



HEROIC

1-10

A Chaos Scar Adventure

# THE TAINED SPIRAL

“The Tainted Spiral” is a short adventure for five 1st-level characters that takes place in the Chaos Scar. The adventure is set in a spiraling network of tunnels carved a by a piece of the great meteor, called a Chaos Shard, that broke away when the comet crashed to the earth. Like the meteorite itself, the Chaos Shard is a malevolent force of chaos and evil that draws other evil creatures to it. The presence of the Chaos Shard has weakened the barrier between the world and the Far Realm, creating rifts in reality that have allowed a number of fell taints and other terrible aberrations to heed the shard’s call...



By Aeryn “Blackdirge” Rudel

illustrations by Mike Sass ♦ cartography by Jason A. Engle

TM & © 2009 Wizards of the Coast LLC All rights reserved.

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

*If you're not playing a Chaos Scar campaign, you can still use this adventure by integrating it into any existing campaign situated near a wilderness area. Unlike some Chaos Scar adventures, its premise relies somewhat on the presence of an active chunk of the meteor. If you use the adventure somewhere other than the Chaos Scar, you'll want to invent your own explanation for the presence of the shard golem in the final encounter.*

## BACKGROUND

When the meteor fell from the heavens, it shed many small fragments, or Chaos Shards, scattering them across the land and the Chaos Scar itself. The largest portion of the meteor ripped the great furrow in the earth that is now called the Chaos Scar. One of the Chaos Shards landed not far from the mouth of the Chaos Scar, where the King's Wall now stands. There, it began to burrow into the earth, carving a twisting pattern of tunnels deep into the ground. At the bottom of a maddening, spiraling network of caverns and passageways, the shard slowly began to increase in power.

Shortly after coming to rest at the bottom of the network of tunnels the energy of the Chaos Shard caused clusters of crystals to grow throughout its domain. Called warp crystals by the races of the Underdark, these strange luminous crystals grow in areas with a strong connection to the Far Realm. The strange properties of warp crystal strengthen creatures from the Far Realm while weakening those native to other planes of existence.

The Chaos Shard exudes a malevolent aura of evil and chaos, and although it is not truly sentient, it does possess a crude, malignant will that draws other evil creatures to it. Recently, the combined influences of the Chaos Shard and the warp crystals have weakened the barriers between the world and the Far Realm, allowing a small group of fell taints, drawn by the power of the Chaos Shard, to pass into the mortal realm. The dim-witted fell taints, believing the Chaos Shard to be a god, now worship it and seek to please it by offering up mortal sacrifices. The fell taints have been venturing out and attacking travelers near the King's Wall, and their victims are carried back to the spiral and either devoured or presented to the Chaos Shard as gruesome gifts.

Over the last few weeks, the fell taints have grown bolder with their raids. Tales of horrific tentacled monstrosities attacking travelers in the dead of night are being spread, and a pall of fear has settled over the area.

## ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

The adventurers find the entrance to the spiral of tunnels carved by the Chaos Shard and enter. Inside, they must deal with the fell taints that worship the Shard, as well as some immature chuuls that have traveled to the area via a small underground stream. Eventually, they reach the depths of the spiral and face the Chaos Shard itself, which has grown a strange armor as a defense against attackers.

## GETTING THE PLAYERS INVOLVED

"The Tainted Spiral" takes place in the Chaos Scar. You can use one of the hooks below to get the PCs into the valley and into the dungeon. Two of these hooks also come with a minor quest that, if completed, can net the characters some extra experience points.

## HOOK 1: STRANGE LIGHTS

This hook can be used when the adventurers are already in the Chaos Scar. The PCs see a strange, bluish glow in the distance that looks like no light they have ever seen. As they travel closer to the source of the light, allow the heroes to make a DC 15 Dungeoneering check to learn that the light is magical and extraplanar in nature, and can be tied to the Far Realm. Star pact warlocks or sorcerers with the Wild Magic class feature can make a DC 15 Arcana check to obtain the same information.

## HOOK 2: MISSING MERCHANTS

The PCs are approached by a young elven woman named Ardia Ironleaf. She is the daughter of Tarthias Ironleaf, the head of a small but profitable elven trading company that deals exclusively in fine, elven weapons. Tarthias has not returned from his last trading expedition, and tales of terrible, tentacled monsters attacking travelers has Ardia very worried, especially since Tarthias' trade route takes him close to the King's Wall. Ardia asks the PCs to find her father, and if her worst fears are true, to return his signet ring to her. She offers the PCs 100 gp and a 15% discount on any goods sold by the Ironleaf Trading Company if they can discover the fate of her father.

**Quest XP:** 250 XP for discovering the fate of Tarthias Ironleaf or 500 XP for returning his signet ring to Ardia.

## HOOK 3: THE CHAOS CONNECTION

Ivian the Unpredictable is a notable sorcerer whose specializes in wild magic; he has sensed the energy given off by the warp crystals and has come to the conclusion that it is connected with the Far Realm. He believes that the energy is radiating from a location in the Chaos Scar and asks the PCs to investigate and discern the source of the energy. He offers 100 gp for the completion of this task. In addition, he will gladly pay another 50 gp for a sample of warp crystal if the PCs bring him some.

**Quest XP:** 250 XP for discovering the source of the chaos energy or 500 XP for returning a piece of warp crystal to Ivian.

**Regardless of what hook you used to get the PCs to explore the tainted spiral, read or paraphrase the following when they reach the first encounter area:**

*Strange blue light spills out of the ragged, gaping entrance to this cave. The light creates strange, twisting shadows that bear little resemblance to the people and things casting them. Your skin crawls wherever the light touches it, and an overwhelming feeling of "wrongness" permeates the area, filling you with an indescribable dread.*

## ENCOUNTERS IN THE TUNNELS

If you would like to add a little more danger to the twisting tunnels that connect the encounter areas in the spiral, consider adding a brief encounter with a small group of fell taints in the narrow confines of the spiral. The PCs might trigger this encounter on their own if they fail the Navigating the Tainted Spiral skill challenge (encounter T1). In that case, it is recommended that you don't use this encounter again to avoid draining the PCs' resources and decreasing their chances of completing the final encounter.

## TREASURE PREPARATION

"The Tainted Spiral" uses the treasure parcel system described in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. The PCs should gain a total of three treasure parcels in this adventure. Listed below are the most likely places to find parcels and what those treasure parcels might contain.

Parcel 1: The Larder	100 gp and 200 sp
Parcel 2: The Silent Stream	Two potions of healing and one 100-gp gem
Parcel 3: Cavern of the Shard	One level 4 magic item

## CONCLUSION: WHAT TO DO WITH THE CHAOS SHARD?

Once the final blow is struck against the shard golem, its crystalline body shatters, leaving the Chaos Shard exposed and vulnerable. The Chaos Shard might be difficult to differentiate from the rest of the shards of warp crystal, but characters can make a DC 10 Perception check to notice that the Chaos Shard glows a bit brighter than the pieces of warp crystal around it. It shouldn't be difficult for the PCs to ascertain that the Chaos Shard is a piece of the great meteor, similar to other shards they might have seen after other adventures in the Chaos Scar (see "Den of the Slave-Takers" or "Death in the Pincers"). A DC 15 Arcana check reveals that it was controlling the shard golem.

Now that the PCs have the Chaos Shard, they can either destroy it, putting an end to a growing evil, or they can attempt to harness the shard's power for themselves. Astute PCs should realize that the Chaos Shard is irrevocably evil, and that should they keep it, even to pursue good purposes, other creatures of evil will be drawn to the shard user—something you can use as a springboard for many future adventures.

### DESTROYING THE SHARD

If the PCs decide to destroy the Chaos Shard, they immediately learn that this shard, similar to some and unlike others, is virtually immune to anything they can throw at it. However, the Chaos Shard is vulnerable to thunder damage and can be shattered and destroyed with concentrated attacks using that energy type. A DC 17 Arcana check is sufficient to reveal

its vulnerability. For the purposes of destruction, the Chaos Shard is a small object with the following statistics: AC 10; Fortitude 10; HP 50; Resist 20 all (except thunder); Vulnerable 10 thunder.

If the PCs discover the Chaos Shard's weakness and begin attacking it with thunder damage, it fills the minds of every PC within 5 squares with raw emotions of hatred and pain. Once the final blow is struck, the Chaos Shard shatters and unleashes a final telepathic scream before falling silent forever. For destroying the Chaos Shard's evil, award the characters 250 XP.

### KEEPING THE SHARD

If the PCs decide to keep the Chaos Shard, they can harness its power for their own uses. The shard can be fitted to a non-magical rod, staff, or wand and will then function as a magical version of any of those implements as follows:

#### Chaos Shard Implement Level 5+

*This glowing lump of blue crystal can be fitted to a rod, staff, or wand, allowing its user to channel the power for the Far Realm to smite enemies.*

Lvl 5	+1	1,000 gp	Lvl 20	+4	125,000 gp
Lvl 10	+2	5,000 gp	Lvl 25	+5	625,000 gp
Lvl 15	+3	25,000 gp	Lvl 30	+6	3,125,000 gp

**Implement** (Rod, Staff, or Wand)

**Enhancement:** Attack rolls and damage rolls

**Critical:** +1d6 psychic damage per plus

**Property:** When you use this implement to attack with an arcane power with the psychic keyword, you can gain an item bonus to damage rolls on that attack equal to this implement's enhancement bonus. When you gain the damage bonus, you also gain vulnerable 5 psychic damage until the start of your next turn. If you are a warlock with the star pact or a sorcerer with the Wild Magic class feature, you do not gain the vulnerable psychic.

**Power** (Daily ♦ Psychic): Free Action: Use this power when you hit with an arcane power with the psychic keyword. The power deals an additional 1d10 psychic damage.

Level 15 or 20: 2d10 psychic damage.

Level 25 or 30: 3d10 psychic damage.

If you'd like this Chaos Shard to exert more of an influence in your campaign, you could decide it continues to grow in power and tries to influence the actions of the character using it. The shard is not truly sentient, but it is filled with a crude malevolence. If you like the sound of that option, consider giving the shard the following attack that triggers when the character uses the shard's daily power. The hero who uses the shard remains unaware of this effect until the first time he or she triggers it.

**Chaos Shard Attack** (Charm): *Trigger:* The Chaos Shard's wielder uses its daily power to add extra psychic damage to an attack. *Attack:* +8 vs Will; *Hit:* the wielder makes an immediate attack with an at-will arcane power as a free action against its nearest ally.

Level 10: +13 vs. Will

Level 15: +18 vs. Will

Level 20: +23 vs. Will

Level 25: +28 vs. Will

Level 30: +33 vs. Will

## T1. TUNNEL TROUBLE

### Encounter Level 1 (XP 525)

- 1 fell taint thought eater
- 2 fell taint pulsars
- 2 fell taint lashers

### SETUP

The PCs encounter a small group of fell taints in the narrow tunnels of the tainted spiral. The portion of tunnel where this encounter takes place is 15 feet wide, 50 feet long, and has a 10-foot ceiling. The floor is relatively clear of debris (no difficult terrain). The fell taints start at one end of the tunnel and the PCs at the other.

#### When the PCs see the fell taints read:

*Ahead of you, the tunnel suddenly widens considerably, giving you space to move around a bit. Unfortunately, a group of squirming, tentacled monstrosities is also enjoying the extra room.*

### TACTICS

The fell taints try to remain at their end of the tunnel, peppering the PCs with ranged attacks. If the PCs respond with powerful ranged attacks of their own, the fell taints lashers rush forward to engage the heroes in melee, while the pulsars and thought eater hang back and continue to attack from a distance.

### FEATURES OF THE AREA

**Illumination:** The tunnels are dimly lit with small clusters of warp crystals.

Fell Taint Thought Eater		Level 2 Controller
Small aberrant magical beast		XP 125
Initiative +2	Senses Perception +6	
HP 26; Bloodied 13		
AC 14; Fortitude 13, Reflex 13, Will 15		
Resist insubstantial; Vulnerable 5 psychic		
Speed 1, fly 6 (hover)		
⊕ <b>Tendrils Caress</b> (standard; at-will) ♦ <b>Psychic</b>		
+6 vs. Reflex; 1d6 + 5 psychic damage.		
✧ <b>Spirit Haze</b> (standard; at-will) ♦ <b>Psychic</b>		
Ranged 10; +6 vs. Will; 1d4 + 5 psychic damage, and the target is dazed until the end of the fell taint thought eater's next turn.		
◀ <b>Thought Fog</b> (standard; recharge ⓧ) ♦ <b>Psychic, Charm</b>		
Close blast 5; targets enemies; +5 vs. Will; the target is slowed (save ends). <i>First Failed Saving Throw:</i> The target is immobilized instead of slowed (save ends).		
♦ <b>Fell Taint Feeding</b> (standard; at-will) ♦ <b>Healing</b>		
Targets a helpless or unconscious creature; the fell taint thought eater loses insubstantial and its fly speed until the end of its next turn, and it makes a coup de grace against the target. If the thought eater kills the target, it regains all of its hit points.		
Alignment Unaligned		Languages –
Str 11 (+1)	Dex 12 (+2)	Wis 10 (+1)
Con 13 (+2)	Int 5 (-2)	Cha 16 (+4)

2 Fell Taint Lashers		Level 1 Soldier
Small aberrant magical beast		XP 100
Initiative +3	Senses Perception +8	
HP 20; Bloodied 10		
AC 15; Fortitude 12, Reflex 12, Will 14		
Resist insubstantial; Vulnerable 5 psychic		
Speed 1, fly 6 (hover)		
⊕ <b>Tendrils Caress</b> (standard; at-will) ♦ <b>Psychic</b>		
+5 vs. Reflex; 1d6 + 4 psychic damage.		
⊕ <b>Tendrils of Stasis</b> (standard; at-will) ♦ <b>Psychic</b>		
+5 vs. Will; 1d4 + 4 psychic damage, and the target is immobilized until the end of the fell taint lasher's next turn.		
♦ <b>Fell Taint Feeding</b> (standard; at-will) ♦ <b>Healing</b>		
Targets a helpless or unconscious creature; the fell taint lasher loses insubstantial and its fly speed until the end of its next turn, and it makes a coup de grace against the target. If the lasher kills the target, it regains all of its hit points.		
♦ <b>Flowing Tendrils</b> (free, when the fell taint lasher makes an opportunity attack; at-will)		
The lasher shifts 1 square.		
Alignment Unaligned		Languages –
Str 11 (+0)	Dex 12 (+1)	Wis 16 (+3)
Con 13 (+1)	Int 4 (-3)	Cha 10 (+0)

2 Fell Taint Pulsars		Level 1 Artillery
Small aberrant magical beast		XP 100
Initiative +2	Senses Perception +8	
HP 18; Bloodied 9		
AC 12; Fortitude 11, Reflex 12, Will 14		
Resist insubstantial; Vulnerable 5 psychic		
Speed 1, fly 6 (hover)		
⊕ <b>Tendrils Caress</b> (standard; at-will) ♦ <b>Psychic</b>		
+4 vs. Reflex; 1d4 + 3 psychic damage.		
⊕ <b>Tendrils Pulse</b> (standard; at-will) ♦ <b>Psychic</b>		
Ranged 20; +6 vs. Reflex; 2d4 + 3 psychic damage.		
✧ <b>Tendrils Flurry</b> (standard; recharge ⓧ) ♦ <b>Psychic</b>		
Ranged 10; targets one, two, or three creatures; +4 vs. Reflex; 2d4 + 1 psychic damage.		
♦ <b>Fell Taint Feeding</b> (standard; at-will) ♦ <b>Healing</b>		
Targets a helpless or unconscious creature; the fell taint pulsar loses insubstantial and its fly speed until the end of its next turn, and it makes a coup de grace against the target. If the pulsar kills the target, it regains all of its hit points.		
Alignment Unaligned		Languages –
Skills Stealth +7		
Str 11 (+0)	Dex 14 (+2)	Wis 16 (+3)
Con 13 (+1)	Int 4 (-3)	Cha 10 (+0)

## T2. THE LARDER

Encounter Level 2 (XP 675)

- 1 dimensional marauder (D)
- 3 fell taint lashers (L)
- 2 fell taint pulsars (P)

### SETUP

This cavern opens up into the Chaos Scar valley, and the light from the warp crystals within can be seen for almost a mile. The fell taints have been using this area as a larder of sorts, and a number of corpses lie at the northern end of the cavern. Currently a group of fell taints and a dimensional marauder are feasting on the corpses, but they are quite pleased that fresher fare has seen fit to show up on their doorstep.

The fell taints and the dimensional marauder are not expecting intruders nor are they intelligent enough to set any kind of watch. However, the fell taints are fairly perceptive with a passive Perception of 18 to oppose the characters' Stealth checks if the heroes attempt to surprise them.

**When the characters enter the cavern, read:**

*A bright bluish light emanates from two clusters of jagged crystals in this wide cavern. A small, murky pool sits in one corner, and a narrow tunnel runs away into darkness at the northern end of the cavern. The bright illumination allows you to plainly see a ghoulish sight: six humanoid corpses lay in a tangled heap in the center of the cavern. Even from this distance you can tell that the corpses have been partially devoured.*

*Floating above the corpses are five horrific creatures, each little more than a wild tangle of squirming tentacles and lurid red eyes. Staring directly at one of these monstrosities sends a jagged spike of a pain through your mind as you try to discern some rational form in the twisting mass. Your eyes and mind find no relief in the other denizen of this cavern: a squat bipedal monster that is little more than a fanged maw with legs.*

3 Fell Taint Lashers (L)		Level 1 Soldier
Small aberrant magical beast		XP 100 each
Initiative +3	Senses Perception +8	
HP 20; Bloodied 10		
AC 15; Fortitude 12, Reflex 12, Will 14		
Resist insubstantial; Vulnerable 5 psychic		
Speed 1, fly 6 (hover)		
⊕ Tendril Caress (standard; at-will) ♦ Psychic		
+5 vs. Reflex; 1d6 + 4 psychic damage.		
⊕ Tendrils of Stasis (standard; at-will) ♦ Psychic		
+5 vs. Will; 1d4 + 4 psychic damage, and the target is immobilized until the end of the fell taint lasher's next turn.		
Fell Taint Feeding (standard; at-will) ♦ Healing		
Targets a helpless or unconscious creature; the fell taint lasher loses insubstantial and its fly speed until the end of its next turn, and it makes a coup de grace against the target. If the lasher kills the target, it regains all of its hit points.		
Flowing Tendrils (free, when the fell taint lasher makes an opportunity attack; at-will)		
The lasher shifts 1 square.		
Alignment Unaligned		Languages –
Str 11 (+0)	Dex 12 (+1)	Wis 16 (+3)
Con 13 (+1)	Int 4 (-3)	Cha 10 (+0)

2 Fell Taint Pulsars (P)		Level 1 Artillery
Small aberrant magical beast		XP 100 each
Initiative +2	Senses Perception +8	
HP 18; Bloodied 9		
AC 12; Fortitude 11, Reflex 12, Will 14		
Resist insubstantial; Vulnerable 5 psychic		
Speed 1, fly 6 (hover)		
⊕ Tendril Caress (standard; at-will) ♦ Psychic		
+4 vs. Reflex; 1d4 + 3 psychic damage.		
⊕ Tendril Pulse (standard; at-will) ♦ Psychic		
Ranged 20; +6 vs. Reflex; 2d4 + 3 psychic damage.		
⊕ Tendril Flurry (standard; recharge ⓧⓧⓧ) ♦ Psychic		
Ranged 10; targets one, two, or three creatures; +4 vs. Reflex; 2d4 + 1 psychic damage.		
Fell Taint Feeding (standard; at-will) ♦ Healing		
Targets a helpless or unconscious creature; the fell taint pulsar loses insubstantial and its fly speed until the end of its next turn, and it makes a coup de grace against the target. If the pulsar kills the target, it regains all of its hit points.		
Alignment Unaligned		Languages –
Skills Stealth +7		
Str 11 (+0)	Dex 14 (+2)	Wis 16 (+3)
Con 13 (+1)	Int 4 (-3)	Cha 10w(+0)

### TACTICS

The monsters here have no goal other than to kill and devour the characters. Although the fell taints and dimensional marauder are not particularly intelligent, they are cunning combatants and have learned a few things about fighting humanoids from attacking travelers near the King's Wall.

When combat begins, the fell taint pulsars move to hover near the ceiling (see Features of the Area) and target the adventurers with *tendril flurry*. The fell taint lashers hold their position to allow the fell taint pulsars to soften up the heroes before entering melee. Finally, the dimensional marauder uses *plane phase form* to become insubstantial.

During combat, the fell taint pulsars continue to attack the characters with *tendril pulse* and *tendril*

flurry when it recharges, focusing their attacks on any heroes that demonstrate effective ranged attacks. The fell taint lashers use *tendrils of stasis* as often as possible to keep the characters immobilized, and generally focus their attacks on the closest enemy. The dimensional marauder uses *reality warp* to teleport the closest foe and itself as far away from the other heroes as possible. It then uses its fearsome bite attack on the isolated character, using *planeplane form* again to escape heroes that come to its victim's aid.

The fell taints fight to the death to defend their lair and their new god, but they make liberal use of *fell taint feeding* to stay in the fight. However, when reduced to 15 hit points or less, the dimensional marauder uses *planeplane form* to escape by phasing through obstacles and walls or teleporting into a place inaccessible to the characters. If the dimensional marauder escapes, it could appear in later encounters, especially if the adventurers are having a particularly easy time in the tainted spiral.

## FEATURES OF THE AREA

**Illumination:** The two clusters of warp crystals here provide bright illumination throughout the entire cavern.

**Ceiling:** The ceiling is 15 feet high.

**Corpses:** Squares with corpses in them are considered difficult terrain. The six corpses here are all humans. Two of the corpses are badly decayed and have been mostly devoured by the fell taints and the dimensional marauder. The other four, however, are fairly fresh, and appear to be part of a single group consisting of a pair of merchants and their two guards. If the PCs search these corpses, a DC 10 Perception check reveals a number of documents detailing the nature of the merchants' business. In

<b>Dimensional Marauder (D)</b>	<b>Level 4 Lurker</b>
Medium aberrant magical beast	XP 175
<b>Initiative</b> +10	<b>Senses</b> Perception +5; low-light vision
<b>HP</b> 45; <b>Bloodied</b> 22	
<b>AC</b> 18; <b>Fortitude</b> 14, <b>Reflex</b> 17, <b>Will</b> 16	
<b>Vulnerable</b> psychic; a dimensional marauder that takes psychic damage immediately ends <i>planeplane form</i> .	
<b>Speed</b> 7, teleport 3	
⊕ <b>Bite</b> (standard; at-will) +9 vs. AC; 2d6 + 3 damage.	
⊕ <b>Reality Warp</b> (standard; usable only while insubstantial; at-will) ⊕ <b>Teleportation</b> +7 vs. Reflex; 1d10 + 4 damage, and the dimensional marauder teleports the target 3 squares. The marauder then teleports 3 squares into a space adjacent to the target.	
<b>Planar Evasion</b> (immediate reaction, when the dimensional marauder is hit by a melee attack; recharge ⓂⓂⓂ) ⊕ <b>Teleportation</b> The marauder teleports 3 squares.	
<b>Planeplane Form</b> (standard; at-will) The dimensional marauder partially phases into another plane, gaining insubstantial and phasing until the end of its next turn or until it hits or misses with an attack. <i>Sustain Minor</i> : The effect persists.	
<b>Alignment</b> Unaligned	<b>Languages</b> Deep Speech
<b>Skills</b> Stealth +11	
<b>Str</b> 11 (+2)	<b>Dex</b> 18 (+6) <b>Wis</b> 16 (+5)
<b>Con</b> 15 (+4)	<b>Int</b> 4 (-1) <b>Cha</b> 12 (+3)

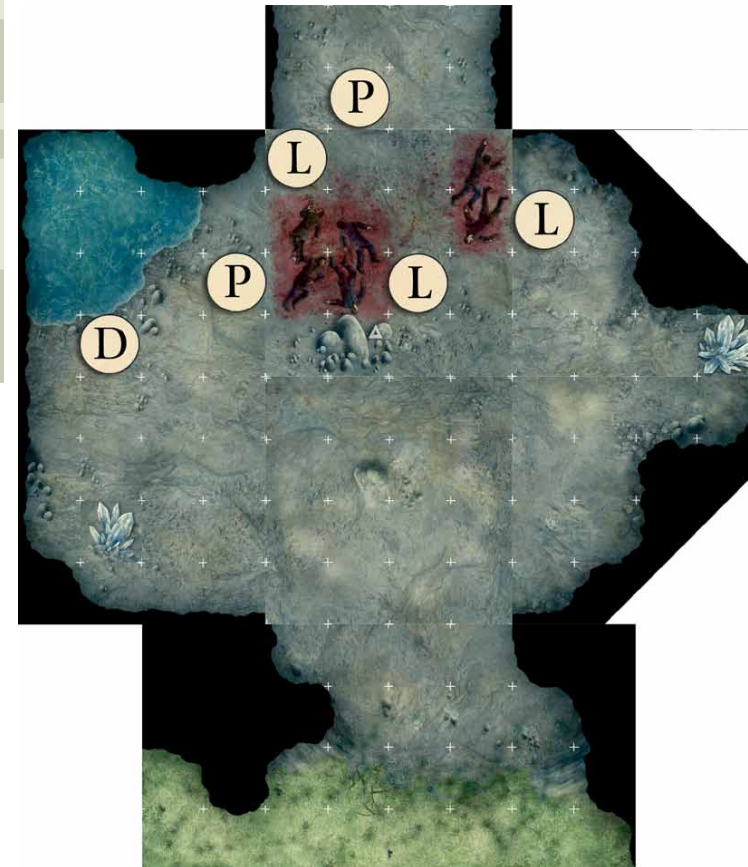
addition, one document is a contract between the merchants and the guards, and it lists the names of all four individuals. If the PCs decide to seek out the families of these individuals and deliver news of their fates, award them 100 XP.

**Pool:** This small pool is only a few feet deep and is considered difficult terrain.

**Rubble:** Squares with rubble are considered difficult terrain.

**Warp Crystals:** The two clusters of warp crystals in this area provide bright illumination out to 10 squares, more than enough to light the entire cavern.

Creatures can move through a square with a cluster of warp crystals, but the square counts as difficult terrain. Warp crystals radiate the dire, chaotic energies of the Far Realm and can have deleterious effects on PCs that get too close to them. Any creature without the aberrant origin that starts its turn adjacent to a cluster of warp crystals takes a -1 penalty to attack rolls until the start of its next turn. Conversely, a creature with the aberrant origin that starts its turn adjacent to a cluster of warp crystals gains a +1 bonus to attack rolls until the start of its next turn.



### T3. NAVIGATING THE TAINTED SPIRAL

The dungeon is comprised of three large caverns connected by a series of twisting, narrow tunnels that spiral deeper and deeper into the earth. The first cavern, encounter T2, is at the surface. The tunnels leading deeper into the spiral range from 5 to 15 feet wide and are dimly lit by small clusters of warp crystals. Navigating the tunnels can be both confusing and dangerous, and the heroes could easily become lost or be set upon by fell taints if they make a wrong turn. This skill challenge begins when the heroes enter the spiral after encounter T2, but is broken up by the combat encounters that follow. See Success, below, for details.

**Level:** 1 (XP 200).

**Complexity:** 1 (requires 4 successes before 3 failures).

**Primary Skills:** Arcana, Dungeoneering, Perception.

*Arcana (DC 10, 1 success, no maximum):* The character's arcane training gives her some familiarity with the energies of the Far Realm, allowing her to detect the source and strength of the energy permeating these tunnels. A star pact warlock or chaos sorcerer gains a +2 bonus on this check.

*Dungeoneering (DC 15, 1 success, no maximum):* A character's familiarity with subterranean environments allows him to navigate the twisting tunnels. The adventurer detects the subtle downward-sloping grade of the narrow passages and knows that going deeper likely means going in the right direction. In addition, he can sense the dire energy of the Far Realm grow stronger as the party descends into the depths.

*Perception (DC 10, 1 success, no maximum):* A character might not know much about navigating underground, but his keen eyes and ears allow him to keep track of landmarks, ensuring that the party doesn't wander in circles.

**Secondary Skill:** Nature.

*Nature (DC 5, no successes):* Although you are out of your element, your direction sense is good enough to aid a companion skilled at underground navigation. You grant a +2 bonus to one ally's next Dungeoneering check made as part of this skill challenge.

**Success:** The PCs reach the next encounter area without incident. After the first 2 successes, the characters have successfully found their way through the first half of the tunnels. Proceed to encounter T4. After the next 2 successes, the characters have reached the heart of the spiral. Proceed to encounter T5.

**Failure:** After blundering around in the darkness for hours, the adventurers wind up back in the encounter area they just left. If they have yet to accumulate enough successes to reach the next encounter area, they lose any gained since that point. They do not lose successes they have accumulated prior to the previous encounter area. For example, if the characters accumulate 2 successes and reach encounter T4, then fail the skill challenge, they find themselves back in the cavern for encounter T4, and are still considered as having 2 successes that count toward overall success in the skill challenge. They lose any success they accumulated between encounters T2 and T3, however. In addition, the characters trigger encounter T1 if they fail, as they run afoul of a group of wandering fell taints. Regardless of how many times they fail the challenge, they only ever deal with encounter T1 once.

## T4. THE SILENT STREAM

### Encounter Level 1 (XP 575)

- 2 chuul nymphs (N)
- 2 fell taint pulsars (P)
- 1 fell taint thought eater (T)

### SETUP

The PCs enter this cavern from the southwest. It exits in the northeast corner via a tunnel heading east. In addition to the fell taints, a pair of chuul nymphs, immature versions of the dreaded aberrant horror, lair in the stream running through the center of the cavern. The fell taints and the nymphs are not exactly allies, but the fell taints are happy to feed on the scraps left by the voracious nymphs.

The chuul nymphs lurk in the stream with only their eyes above the surface, waiting for anything edible to wander close to the shore. The fell taints are always careful to fly at least 5 feet above the stream and out of the nymphs' reach. As in the first encounter, the fell taints are not expecting intruders but are fairly alert. Characters attempting to sneak into this cavern must overcome the fell taints' passive Perception of 18. The nymphs are nearly as alert as the fell taints and have a passive Perception of 17. However, the chuul nymphs are nearly invisible to characters as they hide beneath the surface of the water (passive Stealth check of 19).

Two corpses float beneath the surface in the center of the stream. They are anchored to a large stone by a glue-like secretion produced by the chuul nymphs. Both corpses are elven men, and one of the corpses is Tarthias Ironleaf from the Missing Merchants hook.

**When the PCs enter this cavern, read:** *After navigating the dim tunnels, the shocking brilliance of this large cavern is almost painful to your eyes. More clusters of the strange glowing crystals provide glaring illumination. A murky stream runs sluggishly through the center of this cave, disappearing beneath the rubble-scattered floor in the southwestern corner. However, a trio of the strange, tentacular beasts that seem to plague these caverns lurks across the stream, and they turn to attack you.*

### Perception DC 15

*The still waters of the subterranean stream seem darker in one area. On closer examination, you realize that a pair of corpses bobs in the sluggish current just below the surface.*

2 Chuul Nymphs (N)		Level 2 Lurker
Medium aberrant magical beast (aquatic)		XP 125 each
Initiative +8	Senses Perception +7; darkvision	
HP 33; Bloodied 16		
AC 16; Fortitude 15, Reflex 15, Will 13		
Speed 6, swim 6		
⊕ <b>Claw</b> (standard; at-will)		
+7 vs. AC; 1d6 + 3 damage.		
⊕ <b>Double Attack</b> (standard; at-will)		
Requires combat advantage; the chuul nymph makes two claw attacks against a single target. If both attacks hit, the target is grabbed (until escape).		
⊕ <b>Crushing Claws</b> (standard; at-will)		
Grabbed target only; +5 vs. Fortitude; 2d6 + 3 damage.		
<b>Powerful Grappler</b> (no action; at-will)		
When a chuul nymph moves a grabbed target of Medium size or smaller, it gains a +5 bonus to the Strength attack.		
Alignment Unaligned	Languages –	
Skills Stealth +9		
Str 16 (+4)	Dex 17 (+4)	Wis 13 (+2)
Con 15 (+3)	Int 4 (-2)	Cha 11 (+1)

2 Fell Taint Pulsars (P)		Level 1 Artillery
Small aberrant magical beast		XP 100 each
Initiative +2	Senses Perception +8	
HP 18; Bloodied 9		
AC 12; Fortitude 11, Reflex 12, Will 14		
Resist insubstantial; Vulnerable 5 psychic		
Speed 1, fly 6 (hover)		
⊕ <b>Tendrils Caress</b> (standard; at-will) ♦ <b>Psychic</b>		
+4 vs. Reflex; 1d4 + 3 psychic damage.		
⊕ <b>Tendrils Pulse</b> (standard; at-will) ♦ <b>Psychic</b>		
Ranged 20; +6 vs. Reflex; 2d4 + 3 psychic damage.		
⊕ <b>Tendrils Flurry</b> (standard; recharge Ⓜ Ⓜ) ♦ <b>Psychic</b>		
Ranged 10; targets one, two, or three creatures; +4 vs. Reflex; 2d4 + 1 psychic damage.		
<b>Fell Taint Feeding</b> (standard; at-will) ♦ <b>Healing</b>		
Targets a helpless or unconscious creature; the fell taint pulsar loses insubstantial and its fly speed until the end of its next turn, and it makes a coup de grace against the target. If the pulsar kills the target, it regains all of its hit points.		
Alignment Unaligned	Languages –	
Skills Stealth +7		
Str 11 (+0)	Dex 14 (+2)	Wis 16 (+3)
Con 13 (+1)	Int 4 (-3)	Cha 10 (+0)

### TACTICS

The fell taints move close to the cavern ceiling and open up with ranged attacks as soon as they spot the PCs. The fell taint pulsars begin the combat with *tendrils flurry* and then switch to *tendrils pulse* until *tendrils flurry* recharges. The fell taint thought eater begins combat with *thought fog* and then switches to *spirit haze*. The goal of the fell taints is to keep the PCs on the other side of the stream, or better yet, draw them close to the stream and the lurking chuul nymphs.

The chuul nymphs are familiar with the fell taints' tactics and move adjacent to the shore when combat begins, attempting to stay hidden (make a Stealth check for the nymphs opposed by the characters' highest passive Perception). Once they are in position, and if they haven't been spotted, the nymphs ready

a *double attack* that triggers as soon as any character moves adjacent to shore. If this tactic works, and one or both of the nymphs manage to grab hold of a hero, the nymphs use their next standard action to haul a grabbed adventurer into the middle of the stream and beneath the surface of the water (refer to the rules on aquatic combat on page 45 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*). Once a chuul has a PC in the water, it relies on a combination of drowning and *crushing claws* to dispatch its prey. The chuul nymphs do not leave the safety of the water for any reason. If they are spotted and the PCs resort to ranged attacks from the shore, the nymphs submerge completely, gaining total concealment from the murky water. If one of the chuul nymphs is killed and the other is bloodied, the remaining nymph swims further downstream into a subterranean tunnel and out of the characters' reach.

The fell taints resort to melee combat only if the characters make it across the stream. If forced into melee, the fell taints try to stay adjacent to a cluster of warp crystals to gain a bonus to their attack rolls. The fell taints fight to the death to protect their lair.

## FEATURES OF THE AREA

**Illumination:** The three clusters of warp crystals here provide bright illumination.

**Ceiling:** The ceiling is 15 feet high.

**Corpses:** Two elven corpses float in the stream. One of these corpses is Tarthias Ironleaf. A character that moves into a square with a corpse gains cover and a +2 bonus to Athletics checks made to stay afloat and tread water.

**Pools:** The two pools on the northwest side of the stream are 3 feet deep and are considered difficult terrain.

### Fell Taint Thought Eater (T) Level 2 Controller

Small aberrant magical beast XP 125

**Initiative** +2      **Senses** Perception +6

**HP** 26; **Bloodied** 13

**AC** 14; **Fortitude** 13, **Reflex** 13, **Will** 15

**Resist** insubstantial; **Vulnerable** 5 psychic

**Speed** 1, fly 6 (hover)

⊕ **Tendrils Caress** (standard; at-will) ♦ **Psychic**

+6 vs. Reflex; 1d6 + 5 psychic damage.

✧ **Spirit Haze** (standard; at-will) ♦ **Psychic**

Ranged 10; +6 vs. Will; 1d4 + 5 psychic damage, and the target is dazed until the end of the fell taint thought eater's next turn.

⬅ **Thought Fog** (standard; recharge [2][3]) ♦ **Psychic, Charm**

Close blast 5; targets enemies; +5 vs. Will; the target is slowed (save ends). *First Failed Saving Throw:* The target is immobilized instead of slowed (save ends).

**Fell Taint Feeding** (standard; at-will) ♦ **Healing**

Targets a helpless or unconscious creature; the fell taint thought eater loses insubstantial and its fly speed until the end of its next turn, and it makes a coup de grace against the target. If the thought eater kills the target, it regains all of its hit points.

**Alignment** Unaligned

**Languages** –

**Str** 11 (+1)

**Dex** 12 (+2)

**Wis** 10 (+1)

**Con** 13 (+2)

**Int** 5 (-2)

**Cha** 16 (+4)

**Rubble:** Squares with rubble are considered difficult terrain.

**Stream:** This murky underground stream is slow moving (DC 10 Athletics check to swim) but it is 7 feet deep, requiring characters to swim across it.

**Warp Crystals:** The three clusters of warp crystals in this area provide bright illumination out to 10 squares, more than enough to light the entire cavern. Creatures can move through a square with a cluster of warp crystals, but the square counts as difficult terrain. Warp crystal radiate the dire, chaotic energies of the Far Realm and can have deleterious effects on PCs that get too close to them. Any creature without the aberrant origin that starts its turn adjacent to a cluster of warp crystals takes a -1 penalty to attack

rolls until the start of its next turn. Conversely, a creature with the aberrant origin that starts its turn adjacent to a cluster of warp crystals gains a +1 bonus to attack rolls until the start of its next turn.

**Treasure:** One of the corpses in the stream is Tarthias Ironleaf from the Missing Merchants hook. He wears a platinum signet ring on his right hand that bears the sigil of his house, an oak leaf behind crossed swords. The signet ring is worth 75 gp, should the PCs decide to keep it rather than return it to Ardia Ironleaf.



## T5. CAVERN OF THE SHARD

### Encounter Level 3 (XP 775)

- 3 fell taint lashers (L)
- 1 fell taint warp wender (W)
- 1 shard golem (G)

### SETUP

This large cavern is where the Chaos Shard came to rest after falling away from the great meteor and carving the descending tunnels of the tainted spiral. In the years since, its influence has caused increased seismic activity in the area, which has modified the cavern to its current uneven state. The cavern now consists of three staggered ledges, each roughly 10 feet above the other, separating it into three areas. The ledges present no difficulty to the fell taints, but for creatures that cannot fly, the ledges are a serious challenge.

The fell taints have been bringing roughly half their victims into this chamber, dumping the corpses into the center ledge as an offering to their “god.” The Chaos Shard is hardly aware of the fell taint’s gifts, but this hasn’t stopped the foul aberrations from bringing it new victims on a regular basis.

Although it is not actually sentient, the Chaos Shard possesses a crude survival instinct. To gain both mobility and protection, the Chaos Shard long ago constructed an armored, golem-like shell composed of warp crystals. The warp crystal shell is completely mobile and allows the Chaos Shard to channel the destructive energy of the Far Realm.

Unlike the other caverns, the fell taints here are on guard, fervently protecting their god from intruders. In addition, the entrance to this cavern is devoid of all

cover. These two factors make it unlikely that the PCs will be able to surprise the fell taints by sneaking into the cavern unseen.

### When the PCs enter this room, read:

*You emerge into the glaring illumination of a crystal-lit cavern. The cavern is long, narrow, and separated into three distinct sections by high ledges. Each ledge is roughly 10 feet high, so that the third and final section of the cavern is 20 feet from the ground. On the first ledge, a truly gruesome sight awaits you: a dozen corpses piled in rotting heaps. Hovering above the corpses are three more of the writhing, tentacular horrors that you have battled every step of the way in these cursed caverns. Beyond that, on the second ledge, another tentacled abomination hovers beside a large, blocky humanoid composed entirely of glowing blue crystal.*

### TACTICS

If the PCs cannot mount an effective ranged assault, the fell taint lashers wait for them to begin climbing to the first ledge, and then attack, gaining combat advantage against climbing PCs. When a PC finally gains the first ledge, the fell taint warp wender uses *psychic transposition* to swap places with the hero, placing the unfortunate PC alone with the shard golem. The shard golem focuses its attacks on the isolated PC, using *mind searing strike* every round until the PC is slain or escapes.

If the PCs all gain the first ledge, or if they have strong ranged attacks, the remaining fell taints fall back to the second ledge and use the tactics detailed above. If the PCs manage to gain the second ledge, the shard golem hits them with *chaos pulse*, and the remaining fell taints tear into dazed PCs with melee attacks. Bloodied fell taints take every opportunity

to use *fell taint feeding* on helpless PCs during this combat, trying to stay in the fight as long as possible to protect their god. The shard golem tries to keep as many PCs in its *unnatural aura* as possible, and uses *chaos pulse* as soon as it recharges. It uses *mind-searing strike* on a potent melee-oriented PC each round and saves its action point to put down a bloodied PC with an additional *slam* or *mind-searing strike*.

Once the PCs reach the second tier, the fell taints and shard golem are cornered and fight ferociously and to the death to repel the invading heroes.

Shard Golem (G)	Level 3 Elite Soldier (Leader)
Medium aberrant animate (construct)	XP 300
<b>Initiative</b> +3	<b>Senses</b> Perception +8; darkvision
<b>Unnatural Aura</b> aura 1; non-aberrant creatures within the aura take a -2 penalty to attack rolls.	
<b>HP</b> 98; <b>Bloodied</b> 49	
<b>AC</b> 18; <b>Fortitude</b> 16; <b>Reflex</b> 14; <b>Will</b> 17	
<b>Immune</b> disease, poison, sleep; <b>Vulnerable</b> 5 thunder	
<b>Saving Throws</b> +2	
<b>Speed</b> 6	
<b>Action Points</b> 1	
⊕ <b>Slam</b> (standard; at-will) ⊕ <b>Psychic</b> +10 vs. AC; 1d8 + 4 psychic damage.	
⊕ <b>Mind-Searing Strike</b> (standard; at-will) ⊕ <b>Psychic</b> +10 vs. AC; 1d8 + 4 psychic damage, and one of the following effects (roll a d4): 1. Ongoing 5 psychic damage (save ends). 2. Target gains vulnerable 5 psychic (save ends). 3. The target slides 2 squares and makes a melee basic attack against an adjacent ally. 4. Target is dazed until the start of the shard golem’s next turn.	
⊕ <b>Dual Mind Sear</b> (standard; recharge ☒☒☒) ⊕ <b>Psychic</b> The shard golem makes two mind-searing strikes, each against a different target.	
⚡ <b>Chaos Pulse</b> (minor; recharges when first bloodied) ⊕ <b>Psychic</b> Close burst 3; targets enemies; +6 vs. Will; 5 psychic damage, and the target is dazed (save ends).	
<b>Alignment</b> Chaotic evil	<b>Languages</b> –
<b>Skills</b> Arcana +8, Dungeoneering +8, Endurance +9	
<b>Str</b> 18 (+5)	<b>Dex</b> 11 (+1) <b>Wis</b> 15 (+3)
<b>Con</b> 17 (+4)	<b>Int</b> 4 (-2) <b>Cha</b> 16 (+4)

<b>3 Fell Taint Lashers (L)</b>	<b>Level 1 Soldier</b>
Small aberrant magical beast	XP 100
<b>Initiative</b> +3	<b>Senses Perception</b> +8
<b>HP</b> 20; <b>Bloodied</b> 10	
<b>AC</b> 15; <b>Fortitude</b> 12, <b>Reflex</b> 12, <b>Will</b> 14	
<b>Resist</b> insubstantial; <b>Vulnerable</b> 5 psychic	
<b>Speed</b> 1, fly 6 (hover)	
⊕ <b>Tendrils Caress</b> (standard; at-will) ♦ <b>Psychic</b> +5 vs. Reflex; 1d6 + 4 psychic damage.	
⊖ <b>Tendrils of Stasis</b> (standard; at-will) ♦ <b>Psychic</b> +5 vs. Will; 1d4 + 4 psychic damage, and the target is immobilized until the end of the fell taint lasher's next turn.	
<b>Fell Taint Feeding</b> (standard; at-will) ♦ <b>Healing</b> Targets a helpless or unconscious creature; the fell taint lasher loses insubstantial and its fly speed until the end of its next turn, and it makes a coup de grace against the target. If the lasher kills the target, it regains all of its hit points.	
<b>Flowing Tendrils</b> (free, when the fell taint lasher makes an opportunity attack; at-will) The lasher shifts 1 square.	
<b>Alignment</b> Unaligned	<b>Languages</b> –
<b>Str</b> 11 (+0)	<b>Dex</b> 12 (+1) <b>Wis</b> 16 (+3)
<b>Con</b> 13 (+1)	<b>Int</b> 4 (-3) <b>Cha</b> 10 (+0)

## FEATURES OF THE AREA

**Illumination:** The three clusters of warp crystals here provide bright illumination.

**Ceiling:** The ceiling is 20 feet high.

**Corpses:** Squares with corpses in them are considered difficult terrain. A total of 12 corpses lie here, in various states of decay and dismemberment, including eight human corpses, three elven corpses, and a single dwarven corpse.

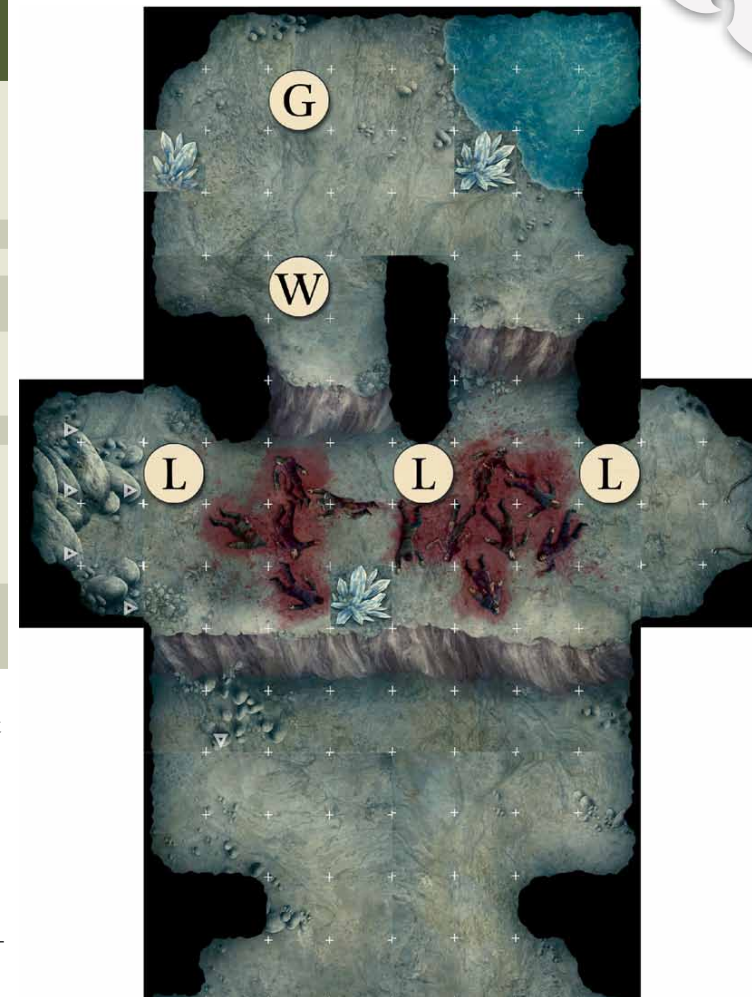
**Ledges:** The three areas in this cavern are separated by two tiered ledges, each 10 feet above the last. Climbing onto a ledge requires a DC 10 Athletics check.

**Pool:** The pool on the highest shelf is 3 feet deep and is considered difficult terrain.

<b>Fell Taint Warp Wender (W)</b>	<b>Level 4 Controller</b>
Medium aberrant magical beast	XP 175
<b>Initiative</b> +5	<b>Senses Perception</b> +10
<b>HP</b> 38; <b>Bloodied</b> 19	
<b>AC</b> 18; <b>Fortitude</b> 15, <b>Reflex</b> 15, <b>Will</b> 17	
<b>Resist</b> insubstantial; <b>Vulnerable</b> 5 psychic	
<b>Speed</b> 1, fly 6 (hover)	
⊕ <b>Tendrils Caress</b> (standard; at-will) ♦ <b>Psychic</b> +8 vs. Reflex; 1d6 + 4 psychic damage.	
⤴ <b>Psychic Transposition</b> (standard; at-will) ♦ <b>Psychic, Teleportation</b> Ranged 10; +8 vs. Will; 1d4 + 4 psychic damage, and the target is dazed (save ends). <i>First Failed Saving Throw:</i> The fell taint warp wender swaps positions with the target.	
<b>Fell Taint Feeding</b> (standard; at-will) ♦ <b>Healing</b> Targets a helpless or unconscious creature; the fell taint warp wender loses insubstantial and its fly speed until the end of its next turn, and it makes a coup de grace against the target. If the warp wender kills the target, it regains all of its hit points.	
<b>Alignment</b> Unaligned	<b>Languages</b> –
<b>Str</b> 11 (+2)	<b>Dex</b> 16 (+5) <b>Wis</b> 17 (+5)
<b>Con</b> 15 (+4)	<b>Int</b> 6 (+0) <b>Cha</b> 12 (+3)

**Rubble:** Squares with rubble are considered difficult terrain.

**Warp Crystals:** The three clusters of warp crystals in this area provide bright illumination out to 10 squares, more than enough to light the entire cavern. Creatures can move through a square with a cluster of warp crystals, but the square counts as difficult terrain. Warp crystals radiate the dire, chaotic energies of the Far Realm and can have deleterious effects on PCs that get too close to them. Any creature without the aberrant origin that starts its turn adjacent to a cluster of warp crystals takes a -1 penalty to attack rolls until the start of its next turn. Conversely, a creature with the aberrant origin that starts its turn adjacent to a cluster of warp crystals gains a +1 bonus to attack rolls until the start of its 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.