

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Centuries ago, a warlike and fecund tribe of orcs (the Severed Ear) claimed a great swath of wooded hills. Advanced for orcs, they discovered the rudiments of civilisation and even developed the habit of burying their glorious dead in crude cairns scattered throughout their territory. The orcs were eventually defeated and scattered after a local hero gathered a great host, marched into the hills and, in a series of battles, crushed their strength. The few orcish survivors fled the final battle and have never returned in force to the region. Since then most signs of their civilisation have been scoured from the land.

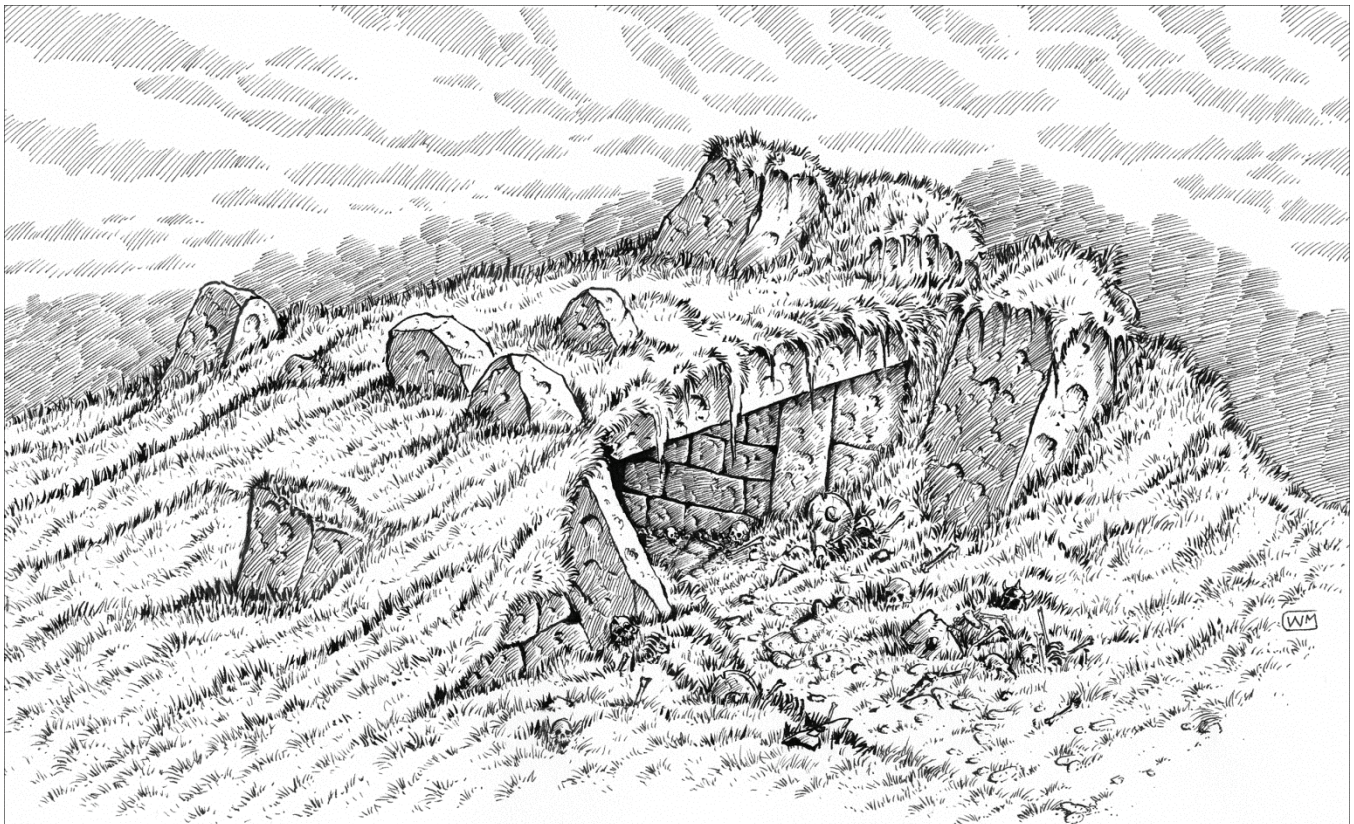
Through the long centuries since their fall, one of the orcs' crude cairns has remained hidden from the attentions of successive waves of explorers and adventurers. Although several bands of adventurers have discovered the lair, none survived to report their find thanks to the presence of Grok Shattershield (the ghost of an ancient orc champion) yet lingering among the dusty remains of his comrades amid the stygian darkness.

The arrival of a pair of mated forest drakes, Arduthal and Ingeirmaugh, attracted to the place by its remoteness and defensibility changed all this. Desiring the tomb as their lair they slew Grok and claimed the place. However, sadly for them, Grok

is as stubborn in death as he was in life and he rejuvenates every time the drakes slay him to continue his struggle.

Although the tomb is quite extensive – formed as it is from a precipitous natural cavern – the drakes stay out of most of the bone-choked passages and chambers because of their battles with Grok. Instead, they dwell in a hidden cavern protected by a network of submerged tunnels spreading out from a subterranean pool lying in the depths of the tomb. The orcs viewed the pool as sacred and so Grok is unable to pass through its waters to slay his tormentors. Thus, has the stalemate languished for several months.

In general, forest drakes are not particularly clever and Arduthal and Ingeirmaugh are no exception to this rule. Thus, they have taken little effort to hide their lair's location. After several months of raids and attacks on travellers, shepherds and remote homesteads the general location of their lair is well known among the locality (although most believe the pair are green dragons!) Now, the local lord, Liofa Othen, grows weary of these attacks and seeks heroes brave enough to slay the drakes. As fate would have it, a suitable band of adventurers shortly thereafter enters his domain...



THE ADVENTURE BEGINS

Before the PCs start *Dwellers Amid Bones*, the GM should determine exactly how he plans to insert it into his campaign. Either use the hook(s) below or devise one of your own. Of course, the PCs could simply stumble onto the ruined cairn on their travels and decide to investigate. Alternatively, they might see either Arduthal or Ingeirmaugh carrying a bloody corpse flying into the forest and decide to investigate.

When the PCs are ready to travel to the Cairn of the Ferocious Dead refer to *The Tuskwood* (page 18).

Note: As the adventure begins, the various NPCs believe the forest drakes are actually green dragons; perceptive PCs will uncover the truth of the matter during the adventure.

A NOBLE PLEA

The PCs have come to the attention of Liofa Othen, the local baron. He wants the dragons' depredations stopped and despatches his trusted advisor, Sir Atheric Sirett, to speak with the PCs. Sir Atheric, a gray-haired, middle-aged warrior, can encounter the PCs anywhere in Arcmoor. He is brusque and chafes at being unable to battle the dragons himself. He prefers speaking with a warrior or similar individual and is impressively chauvinistic.

Sir Atheric tells the PCs dragons have been seen flying in the vicinity of a certain part of the hills. He can provide directions, but the area is several days journey away. He offers them each 500 gp to slay the dragons and exempts them from any taxation on treasure recovered from the dragons' lair.

CAIRN LORE

A character making a Knowledge (local) or Knowledge (history) check may know information about the Cairn of the Ferocious Dead. A successful check reveals all information gained by a lesser check.

DC 10: Ancient burial places of the elder people who once dwelled amid the forested hills dot the area. Most have been discovered and looted centuries ago, but every decade or so a band of adventurers returns to civilisation with ancient treasures and tales of such a newly discovered place.

DC 15: Centuries ago a tribe of orcs – The Severed Ear tribe – dwelled in the hills. For orcs, they were quite advanced in the arts of civilisation, but no less bloodthirsty and ferocious than their normal kin.

DC 20: The orcs deposited the bones of their fallen warriors in cairns carved deep into the hills. Such places were sacred to the orcs and are often choked with bones. The orcs also made sacrifices to their patron deities in such places, hurling golden and silver objects into sacred pools often found in the deepest parts of the tomb.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The PCs may try to get information from Arcmoor's peasants:

- **DC 10 Diplomacy:** The baron is a just ruler, but he has little experience of battle. Crippled in a childhood accident, if he tried to slay the dragons he would likely die a horrible death.
- **DC 20 Diplomacy:** Sir Atheric is a skilled warrior, but Baron Othen has forbidden him to fight the dragons. The baron values his friendship and council too much to risk him on such an adventure.

DRAGONS OR DRAKES?

The local villagers and other common folk are terrified of the dragons; few have survived an attack.

- **DC 10 Diplomacy:** A peasant who witnessed one of the attacks describes the beasts as green dragons with spiked tails. A PC making a DC 14 Knowledge (arcana) check identifies the creatures as forest drakes. A character failing this check believes the creatures are young or juvenile green dragons.

A VISION

Use this hook in conjunction with A Noble Plea. The half-orc PCs in the group have a troubling dream one night. Read:

Fog swirls about a hilly forest. The harsh clamour of battle echoes through the air. Later, bloodied orc warriors carry the naked bodies of their fallen companions to a cleft in the rock and hurl them inside. A harsh roar sounds from within the cave and the orcs – except one warrior wearing a necklace of ears – flees in fear. You awake, furious at the desecration of the cave.

This is a vision from an orc god (the Severed Ear's patron power), angry at the desecration of his people's sacred resting place by Arduthal and Ingeirmaugh.

The PC wakes up unreasonably angry and has a strong urge to travel to the Cairn of the Ferocious Dead and to destroy the dragons. While in the cairn, he gains a +1 morale bonus to attack rolls, damage rolls and saving throws.

Note: For this hook, the GM should choose a suitable orc god already existent in his campaign and add details to the above dream to make the god's identity obvious. Of course, many good-aligned half-orc PCs may be uncomfortable questing for such an unsavoury power; however, this is an excellent opportunity for the half-orc to roleplay his character and to explore its racial roots.