



STICK IN THE MUD

A Chaos Scar Adventure
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“Stick in the Mud” is a short adventure for five 1st-level characters that takes place in the Chaos Scar, near the King’s Wall. It pits the PCs against a tribe of evil bullywugs that have taken up residence in a long-ruined keep. The keep, once the abode of a goliath sorcerer, holds a powerful magic item, the *staff of earthen might*. The staff has been damaged and is hemorrhaging magic. This leak has ripped open a small portal to the Elemental Chaos. A tide of mud has been steadily flowing through the portal and into the cellars beneath the ruins, creating a muddy wallow that is ideal for bullywugs.

For details on the Chaos Scar and its environs, read the [Chaos Scar introduction](#) and check out the map of the entire valley.

BACKGROUND

Centuries ago, a powerful goliath sorcerer named Voran Earthmane constructed a keep in the middle of a rank swamp where he could conduct his arcane research in peace. Voran conducted many experiments in the laboratory beneath his keep, mostly centered on the creation of magic items that harnessed the power of the Elemental Chaos. One of his achievements was a staff that drew strength from earth, and he called it the *staff of earthen might*.

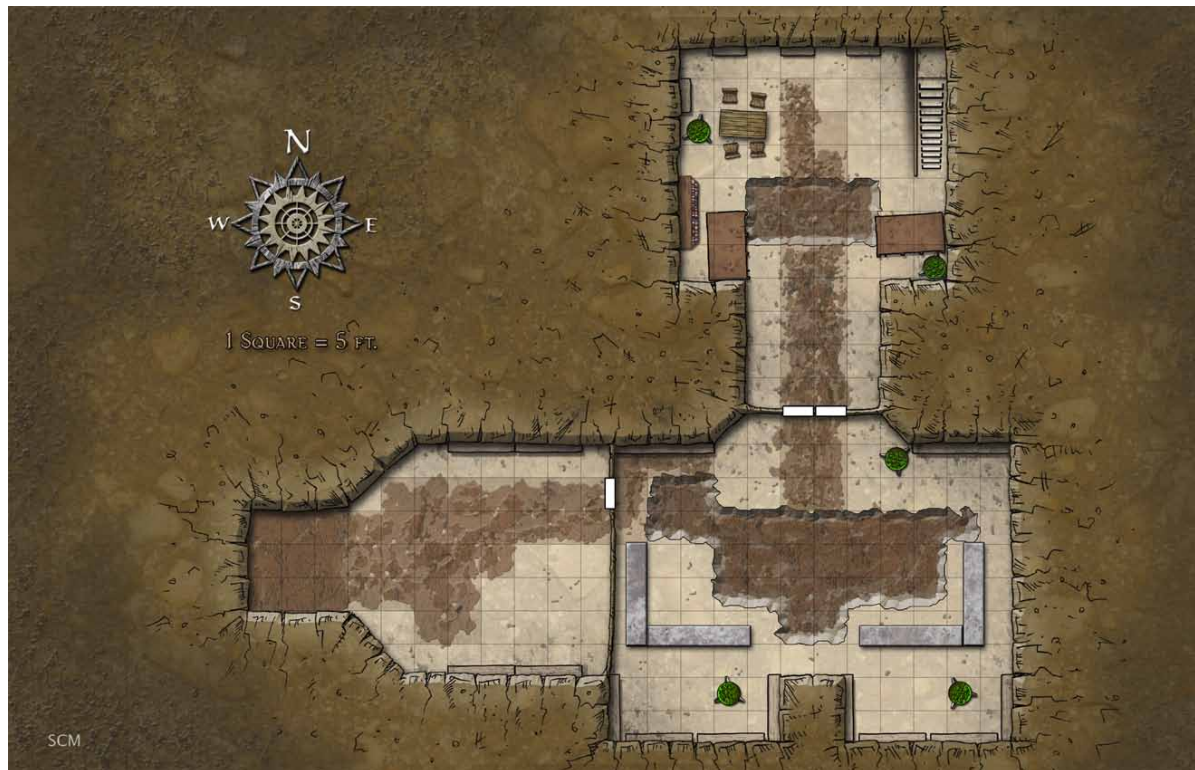
When the great meteorite fell from the heavens and plowed the Chaos Scar, it destroyed Voran's keep, along with many other features of the terrain. The

swamp drained away, leaving only a desolate, dry ruin in its wake. Only the ground floor of the keep and the laboratory beneath it escaped destruction, but even these meager remains were buried in the wake of the meteorite's fall. Voran himself escaped the obliteration of his home, but with his life's work in shambles, he collected those of his belongings he could find and departed the area for lands unknown, and his name and legacy faded into history.

A few weeks ago, a tribe of bullywugs called the Muckrakers, drawn by the evil siren song of the meteorite, uncovered the ruins of Voran Earthmane's keep and moved in. The bullywugs' poisonous and corruptive influence has hastened

the ruined keep's deterioration and damaged Voran's *staff of earthen might*. The damaged staff has opened a small portal onto a sea of elemental mud in the Elemental Chaos, allowing a steady tide of the muck to fill the ruins.

Over the past few weeks, the mud has filled much of the laboratory beneath the ruins with a thick layer of sludge; creating a sticky wallow that is ideal for swamp-dwelling bullywugs. Content with their new home, the bullywugs have begun to look to the lands beyond the valley. A rich bounty of loot and murder lies just beyond the King's Wall, and the rapacious bullywugs will certainly not be able to resist such a temptation for long.



GETTING THE PLAYERS INVOLVED

“Stick in the Mud” takes place in the Chaos Scar. You can use one of the hooks below to get the PCs into the valley and into the ruins of Voran Earthmane’s keep. These hooks also come with a minor quest that, if completed, can net the PCs some extra experience.

HOOK 1: ANCESTOR’S LEGACY

Oneus Earthmane, a local goliath sorcerer and a descendant of Voran’s, believes he has discovered the location of his ancestor’s ancient abode. He hires the PCs to find the ruined keep, and if possible, bring back Voran’s greatest creation, the *staff of earthen might*. Oneus knows little about the valley, but can give the PCs information on Voran, his keep, and the *staff of earthen might* (see Background, above).

Quest XP: 500 XP for bringing the staff back to Oneus.

HOOK 2: WARLOCK RITUAL

A local tiefling warlock, Nyron Darkspell, needs a sample of bullywug mud for a ritual. He believes that by virtue of being surrounded by the mud of their wallow, bullywugs impart certain properties to the mud that cakes onto their skin—properties he believes will aid him in his ritual research. He knows that a tribe of the humanoids lives in the Chaos Scar, not far from the King’s Wall. He hires the PCs to bring back some mud samples, offering a bounty of 30 gp each for a sample of croaker, mucker, twitcher, or mud lord mud.

Quest XP: 100 XP for harvesting the mud from at least two of the four bullywug types and bringing it

back to the warlock or 500 XP for harvesting the bile from all four bullywug types.

HOOK 3: BULLYWUG BOUNTY

The ruins of Voran Earthmane’s keep are close enough to the King’s Wall that the bullywugs have been attacking merchants and travelers. A local constable, Uther Ironhelm, hires the PCs to find and kill the marauding tribe of bullywugs, offering a 5-gp bounty on each bullywug killed. A survivor of the bullywug attacks can point the PCs in the general direction from which the bullywugs came.

Quest XP: 100 XP for killing at least half the bullywugs in the keep or 500 XP for killing them all.

TREASURE PREPARATION

“Stick in the Mud” uses the treasure parcel system described in the *Dungeon Master’s Guide*®. The PCs should gain a total of four treasure parcels in this adventure. Listed below are the most likely places to find parcels and what those treasure parcels might consist of. The magic items should come from the players’ wish lists; do not count the *staff of earth might* +1 as part of the treasure in this adventure.

Parcel	Item
Parcel 1: The Ruins	One level 2 magic item
Parcel 2: The Study	100 gp in gems and one level 1 scroll
Parcel 3: Chamber of the Frog	100 gp and two <i>potions of healing</i>
Parcel 4: Vault of the Staff	One level 3 magic item

GETTING STARTED

Regardless of the hook you used to get the PCs into the Chaos Scar, read or paraphrase the following when they reach the ruins of Voran Earthmane’s keep:

The barren stretch of valley before you suddenly becomes a chaotic jumble of shattered masonry. In the center of the mess, on a low hill, stands the ruined foundation of a keep or tower. Only the lower section and a few walls still stand; however, enough remains intact to cast ominous shadows that could hide nearly anything.

AI: THE RUINS

Encounter Level 1 (XP 526)

SETUP

2 bullywug croakers (C)
2 bullywug muckers (M)
2 bullywug twitchers (T)

The PCs enter the ruined ground floor of the ancient keep and must find their way into the remains of the laboratory below. The PCs can enter the ruins through the intact main doors or can attempt to sneak through one of the many gaps in the walls. The bullywugs in this area are not taking great pains to hide, but the partially intact walls, rubble, and the various mud wallows in the ruins grant them some concealment from intruders.

Lazy, inattentive, and confident, the bullywugs might not notice the PCs approaching if the heroes exercise some caution and attempt to sneak up to the ruins. However, if the bullywugs catch sight of the PCs (the PCs can attempt a group Stealth check if they approach together, opposed by the bullywug twitchers' passive Perception of 13), they attempt to ambush the heroes. In the latter case, make Stealth checks for each of the bullywugs and compare them to the PCs' passive Perception checks.

When the PCs enter the ruins, read:

A soggy gloom fills the crumbling ruins of this keep. The few intact walls cast thick pools of shadows that obscure the jumbled mess of debris that covers the spongy wooden floor. A wet, boggy stench saturates the interior of the ruins, likely from the thick pits of mud that bubble up from some hidden reservoir below, creating wallows of slimy muck.

When the PCs see the bullywugs, read:

Squatting in muddy wallows amid the ruined keep are half a dozen froglike humanoids. Some of them grip crude spears and javelins, while the others are naked save for a coating of filthy mud. A chorus of deep, reverberating croaks echoes off the walls of the ruins when the creatures see you.

2 Bullywug Croakers (C) Level 3 Minion Brute
Medium natural humanoid (aquatic) XP 38 each

Initiative +3 **Senses** Perception +0

Rancid Air (Poison) aura 2; each enemy that spends a healing surge within the aura is weakened until the end of its next turn.

HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.

AC 14; **Fortitude** 12, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 12

Resist 5 poison

Speed 6 (swamp walk), swim 4

⊕ **Claw** (standard; at-will)

+6 vs. AC; 7 damage.

↵ **Foul Croak** (standard; at-will) ◆ **Poison**

Close blast 2; +4 vs. Fortitude; 4 poison damage.

Nature's Release ◆ **Healing**

Any attacker who scores a critical hit against a bullywug croaker regains 3 hit points.

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Primordial

Skills Athletics +6

Str 10 (+1)

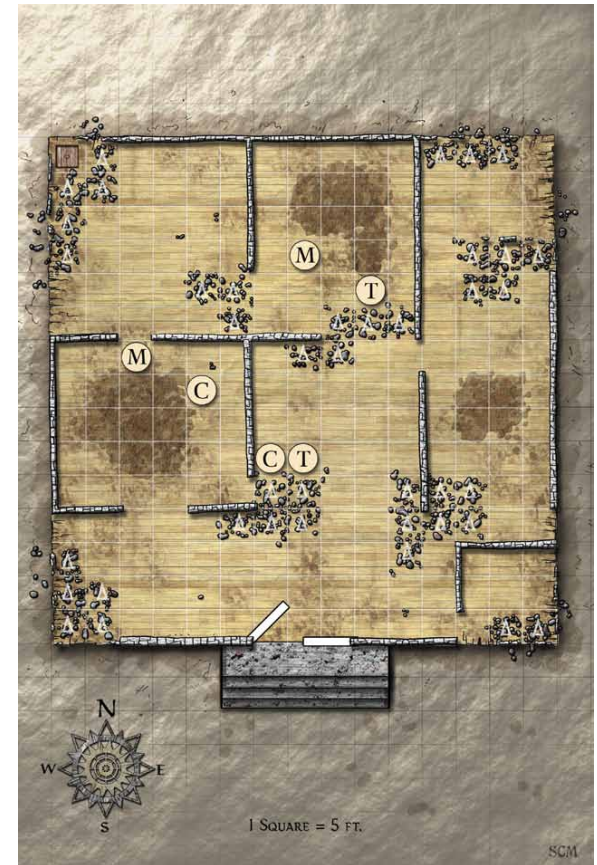
Dex 14 (+3)

Wis 10 (+1)

Con 14 (+3)

Int 6 (-1)

Cha 5 (-2)



FEATURES OF THE AREA

Illumination: Exposed to the elements, the ruins are brightly lit in most areas. However, the intact walls do cast long shadows that provide areas of dim light.

Collapsed Walls/Rubble: These piles of stone and debris are difficult terrain.

Mud Wallows: The mud here is roughly knee-deep to a Medium creature, and the wallows are considered difficult terrain. The bullywugs' swamp walk ability allows them to move through the mud wallows without hindrance.

Trapdoor: Obscured by rubble and debris, this trapdoor opens onto a stairwell leading down into the laboratory beneath the ruins. The trapdoor can be found with a DC 12 Perception check.

2 Bullywug Muckers (M) Medium natural humanoid (aquatic)	Level 1 Brute XP 100 each
Initiative +2	Senses Perception +0
Rancid Air (Poison) aura 2; each enemy that spends a healing surge within the aura is weakened until the end of its next turn.	
HP 34; Bloodied 17	
AC 12; Fortitude 12, Reflex 12, Will 10	
Speed 6 (swamp walk), swim 4	
⊕ Spear (standard; at-will) ♦ Weapon +4 vs. AC; 1d8 + 3 damage.	
↓ Bullywug Rush (standard; usable only in place of a melee attack when charging; recharge ☒ ☐☐) +5 vs. Fortitude; 2d6 + 4 damage, and the target is knocked prone. <i>Miss:</i> The bullywug mucker takes 3 damage and is knocked prone.	
Bully A bullywug mucker's attacks deal 1d6 extra damage against prone targets.	
Nature's Release ♦ Healing Any attacker who scores a critical hit against a bullywug mucker regains 3 hit points.	
Alignment Chaotic evil	Languages Primordial
Skills Athletics +8	
Str 16 (+3)	Dex 14 (+2)
Con 14 (+2)	Int 6 (-2)
	Wis 10 (+0)
	Cha 8 (-1)
Equipment leather armor, spear	

TACTICS

The bullywugs have no goals in this encounter beyond killing the PCs and looting their corpses. In addition, being very chaotic and fairly greedy, they do not even bother to warn the rest of their tribe in the laboratory below the ruins if combat breaks out here.

Once combat begins, the bullywug croakers and muckers charge into melee. The bullywug muckers making use of *bullywug rush* in the opening round of combat, and the bullywug croakers fire off *foul croak* whenever they can catch two or more PCs in the blast, even if it means hitting one of the muckers.

The bullywug twitchers each move to the center of a mud wallow and support the croakers and muckers

2 Bullywug Twitchers (T) Medium natural humanoid (aquatic)	Level 2 Skirmisher XP 125 each
Initiative +7	Senses Perception +3
Rancid Air (Poison) aura 2; each enemy that spends a healing surge within the aura is weakened until the end of its next turn.	
HP 34; Bloodied 17	
AC 16; Fortitude 13, Reflex 14, Will 13	
Speed 7 (swamp walk), swim 5	
⊕ Javelin (standard; at-will) ♦ Weapon +6 vs. AC; 1d6 + 3 damage.	
☹ Javelin (standard; at-will) ♦ Weapon Ranged 10/20; +8 vs. AC; 1d6 + 3 damage.	
↓ Spasmodic Hop (standard; encounter) ♦ Reliable, Weapon Marks on the bullywug twitcher end, and it shifts 4 squares before the attack: +7 vs. AC; 2d6 + 3 damage, and the target takes a -4 penalty to attack rolls against the twitcher until the end of the twitcher's next turn.	
Nature's Release ♦ Healing Any attacker who scores a critical hit against a bullywug twitcher regains 4 hit points.	
Alignment Chaotic evil	Languages Primordial
Skills Athletics +8	
Str 14 (+3)	Dex 18 (+5)
Con 10 (+1)	Int 10 (+1)
	Wis 14 (+3)
	Cha 8 (+0)
Equipment 5 javelins	

with thrown javelins. The twitchers try not to engage the PCs in melee outside of a mud wallow if possible, preferring to draw heroes into the mud where their swamp walk ability gives them an advantage. The twitchers save *spasmodic hop* to finish off a wounded PC; they can reach a PC up to 11 squares away with this attack.

A2: THE STUDY

Encounter Level 1 (XP 550)

SETUP

3 bullywug muckers (M)

1 bullywug twitcher (T)

1 hidden quagmire hazard

The PCs move down a stone staircase into the first room of the ruined laboratory beneath the ruins. This room once served as a Voran Earthmane's study, although time and the deleterious presence of the bullywugs have left little but a mud-choked ruin. The mud in this room can be treacherous, and the shallow pit in the center of the room appears as just more mud-covered stone, making it hard to detect and avoid.

The bullywugs in this room are not on alert, and are unlikely to be prepared to ambush the PCs. If the PCs move quietly, they might be able to sneak up on the bullywugs and gain a surprise round. Combat in this room *does* alert the mud lord in the next room; however, the mud lord doesn't send any of the giant frogs or croakers that serve it to aid the bullywugs in the study, preferring instead to set its own ambush for the heroes.

3 Bullywug Muckers (M)	Level 1 Brute
Medium natural humanoid (aquatic)	XP 100 each
Initiative +2	Senses Perception +0
Rancid Air (Poison) aura 2; each enemy that spends a healing surge within the aura is weakened until the end of its next turn.	
HP 34; Bloodied 17	
AC 12; Fortitude 12, Reflex 12, Will 10	
Speed 6 (swamp walk), swim 4	
⊕ Longspear (standard; at-will) ♦ Weapon	
Reach 2; +4 vs. AC; 1d10 + 3 damage.	
↓ Claw (standard; at-will)	
+4 vs. AC; 1d6 + 3 damage.	
↓ Bullywug Rush (standard; usable only in place of a melee attack when charging; recharge ☼ ☼)	
+5 vs. Fortitude; 2d6 + 4 damage, and the target is knocked prone. Miss: The bullywug mucker takes 3 damage and is knocked prone.	
Bully	
A bullywug mucker's attacks deal 1d6 extra damage against prone targets.	
Nature's Release ♦ Healing	
Any attacker who scores a critical hit against a bullywug mucker regains 3 hit points.	
Alignment Chaotic evil	Languages Primordial
Skills Athletics +8	
Str 16 (+3)	Dex 14 (+2) Wis 10 (+0)
Con 14 (+2)	Int 6 (-2) Cha 8 (-1)
Equipment leather armor, spear	

When the PCs enter this room, read:

This stone chamber is bathed in a greasy, yellow glow from a pair of smoking braziers in the northwest and southeast corners of the room. The floor is covered in a thick viscous mud that adds a swampy stink to the pungent smoke issuing from the braziers. Toppled tables, bookshelves, and other bits of furniture thrust up from the muck in various places like islands in a muddy sea. Four loathsome, froglike humanoids squat in the mud on the east end of the room, near a pair of double doors that are slightly ajar.

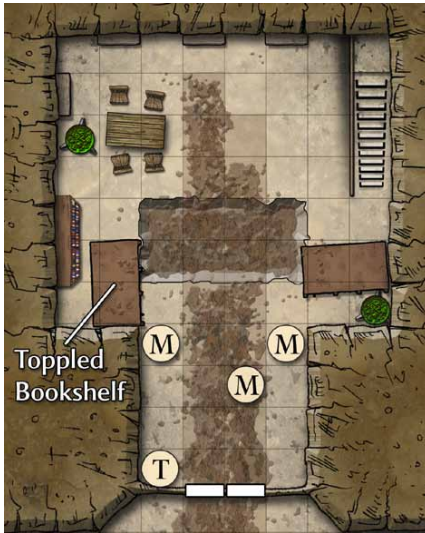
Bullywug Twitcher (T)	Level 2 Skirmisher
Medium natural humanoid (aquatic)	XP 125
Initiative +7	Senses Perception +3
Rancid Air (Poison) aura 2; each enemy that spends a healing surge within the aura is weakened until the end of its next turn.	
HP 34; Bloodied 17	
AC 16; Fortitude 13, Reflex 14, Will 13	
Speed 7 (swamp walk), swim 5	
⊕ Javelin (standard; at-will) ♦ Weapon	
+6 vs. AC; 1d6 + 3 damage.	
☹ Javelin (standard; at-will) ♦ Weapon	
Ranged 10/20; +8 vs. AC; 1d6 + 3 damage.	
↓ Spasmodic Hop (standard; encounter) ♦ Reliable, Weapon	
Marks on the bullywug twitcher end, and it shifts 4 squares before the attack: +7 vs. AC; 2d6 + 3 damage, and the target takes a -4 penalty to attack rolls against the twitcher until the end of the twitcher's next turn.	
Nature's Release ♦ Healing	
Any attacker who scores a critical hit against a bullywug twitcher regains 4 hit points.	
Alignment Chaotic evil	Languages Primordial
Skills Athletics +8	
Str 14 (+3)	Dex 18 (+5) Wis 14 (+3)
Con 10 (+1)	Int 10 (+1) Cha 8 (+0)
Equipment 5 javelins	

Perception DC 15

You also notice that the mud in the center of the room seems much deeper and stickier than that in the rest of the chamber.

TACTICS

The bullywugs here are aware of the hidden quagmire hazard in the center of the room and attempt to use it to their advantage. The bullywug twitcher begins combat by throwing javelins at the PCs, while the bullywug muckers hang back and hurl bits of debris (harmless) and taunt the PCs in Primordial. The bullywugs hope to lure the PCs into the quagmire hazard, so that the muckers can use longspears they keep nearby to stab at heroes that become stuck in the mud.



Hidden Quagmire Hazard **Level 2 Obstacle**
Hazard XP 125

A shallow pit filled with thick mud blends in with the muddy stone floor of the study.

Hazard: The 2 x 4 section of the muddy floor hides a shallow pit filled with thick mud.

Perception

DC 15: The character notices that the mud is much deeper in this area.

Trigger: When a creature enters or begins its turn in one of the hazard's 8 squares, the hazard attacks that creature.

Immediate Reaction **Melee**

Targets: The creature that triggered the trap.

Attack +5 vs. Reflex

Hit: The target is immobilized (save ends).

Countermeasures:

A character who makes an Athletics check (DC 11, or DC 21 without a running start) can jump over the pit.

When one or more PCs becomes immobilized in the quagmire, the bullywug muckers use *bullywug charge* to dash forward and attack a trapped PC without entering the quagmire themselves. The muckers continue to stab trapped PCs, focusing on those knocked prone by *bullywug charge*. If forced into close melee combat, the muckers drop their longspears and attack PCs with their claws.

The bullywug twitcher continues to use its javelins at range during the combat, targeting PCs trapped in the quagmire at first, and then switching to those that escape or avoid the hazard. It prefers to stay out of melee combat as long as there are two or more muckers still standing. When only one mucker remains, the twitcher uses *spasmodic hop* to enter melee, targeting a wounded PC if possible.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

Illumination: A pair of braziers burning a pungent fungus provides illumination in this room. The braziers provide bright illumination out to 4 squares, with spaces beyond this ranged counting as dim light.

Ceiling: The ceiling in this area is 15 feet high.

Bookshelves/Tables: A character can jump onto a toppled bookshelf or the table with a DC 20 Athletics check (remember the -2 penalty to Athletic checks imposed by the muddy squares). Anyone under the table has superior cover (-5 penalty to attack rolls against him). A character can flip over the table or topple one of the standing bookshelves with a DC 12 Strength check; both can be tipped over to provide cover.

Braziers: If tipped over, each brazier creates a burst 1 zone of greasy smoke that provides total concealment to those within it. The zone lasts until the end of the creature's turn that tipped over the brazier.

Muddy Squares: Although not deep enough to hinder movement, the elemental mud that covers these squares is treacherously slick. Any Acrobatics, Athletics, or Stealth checks made in a muddy square take a -2 penalty. Bullywugs and any creature with swamp walk do not take the penalty to skill checks.

A3: CHAMBER OF THE FROG

Encounter Level 2 (XP 602)

SETUP

- 1 bullywug mud lord (L)
- 2 giant frogs (F)
- 4 bullywug croakers (C)

This area was once the main alchemical and magical laboratory of Voran Earthmane. The large L-shaped stone tables and tall book shelves were magically hewn from the surrounding stone, and thus have withstood the march of centuries and the residence of the bullywugs far better than those in the study. The ruins and shards of old alchemical equipment can be found scattered on the tables and the floor here.

The noise of the combat in area 2 alerts the bullywug mud lord and its giant frogs and croaker minions in this room. When the PCs enter the room, the giant frogs are in the mud wallow, while the croakers and the mud lord hide beneath the large stone tables that dominate the center of the room. Make Stealth checks for the croakers and mud lord and compare them with the PCs' passive Perception checks.

When the PCs enter this room, read:

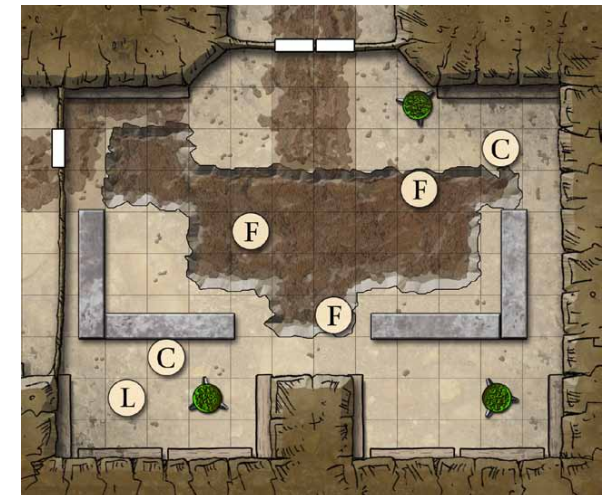
This large room is lit by more of the stinking, smoky braziers and seems to be even muddier than the previous room. A pair of large, L-shaped tables and a number of tall bookshelves, all made of stone and strewn with the broken remains of ancient alchemical equipment, mark this room as having once been some kind of laboratory. The center of the room is taken up by a shallow pit filled with thick mud, and within this filthy wallow are two of the most enormous frogs you have ever seen.

Perception

DC 10: *There is a bulky stone door, barred and shut, in the south wall. A steady river of thick mud flows from beneath the door.*

4 Bullywug Croakers (C)		Level 3 Minion Brute	
Medium natural humanoid (aquatic)		XP 38 each	
Initiative +3	Senses Perception +0		
Rancid Air (Poison) aura 2; each enemy that spends a healing surge within the aura is weakened until the end of its next turn.			
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.			
AC 14; Fortitude 12, Reflex 14, Will 12			
Resist 5 poison			
Speed 6 (swamp walk), swim 4			
⊕ Claw (standard; at-will)			
+6 vs. AC; 7 damage.			
↵ Foul Croak (standard; at-will) ♦ Poison			
Close blast 2; +4 vs. Fortitude; 4 poison damage.			
Nature's Release ♦ Healing			
Any attacker who scores a critical hit against a bullywug croaker regains 3 hit points.			
Alignment Chaotic evil		Languages Primordial	
Skills Athletics +6			
Str 10 (+1)	Dex 14 (+3)	Wis 10 (+1)	
Con 14 (+3)	Int 6 (-1)	Cha 5 (-2)	

2 Giant Frogs (F)		Level 3 Controller	
Medium natural beast (aquatic)		XP 150 each	
Initiative +5	Senses Perception +6		
HP 44; Bloodied 22			
AC 18; Fortitude 15, Reflex 16, Will 13			
Speed 4 (swamp walk), swim 6			
⊕ Bite (standard; at-will)			
+8 vs. AC; 1d6 + 3 damage, and a Medium or smaller target is swallowed. A swallowed target is stunned, takes ongoing 5 damage, and can't be targeted by any effect (save ends all effects). A giant frog can have only one target swallowed at a time and cannot make bite attacks as long as the swallowed target is alive.			
↵ Grasping Tongue (minor; at-will)			
Ranged 3; +7 vs. Reflex; the target is pulled 2 squares.			
Prodigious Leap (move; at-will)			
The giant frog shifts 4 squares. It can shift through enemy squares as long as it ends its movement in an unoccupied space.			
Alignment Unaligned		Languages –	
Skills Athletics +8, Stealth +9			
Str 14 (+3)	Dex 17 (+4)	Wis 11 (+1)	
Con 12 (+2)	Int 2 (-3)	Cha 6 (-1)	



Bullywug Mud Lord (L)		Level 3 Artillery
Medium natural humanoid (aquatic)		XP 150
Initiative +2	Senses Perception +9	
Rancid Air (Poison) aura 2; each enemy that spends a healing surge within the aura is weakened until the end of its next turn.		
HP 39; Bloodied 19		
AC 16; Fortitude 14, Reflex 14, Will 16		
Speed 6 (swamp walk), swim 5		
⊕ Quarterstaff (standard; at-will) ♦ Weapon		
+8 vs. AC; 1d8 + 1 damage.		
⚡ Electric Reflux (standard; recharge [E]) ♦ Cold, Lightning		
Close blast 3; +6 (+8 with <i>necessary sacrifices</i>) vs. Reflex; 2d6 + 4 cold and lightning damage, and the target is dazed until the end of the bullywug mud lord's next turn. <i>Miss</i> : Half damage.		
🔥 Fiery Croak (standard; at-will) ♦ Fire, Thunder		
Area burst 1 within 20; +6 (+8 with <i>necessary sacrifices</i>) vs. Reflex; 1d10 + 4 fire and thunder damage.		
Necessary Sacrifices		
If a bullywug mud lord includes at least one ally in the area of its area or close attacks, each of its rolls with that attack gains a +2 power bonus.		
Nature's Release ♦ Healing		
Any attacker who scores a critical hit against a bullywug mud lord regains 5 hit points.		
Alignment Chaotic evil	Languages Primordial	
Skills Arcana +6, Nature +9		
Str 12 (+2)	Dex 14 (+2)	Wis 16 (+4)
Con 15 (+3)	Int 11 (+1)	Cha 10 (+1)
Equipment quarterstaff		

TACTICS

The giant frogs attack as soon as the PCs enter the room. Each frog uses *grasping tongue* to snare the closest PC and pull him into its maw. Once a giant frog has swallowed a PC, it uses *prodigious leap* to escape any further combat; however, if cornered, it continues to attack.

The bullywug croakers and mud lord wait until the PCs engage the giant frogs before unleashing their own attacks. Directed by the mud lord, the croakers move in close and unleash their *foul croaks* en masse, attempting to catch as many PCs as possible in the blasts. The bullywug mud lord augments this assault with *fiery croak*, trying to catch at least one of the croakers or giant frogs in the burst to gain the benefit of *necessary sacrifices*.

The bullywug croakers continue to use *foul croak* until engaged in melee by a PC. The mud lord moves around the room, using the mud wallow to keep the PCs from closing with it, and using *fiery croak* each round. It saves *electric reflux* for when one or more PCs engage it in melee.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

Illumination: A trio of braziers burning a pungent fungus provides illumination in this room. The braziers provide bright illumination out to 4 squares, with spaces beyond this ranged counting as dim light.

Ceiling: The ceiling is 15 feet high.

Bookcases/Shelves: The large bookcases and shelving units in this room are 10 feet high and have been magically shaped directly from the surrounding stone of the walls. They cannot be toppled over, but they can be climbed with a DC 15 Athletics check.

Braziers: If tipped over, each brazier creates a burst 1 zone of greasy smoke that provides total

concealment to those within it. The zone lasts until the end of the creature's turn that tipped over the brazier.

Vault Door: The large stone door in the south wall leads to the vault containing the malfunctioning *staff of earthen might*. It is not locked, but the door is heavy and the thick mud flowing beneath it makes it difficult to open. A DC 15 Strength check is required to push open the vault door.

Mud Wallow: The mud here is roughly knee-deep to a Medium creature, and the wallow is considered difficult terrain. The bullywugs' and giant frogs' swamp walk ability allows them to move through the mud wallow without hindrance.

Muddy Squares: Although not deep enough to hinder movement, the mud that covers these squares is treacherously slick. Any Acrobatics, Athletics, or Stealth checks made in a muddy square take a -2 penalty. Bullywugs and any creature with swamp walk do not take the penalty to skill checks.

Tables: A character can jump onto a table with a DC 20 Athletics check (remember the -2 penalty to Athletic checks imposed by the muddy squares). Anyone behind a table has cover (-2 penalty to attack rolls against him) and anyone beneath the table has superior cover (-5 penalty to attack rolls against him). The tables are solid stone and are bolted to the floor; they cannot be tipped over.

AREA 4: VAULT OF THE STAFF

Encounter Level 3 (XP 750)

SETUP

Staff of earthen might skill challenge (S)

4 mud men

The large chamber was once a storage room where Voran kept his creations, including the *staff of earthen might*. While poking around in here, one of the bullywugs cracked the staff, opening the rift to the Elemental Chaos. The staff has been spewing mud from the Elemental Chaos for weeks now, and the area around the staff is a swirling mire of churning mud. The bullywugs avoid this room because it has recently become the lair of four mud men, minor elementals whose malleable body allowed them to squeeze through the tiny portal to the Elemental Chaos opened by the *staff of earthen might*. The mud men are within the thick mud around the staff, and are, for all intents and purposes, invisible to the PCs until they attack.

In order to retrieve the *staff of earthen might*, the PCs need to defeat the mud men and complete a skill challenge to close the portal to the Elemental Chaos.

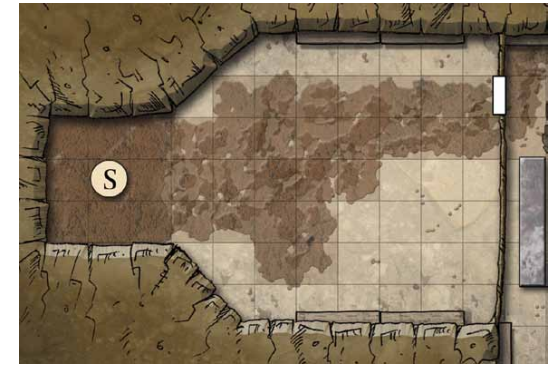
When the PCs enter this room, read:

This stone vault is lined with shelves holding many strange devices. Some of them even appear to be intact and might be valuable. However, your most pressing concern lies at the southern end of the room, in a small alcove, where a thick, stone staff juts out from a swirling vortex of mud and spews forth a steady deluge of elemental muck.

When the mud men attack, read:

Suddenly, the roiling mud rises up in vaguely anthropomorphic shapes that flail and batter at you with lashing, muddy appendages.

4 Mud Men		Level 2 Brute
Small elemental magical beast (earth, water)		XP 125 each
Initiative +2	Senses Perception +7	
HP 43; Bloodied 21		
AC 14; Fortitude 15, Reflex 13, Will 13		
Immune disease, poison		
Speed 5		
⊕ Slam (standard; at-will)		
+5 vs. AC; 1d10 + 3 damage.		
↘ Mud Ball (standard; at-will)		
Ranged 10; +3 vs. Reflex; the target is slowed (save ends).		
If the target is already slowed, it is instead immobilized (save ends).		
Amorphous Body (immediate reaction, when hit by a melee attack; encounter)		
The mud man shifts 3 squares.		
Relentless Assault		
The mud man gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls against slowed or immobilized creatures.		
Alignment Unaligned	Languages Primordial	
Skills Stealth +7		
Str 16 (+4)	Dex 13 (+2)	Wis 13 (+2)
Con 13 (+2)	Int 6 (-1)	Cha 8 (+0)



TACTICS

The mud men do not attack until a PC moves into the thick mud around the staff, at which time they rise up and attack the nearest intruder. When combat begins, two mud men attack any PCs in the thick mud around the staff with slam attacks, while the other two use *mud ball* to keep the other PCs at bay. After the first round of combat, the mud men focus their melee and ranged attacks on any creature that is slowed or immobilized to take advantage of *relentless assault*.

The mud men do not use any sophisticated tactics beyond those described above and fight to their destruction to protect their new home.

Stem the Muddy Tide
Skill Challenge**Level 2**
XP 250

Your skill and knowledge are required to close the portal to Elemental Chaos.

The PCs must use their knowledge of the arcane arts and the natural world to close the portal to the Elemental Chaos that has been opened by the malfunctioning staff of earthen might.

Complexity

2 (requires 6 successes before 3 failures).

Primary Skills

Arcana, Nature.

Arcana (DC 15, standard action, 1 success, no maximum)

With practiced gestures and muttered arcane phrases, you seek to exert your will over the malfunctioning magic item and close the portal to the Elemental Chaos.

Nature (DC 15, standard action, 1 success, no maximum)

Your knowledge and control over the natural world extend into the primordial realm of the Elemental Chaos. You exert your will over the staff of earthen might in an attempt to seal of the portal it has opened.

Secondary Skills

Acrobatics, Athletics.

Acrobatics (DC 10, move action, or no action if made as part of a move, no successes)

Your natural agility allows you to keep firm footing in the thick mud, making the task at hand easier to accomplish. You gain a +2 bonus to your next Arcana or Nature check made as part of this skill challenge.

Athletics (DC 10, move action, or no action if made as part of a move, no successes)

You might not be skilled in esoteric knowledge, but you can use the strength of your body to brace your companion against the slick tide of elemental mud. You grant a +2 bonus to one ally's next Arcana or Nature check made as part of this skill challenge.

Success

The PCs close the portal to the Elemental Chaos by repairing the staff of earthen might, which can then be retrieved.

Failure

The flow of mud from the Elemental Chaos continues. You cannot retrieve the staff until it is closed. In addition, if the flow continues unabated it could submerge the ruins in elemental mud and allow more mud men to pass through, as well as larger, more dangerous creatures from the Elemental Chaos. You can attempt the skill challenge again after a short rest.

FEATURES OF THE AREA

Illumination: There is no illumination in this room.

Ceiling: The ceiling is 15 feet high.

Muddy Squares: Although not deep enough to hinder movement, the elemental mud that covers these squares is treacherously slick. Any Acrobatics, Athletics, or Stealth checks made in a muddy square take a -2 penalty. Bullywugs and any creatures with swamp walk do not take the penalty to skill checks.

Shelves: The large shelving units in this room are 10 feet high, have been magically shaped directly from the surrounding stone of the walls, and cannot be toppled over. However, they can be climbed with a DC 15 Athletics check.

Thick Mud: The squares around the staff are filled with thick mud and are challenging terrain. A skill check is not required to move into a square with thick mud; however, it requires a DC 10 Athletics check to move out of a square with thick mud; a failed check means the PC is immobilized (save ends).

Treasure: If repaired and retrieved, the staff is a staff of earthen might +1. 🌀

**APPENDIX:
NEW MAGIC ITEM****Staff of Earthen Might****Level 3+**

This staff channels the power of the earth to add strength to your limbs and weight to your blows.

Lvl 3	+1	680 gp	Lvl 18	+4	85,000 gp
Lvl 8	+2	3,400 gp	Lvl 23	+5	425,000 gp
Lvl 13	+3	17,000 gp	Lvl 28	+6	2,125,000 gp

Implement (Staff)

Enhancement: Attack rolls and damage rolls

Critical: +1d6 damage and the target is knocked prone.

Property: When you are standing on a surface of stone or earth, you gain a +2 item bonus to Athletics checks and Strength ability checks (but not Strength-based attacks).

Power (Daily): Free Action: Use this power when an attack with this implement hits. The target feels as if its weight has tripled, and it is slowed until the end of your next turn.

About the Author

Aeryn "Blackdirge" Rudel is a staff writer and editor for Goodman Games, a freelance writer and RPG designer, and the editor-in-chief of the 4E magazine *Level Up*. He has been a professional game designer since 2005, and his recent author credits include *Blackdirge's Dungeon Denizens*, *Critter Cache: Daemons*, and *Hero's Handbook: Tiefling*. Aeryn currently lives in Modesto, California with his wife Melissa, a non-gamer whose tolerance for her husband's geekery borders on the supernatural.