and Gold), three diamonds, a Ruby, Sapphire, Emerald and another dozen and a half of other semi-precious gems.

This was, veritably, the biggest amassment of loot we had come upon so far in the adventure. I was so heavily laden that I was slowed. Rather than lug all the stuff around, I gave a few pieces to Deekin and Valen to improve their respective kits, then called up Volkarion and sold almost everything else to him. I got a cashier's cheque from him for all my GP to eliminate even more weight.

Off to the East side of the hoard was Vix'thra's Phylactery. I was not able to do anything with it and all I could see in it was a blood red mist. I left it there for any others who might come later and find a way to examine it further. I had no worries about the dragon coming back. Three times is always a charm in magic lands.....

Then we made our way back up to and out of the temple. Cordigan came running up to us, profusely expressing his gratitude for our having removed the pall of fear that had ruled Dreading's Deep. Valen admonished him that freedom was something that had to be fought for and fiercely protected. We rested to recover from all our wounds and refresh our spell capabilities and then made our way to the exit. Every ex-slave we met ran up to thank us. All in all, that was a reasonably satisfying conclusion for this part of the adventure.

As we emerged from Dreading's Deep, the Valsharess appeared in a cut scene, castigating a bound and evidently helpless Mephistopheles for the fact that we had been causing her so much grief. "Too bad," I thought, "We are going to see you off, you big boobed doofus!" (I wondered to myself how she would be able to fight with those watermelons harnessed to her chest. Perhaps she thought all those arrayed against her were hormone-raging, infantile-minded males who would be dazzled by cleavage. Whatever, she was going to find herself facing a quite different reality.)

XP earned in this area:

Bone Golem: @26XP

Vix'thra: 833XP

³⁷ The amount of each pile of treasure appears to be generated at random. I think the minimum to be expected is 10,000+GP.

7. The Chasm of the Eye Tyrants

We made our way over to that bridge we had discovered earlier, crossed it and entered the cave at the other end. We followed a tortuous pathway with steep drop off on one or both sides. We had gone about a hundred paces and begun to move West when we were confronted by a big Drow named Eldrath Ra'sin, who seemed to be looking for - and glad to have found - me. He was not a very nice character and before I knew it we had begun to cross swords. He was a powerful fighter and appeared to have exceptional spell casting abilities. He also had several Drow Wizards and Warriors accompanying him.



1. To/From the Badlands (3)
 2. To/From Beholder Cavern (1)
- e. Eldrath Ra'sin

It was fortunate that a sixth sense had moved me to use my *Bull Strength* and weapon enhancement spells before meeting him. Otherwise, we would have been in real trouble. Afterward, on Eldrath, I found the two-bladed sword *Anduvir*, a set of *Dragon Armour*, a *Cloak of Resistance+3* and some *Greater Gloves of Discipline*. *Anduvir* was a formidable weapon and if I were not so content with my *Enserric*, I would have equipped it. I did equip the *Dragon Armour* even though it was a slightly lower class than what I had, mainly because of the ability it gave me to cast *Battletide* once a day. On the other remains nearby, there were a lot of *Poison Bolts* and potions of *Cure Critical Wounds*.

Realm of the Beholder Tyrant

There was nothing else of interest that we could see so, when we found another cave entrance in the Northwest corner of the area, we entered it.



1. To/From Chasm (2)
 2. To/From Obelisk Cavern (3)
- a. Attiz
- e. Drow Emissary
- t. Beholder Tyrant

No sooner had we entered than a group of Beholders and Beholder Mages attacked. It was a good thing that we had buffed up before going inside. Beholders, and Beholder Mages especially, can mortally wound you fast if they catch you off guard. But if you are ready and move in quickly, before they can get their phasers off at you, you stand a good chance. Either you can kill them or else they will spring off, wounded, only to reappear a little farther along whatever path you take. Better to do away with them when they are in front of you.

Once we had cleared the opening ahead of us, we followed the cavern to the East. Around a corner to the North, we came upon a Kobold named Attiz, the only one of all those we met who could speak. Except for him, all the others Kobold slaves had had their tongues cut out by the Beholders. Attiz was quite pleased to learn that Deekin was not a slave and even more pleased when I said that we had come in after the Beholders. He willingly gave us a lot of good intel about where things lay the Beholders' domain. In particular, he warned us about the presence of a Drow Emissary and her cohort up near where the Beholder Tyrant kept his court.

We proceeded cautiously after that, exploring first the West side of the cave system, meeting several Beholders and Beholder Mages en route and passing through a dungeon chamber with a lot of dead caged Kobolds. Deekin was quite upset by how his distant kin had been treated. But then he was qualitatively different from any other Kobolds I had ever met. Beyond that chamber, up in the far Northwest corner and having it out with more Beholders, we found a black chest that held a *Whip*+4, a *Dire Mace*+4 and a *Kama*+4, plus an Emerald on a small pile of remains.

We made our way back South to where we had met Attiz, clearing more Beholders as we went. Then, East across the South passageway, past where we had first entered. In the Southeast, there was a *Deep Rothe* pen. I couldn't figure out what to do with them, so just left them in peace.³⁸ , Still in the Southeast, but moving North, we came to a Library. After clearing more Beholders, we were able to rest and rummage through the bookshelves. We found a few common books and spell scrolls there, but not a lot else. In the next chamber to the North, there were more Beholders and another black chest. In it were a *Greataxe*+4, a *Katana*+4 and a *Spear*+4.

In the Northeastmost chamber, we came upon the Drow Emissary Attiz had mentioned, accompanied by a couple of Wizards and Warriors. The Emissary put up a bit of resistance, but frankly I would have expected it to be a lot harder fight than it was. On his body, I found an *Ironskin Ring*, couple of spells and a letter from the Valsharess that echoed the one we had found in Dreading's Deep. If she ever read *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, it sure didn't show in the tone and content of her letters. I certainly would not want to be an ally with someone who addressed me as she did them. Still that gave me hope for a better ultimate outcome to this adventure. In the other remains were four *Cure Critical Wounds* potions and a chest that contained 2392GP.

Having dealt with the Drow, I figured the Beholder Tyrant would have to be somewhere not far off. It only made sense that it would be in the centre of this area, so that was where we moved next. We opened a door to the South into a chamber with a large hole in its centre. By the door was a chest with a Stone Slab in it. Examining it closely, I could make out writing in black ink that referred to an *Obelisk* that blocked magic effects and the possible use of the Obelisk's Core as a

³⁸ Perhaps a different character class with animal handling skills might have a different experience.

weapon. I wasn't sure what to make of this, so I tucked it in one of my bags so I could take a closer look at it later. Ahead of us, there was another door to the South and I had the feeling that we were nearing the nexus of the Beholder Domain. Bearing in mind what Attiz had said about the number of protectors the Beholder Tyrant kept about her, I made sure we were well buffed up before we went tried it and, as well, gave Valen the *Ironskin Ring* to improve his kit, at least temporarily.

It was a good thing I did, because once inside the mad melee was no piece of cake. I had to use one Potion of Heal and a particularly unfortunate hit from one of the Beholder Mages. But in the end, we prevailed. On the body of the Beholder Tyrant was only a Fire Opal. Behind her throne, however, behind a locked and booby-trapped door was her treasury three chests chock a block full of good stuff. I had to use a set of Thieves' Tools+6 to unlock it because I forgot I had my *Lesser Amulet of the Master*. It did not, unfortunately, help any with disabling the trap.³⁹ I was ok, but both Valen and Deekin took some considerable damage when I pushed it open. Inside one chest was the Dwarven Waraxe *Spellmasher*, a *Potion of Bull Strength*, 4007GP and an *Acid Flask*. In the second was a *Cloak of Great Stealth*, a Diamond, a *Healer's Kit+10* and a set of *Thieves' Tools+10*. In the last, an *Amulet of Divine Radiance*, 4711GP, another *Healer's Kit+10* and Spell Scrolls of *Bigby's Crushing Hand*, *Drown* and *Improved Invisibility*.

We started to make our way out and had almost left that room with the chest and the Stone Slab when I noticed there was a way to clamber down that hole.

XP earned in this area:

Drow Warrior, Wizard: @26XP

Eldrath Ra'sin: 833XP

Beholder: @26XP

Beholder Mage: @833XP

Beholder Tyrant: 833XP

No Magic Here: The Obelisk

As we came down into this dark labyrinth, we all noticed that anything we had with magical capabilities no longer seemed to work. This was especially hard on me because I had stashed all my heavy items in my magic bags and I was immediately slowed. I remedied that by shucking all of my heavy stuff and holding bags in a corner I thought to be pretty safe. With my ease of movement back, I was ready for anything that might present itself.

As it, or rather they, did soon enough. In virtually every cave pocket in this area there were *Dire Spiders* and *Sword Spiders* and *Ettercops*. None of these were especially hard to beat down individually. But they seemed always to get of an entangling web down, which meant it was hard to get at them until the effect wore off. We moved up the West side of the area, encountering more spiders, which we had to fight and lots of Ghost Warriors, which seemed just to ignore us and with which we couldn't engage.⁴⁰

³⁹ Unlocking the door and disabling the trap each required a skill level of 44. I was ok with the Thieves's Tools, but couldn't get above 37 on the trap, even with my Amulet of the Master. It only increased my ability by 2.

⁴⁰ This may prove different for a different class or alignment of character.



3. To/From Beholder Cavern (2)

- b. Beblith
- o. Obelisk

We eventually came to a long hallway that led East, and were going to start down it. But I took a big swipe at a cobweb on my left (North) and then noticed a few steps beyond it a door that opened to the West. It was locked and had a trap set (of course!), but I had no problem with either and we went through it, on to a narrow walkway that led to an island. In the middle of the island was glowing obelisk, pulsating with power. “Aha!” I thought, and immediately went to use that *Stone Slab* I had picked up earlier.

Except that I had left it in one of my *Bag of Holding* way back where we had entered this area. I was almost to going back to fetch it when I noticed four sets of rune plates emanating from the bottom of the obelisk. Then I discovered that, while nothing happened when I touched the rune plate closest to the obelisk, that was not the case for the other plates. Each of the other three rune plates in each set could be changed to a different rune by “Using” it. From that it was a simple process of matching all the runes in each set to the centremost plate. When I matched the last plate, the obelisk stopped pulsating. And with that, all of the magical enhancements of our respective kits again became effective.⁴¹ After shutting down the obelisk, I examined it closely and found its power orb.

After tucking it away for safekeeping, we looked around the island but found nothing else of interest. We made our way Westward through a winding passage. When we came to an large open cavern area, a cut scene showed a humungously big spider lumbering it way toward us. It was obvious that it was not going to waste any time bothering to communicate with us. Luckily, I was able to get off a few buffing spells before it made it to us and, after a short battle, we had prevailed. I shudder to think how hard it might have been had we not previously recovered full use all of our magical abilities enhancements. What a stroke of luck it was to have been able to unlock that door on the other side of the obelisk island.⁴² On the beast, I found an Emerald and a sac of *Beblith Poison*.

We ran into a few more Dire Spiders, Sword Spiders and Ettercops on our way back to where we had come into the area. But none offered any great resistance to our restored powers. Nor did we find anything else of interest before I picked up the bags I had left behind and we clambered back up

⁴¹ Not only do your magical enhancements return to full potency, you earn 1500XP for solving the riddle.

⁴² Beblith has HP well North of 550. If you come upon it from the East while your magical abilities are blocked, you had better have weapons that are really good without magical enhancements and have a lot of HP and be really good at melee fighting. Either that or be able to run really fast to get by Beblith to the obelisk island so you can disable it.

the boulder to the Beholders' hold.

Luckily, I had thought to buff us up again before ascending. One up, we were surrounded by Beholders and Beholder Mages who were mightily angry that we had deposed their Tyrant. Apart from a few precious stones on the remains, I concluded there was nothing else to be discovered down here. So we headed back up to the Chasm and returned to the Badlands. There was still another of the Valsharess's allies we had to deal with and we had not even found out where they were. Yet.

XP earned in this area:

Dire Spider, Sword Spider Beholder: @26XP

Beblith: 226XP

Beholder Mage: @866XP

8. Zorvak'Mur

The Northwest sector of the Badlands was the only one we had not yet explored, so it was over there we went next. Back up on that rise where the pile of bones had been, we followed a stream and from the heights could see a finely constructed masonry bridge far below us. There was, however, no way to get to it. Until, that is, we found a cave entrance that took us down a set of stairs and right on to it. Following along the bridge, we came to a cave entrance in the far Northeastmost corner of the sector. This had to be where we would find the Illithids. They were the only potential Valsharess allies left to sort.

The Entrance Cavern (Level 1)

No sooner had we entered and started to look around when we met a band of Dueregar who took us for slavers. Like themselves, I concluded, because their leader started a conversation nicely enough. He let slip that it was important to have a helmet like the one he wore if we were going to avoid ending up as slaves ourselves. (I thought I remembered picking up something like that back on the Maker's Island.) When I thanked him for the tip, one of his band reproached him for being so stupid as not to realize that there were more of them than us. I warned them that if they tried anything, it would be the last thing they did. But to no avail because before we knew it they were upon us. We were ready, however, much to their disadvantage. Afterward we picked up a *Helm of Shielding*, which I equipped, a *Dwarven Waraxe+4*, a set of *Padded Armour+6* and assorted small loot.



1. To/From Badlands (4)
 2. Quiet Village
 3. To/From Zorvak'Mur Level 2 (x)
- d. Dueregar Slave Traders
I. Illithid Abysmal

I would have liked to equip my henchmen with the same thing, but there were no other helms anywhere. The Valen set my mind at ease by telling me that, with me protected, the Illithid would assume that he and Deekin were slaves and not bother with them.⁴³ We started off North and were a bit taken aback at what seemed to be a cascade of water blocking our path. As we approached, it turned out to be just an illusion and disappeared without any effect. It might, perhaps, have had some effect upon the faint of heart or easily susceptible.

Farther on, we came to a village that had a bunch of apparently mindless slaves in it. And a black barrel containing fish. Moving East from the village, we were stopped by an Illithid Abysmal who demanded I take off my helm and reveal myself to him. When I said no dice, he accepted that and granted us access to the next level.⁴⁴ After a quick look around, we found nothing else of any significance, and proceeded down to the next level.

XP earned in this area:

Dueregar: @26XP

Slavers' Central (Level 2)

Down the spiral staircase, we came upon three Intellect Devourers. They didn't attack and I assumed it was because they also considered us to be authorized visitors.⁴⁵ The same thing happened when we crossed the bridge into Zorvak'Mur proper and came across Hook Horrors and Umber Hulks. The first thing we saw before us was a tavern. Inside, we learned it was named the Poison Chalice and run by a Golem. Deekin chatted with the Golem and found out it had run the bar for 749 years, 17 days, 3 hours and 14 minutes precisely. And that ours was the first party that had asked for service. Deekin got all excited and thought we might get a prize for being the first customers. I humoured him and bought a drink. It became immediately evident why no one else had never ordered anything: Golems are seriously bad brewers.

Leaving the swill at the bar, I started a conversation with a Dueregar slaver nearby to see what intel I might pick up. He explained that the tavern was the only place in Zorvak'Mur that the Illithid did not come, primarily for fear of the Golem. It was good to know there was a place we might come back to if we got into rouble and needed a place to rest up. He also told us more about the Illithid, as

⁴³ I had thought that the *Merkil's Helm* I had picked up back on the Isle of the Maker would have the same protective capabilities. When I had first picked it up there was a message that it would be useful later. It turned out *Mind Blank* was not effective against Illithid. When I put it on, the first Illithid Abysmal I met next saw right through me and we had to fight to survive not only against Illithid, but also against their slaves. I decided that playing on without revealing myself, instead of a continuous melee, was the best way to get to the Illithid powers that be and deal with the Valsharess ally problem we had. Besides, all you get for fighting is a paltry 26XP per monster going forward. There are better ways to earn more XP. (I went back to my previous game save and restarted.)

⁴⁴ There are several choices in how to proceed when meeting this guy. You can do what I did: Pretend to be a slaver. Or you can take off you *Helm of Shielding* as the thing demands. In which case, you become a slave and your game ends then and there. Or you can get your back up and fight, which is counter-productive to the best game outcome.

⁴⁵ I went back and killed the Devourers: That would be three fewer monsters to have to deal with on our way out. Killing them did not alert the other assorted bad guys that we were interlopers. If, however, you try this after crossing the bridge, you will have all of Illithid, their retainers and slaves coming at you. As noted above, this is a lot of fighting and you give up the opportunity to earn extra additional XP.

well as about the fighting pits, the slave auctions and the lay of the land generally. Back outside, we moved a few steps South and saw an Illithid merchant. I thought I might be able to unload some of the excess loot we were carrying, but the thing refused to trade. They certainly were an arrogant bunch of goofs.



1. To/From Level 1(3)
2. The Poison Chalice Palace
3. Fighting Pit Viewing Portals
4. Illithid Sleeping Chamber
5. Slave Auctions
6. To/From Slave Pens
7. To/From Level 3(1)

- m. Illithid Merchant
p. Mind Flayer Pit Boss

Moving to the Southwest, we saw a round bubble of a structure with oval windows all around it. As we went closer to see what was inside, we were approached by another Illithid who asked if we were come to see the fights in the pit and whether we were interested in betting. I agreed, mainly to see what was going on and went over to a portal. As it happened, the thrall I had bet on won and I had won 1000GP. But I felt cheapened and dirty at having bet once and had had enough.⁴⁶ Instead of making another bet, we left and I decided to put an end to that particular activity. I believe in fighting and killing if you have to, but not in mindless fighting or watching mindless fighting for some sick, feral pleasure.

For some reason - I guess I was feeling just slightly off after watching the thrall fight - that I decided to check out that structure I had noticed to the North of the Poison Chalice palace. It turned out to be a sleeping chamber for off duty Illithid functionaries. On entering, I noticed a black chest in front of us and a bunch of egg-like sleeping chambers. Foolishly perhaps, I opened the chest and , before I had a chance to check out the contents, we were set upon by awakened Illithid Mind Flayer, Venerator Darkener and Ulitharid. After a brief, but intense, fight we had prevailed and looted at pleasure. On the remains there were a few GP, a *Ring of Protection*+6 and a *Potion of Clarity*. In the chest, the haul was worth the fight: 2 Emeralds, a Fire Opal, Malachite, Topaz and a few other semi-precious stones and 4200GP.

I was concerned that we might have revealed ourselves by finishing off the resting Illithid, but when we left the Sleeping Chamber building, the Umber Hulks outside apparently noticed nothing amiss. Our cover was still good, so I decided to check out the slave auction area.

We crossed a bridge behind the Poison Chalice, to the West wing, where I saw a human female thrall up on the auction block. I decided then and there that I was not going to permit another to be sold into permanent bondage or be used as wager fodder in a pointless fight. After a not very

⁴⁶ The first bet is 1000GP. After the first, bets are reduced to 500GP. I could not make out any pattern to winning or losing. I suspect it is a random outcome. If you don't feel besmirched by the activity and are lucky, you can presumably win a lot of GP. Of course, you could just as easily lose.

helpful exchange and some auctioneer patter the auction for her began. I had lots of GP and managed to scare off other bidders with a precipitate jump in the bidding and ‘won’ her.⁴⁷ I found, pretty quickly after taking possession of her, that this human was defiant and prepared to die rather than submit and had to be handled very carefully if I wanted her to survive. Just setting her free was not an option because she would never get past all of those Hulks and Mind Flayers still behind us.

I decided that making her continue to act like a thrall was the only way to get her out. The problem was getting her to do just that. Eventually, I managed to get her to accept that being my slave and taking a message out of the area for me was something she had no choice but to do. So, I sent her off with a message for the Seer back in Lith My’athar.⁴⁸ I figured that I could tell her she was free when/if we met back at the seer after I had finished with this last bunch of Valsharess allies.

From the auction block, we went North to the Slave Pens. Inside, we met the Warden, a psychopath who held the slaves in preparation for use in the fighting pit we had seen earlier. This guy was truly warped and deserved the most painful possible death. I just disposed of him quickly (and the Hulk and Intellect Ravager assistants.) On his remains, I found a *Dwarven Waraxe*+4 and the *Prison Master Key*. Then I went to each of the cells clockwise. There was nothing in the first cell, but in the second was a Drider that had been “prepared” and attacked us. On coming out of each cell, I smashed the Illithid control panel out of sheer spite. Before the next cell, there was a black crate in which I found a *Lesser Dispel* scroll and a *Wand of Lesser Summoning*.

The next door required the master key to open. It led to a large cell block with four Umber Hulk guards. After sorting them, I went to each cell in the block clockwise again. In the first was a manticore. The next turned out to be an armoury with a lot of enhanced weapons for use in the pits. I gathered them all up and when the weight slowed me, I summoned Volkarion and sold them, as well as all the other accumulated excess loot, to him.

Then, considerably lighter on my feet, we continued. The next cell had three intellect Devourers in it. And the next, a Berserk Krensher. The last cell in the block had a drider in it. When I had put it out of its misery, I found a cocoon with a *Pearl of Bashing*⁴⁹ and a *Healer’s Kit*+6 and a *Thieves’ Tools*+6 in it. With nothing else in the area and having destroyed all of the cell controls, we went back out to where we had found the Warden. There was one door there, on the East wall, which I hadn’t opened yet.

⁴⁷ There are several scenarios in the auction. The cost can be 3000GP, 4000GP, 5000GP and perhaps more, depending on how you act in the bidding. I got her for 3000GP with a jump bid at the right moment. Of course, you can also decide to take on the auctioneer and the other bidder, but that results in the slave girl also being killed. Plus, of course, you will have revealed yourselves as hostiles.

⁴⁸ If you don’t manage your exchange with her after the auction just right, she will end up dead (@26XP), not free. To persuade her, you have to: (1) Ask if she would rather be a thrall to the Illithid; (2) Tell her you are going to free her; (3) Treat her as a thrall and order her to take a message to one of your allies; and then (4) give her a fake message and directions to find the Seer. Doing it this way earns 1000XP. When you return to Lith My’athar later, if you are able to speak to her in the temple of Lolith, you earn an additional 500XP as well as an alignment shift of +3 Good.

Any other dialogue ends up with her attacking you and no XP awarded. If you try to play the heavy and tell her to “Shut Up”, you will, in addition to killing her, get an alignment shift of +7 Evil.

⁴⁹ I never found out what this could do, or how to use it.

Behind it, there was a troop of thrall gladiators. One, a Drow named Argosus, came up to me and asked about the warden. At the news that I had served him his reward for service, Argosus's eyes lit up and he asked if we were there to free them. I said yes, but asked that they not leave immediately because that would alert the whole of Zorvak'Mur. I managed to persuade them to stay put until I came back from dealing with the Elder Brain. I didn't have a lot of confidence that they would wait, but I really had no other choice.⁵⁰

I went out and over to the area I had not yet explored, in the Southeast. There, I was met by a Mind Flayer Venerator who blocked the way and refused entry to the portal behind it. I told it that I was looking for the Elder Brain and wanted to speak to it about the Valsharess. That made it pause for a second and then it appeared to get a message. It then said I would be allowed to proceed if I took off my *Helm of Shielding*.⁵¹ "Not bloody likely", I thought, and refused. At which point I had two options: Walk away or Take the bugger out.

I chose the latter which, of course, laid open our general approach to the place. First the Venerator and his Minotaur familiar took exception and, after we had dealt with them, all the other Illithid and their thralls became hostiles. Given these developments, I decided we should just go through the rest of the level we were on and the entry level as well and just clear out the whole lot of them. Then, at least, we could go back to the slave pens and tell Argosus and his cohort that they were free to leave.

Which is what we proceeded to do. As they all started running for the exits, I decided we should accompany them, just in case there were any monsters we had missed in our sweep. It was a good thing we did, and that we kept to the fore of the escapees, because it turned out we had missed one or two that might have done some damage to the erstwhile thralls. Anyhow, we were successful

⁵⁰ If they do charge out straightaway, they will all get killed in trying to escape and alert the whole lot of Illithid. To prevent that happening, your alternative to persuading or bluffing or intimidating them to wait til you get back is to fight and kill them all. This earns 26XP each and an alignment shift to Evil. It also precludes earning any XP for freeing these captives. (See footnote below.)

⁵¹ At this point, your choice is only to fight your way in or take off the Cowl of Shielding. The former is what I chose to do. If you do the latter, the Venerator will escort you to the portal and you will be transported directly into the presence of the Elder Brain. Once there your dialogue can take several courses but they all boil down to fighting the Illithid or helping them win ultimately.

The Elder Brain will offer to stop the Illithid from assisting the Valsharess if you bring it the *Mirror of All Seeing*. (Remember that artifact from Shaori's Fell?) Unless your character is unremittingly evil, this is a Hobson's choice: Face ultimate domination by either the Valsharess or by the Illithid. And you can either give them the mirror or fight them.

My own conclusion was that there was little to be gained in the long run by making the Valsharess weaker, on to make the Illithid more powerful. If you kill the Elder Brain, you will have to fight your way back out to the upper level. Also, you will find that the Argosus and the gladiator thralls are long gone or dead (i.e., you earn no XP for their freedom scenario).

I didn't choose to play as an evil character, so I didn't pursue that game line. Some day, I may choose to go back and see what happens if I give the *Mirror of All Seeing* to the Illithid. Right now, I am content to speculate that following that game line makes the Illithid all powerful and that the game ends the same as it does if you do not break free of the dream offered to you in the game line I followed: Prematurely and unsatisfactorily; End credits.

in shepherding them all to the exit gate and they all got off safely and, presumably, happily.⁵²

After they had all gone, we returned to that portal where the Venerator had so rudely interrupted our progress previously and were taken down to another, darker level.

XP earned in this area:

Intellect Devourer, Intellect Ravager: @26XP

Mind Flayer, Umber Hulk: @26XP

Mindless Thralls (Dueregar, Drow, etc.): @26XP

Ulitharid, Mind Flayer Darkener, Devourer: @666XP

The Warden, Mind Flayer Pit Boss: 666XP

The Elder Brain (Level 3)

After we entered the portal, there was a cut screen in which the Elder Brain sicced his minions on us. When we had landed, four Umber Hulks greeted us. Once we had despatched them, it appeared that each exit from the spot we were in was blocked by a *Wall of Swords*. On closer inspection, however, these all turned out to be illusions.



1. To/From Level 3(7)
2. Illithid Energy Central
3. The Elder Brain

1. Locked Door
- r. Mind Flayer Rest Pod
- w. Wall of Swords (Illusion)

We headed South from our arrival area, passing through the illusions and came to a long chamber with Illithid controls spaced along each side. We were attacked immediately by another Umber Hulk, a Mind Flayers, several intellect Ravagers and Expressionless Dueregar (obvious mindless thralls). All of which we despatched with ease. And after which, I proceeded to bash all of the Illithid controls in the chamber. I didn't know what they did, but I was not going to let those bozos use them for anything else. Ever. In a black crate at the South end of the room, there were potions of *Aid* and *Bless*, a *Greater Magic Weapon* scroll, an *Acid Flask* and a Garnet.

Moving West, we came to another chamber and were again attacked. This time by several Vacant-looking Drow, another Umber Hulk, an Adult Red Dragon that was more of a pussycat and 5

⁵² Freeing Argosus and his cohort earns 5000XP. In addition, for each ex-thrall gladiator that passes through the entry gate on the level, you earn an additional 250XP.

Ulitharid. After bashing all the Illithid controls, I found a chest that appeared in the middle of the chamber. But it was only an illusion and in its place another Ulitharid appeared.

In the next chamber to the West were several alcoves with sleeping pods in them. A black barrel, a black crate and a treasure chest all proved to be illusions and instead yet another Ulitharid attacked us. With it sorted, I unlocked each of the four sleeping pods in turn and killed the Mind Flayer Darkener inside. Served them right for sleeping on the job.

Though the door to the North, we came to another long chamber again with Illithid controls along the walls. Vacant-looking Drow and Expressionless Dueregar thralls came at us, as did another couple of Intellect Ravagers. Another illusory chest produced another Ulitharid coming at us. I started along the West wall, bashing an Illithid Control panel, then finding a piece of Malachite, a *Potion of Invisibility* and a *Healer's Kit+3* in a black barrel that was not illusory. In another barrel nearby, there was a *Potion of Cure Critical Wounds*, a *Healer's Kit+1*, a Greenstone and a set of *Thieves' Tools+3*. All the other barrels in the room proved illusory, but at least no Ulitharid appeared when I checked them out. There were two doors, both locked, on the East wall, that evidently opened into the inner part of this area. I decided to leave them for a moment, while I checked out a passage that led North.

The passage opened to a chamber that ran East-West on the Northern edge of the area. A Ulitharid, a Mind Flayer a couple of Witless Swirfneblins all attacked. After dealing with them, I destroyed all the Illithid Controls in the chamber and followed a passage West. Ahead of us was another *Wall of Swords* that proved illusory, and we ended up back where we had first descended into the level. We had completed a circuit (and survey) of the outer edges of the area. There was only one way to get further in and that was to go back to those locked doors. Which we did.

The door at the Northern end of the chamber gave me an option: Use my lock picking skills or use my intelligence to open the lock.⁵³ I did the former and opened the door. Inside, the first thing I saw were four Ulitharid. I ducked back and we quickly went down to the South door and opened it. It opened to the same chamber. We went back to the other door, charged through and took the Ulitharid by surprise. Gratifying. A few Intellect Ravagers tried to come to their aid, without success. Afterward, when I was destroying the Illithid Controls in the chamber, a locked and booby-trapped chest appeared in the middle. Once I had it unlocked and the rap disabled, inside I found a set of *Thieves' Tools+10*, a Ruby and scrolls of *Power Word Kill* and *Dominate Monster*.

When we moved to the South, another chest appeared, but it proved illusory. The Ulitharid that appeared, however, was not. As we moved East after dealing with it, five Grey Renders blocked our way. For a bit there, it was touch and go because they successfully stunned both Valen and me. Luckily, Deekin was impervious to their spells and he used his spell capabilities to do them all damage until Valen and I recovered and finished them off.

⁵³ Using your intelligence earns 250XP. Picking the lock also earns 250XP. Guessing until the door opens works, but only getting it correct the first time earns any XP.

It is possible to open one door and then, without going through it, go to the other door and repeat the process, earning the 250XP each time.

(Using intelligence, the correct number for the North door is 98 and for the South door, 17.)

In the room they were protecting, another Ulitharid, two Mind Flayer Darkeners and several Intellect Ravagers came at us. In the remains afterward, I found an Alexandrite and, in a Black Crate a Fire Opal, a *Thunderstone* and potions of *Bless* and *Eagle's Splendour*. There were also a couple of Illithid Mechanisms and an Illithid Mental Amplifier. Once again, I wasn't exactly sure what these things did, but I was sure it could not be anything benign. I just bashed the two mechanisms without bothering to look at the closely. I didn't want to risk doing whatever it was they did. And then I bashed the amplifier as well.⁵⁴ I think that was the right thing to do because I heard a voice complaining about being empty and needing more brains.

As we went through the doorway into the next chamber, a Mind Flayer Venerator, several Darkeners and Intellect Ravager came at us, as well as a hapless Vacant-looking Drow. On the East wall, there was an opening to a short hall with a door at the end. Leaving that for the moment, we went forward and found ourselves back where we had come through the locked doors. These passages and chambers mad an inner concentric area on the level. That door at the end of that small hall clearly led to the centre of the level. There we went next.

The door was locked and I was presented with the same options as the outer two doors. When I tried my lock picking skills, it appeared a specific key was required. So I used my intelligence instead. The correct solution was really quite easy: All I had to do was work out a bit of consecutive subtraction.⁵⁵

On opening, I caught a quick glimpse of the Elder Brain before I was transported to a green glade and a handsome young man came rushing up to me. He said that I had been having a dream and that everything was ok. Something, however, struck me as odd. First, neither Deekin nor Valen were anywhere to be seen. Second, while this place had the appearance of some kind of bucolic paradise, it just didn't seem real. Finally, I was certain that I had no idea who this guy was. When he asked me to go along with him, I just was not having any more of it. At that point, I was attacked by a Beholder, a Pit fiend and an Umber Hulk, plus another summoned attacker or two.⁵⁶

Eventually, I got the upper hand and did them all in. At which point, I was returned to the chamber where the Elder Brain sat. It said it knew I had released the thralls from the pits and had brought about the destruction of Zorvak'Mur, but would not stop the other Illithid from joining the Valsharess. I thought to myself, "Two out of three potential allies destroy is not a bad score. And in any case, without a central coordinator, you Beholders have to be less potent." And I attacked and killed the Elder Brain quite easily. It was, after all just a big blob of blubbery mush that now could

⁵⁴ Touching the mechanisms seems to activate something in the room. I guessed the Amplifier and bashed it. When I did that, a voice said "Freedom". When I just bashed the Amplifier without touching the mechanisms, the voice said "My Mind! So empty. Must find brains." Whichever you do will change your first interaction with the Elder Brain.

⁵⁵ Opening the door using intelligence earned another 250XP. I am not sure if a character of a different alignment or class might have obtained the specific key (whatever or wherever it was) required to open the door. In any case, the question was moot. (The answer is 3.)

⁵⁶ If you choose to go along with whoever approaches you in this scenario, your mind is enchanted and you go off forever to the equivalent of Lotus Land. Your game is finished and the end credits roll. A singularly unsatisfying ending.

only spurt a harmless green slime.⁵⁷

Not so harmless, however, were the Umber Hulks, the Mind Flayer Darkeners, and Mind Flayer Venerator who came charging in too late to help the blob. Fortunately, both Deekin and Valen were once again at my side and we were able to deal with the bunch of them. Looking around afterward, I found only a few GP in the remains on the floor. In the two black chests in the chamber, there was considerably more stuff. In one was 7750GP, a Diamond, a scroll of *Destruction* and a *Potion of Ironguts*. In the other were 4579GP, two Diamonds, an Emerald, two Sapphires, a Topaz, a Malachite and two Garnets, as well as a *Healer's Kit +10* and potions of *Bull's Strength* and *Owl's Wisdom*.

With nothing else left to see there but the rotting bubbling blob, we made our way back to the portal where we had arrived. We ran into one or two of the monsters we had missed on our way to the centre, but made short work of them. One of those illusory Wall of Swords we had passed through before proved to be not quite illusory, but it was unable to do more than negligible damage to any of us. We got on to the portal and before we knew it were back up on Level 2.

We had, of course, taken care of all the Illithid there, so there were none in evidence. As we made our way to the bridge out, I remembered all the slavers in the Poison Chalice. I didn't much care for the idea of them being able to continue there at their leisure and go on to the next slave trading emporium. So I decided to go in and finish them off. I did take the precaution of telling both Deekin and Valen to stand their ground outside. This was my fight, and mine alone.

So I went in and killed all the Dueregar and the Lizardfolk Guards quite handily. Unfortunately, the Golem did not take kindly to my eliminating all his customers and came after me unceasingly. I was unable to do any damage to it, so I chose to flee the Palace. It was a good thing I had told my henchmen to wait outside or they both likely would have been killed. Outside, I told them to follow me once again. The Golem followed too, but luckily, it was too slow to catch up with us. He did not stop the pursuit, however, until we were out of the entrance level, into the Badlands and headed back to Lith My'athar.

XP earned in this area:

Intellect Devourer, Intellect Ravager, Umber Hulk: @22X, @26XP
 Vacant-looking Drow and Expressionless Dueregar, Witless Swirfneblin: @22XP
 Dueregar Slaver in Poison Chalice: @26XP
 Mind Flayer Darkener, Grey Render: @26XP, alternatively @228XP
 Beholder (ex-dream): @40XP
 Lizardfolk Guard in Poison Palace: @40XP
 Mind Flayer Darkener in amplifier Room & at Elder Brain chamber: @266XP
 Mind Flayer Venerator: @285XP
 Mind Flayer Venerator (at Elder Brain chamber): 333XP
 Ulitharid: @400XP (@266 in Amplifier Room)
 Pit Fiend (ex-dream): 400XP
 Umber Hulk (ex-dream): 500XP

⁵⁷ Attacking and killing the Elder Brain earns 2000XP.

10. Showdown!

We reentered the Western environs of Lith My'athar and made our way to the outer gates. There we were met by Sergeant Osyr who said the Seer had been looking for us. We were then transported into the Temple of Lolith. There the Seer told me that the showdown with Valsharess was imminent and they needed me to lead the defense of the city. I demurred⁵⁸, but the Seer insisted, saying it was my destiny, that I should rest while the defense forces were all mustered and that they would wake me in the morning.

In what I at first thought was a dream, the Valsharess appeared before me in the Throne room. She attempted to enlist me to her side with various blandishments, but I refused her offers⁵⁹. The next thing I knew, I was at the inner gate and Commander Imloth was asking me to give the troops their disposition and fighting orders. I did that and the battle began.

We got through the assault on the outer and inner gates, causing the invaders to flee. Teleported back to the Seer, we were considering next steps when another assault came from the docks. Having sent Lavoera and a Battle Golem back to protect the Seer, we were able to beat the Drow down. As we rested, yet another wave came at us, this time from Umber Hulks and Illithid Mind Flayers. I had just downed a Clarity potion in time, so I was able to deal with them even though some on our side were stunned temporarily.

After a brief respite, the Seer said that we had done well but that we still had to sort the Valsharess once and for all. Teleported to just outside her fortress, we were considering how best to make the assault when, against my will, I was drawn inside all alone. There, I witnessed a cut scene conversation between the Valsharess and her bound Mephistopheles in which she ordered him to subject me to the worst tortures. Mephistopheles, I guess, had had enough of her by that time. He refused and killed off all of the Red Sisters she had in waiting. He then restored me to full health and spell capability and the final confrontation between me and the Valsharess.

This was not a fair fight. Even though I was a Rogue 8/Paladin 17 by this time, I found the battle virtually impossible to win. The Valsharess kept being restored to full health no matter how many times I got her down to near death status and she was able to get off devastating spells at uncanny speed.⁶⁰ In the end, however, I managed to move quickly enough and get in enough strikes

⁵⁸ If you want to get further credits for freeing that slave girl you bought back in Zorvak'Mur, you have to look around before this dialogue ends and speak to her. When you tell her she is free, you receive an additional 500XP as well as an alignment shift of +3 Good. If you do this, the game machine takes it that you have agreed to lead the Rebel forces against the Valsharess, reluctantly or not. You go straight to a dialogue with the Valsharess where she tries to win you to her side. And from there to the battle preparations.

⁵⁹ If you decide to side with the Valsharess, she will ask that you open the gates when she attacks. I didn't check out this scenario, but I assume it leads to the defeat of the Seer and the rebel forces. I may pursue it in a future replay of the game just to see how it unfolds, but I wasn't ready to play an evil or flawed character this time around. Perhaps another can tell how that scenario plays out.

⁶⁰ By this time, besides the uncanny invincibility of the Valsharess, I had noticed several strange things happening in the course of game play. Many dialogues were arbitrarily truncated and others that I had been able to have in previous games were unavailable. I concluded something had gone awry in the game engine. This may have been due to the latest game patches or it may be due to the way I maximized the number of XP earned at each stage to that point.

to kill the Valsharess.⁶¹

No sooner had I done that but Mephistopheles burst his chains and gloated over my victory. Claiming the outcome had been his intention all along, he gave a few signals of his foul intentions and consigned me to the Gatehouse where I ended up face to face with the Reaper.⁶²

XP earned in this area:

Pit Fiend, Dueregar, Drow Flame Master, Umber Hulk: @25XP

Drow Champion Marksman: @133XP

Mind Flayer Darkener: @266XP

Balor Baron, Drow Wizard Captain, Paragon Mind Flayer: @333XP

IV. THE UNDERDARK II - CANIA

1. The Gatehouse

In the Gatehouse, I soon discovered that the Reaper, while grim, was not so fearsome. In fact he was quite helpful and informative, notwithstanding the fact that he would not return me to where I had been previously (Toril). He told me about the use (and abuse) of *True Names*, of the connection between Mephistopheles and myself through that relic I had, but which I noticed was now missing. When I asked if there was no way he could help me, he offered his regrets but did comment that, if I knew his *True Name*, I could command him⁶³ to break the bond with Mephistopheles and return me to Toril. He also brought back to life both Deekin and Valen when I asked about them. He even gave me the option of bringing back Nathyrra, which I did even though I couldn't take her on.



1. To/From Cania (1)

- g. Teleport gate
- p. Planar Gate
- r. The Reaper

When it was clear there was little more I could learn from him, I knew we had to go through

⁶¹ To beat the Valsharess this time around, having saved the game after the last wave of assaults in the city, I had to exit and reduce the difficulty one level. I didn't like or want to do this, but as I noted in the previous footnote, funny things were happening in the way the game worked that had never previously happened and there seemed no other way to move on. Afterward, at the first opportunity, I returned to the Game menu and restored it to Hard Core D&D rules.

⁶² At this point, I noticed on the game record messaging: "Reached Level"s 10 and 20, "Gold Achievement Unlocked!" and "Dunk the Monk". None of these made much sense. The latter in particular.

⁶³ Learning this from the Reaper earns 300XP.

the gate in the South of the Gatehouse, to Cania. It was there, I concluded, that I would have to learn the Reaper's *True Name* and, somehow, figure out how to get us back to Toril, the land of the living. And deal with Mephistopheles.

2. The City of Lost Souls

Immediately on entering⁶⁴ we noticed how frigid the place was and how we seemed to take hits at intervals for no reason. A group of Worried Spirits was gathered around a brazier and we were able to learn something of the place from them. Apparently, spirits were being taken at random and devoured by Mephistopheles to create an army of the dead in Toril.⁶⁵ They also told us that one spirit had arrived and had attempted to challenge Mephistopheles, but had failed and had retreated to an ice cave and could not be brought out.⁶⁶ That sounded to me a lot like something the Aribeth who betrayed Neverwinter way back when might do. They indicated that the only way to help her was to help the Scrivener and get him/it to write her name in the snow and ice above the cave entrance. I made a mental note to see if it was Aribeth and if I could do anything to redeem her. She had been quite a Paladin in her day and her fall was not all, or even mostly, her fault. I empathized with her.



1. To/From The Gatehouse
2. The Quarry
3. The Temple
4. Ice Cave (Aribeth) Hell Breath Tavern
5. Hell Breath Tavern
6. Planar Gate to/from Wastes of Cania (1)

- c. Carved Column
- p. Plinth
- w. Worried Spirits at Brazier

After speaking to them, I decided we probably had a lot to do in the city. We started off to the South and came to a Stalinist building that turned out to be a massive ice quarry.

The Ice Quarry

I thought we should get inside away from the cold strikes and so we went inside. Where the first thing we saw was Gru'ul the Quarry Boss, a big ugly, demon type creature who was fuming over

⁶⁴ On entering for the first time, you earn 200XP.

⁶⁵ On learning about the devouring of spirits by Mephistopheles, you earn 300XP.

⁶⁶ On hearing this recited, you earn 100XP. If you evince an interest in helping her and learn about the Scrivener, that earns another 100XP.

his desk and would not give us the time of day. All he would say - and that not very civilly at all, was that the quarry was closed until Grinder #5 was up and running again.

I wasn't sure what that meant, but we left him to his papers and slipped past his desk to explore the rest of the quarry. Down a passage leading East, we came to a gate that led down into the quarry proper. There were a couple of Erinyes Quarry Workers beside the gate, but we were not able to attract their attention. No loss.



1. To/From City (2)
2. To/From Level 2 (3)
3. To/From Level 1 (2)

- g. Quarry Grinder
- p. Pit Boss Gru'ul
- w. Weary Quarry Slave



Through the grate we came to what evidently was the working quarry. Straight off, I engaged the first Weary Quarry Slave I met in conversation. Grateful for the moment's rest, he was quite helpful and told me about the Hell Breath Tavern in the Southwest part of the city ("Good for a warm drink if not a lot else"). He didn't know anything about the Reaper's *True Name*, but he did point me in the direction of the Gith Sensei, a deacon or some such thing of a group of Githzerai pilgrims, who was at the temple in the Northwestern part of the city.⁶⁷ He also told me that Gru'ul, the pit boss, would buy and sell stuff if he was in a good mood.⁶⁸

Well, Gru'ul clearly was not in a good mood, but I thought if I could get his production problem straightened out, he might be more amenable to showing his wares. When I asked about quarry grinder #5, the worker just pointed down the hill, and said to look for the imp caught in a machine. We did that and found the imp sleeping on his machine. When I woke him up, I learned he had put his arm into the machine in order to get himself out of work. While talking to him, I asked about the Reaper's *True Name* and he said Mephistopheles was probably the only one who knew it, although he intimated that someone called *The Sleeping Man* might also know.⁶⁹ He also repeated the information about the Gith Sensei and the Githzerai pilgrims. He commented that the pilgrims spent more time in the Tavern than the Temple, however.

In a lull in the conversation, I managed to get his arm free of the machine. That freaked him out because he thought he would just be put back to work. When I pointed out that he had only one functional arm, he was mollified, indeed highly pleased, at the thought of early retirement. He ran off and I took a few moments to repair the machine fully and to make sure it ran properly again.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Eliciting this information earns 100XP.

⁶⁸ This also earns 100XP.

⁶⁹ Finding out about the *Sleeping Man* earns 200XP.

⁷⁰ Freeing the Imp's arm earns 200XP. Repairing the machine after he has run off in glee earns another 300XP. (You could just feed the Imp through the machine: That earns 300XP and an alignment shift of + Evil.)

Then we made our way back up to the first level. On the way, I picked up a *Velox Berry*, thinking it might come in useful for a fire if we got to the point that we needed one badly. (Luckily, we were proving mostly resistant to the cold strikes against us. So far.)

When we came back to Gru'ul, I was able to engage him in a conversation of sorts, only marginally more civil than the first time around. I attributed this, correctly, to the fact that I had got his operation back on track. He was willing to tell me about Mephistopheles and his ambitions, about rumours of a Drow (the Valsharess, I assumed) who had learned his true name but he didn't have much more intel of any real interest. I then asked him to see his inventory⁷¹ and found a couple of really good items (a *Belt of Storm Giant Strength* and an *Amulet of the Master*). Luckily, I had enough GP to buy them and upgrade my kit overall. I had a hunch that I would need the best possible to get further along.

Back outside, we made our way around the rest of the city, finding the Tavern, the Temple and the entrance to the Cave where Aribeth was ensconced. As we went, we met several more quarry slaves, spirits and several of the pilgrims, but none had anything new to offer in the way of intel. I was also able to find and sock away several more *Velox Berries*. Then I remembered that my first priority had to be the Reaper's *True Name* and we made our way to the temple in the Northwest of the city.

The Temple I - The Gith Sensei

Outside the temple, I noticed a sullen looking pilgrim. When I asked him why he was so glum, he complained about being stuck in Cania and not even being able to see the *Sleeping Man* for whom he had made the pilgrimage. He said the Sensei, whom they had followed, would not let any see the object of their pilgrimage until they had found the answers to several mysteries. He said he had found the answer to the third mystery but had given up trying for any more. I was grateful for his sharing his answer⁷², which I had Deekin note carefully, but determined that we would not give up so easily.

Before we entered, I achieved a breakthrough, I believe, with Valen. He expressed his gratitude for my having helped against the Valsharess and put out a hand in friendship, which I accepted gladly.⁷³

Entering, ahead of us was a woman in robes at a book on a lectern. She disappeared off to the left as we moved forward. I took the opportunity to read a bit in the book, which must have been *The Book of the Sleeping Man*. What I read related some of the history between the *Sleeping Man* and

⁷¹ After milking him for information and asking to purchase something, I was awarded 700XP.

⁷² The Third-Fold Mystery is why the *Sleeping Man* left home. The answer is because he had not know love. Learning that from the pilgrim earns 500XP. The answer gets stored in your quest notebook and is used when you try to recite the mysteries to the Sensei.

⁷³ This dialogue has an option to say you would be willing to be "more than friends". I was not interested in pursuing that story line. Mainly because I shuddered at the thought of Half Elf/Human and Tiefling progeny.

Mephistopheles and revealed that the nature of his quest had been to find the *Knower of Places*.⁷⁴ That, also, I had Deekin note down.



1. To/From City of Lost Souls (3)

- b. *The Book of the Sleeping Man*
- c. Chapel (Sensei)
- d. Planar door
- m. *The Sleeping Man*

Then I moved off to follow where that robed woman had gone and found her in a chapel in the West side of the temple. She greeted me by name, which was a surprise until she followed up by telling me she and her kind had become adept at reading minds to a certain extent. She explained about the nature of a *True Name* (“written on your heart”) and about planar travel (only two portals in Cania: the Gate and the tributaries of the River Styx). She said the Gate would take us anywhere if we were able to command the Reaper. Past the River Styx, however, led only down to the Ninth Hell. Reading, rather listening, between the lines, it became evident that the *Sleeping Man* and his dream(s) were key to learning the Reaper’s *True Name*. And to getting back home.

When I asked her about the *Sleeping Man*, she revealed the requirement for access to him: Answering the five-fold mysteries of his existence. These were: (1) Who is he? (2) From whence did he come? (3) Why did he leave? (4) Whom did he seek? and ((5) What was the answer? She then told me about the First-Fold Mystery related to him, that he was a celestial planetar, a creature of Good travelling the planes⁷⁵ I thought I was well on the way then, having in my pocket (or rather Deekin’s notebook) the answer to three out of the five already. We went round and round a couple of more times and then I understood that I was not going to get access to the *Sleeping Man* until I could recite the answers to the Five-Fold mysteries to her, and left her to her meditations.

Going over to the door on the East side of the room I found it was locked. When I tried to open it, it seemed that the Sensei’s mind was probing mine and interfering. So I decided to respect the sanctity of this temple for the moment and go back out and try to find the remaining two mysteries.⁷⁶

Outside, I was in a quandary about how to proceed and then I remembered about the leader who had challenged Mephistopheles and thought that might get me closer. At least it would keep us

⁷⁴The Fourth-Fold Mystery is what the *Sleeping Man* sought. The answer is the *Knower of Places*. Learning that earns another 500XP.

⁷⁵ The First-Fold Mystery is what the *Sleeping Man* was. The answer is a *Celestial Planetar*, a Pilgrim traveling the Planes of existence. Learning that earns another 500XP.

⁷⁶ You can also try to unlock the door. If the Sensei interferes with your concentration, go outside the temple and come back in. When she heads off to her meditations, you can open the door if you have a lock pick 28 skill level. This gets you to the *Sleeping Man*, but you give up the maximum 3000XP you can earn by getting all five Mysteries.

busy while we thought more about the remaining mystery answers for the Sensei. A few of the spirits or pilgrims I had tried to talk to along the way in the city had mentioned the Scrivener as well. So I decided to follow up those leads.

The Scrivener and the Ice Maiden

Climbing the hill to the East of the temple, we followed the edge until we came to a little dog like creature standing outside what appeared to be a cave entrance. By treating it as I would a pet, it transmitted a lot of information telepathically. When I asked about the Fivefold Mysteries, it sent me a vision of elementary and other equations which I took to mean Elysium, the answer to the Second-Fold Mystery.⁷⁷ Deekin noted that one down too.

The Scrivener was quite agitated about the cave and when I asked about that, it showed me a vision of a woman locked in the ice. When I asked if I might be able to help, he made it clear the answer was yes with a vision of him write the name of the woman on a blank wall. When I asked how, he gave me another vision or a pillar and some other things, which Deekin, rightly, took to be a game of charades and find the pillar with the right answer. There were three of these, all of which I got right, which made the Scrivener deliriously happy and which caused him to run up to a blank sheet of snow and Ice and write the name: *Aribeth de Tylmarande*.⁷⁸

We followed him back up to that apparent cave, into which we could now enter. We did and looting around, found some more *Velox Berries*. Then, down in a gully I spotted a figure I took to be Aribeth. We went down to her and I kindled a roaring fire with three *Velox Berries*. The figure thawed out⁷⁹ and immediately began to attack us. When I got her down to ‘near death’ status, she stopped and surrendered.

Aribeth, the Plague and the Battle of Neverwinter were all well before my time, but I knew the history well. My first priority was to get the answer to the Fifth-Fold Mystery and it took a high level of persuasive abilities to get her, eventually, to reveal it.⁸⁰ Once we had that out of the way, I had quite a discussion with her about what had happened back in Neverwinter and the role that Mephistopheles had played in deceiving her. I managed, eventually also, to make her see that she had acted from a sense of justice and that she had been misled. Reconciled to her past, Aribeth rededicated herself to fighting Evil.⁸¹ She even offered to join me as a henchman. Unfortunately, I would have had to give up either Deekin or Valen to take her on and I was not prepared to do that.

⁷⁷ Ka-ching: 400XP

⁷⁸ The pillars are *Treason*, *Dimension* and *Infinity* in that order. Getting these correct, leading the Scrivener to the correct pillar and interacting with him at that point earns 400XP for the first, and 500XP for each of the other two. When the Scrivener inscribes Aribeth’s name, that earns another 300XP.

⁷⁹ This earns 500XP.

⁸⁰ It may be possible to get the answer through logic. But I had no success asking her to help, until I put on my *Armour of Command* with its +5 Persuade and my *Amulet of the Master* with its +6 Persuade. I was quite happy to have kept both of those in my inventory! Oh yes: The answer is the Gates of Cania and it earns another 500XP.

⁸¹ Achieving this earns another 500XP.

So with the Five-fold Mysteries locked securely in memory (and Deekin's notes), we were ready to return to the temple. Except by that time I really did feel that I had earned a hot drink. I thought, "A hot chocolate would nice, but an Irish Coffee or a Hot Buttered Rum even better." So we made our way to the tavern that we had been told about by various acquaintances.

The Hell Breath Tavern

On entering, we met up with several Githzerai pilgrims and more quarry workers, most of whom were uniformly rude and unhelpful. Even those who were semi civil did not have anything new to add to what I had learned from others we had already met. A little farther in, I overheard more than one pilgrim ruing the day he had ever met someone or something called Arden Swift.



1. To/From City of Lost Souls (4)
 - a. Arden Swift
 - r. Rizolvir's Ghost
 - t. Tavern keeper

It didn't take long before we came face to face with Swift himself, a Tiefling and a self-proclaimed Bard who looked to me like an archetypal con-man. Deekin thought he was fun, though, so I took the time to chat with him a bit. It didn't take long before he boasted that he had figured out the Fourth-Fold Mystery. Quite proud of himself, he was. But despite his boasting he had no idea where the *Knower of Places* might be found.⁸² When I noticed and commented on the dent in his horns, he said he had had a run-in with the Sensei over his plan to wake up the *Sleeping Man* with a *Trumpet of Pandemonium*. She clearly had not thought highly of his idea of a practical joke.⁸³

Deekin, on the other hand, was enthused by the idea of a *Trumpet of Pandemonium*, saying it would be perfect for Kobold music and wanted one. I wasn't much enthused about that: Kobold music at its very best can only be politely described as atonal and arrhythmic and I sure did not want Deekin producing it as we went forward. I thought, on the other hand, that if it ever came to having to wake the *Sleeping Man* such an instrument might be useful. Swift offered to give it to me if I would play a card game for it, with side wagers. I wasn't born yesterday so I knew this game was stacked against me. Valen also warned me against trying it and suggested we just blow Swift away and take the Trumpet. I thought, however, that I would give this joker one chance to play it straight.

So I put my 5000GP down on the table and we started. Of my first three questions, I could tell he had lied twice. After two more where I couldn't make out truth or a lie, I took a guess consistent with the logic of the first two lies. As I expected, he claimed I had lost and suggested that we have

⁸² If you have come to Swift by a different route than I took and do not yet have the XP bonus for learning the Fourth-Fold Mystery, you will be awarded the 500XP. Otherwise, this is just a pleasant conversation.

⁸³ Getting Swift to tell you about his plan to use the *Trumpet of Pandemonium* earns 300XP.

another go. When I pointed out he had been caught in not only one, but two lies, it came to blows and we took Valen's preferred approach to bargaining with him. On Swift's remains we found the *Trumpet of Pandemonium* and my 5000GP ante, all of which I took into inventory.⁸⁴

Afterward, in a side room, we met up with the Tavern keeper, a big Dragon who was friendly enough. When I asked what he had that was hot, he offered to make me a *Velox Berry Firewater* if I had five Velox berries. I did, and he did, which gave me a bottle of the stuff guaranteed to keep me/us hot for as long as a three-berry Velox fire. I tucked it in one of my packs to take later, just in case we were ever to find ourselves *in extremis* with no shelter insight. This guy also acts as merchant, but he does not have a lot to sell other than booze.

We moved into the last section of the tavern and were surprised to see Rizolvir's Ghost there, working over a fire. He had not survived Mephistopheles' devastation at Lith My'athar but was still able to offer the same merchant and weapon enhancement services as he had in life. Both my weapons were already buffed to the maximum, but I took Deekin's Pixie Lance into my inventory temporarily and had Rizolvir do some work on it. Valen would not give up his bespoke weapon, so I could not do anything to enhance it for him.

With nothing else for us in the Tavern, warmed, refreshed and kitted to the max, we returned to the Temple.

The Temple II - The Sleeping Man

I recited the Five-Fold Mysteries to the Sensei.⁸⁵ She congratulated me, unlocked that door to the East and gave me a crystal that I could wear (*Amulet of the Sensei*) to make it possible to read the *Sleeping Man*'s thoughts and dreams without waking him.

I followed the hallway and through the door at the other end where I found the *Sleeping Man*. We were able to examine him closely, but I was not sure how whether to try to wake him or to use the Sensei's Amulet to tap into his dreams. In the end, I decided that we would have to wake him. Reading dreams may be a way into a person's head, but dreams do not always reflect reality. Besides, using the amulet struck me as too much the behaviour of an eavesdropper or a Peeping Tom. That may have been ok for a religious nut, but not for me. In any case, I wanted hard, reliable information given by someone who was fully conscious and preferably voluntarily cooperative.

To waken him, I was presented with three options: Shout in his ear; Cut him; or Use the *Trumpet of Pandemonium*. We tried shouting, but that did nothing. I was not about to cut him and risk damaging someone or something I knew nothing about. So I chose to use the trumpet. (That cured Deekin of thinking he could make Kobold music with it!)

Immediately I did that the Sensei came charging at us, screaming "No one disturbs the Sleeping man!". There was no reasoning with her and she insisted on attacking, with only one result:

⁸⁴ Killing Swift earns 333XP. Taking the trumpet into inventory earns 600XP. If there is a way to get Swift to play straight so you can win the game fairly, I haven't found it! There is no negative alignment shift for killing him.

⁸⁵ This earns your final 500XP for learning all the mysteries.

Her speedy demise. Afterward, the no longer sleeping man asked me who she was and when I told him about the religious cult she led in his name, he termed it a heresy. I didn't feel so bad about putting that articular pilgrim to the sword.

I was able to speak with him at length and learned about him, his experiences and what I had to do to find the *Knower of Places* and ultimately, the *Knower of Names*. He described, and offered me a *Puzzle Ring*, comprised of three parts, that would show me the way to the *Knower of Places*. When I accepted, he caused a gate to his vault to appear, through which I had to go to find the ring.⁸⁶ His last words to me before I set off were to stress that the *Knower of Places* would answer only one question and that it was vital that I ask her where I will find the *Knower of Names*.

The Temple III - The Vault

I left him and went through the door to the vault. The first thing I saw was a table with a prayer card that read:

As a child, I learned to Hope.
When I became a man, my Hope matured into Faith.
With my old age approaching, I pray my Faith bears
Love upon its branches.

I didn't realize it at the time, but that provided the key to putting together the *Puzzle Ring*. Assuming I was able to get all three parts of it.



1. To/From The Sleeping Man
- c. Prayer Card
- o. Essence Orb

In the far distance North, I saw three pillars with some kind of orb on each. As we approached them, however, Skeletal Minions appeared out of nowhere and attacked us. We managed

⁸⁶ Blowing the trumpet earns 200XP plus another 800XP, presumably as reward for using the best approach to the problem. Killing the Sensei when she attacks earns 266XP plus another 300XP. Pursuing the dialogue with the Sleeping Man and having the Astral Gate appear earns 500XP+500XP.

Using the Sensei's Amulet nets only her amulet and the same XP for having the Astral Gate opened. Unfortunately, it also leaves her free to continue peddling her religious fantasies.

Cutting wakes the Sleeping Man immediately but it damages him, nets you only 200XP and an alignment shift of +10 Evil. The Sensei attack scenario plays out and you do get those XP and the Amulet as well as, later, the same XP for getting the information from the Sleeping Man and having him open the Gate to Astral Vault.

to kill them, but they were tough nuts to crack and we had to rest afterward to try to heal our wounds. No sooner had we started to do that but a great Walking Bone Mass appeared and attacked. It was no easier than the skeletons. After downing it, we retreated quickly to the South end of the Vault and managed to rest and recover from our quite serious wounds. I was regretting having sold off *Lavoera's Wrath* earlier. Not a smart move. I understood then why the Sleeping Man had been so apologetic about not having disabled all of his vault protection creations.

We buffed up with several of my Paladin spells and Deekin added some of his and we went back toward the pedestals. Once again Skeletal Minions and then another Bone Mass came at us. We despatched them and then retreated again to recover and heal wounds. A third time we charged forward and the same lot, or replicants came at us again. Third time seemed to be the charm because when they were all down, everything became totally peaceful and quiet.

That gave me a chance to look around carefully. The remains of our attackers held only a Spear+6 and a large bone each. The next thing I did was check out the pedestals and essence orbs. Each of them held a piece of the Sleeping Man's ring. I picked them up to inventory and took another look around to see if there was anything of value. There was nothing else evident in the vault except for a chest on the East wall that was apparently inaccessible, although there seemed to be chains hanging that might be useful if one were a chimpanzee. There had to be some way over there, but I couldn't see it right then.

With nothing else apparently in the vault, I took a closer look at the ring pieces. Each had a different letter marked on it: an "H", an "F" and an "L". I figured the puzzle had to be how to get the thing together. When I handled and "used" one of the pieces, a number of options were presented for assembling the pieces. I remembered the prayer card we had seen earlier and it was pretty clear what the correct order was⁸⁷. With the pieces all in the right order, they transformed into a ring.

I chanced putting on the ring and everything immediately took on a purplish tinge. I was in an apparently different plane in the same place. The first thing I noticed were chests on either side of and between the pedestals. In chest on the East end was a *Healing Kit+10*, a scroll of *Mestil's Acid Sheath* and a Ruby. In the next chest over was 4506GP, two *Healing Kit+10* and a scroll of *Crumble*. In the next chest over was another Ruby, a *Potion of Antidote* and a scroll of *Lesser Spell Mantle*. Finally, in the chest on the West end was an Emerald, another *Healing Kit+10*, a *Potion of Aid* and a *Choking Powder*.

I still couldn't see any way to get to the chest on the East wall so we headed South to go back out to the now-not *Sleeping Man*. At the door, on each side, there was a chest. In the chest on the East side, there was 4479GP, a Diamond, scrolls of *Shapechange* and *Greater Stoneskin* and a *Healing Kit+10*. In the other was another Emerald, potions of *Ironguts* and *Cat's Grace* and scrolls of *Dirge* and *Bigby's Grasping Hand*. I thought that the *Grappling Hand* scroll might work to get over to that chest on the East wall, but it wouldn't work for me so I just tucked it away.

Back in the now-not *Sleeping Man's* chamber, he said that I had indeed got the ring, told me to keep it safe and to follow the path it led to the *Knower of Places*. Still wearing the ring and looking around the chamber, I spotted the altar in the purplish plane and found on it a *Helm of*

⁸⁷ H, F & L, of course! Those are capitalized nouns in the prayer. No XP earned for doing this, however.

Righteousness which I immediately equipped, an Emerald, and potions of *Aid*, *Clarity* and *Speed*. After resting, I took another look around the temple, found nothing of interest and decided to go back out into the city, still wearing the *Puzzle Ring*.

Immediately we got outside, I saw a big red arrow in the snow and realized what the Sleeping Man had meant by the Ring showing me the way. It pointed over to a planar door that had not previously been visible, near the Northwestern boundary of the city. I was going to go through it, but then thought perhaps I should go back to the Quarry and perhaps get some more healing potions from Gru'ul. Inside the Quarry building, I immediately noticed a crate that had not previously been visible. I opened it and inside were a suit of armour *The Iron Skeleton*, an Emerald, a potion of *Heal* and of *Bless* and a scroll of *Summon Creature IV*.

I gave the Iron Skeleton to Valen, then went over and bought a few more potions of Heal from Gru'ul, whose humour had not improved noticeably. Then we went back to that Planar Gate and into the Wastes of Cania.

XP earned in this area:

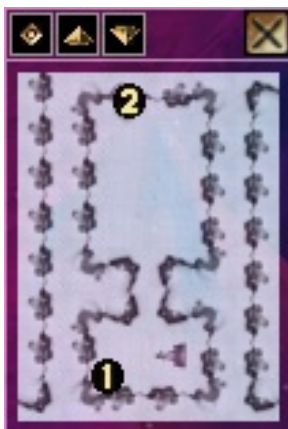
Skeletal Minion: @228XP

Huge Bone mass: @266XP

3. The Wastes of Cania

The Wastes - First Guardian of the Path

On entering the Wastes, the first thing we saw was a deserted campsite and a Velox Nettle, which I took into inventory just in case. We then made our way North through a gully at the end of which we ran into a demonic Guardian of the Path. This guy was one tough customer. It didn't help that strange things seemed to happen in the course of the fight with it. First, I changed form into a fairy, then to an Earth Elemental and then to a wolf before returning to my own form and being able to land a few blows. Luckily, both Valen and Deekin kept at the monster when I was not able to contribute much in the way of telling blows on it.⁸⁸ That's what teamwork is all about.



1. To/From City of Lost Souls (7)
2. To/From Inner Wastes of Cania

⁸⁸ Killing the Guardian of the path is worth 266XP for the Kill and 500XP for completing part of the *The Arch-Devil's Guardians* secondary quest.

Afterward, revisiting what had happened, Valen said he thought he had caught a flash from the Sensei's Amulet flash in my pack. I took a closer look at it and noticed that the light got caught in the crystal in different ways. With a bit of judicious experimentation, I discovered that by catching the light in different ways, I could transform myself into each of those forms I had had during the fight. On the Guardian's remains I found a taunting letter that I didn't pay much attention to and an *Astral Blade*+6.

There was nothing else to be found in this area other than another Velox Nettle and there appeared no way to move further, even though one of the astral arrows was pointing North. Examining all of the cliff walls around us, I noticed another arrow pointing at a spot that seemed to be full of fallen ice. I tried dislodging some of the blocks but it quickly became evident that only a whole lot of powder or something really big was going to move that ice dam.

Then I remembered that the Sensei's Amulet provided the answer to the problem: As an Earth Elemental, I could move those ice boulders easily. Except, moving them proved no easy task. I decided on another tack. I stepped back three or four paces then did a running bash at the wall. At first, not much happened. But repeating that a few times cleared away the passageway completely.

The Deeper Wastes of Cania

Once through, we followed footprints in the snow North and stumbled upon an Ice Troll camp beside a river of molten lava. Deekin helpfully observed that it was impassible. The juxtaposition of hot and cold was puzzling, but then I remembered this was a different plane. Maybe that explained it. In any case, the Trolls were not very welcoming. On their remains, I found a *Bastard Sword*+6, *Thieves' Tools*+10, a pile of 59 GP and another of 2620GP.



1. To/From Wastes (2)
2. Hell Frost Warg Den
3. To/From Mimic's Chamber (1)
- 4.
- b. Boulder Blockage
- c. Ice Crystal
- l. Lamp Standard
- t. Ice Troll Camp
- x. From Mimic (3)

Beyond the camp we climbed a hill and were immediately accosted by more Trolls and a couple of Hell Frost Wargs as well. On the remains, I found a couple of leather hides and a *Light Hammer*+4. Then I noticed an ice crystal protruding from the ground and was able to look into it. I

did not very much like what I saw: A vision of Mephistopheles striding pretty much victorious over a battlefield in what I think I recognized as somewhere in Toril.⁸⁹

Moving farther on, we were attacked by more Hell Frost Wargs which came out from behind a lair. We could see things in there, but couldn't get in to check what they were. I used the Sensei's amulet to take the form of a wolf and got in that way. I had to change back to check out the piles of debris and bones. There was not much: A place to make a fire; A Velox Nettle; and a *Sling of Force*. Back on the outside of the den, I found a *Ragged Cloak of the Warg* and another leather hide.

The directional arrows generated by the *Puzzle Ring* led me to an impassable blockage of boulders. Several other boulder agglomerations blocked all but one way to proceed in this area. That was through a Planar Gate just South of the Ice Crystal in which I had looked.

The Mimic's Nest

Through the gate, in a cut scene I faced a chest out of which jumped a *Demonic Grappling Hand* and when I moved toward it, it flew away and the chest it was in disappeared.⁹⁰ The first thing I noticed after that was that there was no more purplish tinge to everything in sight. The second thing was that the *Puzzle Ring* had moved from my finger to my pocket. The third was that there were barriers blocking the way forward, no matter which way we tried to move along the walkways. The fourth was that there were chains, like those in the *Sleeping Man's* vault back in the city, hanging in various places. The fifth was that when I put the ring back on, the plane changed and barriers that had blocked our path disappeared and others appeared ahead and, as well, that our pathways were bounded by a sea of molten lava or solid ice, depending on the plane we were in. The sixth was that, in either plane I spotted chests at one or two places behind the barred paths.

I quickly deduced that we could make our way in this area quite easily if I equipped the ring to a quick slot and put it on and took it off as necessary to move through barriers. As per standard adventuring procedure, I decided all those chests should be examined more closely regardless of the plane in which they were located. Moving off first to the right (East), I found a chest containing a Diamond, scrolls of *Fear* and *Sunburst* and a *Healer's Kit+10*. North from there was a brick wall (in both planes), but West of it another chest up against a solid brick wall, in which I found 4743GP, another *Healer's Kit+10*, a *Potion of Heal* and scrolls of *Mass Blindness/Deafness* and *Mass Camouflage*.

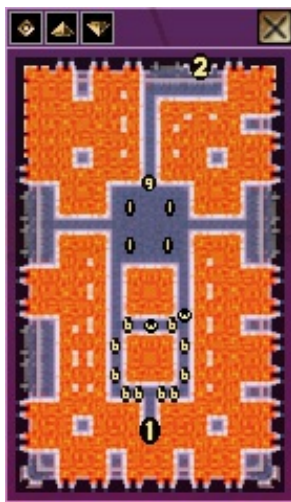
Retracing our steps back to where we entered, I then took the other route West and North. We came to a large square area in which there were two floor levers⁹¹ attended by four fiery statues and a fifth statue centred inside the others. There were passageways leading East and West and another to the north blocked by some kind of door or gate. Before we knew it, we were attacked by eight Azar Gem miners, all of whom were quite difficult to defeat. The Mimic and its Grasping Hand

⁸⁹ Looking in the crystal and watching the cut scene earns 650XP.

⁹⁰ Somehow, after watching the cut scene, you are awarded 500XP.

⁹¹ There are four levers, one at each corner statue. Two levers only are visible only in the normal plane, and another two in the purplish plane.

was jumping around all the while we were fighting. Scavenger Rats occasionally trailed us until we did away with them.



1. From Deeper Wastes (3)
2. To/From Mines (3)
3. Astral Door to Greater wastes (x)
4. Magically Barred Passage

- b. Barrier
- f. Fire Conductor
- g. Gate
- l. Lever
- m. Gem Throwing Machine
- w. Brick wall



Once the fighting was over, we were able to look and move around freely. On the few miners' remains, we found over 1500GP and a Pile of Gems. At the end of a narrow passageway to a dais on the East wall was a landing with a chest (Ruby, scroll of *Healing Sting*, potions of *Heal* and *Eagle's Splendour*). In a chest in the dais at the end of a similar passageway to the West, there was a suit of Caseil's Armour, a *Finger of Death* scroll a *Healer's Kit*+10, a potion of *Lore* and a Ruby.⁹²

I tried pulling the visible levers but that door or whatever it was to the North would not open. But then I thought to change planes and two other levers became visible and I pulled them as well. That opened the way to the North. As I neared the end, I spotted the Mimic and went into a cut scene in which it said "It seems a bit...convenient.. That the relic you found so long ago was part of Mephistopheles. Mind you, I suppose that's how you became involved in all of this, isn't it.

Then the cut scene took me through the door to the North where it continued with a gem throwing machine throwing gems and the Mimic chasing after the thrown gem. Looking around, in the exact centre of this area, I came to some kind of cathode or anode and off to its left, a lever. When I tried the lever a fiery crackle resulted. Then it struck me: If I were to lure the Mimic on to that spot, I could make it a crispy critter. And I knew just how to do it if I could find enough gem piles to attract it.

So I spent the next while collecting gem piles (and killing off Scavenger Rats at the same time). When I thought I had enough I laid on right on that cathode (or anode, whatever) and then the others spaced at shortish intervals down to the chain hanging over the West leading pathway. And sure, enough, after a bit, the Mimic captured one, and then another of the piles. That continued until the greedy gut was at the gem pile in side the cathode/anode location. Then, before it knew what hit him, I had pulled the lever and made toast of the Mimic. Immediately, *Bigby's Grasping Hand* jumped into my pack. (I fitted it to a quick slot: If the Mimic could use it, I might be able to as well.

⁹² The specific items are mostly picked at random by the game algorithm. However, there is always one pile of Gems, a *Caseil's Soul* Armour and over 1500GP in total.

And before I knew it we were confronted by another kind of demon, Gargamesh, who claimed it was his and would not take no for an answer. Unfortunately for him, we were in pretty good shape and gave him a bigger fight than he must have expected. With both Gargamesh and the Mimic done for, we finally had a chance to rest and recharge. On Gargamesh's remains I found the Katana *Radiant Death* and *Potion of Heal*. On the Mimic, I found that he had appropriated my Dragon Armour (which I promptly re-equipped). As well there were a pair of *Boots of Striding+10*, potions of *Heal* and *Speed* and a large *Scavenger Rat Skull*. I didn't know what to make of the skull, so I just stuffed it into a corner of one of my bags. Then I flogged off most of the excess loot to Volkaren, just to get rid of some weight. Better than dieting.....

I checked out a misty passageway in the Northwest corner of this area, but it was magically locked and I couldn't figure out how to get through it. So I decided to leave it for later. Back in the centre, just to the side of the lever, I found an Astral Door had appeared. It certainly hadn't been there when we arrived so it had to be a way forward. I could not find where we had first arrived in this area, nor a way to get back to where we had first met the Mimic. And, now that I had the *Grappling Hand*, I also thought it would be nice to go back and see whether it could get me to that remote chest in the *Sleeping Man's Vault*.

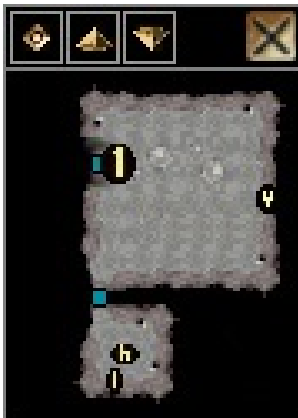
With no other way forward, I decided we had to go through the Astral Door. That took us to a cliff overlooking the River Styx, on other side of those boulders that had blocked our way before we went to find the Mimic. I was in the Astral plane and could see the red arrow pointing to the edge of the cliff, so I was pretty sure we were in the right place. Unfortunately, we had no way to go forward and the boulders were blocking our way back.

The Chamber of the Long Death (The Gang of Five)

As we stood there wondering what to do, a group of Ice Trolls on the other side of the river began attacking us with spells and whatnot. I approached the cliff's edge to check them out and the *Grasping Hand* began to twitch. When I saw a light standard on the opposite side of the river, that gave me an idea of how we might get over there to deal with the trolls up close and personal. I activated the *Grappling Hand* and it flew to the light standard, taking us with it. Then we were able to deal with the monsters and give ourselves some time to get our bearings on the North side of the river.

After a short bit, the path toward the Northwest was blocked by more boulders. We went back toward the Northeast and eventually found ourselves face to face with yet more Ice Trolls in a kind of dead end valley. With all the trolls disposed of, I checked out the few remains there were and found 3860GP, but not much else except for some *Bullets of Smiting*. Then I spotted some more red arrows pointing to another Astral Door on the east wall of the valley.

We went through that door and the first thing I saw was Grimgnaw, that grim monk who was at the battle of Neverwinter, with four other very unsavoury characters ranged around him. I remember thinking that either he was in trouble with them or we were soon going to be in trouble all five of them. Before they spotted us, I took Deekin and Valen aside, had Deekin cast all his buffing spells on us and then I used my buffing spells on each of us. Not to mention downing several buffing and protective potions.



1. To/From Puzzlers' Sepulchre (1)
 - h. Small Hole in Wall of Boxes
 - l. Lever
 - y. Arrival from Greater Wastes (4)

It was a good thing that I did that. For no sooner did we approach Grimgnaw and begin conversing than it became clear we were either going to have to submit meekly or to fight our way through the lot of them. And so it happened. Before we were finished, I had gone through ten potions of *Heal* and both Deekin and Valen had gasped their respective last breaths. It ended up with just me and Grimgnaw duking it out, a long and bloody travail. But I prevailed, luckily.

Luckily for me and for Deekin and Valen too because I still had my *Rod of Resurrection* and brought both back to life. With them by my side and all of us fully rested, we rifled the bodies of the goons. On the body of Grimgnaw I found a *Small Silver Key*, a set of *Master Robes of the Old Order*, a *Cloak of Protection+5*, *Gloves of the Long Death+6*, a *Ring of Protection+5*, a *Ring of Resistance+3* and a *Scarab of Protection+6*. No surprise that he fought so strongly for so long.

On Balpheron, there was his *Robe of Balpheron*, a *Cloak of Epic Spell Resistance*, *Bracers of Armour+7*, *Boots of Reflexes+6*, a *Scarab of Protection+6*, *Balpheron's Staff*, a *Ring of Protection+5* and a *Ring of Fortitude+5*. On Kot Uth-Kalin, there was a set of *Half Plate+7*, a *Cape of the Fire Bath*, *Boots of Hardiness+3*, *epic Gloves of Discipline*, a *Belt of Fire Giant Strength*, a *Ring of Protection+6*, a *Ring of Elemental Fire Resistance* and the *Slasher of Koth*. On Crimson, there was a *Mantle of Great Stealth*, a *Heavy Crossbow+6*, a *Potion of Cure Critical Wounds*, a *Potion of Antidote*, a *Greater Swordsman's Belt*, her *Invisible Death Armour*, the *Dagger Bloodsucker*, an *Epic Amulet of Health*, a *Ring of Protection+6*, *Boots of Elvenkind*, a *Ring of Fortitude+6* and the *Rapier Devil's Sting* (which I was not able to identify til later). On Maugrim, was his *Blood Plate Armour*, a *Tower Shield+6*, a *Cloak of Protection+5*, the *Morningstar Nemesis*, *Epic Gloves of Concentration*, a *Girdle of Holy Might*, a *Ring of Power* and a *Ring of Holiness*. Oh yes, and scrolls of *Cure Critical Wounds*. This was no bunch of petty criminals.

After giving both Deekin and Valen a few items that would improve their kit, I took a close look around the cave. There was a skull-like Protrusion in the West wall that looked like it was an exit, but we could not get past the outer pillars of the thing. Then I found a locked door in the Southwest corner and a use for that *Small Silver Key* I had found on Grimgnaw. Behind it was a small chamber in which a bunch of boxes had been piled high and formed a dividing wall. Beyond the boxes, I could see a lever, but no way to get to it. Then I noticed a small hole in the box wall. No way to get through that as any of us was. But then I remembered the *Sensei's Amulet* and turned myself into a Pixie and flew right through that little hole in the barricade.

On the other side, I returned to my own form and pulled the lever. A cut scene then showed

the barriers to that skull-like exit all crumbling. I happened to notice a Rat's nest and found a *Soulrinker* Bastard Sword in it and packed in with my other loot. Then back to Pixie form and back to the other side of the barrier and back to myself.

Out in the main chamber, we proceeded to the skull formation, and rested for the night in the relative warmth of the place. A last careful look around in purple planar mode revealed a barrel I had not seen previously. In it was a *Robe of Leathers*, an Emerald, scrolls of *Darkfire* and *Firebrand* and a *Healer's Kit+10*. I also found a pile of remains with one *Devil's Sting* and a dozen *Cure Critical Wounds* scrolls. Then we went out through the only way open to us.

The Puzzlers' Sepulchre

Once through a cut scene showed several winged puzzlers and one of them saying "Our next Victims!" and they proceeded to attack. Boy, was that one mistaken! Looking around afterward, I saw we were on a jetty facing on to a sea of lava with rows of cut stone masonry islands in it, Ten islands in all. On a pile of remains, I found a *Greatsword+6* and a *Fire Arrow*. I spotted a statue on which there was an inscription: "Stone to stone, the stone turns; Lightning to lightning, the lightning fades".⁹³ Another Puzzler attacked and on his remains, there was a *Halberd+6*. In a chest on the landing, I found a Ruby, a scroll of *Dismissal*, a potion of *Cure Critical Wounds* and a *Healer's Kit+10*.



1. From Chamber of the Long Death (1)
2. Portal to Knower of Names

- c. Hanging Chain
- l. Lever
- s. Statue
- t. Treasure Pile

I pulled the lever at the end of the jetty and it teleported me to the next island to the North. I noticed that a big red arrow on the floor changed direction at intervals and that there was a lever in one corner. Putting two and two together, I deduced that moving the lever would teleport us to the next island in whatever direction the arrow was pointing. So I teleported us to the next island North. On this island, there were two levers, a single-handled one and a double-handled one. I was pretty sure that the single-handled lever was for teleporting but was not sure about the other.

⁹³ Finding the inscription is worth 200XP.

So I tried it. Nothing seemed to happen other than a coloured light column appeared over it. When I moved the lever again, a different light appeared. I fiddled with it until I settled on a blue column over it. Blue tends to be my favourite colour. Then I decided to see what there were on the other islands. Most of the others had only the one lever. But two other islands had a second lever which did the same as the first. I left each with a column of blue over it.

All the while we were jumping from island to island, Puzzlers on a peninsular in the North central part of the area were shooting arrows at us. We pretty quickly finished a visit to each of the islands. Lucky for us the Puzzlers were bad shots. And that we had regeneration enhancements in our equipped kit. Nonetheless, I decided that enough was enough and we navigated over to where they were and finished them all off.

Looking around, I saw a door to the East that was blocked to us by some sort of lightning charge. Next I saw three statues, each with a blue light column over them, and discovered that I could make them rotate on their respective axes in increments by touching them. Then I saw another lever on a narrow peninsula to the East and went to it. When I moved it nothing happened. Then I turned around and saw the centre statue was in line with the lever and the blocked door. Remembering the inscription on the statue back on the landing, I decided to point the head of the statue toward the blocked door and try the lever again.

That produced a weak electrical beam from the statue to the door, but nothing else. Then, I pointed the other two statues toward the door, went back and moved the lever again. That produced a powerful beam and the lighting blocking the doorway disappeared.⁹⁴ Through the door, there was a small chamber with a locked chest on each of its North and South walls and a door to the East.

I tried unlocking the chests, but even though my unlock skills were sufficient, the chests would not open. It was then I noticed another arrow, in the centre of the chamber, rotating in increments. When I timed my opening of a chest to coincide with when the arrow was pointing at it, the chest opened. In the chest on the North wall were 1478GP, a *Belt of Cloud Giant Strength*, potions of *Aid* and *Lore*, and a *Thunderstone*. In the chest on the South wall was a set of *Hide Armour+7*, a scroll of *Darkness*, potions of *Speed* and *Cure Critical Wounds*, and a Garnet.

The door to the East was the same: It would open only when the arrow was pointed at it. It opened on to a big rectangular chamber where we were attacked by several more Puzzlers. Apart from a corpse on which there was a *Breastplate+3*, the only other thing of interest in the chamber was a door to the South. It opened on to a long hallway South. Puzzlers appeared a couple of times as we went forward, but they were no real obstacle. After a jog East, it ended abruptly at a lake of lava. Across the lake I could see landings with hanging ropes at them. And more Puzzlers.

Then I noticed the chain hanging beside me and immediately the *Grappling Hand* came to mind as the way to move about this area without getting my toes or clothes singed. I used it to get a couple of bags of treasure from small islands, and to get close to several of the Puzzlers that continued to bother us. Each of the two treasure piles rendered two potions of *Heal*.

⁹⁴ Disabling the blocking beam earns 300XP. Note that to create a beam strong enough to disable the lighting blockage, each of the three statues had to have the same colour light beam over it as well as to be pointed at the door. It took me a couple of tries before I got the colour combination part of the puzzle right.

On the remains of the various Puzzlers we sorted were: 4478GP and an Alexandrite; 40GP and a *Bastard Sword*+6; *Studded Leather Armour*+5 and 8 pieces of *Farel's Gold*; a *Tower Shield*+5; a *Chain Shirt*+5; 60GP; and 1395GP. In a chest in a nook in the Northeast, there was a *Caniam Cathix Bastard Sword*, a *Healer's Kit*+10 and a Ruby.

Eventually we ended up facing the second Guardian of the Path. He was every bit as difficult as his predecessor earlier on, but we prevailed. On him was an old note that ordered him to stand guard until he received further orders, a *Whip*+6.⁹⁵ In one of the chests nearby were 4528GP, Potions of *Invisibility* and of *Heal* and a scroll of *Gate*. In the other were a *Healer's Kit*+10 and potions of *Heal*, *Invisibility* and *Cure Critical Wounds*.

The I noticed the portal he seemed to have been guarding. With nothing else in the area and no way to go back beyond the Puzzlers' Sepulchre, all we could do is check out the portal.

The Knower of Places

That portal teleported us into the realm of the Knower of Places. I began speaking to her and she clearly took me for the Sleeping man because she kept referring to me as "Her Planetar" and, at first, refused to provide answers to any question I might pose. Eventually, however, I manage to persuade her that I really was not he Planetar and she consented to answer a question. Of the many possible questions I might pose, I asked her where the *Knower of Names* was. At first she resisted, but then answered, indeed, revealed that the *Knower of Names* was her sister, who had been taken gulled by Mephistopheles and that when he had what he wanted, he imprisoned her. She was so incensed by recalling what had happened that she even offered a clue as to how to get directly to the spot. She spoke it in a riddle which made no sense to me at the time.⁹⁶



- a. Arrival from Puzzlers' Sepulchre (2)
- d. Astral door
- k. The Knower of Places

I thanked her and we went the only way we could, through the Astral Door behind her.

⁹⁵ Looting the Guardian and reading the note earns 500XP.

⁹⁶ This exchange earns 500XP. The riddle is 7 minus 16. You will have to try to make sense of it later.

XP earned in this area:

Scavenger Rat: @26XP

Puzzler: @26XP, @133XP, @228XP or @266XP

Guardian of the Path: 160XP or 266XP

Ice Troll Berserker, Shaman: @266XP or @320XP

Azar Gem Miner: @266XP or 320XP

Hell Frost Warg: @320XP

Grimgnaw, Maugrim, Balpheron, Crimson, Koth Uth-Kalin: @400XP

The Deepest Wastes of Cania - I

We arrived on a ruin with a campsite where we could have lit a fire, had we need to rest. As we moved to the West, we were received somewhat frostily by a couple of Frost Giants. I was going to follow the astral arrow pointing North, but Valen went charging after another Frost Giant and an Ice Troll Shaman further to the Southwest. So, We had to follow him to try to make sure he didn't get into too much trouble. Good thing too, because there were another couple of Ice Trolls, A Shaman and a Berserker, laying in wait to ambush him. There was nothing on the Frost Giant remains, but on the Ice Trolls, I picked up 57GP and a *Potion of Speed*.



1. Arrival from Knower of Places
2. Ice Troll Lair
3. Beneath the Ice
4. To/From Fortress Courtyard

- c. Crystal
- f. Fencing
- g. Gate
- p. Post

Ice Trolls

In the dead end where we ended up, there was an entrance to a cave, with skulls impaled on a stake on either side. I decided we might as well check it out, seeing as how we were there. That got us into an Ice-Bound Lair where there were, of course, more Ice Trolls. We spent a while clearing the area of them. On their remains afterward, I found a *Dwarven Axe +5*, Fire Opal and 44GP. There were also some treasure chests in corners. In one, I found a Diamond, a *Healer's Kit+10*, potions of *Heal* and of *Invisibility*. In a nearby Astral Chest, there was 4223GP, two *Healer's Kit+10*, potions of *Heal* and of *Owl's Wisdom* and a *Sash of Searing*. In a third chest, there was a Ruby, scrolls of *Spike Growth* and of *Summon Creature IV*, and potions of *Aid* and of *Clarity*. In the fourth chest, there was an Emerald, a *Dwarven Waraxe+6*, a scroll of *Shapechange* and potions of *Clarity*, *Heal* and *Cure Critical Wounds*. This was not a very complicated area to explore, basically a crooked square. But the loot was good.

After that digression, I led my henchmen back to where we picked up the trail of astral arrows. It led us North and East. In the Northeast corner of the area, we ran into a couple of Fire Elemental Scouts who were quite effective fighters. There were a couple more behind an river of flowing lava, but we had to retreat and rest up and heal for a bit before thinking about how to get at them. Returning to the river of lava, I used the *Grappling Hand* to get over to the other side. Where we dealt with them also. There was not much left of them, only a single Fire Opal. After a rest, I notice an entrance to another cave.

Beneath the Ice

That led to an extensive area under the ice where there was lots of lava flowing. On a small peninsula to my right (East), I spotted another Fire Elemental and used⁹⁷ the *Hand* to get over and sort it. On another little promontory farther East, I spotted a pile of treasure and used the *Hand* to retrieve it. When I checked it out, there were three potions of *Heal*. Then I grappled back to where we had first entered.



1. To/From Deepest Wastes (3)

- c. Hanging Chain
- f. Fiery Corridor
- o. Prison Anchor
- p. Prisoner

Looking to the North, the only way to proceed was through a long corridor of flaming coals. I was pretty sure that none of us would survive trying to cross that, even hasted as we all were. So I told Valen and Deekin to stand their ground and then used the *Sensei's Amulet* to change into pixie form. I was totally encumbered and slowed, but doing that allowed me to fly (albeit very slowly) high enough over the corridor without turning into a crispy critter. That got me to the end of the fiery corridor, but then I was on a narrow ledge facing an expanse of molten lava and could not go any farther. To deal with that, I returned to my normal form and used the *Grappling Hand* to pull myself over to the solid ground on the other side. I had seen the Fire Elemental waiting there for me, but I figured I could deal with it by myself. Except, there were two of them and it was a near run thing (to quote Wellington after Waterloo).

Somehow (Don't ask me how), both Deekin and Valen appeared during the fight and helped, if only by acting as targets. Afterward, I changed their orders to "Follow me" and we looked at how to get to the other parts of this area. Looking around, I found a *Thieves' Tools* +10 and a *Torch* on the remains and a *Velox Nettle*. There were chains hanging at strategic places, so I was able to use the

⁹⁷ To use the *Grappling Hand* successfully, you have to be facing the spot you want to go to or retrieve from. If it doesn't seem to work, try changing your character's stance or direction slightly.

Grappling Hand to move ahead to the next landing. That brought us face to face with another Fire Elemental. Having dealt with it, I noticed an island in the midst of the lava with four electrical (I surmised) beams, one at each corner forming a pyramid. In the lava lake, at each corner of the central island was a rocky outcrop. It looked a lot like the kind of setup that had held Lavoera back in the Upper Underdark. And sure enough, looking up at the apex, I saw a prisoner held by the beams.

I grappled over to the rocky outcrop to the Southwest of the island for a closer look. There, I sent the *Grappling Hand* to the base in the Southwest corner of the island. That did not seem to do anything at first, but then it resulted in the beam anchored at that point to lose power and then go out completely.⁹⁸ It also resulted in another angry Fire Elemental transporting itself over to us and attacking. (By this time the Elementals were a nuisance with which we had to, and did, deal reasonably expeditiously.) We then grappled to a landing at the South edge of the lava lake, where I picked up a rather ordinary gold necklace in a chest.

From that landing, we grappled over to the rocky outcrop at the Southeast of the central island. There I threw the hand at the Southeastern prison anchor, with the same result as the previous time. Then we grappled over to a landing on the East side of the lake and had to deal with another Fire Elemental before we could move on to the next outcrop. There I shut down the beam in the Northeast Corner. After that we grappled over to the landing on the North edge of the lake. There, after sorting a Fire Elemental, I found 318GP in a chest and another *Velox Nettle* in a corner. We then grappled to the outcrop at the Northwest corner of the island and put out the last prison anchor.

Unfortunately, it was too late to save the prisoner, whoever or whatever it was. Only a blood-soaked bag remained in the centre of the island. I was able to retrieve that with the *Hand* and in it was a *Band of Fire and Frost*. That was a pretty powerful ring and I was going to give it to Deekin or Valen. But it didn't seem to me to add that much more to either's kit. Indeed, it would have meant removing the *Regeneration+1* from Valen's, which would have been a negative in my view. We then returned to the main entrance to the area and rested before heading out into the cold again.

As we made our way to what appeared to be the centre of this area, I saw and looked into an ice crystal. It was not a very happy scene: Mephistopheles arriving at the inn in Waterdeep, killing all and sundry and then monsters flowing in behind him. It lent a sense of urgency to pressing onward. Which we did and were then met by two Frost Giant Guards and several of their pet Hunting Wolves. All of which we disposed of after a bit of a scuffle. Afterward, we picked up a wolf pelt and some GP from the remains.

Then, I saw before us the gates and the way forward.

The Fortress Courtyard

We went through the gates into what appeared to be a courtyard and approach to a fortress. A cut scene showed a crack appearing a wall and a demon coming through it, then fighting with a couple of Frost Giants.

⁹⁸ This earned 200XP. There is no reward for disabling the next two anchors, but upon disabling the fourth, another 300XP is earned.



1. To/From Deepest Wastes (3)
 2. Gates (Locked)
 3. Crack in Courtyard Wall
- w. Frost Giant Hunting Wolf Pen

As we made our way forward, we were attacked by several Frost Giants and their Hunting Wolves as well. With them all put down we had time to rifle their remains, which netted 2572GP, 41GP, 36GP and a *Hammer of the Glacier*. And for a look around for more loot, which netted the heavy staff *Thornshield*, potions of *Heal* and of *Cure Critical Wounds*, a scroll of *Fear* and a ruby.

I tried opening and then unlocking the gates in front of us (to the South) to no avail. The I noticed the crack in the wall that had appeared in the cut scene to the East, with a Pit Fiend dead in front of it. With no other way to proceed, seeing tracks in front of the crack and the sounds of a raging battle behind it, I decided we should go through prepared for a fight.

XP earned in this area:

- Frost Giant Hunting Wolf: @26XP
- Frost Giant: @133XP
- Ice Troll Shaman: @133XP
- Fire Elemental, Scout: @133XP

The Deepest Wastes of Cania - II

Windswept Battlefield

Through the crack, we encountered a raging battle in which numerous monsters were fighting each other and/or us, depending on who was nearest. Eventually, we managed to overcome the bunch of the. If we had been any weaker as a team, I could have used the *Sensei's Amulet* to transform myself into an Earth Elemental and be able to hurl trees, boulders and other detritus at the various monsters to subdue them. But, as I say, we seemed to manage without doing that.

Once the actives had all been cleared, we explored the area. We found ourselves in a valley of sorts. While we could climb the cliff on the West, all the paths farther West was blocked by apparently immovable boulders. On the North, the cliffs were unscalable. Eventually, I spotted a promontory that looked out over a lava river. On the other side, I saw a post with a burning torch on it and decided that we should get over there. Before doing so, I had a premonition that there was big trouble on that side, so we buffed up with all the good spells I had and some from Deekin as well.

Then I used the Grappling hand to get us over to the other side. After a few moments, we saw a big, big bad guy siccing a bunch of lesser bad guys on us. We knew we were in for a fight.



1. To/From Fortress Courtyard (3)
 2. Raging Hordes (Three Protectors of the Way)
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- b. Boulder Blockage
 - c. Catapult
 - g. Impassable Iron Fencing
 - k. The Knower of Names
 - p. Post with Torch

The Devil's Prison

It was a good thing we had buffed up because this bunch just kept on coming. And coming. I think the minions erupted from their hidey holes at least five times before we exhausted them. It took a lot of lucky hits and several healing potions for both Valen and myself before they were all sorted. Then the head honcho, who had been giving orders and who was, I think, the last Guardian of the Path, was left alone to stop us. He was formidable and just refused to be killed. Several times we had him down to just short of death. But then he would transport himself to another spot, mostly healed so we had to begin over again. Eventually, though, down he went. On the body, I found the bastard sword *Brimstone* and a note, presumably to the Guardian, charging him with stopping any comers and promising him dominion over the Wastes.

With all that done, I was free to look around and found that we had been fighting on a peninsula in the Northwest sector of this part of the Wastes, separated from the rest by that river of lava we had crossed before the battle royal.. In the middle of the place, I saw a circle of twelve frozen craters, each of which appeared to imprison some kind of creature underneath the thick covering ice. I could not, however, see down into them with any clarity.

This had to be the prison to which Mephistopheles had sentenced the Knower of Names. But, try as I might, I could find no way to crack the ice on any of the craters. So I had to look around for some way of breaking the ice. Fortunately, I was still wearing the *Puzzle Ring* and thought to look for some of those astral arrows that had guided our way this far.

The arrows led us to a spot by the lava river at the Northern edge of the area (almost at the centre of my virtual map). There I saw another post with a torch. Using the *Grappling Hand*, I got us over to the other side, where there were more arrows to follow. We followed a gully with high cliff walls, and ended up in another valley, across from where we had just finished fighting. Impassable cliff walls were on all sides except for the lava river. Looking around, I found a lot of broken weapons, debris and some *Velox Nettles*. If each of us had not had regeneration enhancements on our kit, we would have sorely needed nettles to keep us warm enough to rest up. The cold in this area was brutal.

Finally, I found a catapult that was undamaged and, which I thought, could be used to break the ice on those prison craters. None of us could pick it up. The three of us together couldn't even move it. Then I remembered the *Sensei's Ring*: As an Earth Elemental, I could easily throw the catapult over to the prison area! So that is what I did. It landed right in the centre of the ring of prison craters. Then, I returned to normal and used the *Grappling Hand* to get us back to the prison area again. Across from where the catapult had been, there was another post and torch, so we didn't have to retrace our steps. Once over, the astral arrows led me to the catapult, so I was pretty sure we were on the right track.

At this point, I rested and knew we were close to finding the Knower of Names. I decided to divest myself of all the excess loot we had accumulated, just in case we had to travel light, and called up Volkarion.

Back in the prison, I tried to remember what the Knower of Places had told me would help find the Knower of names. Try as I might, "Seven minus Sixteen" didn't make any sense to me. When I had thrown the catapult over, it had landed smack dab in the centre of a dozen frozen over craters arranged in a circle. So I started methodically, facing North, aiming the catapult at the one o'clock crater and breaking it.

When it broke, out came the Pit Fiend imprisoned inside. It then proceeded to attack us straight away. To repay its ingratitude, we made short work of it, picking up some loot from its remains afterward. Then I continued, shifting the target of the catapult clockwise to the next crater. With the same result, for the next ten craters.

XP earned in this area:

Devil Warrior: @26XP

Balor Lord, Vrock, Erinye, Fire Imp, Succubus, Pit Fiend: @133XP

Guardian of the Path: 133XP

Pit Fiend Prisoner: @133XP

The Knower of Names

Finally, at the crater at the 12 o'clock position, I freed the Knower of Names.⁹⁹ She greeted me by calling me by my *True Name* (Donita'ar, the True Light of Cania).

In the dialogue I had with her, the Knower told me of how she had loved Mephistopheles, abetted his machinations in Cania and ended up his prisoner. Having heard all that horror story, I decided that, besides the *True Name* of the Reaper, I also had to know Mephistopheles' *True Name* if I were to bring him to book successfully. And, to ensure she told me Mephistopheles' name, I had to know the Knower's *True Name*. And, of course, to get to Mephistopheles, I had to get the *True Name* of the Reaper to ensure he willingly got me back to Waterdeep. The last two that I thought might be useful or helpful were the *True Names* of my companions, Valen and Deekin.

⁹⁹ Yes, I know. I could have freed her right off by starting at the 12 o'clock crater. But then I would not have got the 133XP for each Pit Fiend Prisoner, not the loot on the remains. At this point in the game, having a LOT of GP directly affects your options nearer to the end.

As soon as I started asking her for names, I was glad I had picked up and sold off all that excess loot along the way because each name had a cost either in GP or in some of the special items I had brought along.

Mephistopheles *True Name* was Thra'axfl the Ambitions. That cost me 500,000GP, but it also earned 1000XP, plus a second 1000XP. I was not able to persuade the Knower to tell me his name until I had first asked her for her *True Name*. Hers turned out to be Phyreshi the Knower. That cost me 200,000GP and earned me another 500XP.

The Reaper's True Name was Hecugoth the Abandoned. Getting that required no GP but it did require surrendering both the *Puzzle Ring* and the *Sensei's Amulet*. I gave them up reluctantly and only because we needed the Reaper's name to get back to confront Mephistopheles. I wasn't sure we were not going to need either again. But it was evident that we were getting near to the end of this adventure and it was equally evident that there was no other way of getting out of Cania.¹⁰⁰ Getting the Reaper's name earned another 500XP.

Finally, I still had enough GP (200,000 GP each) to learn the True Name of Deekin (Ixthyria the Scalesinger) and Valen (Oeskanthine the Demonwrestler). Each earned another 500XP. I could probably have learned other names, at similar costs and rewards. By that point, however, I was sure I had all I really needed to deal with Mephistopheles and it was time to get a move on. I thought, however, that there had to be something else going on with the Sleeping Man, so I asked his *True Name* (Celesfa'ar the Patient). That cost me 100,000GP but also earned 1000 XP. I still had a lot of GP so I asked the True Name of his true love. Luckily, I still had just over the 300,000GP required for that. When I paid, the Knower revealed it was none other than myself! That earned me 1000XP plus yet another 1000XP.

At that point, there were no more names that I thought might be useful, so I asked the Knower to get us back to the City of Lost Souls.

4. The City of Lost Souls - II

This she did and we found ourselves back in the Temple of the Sleeping Man. There we met the Sleeping Man once again, wide awake. He looked at me expectantly and so began a dialogue with him.¹⁰¹ I told him that I had learned the name of his one true love, that it was me and he proceeded to shower me with kisses. (That earned 1000XP plus a second 1000XP.) I broke away and he asked what was the matter. Whereupon I told him of the trouble back in Toril. With that, he said he would move heaven and earth to help and told me to return and he would fight alongside me and flew off. (That earned yet another 1000XP.)

With him gone, I recalled that unreachable chest in his vault and thought I might as well see what was in it before moving on. We returned to the vault and I used the *Grappling Hand* to get over to the chest. That turned out to be a good decision because, in the chest was a *Shroud of Kings*,

¹⁰⁰ Giving up the Puzzle Ring meant that I could no longer travel on the purplish plane.

¹⁰¹ If you have not learned The Sleeping Man's *True Name* and that of his true love, your dialogue will be limited to thanking him, killing him, or just leaving him be.

potions of *Speed*, *Lore* and *Cure Moderate Wounds*, as well as a scroll of *Remove Disease* and a gold ring. The *Shroud* had long list of enhancements, notwithstanding a -4 Charisma effect (which I thought I could easily live with) so I equipped it. We then rested and I had a chance to talk with both Valen and Deekin. I learned about Valen's quite tragic past and noticed that Deekin had grown wings and into a Dragon Disciple.

Then we made our way out of the temple and into the city. The first thing I thought of was to go back to the Mimic's area and check out that door that was closed to us there. However, when I got to where the astral gate had been, only the side pillars remained and there was no way to get back to the Wastes.¹⁰² So I gave up that idea and decided just to get back to the Reaper and Toril and get to grips with Mephistopheles without further delay.

5. The Gatehouse - II

We headed back to where we had first entered the city and transported back up to the Gatehouse. I saw Nathyrra still there and had a short chat with her, but I did not see any reason to part ways with Deekin and Valen in order to have her join me. Then I went to the Reaper and used his *True Name* and ordered him to return us to Waterdeep.¹⁰³ He was genuinely relieved to be free of Mephistopheles' control and asked if there was anything else I wanted him to do. So I asked him to let the Giztherai Pilgrims go home and to let the Spirits of the Dead to haunt the Living.

Then we went to the portal that would return us. Before we reached it, however, Deekin stopped me and asked if we were almost at the end of the adventure. When I confirmed that, Valen said it would be a pleasure to fight along side both Deekin and me. Quite a change of attitude from when we first started travelling together. Deekin grows on people the more they know him. Then I had a chance to address each by his *True Name*. To Deekin, I told him to believe in himself and that he didn't need me any more. To Valen, I told him that he was free of his internal taint, which removed the rage from his soul, and he began thanking me profusely. I was content to see him at peace with himself finally and confined my response to a simple "You are welcome"¹⁰⁴

That done, I had a chance to level up one more (last) time.

V. WATERDEEP AND MEPHISTOPHELES

We arrived back in Waterdeep to see death and destruction running amok. Then Mephistopheles himself confronted us. One right supercilious, sneering blowhard he was! First he tried. When that failed, he turned to Valen and tried to persuade him to change sides. He offered to

¹⁰² Without the Puzzle Ring, I was no longer able to move on the purple plane. I know that it can be done because I recall having been able to do so on a previous play through of the game a few years ago. I just cannot remember exactly where it led or what happened when I went through it. I have a vague memory of having been able to explore the other parts of the Final Battlefield area that were blocked off by boulders this time around, but that could be mistaken.

¹⁰³ This earned 700 XP. Plus an additional 500 when he asked if there was anything else I would have him do before going back to Waterdeep. Asking him to allow the Giztherai Pilgrims to return home and to allow the Spirits of the Dead to haunt the Living each earned an additional 500XP.

¹⁰⁴ These two bits of dialogue, done in the way we did it, each earned 500XP.

free Valen from the blood wars within him, which didn't get him very far seeing as how I had already done that for Valen. When Valen stood fast beside me, Mephistopheles turned his attention to Deekin and tried to flatter the little fellow into changing sides. Deekin took all he said in and then replied that he just didn't like the big twat and also would stand by me to the end.

At that point Mephistopheles roared that I could not stop him. "Think again, you big turd", I thought and used his *True Name* to command him to stop the carnage. That done, he asked how else he had to serve me. Then I commanded him to return to Cania and remain there forever.¹⁰⁵

With that, the game ended. A cut scene started, showing a Monk at a book sometime in the distant future. Each page of the book when turned told a different story: First, of myself aka the main character, then of Valen, Deekin and the other principal characters in the game. It left ambiguous the ultimate end of Mephistopheles, perhaps to leave open the possibility of a sequel. When all that was finished, the end credits rolled.

All in all a good, interesting game.

¹⁰⁵ Commanding Mephistopheles to stop the carnage earns 3000XP. Ordering him back to Cania earns another 1000XP. You also have the choice of replacing him, if you are of Evil persuasion. That earns the same number of XP. You can also choose to fight him. I doubt that is worthwhile, even with Valen, Deekin (and in a bit, the Sleeping Man) at your side. I tried it a couple of times and got killed in the effort. Perhaps if I had prepared better it would have turned out differently. I doubt the XP earned would be much better.

But what the heck, why fight when you have the equivalent of a targeted neutron bomb in knowing Mephistopheles' *True Name* with which to do him in?