

DG1 Secrets in the Dark

By Dan Hass



A dungeon; a dragon (well, dragonish)... Away we go!!! Fortune (or fate) has brought together a fugitive dragon cultist, and an alien creature which has been terrorizing the surrounding communities. It is time for heroes to emerge to set the situation right. A Dungeons and Dragons 5th Edition Adventure for 1-6 first level characters.

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Adventure Summary

Secrets in the Dark is a Dungeons and Dragons 5th Edition adventure designed for 1-8 1st level characters and the DM. The adventure requires the *Player's Handbook*, *Monster Manual*, and *Dungeon Master's Guide*.

The encounters include scaling for 1-8 characters, but parties of 1 or 2 PCs and 7 or 8 PCs are fringe circumstances that may play oddly. Specifically, parties of 1-2 are highly susceptible to a single bad die roll, and 7-8 can slow play dramatically. Ideally a party will be 3-6 PCs.

It is set in the [Alshon Region](#) which is part of the [Dimgaard Campaign Setting](#).

Other Adventures

You can find all the Dimgaard adventures to date (and supplemental content) on drivethrurpg.com. Additionally, you might consider back [this kickstarter](#). In addition to the current adventures, it has “catch up” options.

Preparing for the Adventure

It is always a good idea for the DM to read through an adventure before running it. *Secrets in the Dark* is no different.

The adventure is deliberately short so that the DM can use the first portion of a session creating characters and then jump into *Secrets in the Dark*.

Maps ready for virtual tabletops are [here](#).

The adventure is designed for the Dimgaard campaign, but it should fit into almost any campaign setting.

Types of Adventures

There are many types of D&D adventures. *Secrets in the Dark* is a “dungeon crawl”. The Dimgaard series though explores a wide variety of adventure types.

A battlemat or dungeon tiles may be helpful, but not necessary.

Running the Adventure

Each encounter lists the map appropriate for that encounter. Appendix 1: DM Maps contains a map of the Alshon Region in

case the DM doesn't have access to the *Alshon Region Campaign Guide*.

In most cases the setting for an encounter is described in boxed text. The DM may use this verbatim if the encounter unfolds as designed, however, if the PCs have done something unexpected, the boxed text may not accurately describe the set up. The DM should not feel constrained by the boxed text, and should feel free to describe the encounter as necessary for the particular circumstances of the adventure.

The encounters where combat is likely are intended to be **hard** (*DMG* p.82) encounters.

Creature Modification

A **medium** XP budget is used for encounters where combat is likely. And for some parties an unmodified **medium** may meet the definition of **hard**. Some parties are not optimized for combat and their tactics are not as well-coordinated as the players much prefer the roleplaying aspects of the game.

To scale the same base encounter up to a **hard** challenge for those parties that are more capable in combat, suggested modifications are made to the creatures. These modifications do not increase the calculated CR of the creatures, but increase their effectiveness in combat. These are denoted with a ¹.

The DM should include or ignore these traits as necessary so that the encounter meets the definition of **hard** for her particular party

Adventure Background

A few years ago, a band of hobgoblins took up residence in an old mine and were raiding the nearby communities. Eventually, a group of “crusaders” eliminated the hobgoblins. However, vestiges of the hobgoblins' occupancy remain.

The giant wolf spider, P'tha, was *awakened* by a benevolent druid in the hopes P'tha would be something of an adventuring companion. Alas, P'tha's temperament is towards evil, and he went his own way. He wandered into the deep

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forest and happened upon an overgrown entrance to the tunnel system.

To his pleasure P'tha discovered that in the tunnel's entry chamber lurked hobgoblin zombies – vestiges of the previous inhabitants, and perfect guards for his new home. He found what appeared to be a living chamber at the bottom of a tunnel, and took up residence. Since he could easily pass by his de facto zombie guards using his Stealth, he began to launch raids against settlements in the nearby communities at night preying upon their livestock.

Meanwhile, the dragonborn adept, Arjhan, was part of a recently formed cell of the Red Dragon Cult in a nearby town, Leischport. Their first criminal foray - an attempt to raid the town armory - went horribly wrong, and Arjhan was the only survivor. He barely escaped with his life and fled to the forest.

He, too, stumbled upon the tunnel system, and using his *minor illusion* spell was able to sneak past the zombies. He found another abandoned living chamber and made himself comfortable.

P'tha knows about Arjhan, but is indifferent towards him. As long as Arjhan doesn't endanger his operation, P'tha is comfortable sharing the space with Arjhan.

Adventure Outline

The PCs are given the opportunity to explain how they came to form a group. They are offered various reasons to take up the mission to explore the tunnel system and presuming they accept one, they head off into the wild.

As they approach the entrance to the tunnel, they infringe on the territory of some baboons. Entering the tunnel, they must get past the zombies. There is P'tha, Arjhan, a trap, and a disease within the complex.

Starting the Adventure

The DM is free to design her own "hook" based on character backstories, but here are some suggestions.

1: Earl Damose, ruler of Leischport (where the dragon cult attempted its raid)

puts out a call for aid, and offers a bounty on the cultist (Arjhan) who got away. He doesn't want to commit members of his guard as he is afraid of further cult activity and needs to retain his full complement of men-at-arms to protect his fief.

2: The lead huntsman in Tallywood posts a reward for anyone who can find out what has been depleting game (P'tha) in the lord's forest and attacking livestock at night. He has a cow that was killed, and thinks it may provide clues.

Rewards

The amount of treasure is a defining trait for a campaign. The adventure's reward amounts are deliberately left to the DM to decide. If she wants a campaign where the PCs are wealthy and can afford luxuries and ribald carousing she might set the rewards at 20 gp per PC.

For a grittier campaign where PCs struggle to make ends meet, she the award might be 10 gp total.

Regardless of the hook, the PCs must find their way to the tunnel. The PCs can use Wisdom (Survival) to track P'tha from Tallywood. Alternately, a DC15 Intelligence (History), Intelligence (Investigation), or Charisma check will recall/reveal that about two months ago a clan of goblinoids took up residence in the tunnel complex, and that it would be a likely place for undesirables to hide out. The location is said to be haunted and is avoided by the area residents (it took a "crusade" by several surrounding fiefs to eradicate the clan). The DM and PCs may have some unexpected means of revealing the location and purpose of the tunnel.

The entrance to the tunnels lies 20 miles deep through a forest with thick undergrowth (**difficult terrain** PHB p.182).

Travelling

PHB's Chapter 8 has guidelines for travelling. Travelling can be an important part of a DM's campaign or trivial depending on her inclination.

Assuming the PCs find a means of identifying the area of the tunnel complex, proceed to Encounter 1: The Local Fauna.

Encounter 1: The Local Fauna

Map. The Local Fauna (Appendix 1)

Encounter background. Baboons claims this as their territory.

Random Encounter?

This is a “random encounter”. It is an encounter unrelated to the main story that the PCs confront in transit. However, rather than place a table with various possible encounters for the DM to roll on, one is simply presented. If the DM wants a unpredictability, she can construct a table using *DMG* p.302.

This is a deeply wooded part of the forest. Through the thick canopy only dim light reaches the forest floor. There are numerous trees, and the dense undergrowth makes the area difficult terrain. In the distance unknown birds screech regularly. Scents of alien flowers mix with those of decaying organic matter, and from the smell there may be the remains of some dead animal nearby. Suddenly, the sound of something moving through the trees and vines floods the scene.

Running the encounter. There are numerous trees, it is not **difficult terrain** for creatures with a climb speed.

Initiative Matters

Having many opponents act on the same initiative can dramatically increase the challenge of an encounter. If 10 baboons (for example) all attack together, they can easily overwhelm a PC and no PC can intervene to ameliorate the damage.

It is a good policy to break up the attackers into groups of two or three.

Scaling the encounter: The number of baboons varies with the number of PCs.

# PCs	# baboons	XP
1	2	20
2	5	50
3	8	80
4	10	100
5	12	120
6	14	140
7	17	170
8	19	190

Baboon. *MM* p.318

¹**Hit Points** 5 (1d6+2)

¹**CON** 14 (+2)

¹**Saving Throws** Dex +4, Con +4

¹**Skills** Acrobatics +4

¹**Snatch.** As a bonus action, a creature the baboon can see within 5 ft. must succeed of a DC14 Dexterity (Acrobatic) check or the baboon grabs a weapon or item the creature is carrying.

Reactions

¹**Deflect.** The baboon deflects a projectile targeting it.

Concluding the encounter: If the PCs win, they can continue searching until they find the entrance to the tunnel system.

The party is in a dangerous wilderness. A short rest is possible before entering the tunnel system, but the environment is too difficult to take a long rest in – insects, suffocating heat and humidity make it impossible.

Rests

An important tool in modulating the difficulty of encounters is regulating rests. 5th edition presumes that PCs will have several encounters before a long rest and even short rests should be rationed. If PCs are allowed frequent long rests, even **deadly** encounters rarely present much difficulty.

Once the actions starts, there is no opportunity for the PCs to take a long rest.

Appendix 1. DM Maps has a map of the tunnel complex.

The tunnel is unlit so the PCs will need a light source if they don't have darkvision. It is about 40 ft. to the entry chamber (Encounter 2).

Encounter 2: The Eternal Guardians

Encounter background. The crusaders left the complex without destroying the shrine to Maglubiyet (Encounter 5), which has turned hobgoblin corpses into zombies.

The tunnel is 5ft wide with no light source. 40ft down the tunnel it opens into a roughly circular chamber 30 ft. in diameter. The scent of decaying flesh seems stronger. The sounds of the jungle have faded so that only an occasional whoop or screech can be heard. There are two 5 ft. wide openings on opposite sides of the chamber; the one you came down leading back to the surface, and one that leads deeper underground.

Running the encounter. The chamber contains hobgoblin zombies which attack.

Calculated CR

In 5th edition, a monster trait that imposes a condition is referred to as a “rider” (DMG p.278). Only effects which actually affect damage, hit points, armor class, or to hit increase CR. Conditions that do not cause damage don’t generally affect the calculated CR of a monster.

Scaling the encounter. The number of zombies varies with the number of PCs.

#	Zombies	XP
1-2	1 zombie	50
3-4	2 zombies	100
5	3 zombies	150
6	4 zombies	200
7	5 zombies	250
8	6 zombies	300

Zombie. MM p.316

Hit Points 30 (4d8+12)

Saving Throws Con +5, Wis +0

Poison Spittle. As a bonus action, a creature the zombie can see within 5 ft. must succeed on a DC13 Dexterity saving throw or be blinded. A blinded creature can use an action to end the condition.

Actions

Slam. Melee Weapon Attack: +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. **Hit:** 4 (1d6+1) bludgeoning damage and the target must succeed on a DC13 Constitution saving throw or be incapacitated for one round.

Concluding the encounter. If they get past the zombies, they are able to enter the tunnel system and explore.

Arjhan won’t sit idly while the PCs take a long rest; he will sneak up to attack.

Exploring the Tunnel

Ideas about exploration have evolved over forty+ years of D&D. The “old school” approach is to lay out a dungeon, place encounters, and let the PCs wander through hitting encounters as they come based on the PCs’ choices: “You come to a fork; do you go left or right?”

Many DMs now arrange encounters in a particular order to build a storyline towards rather than rely on random decisions. Rather than detail the meanderings of the PCs, the DM decides the order in which she wants to present Encounters 3-6 (possibly excluding some). For example, the DM could present the trap (Encounter 5) and the disease (Encounter 6) before the creature encounters (Encounters 3 & 4).



Hobgoblin Zombie

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Encounter 3: The Dragon Cultist

Encounter background. Arjhan's living chamber is at the end of an offshoot from the main tunnel. Arjhan spends most of his time in his chamber napping and bemoaning his fate. He has heard rumors of another cell of the Cult of the Red Dragon that exists in the city of Alshon Landing, downriver from Leischport, and he is considering relocating there to see if he can make contact with them.

The 5 ft. tunnel opens to a 20 ft. by 30 ft. chamber with rough-hewn walls. A hay-filled mattress lays on the floor, and several pieces of broken furniture clutter the room. There is no light source in the chamber. A partially eaten meal of wild fruits and berries sets on the ground beside the mattress.

Roleplaying?

While this is likely going to open as a combat encounter, it doesn't have to be a fight to the death. Arjhan isn't suicidal. Depending on PCs' actions the DM may opt to allow a negotiated resolution.

If Arjhan can render a PC unconscious, he will threaten the life of the PC to negotiate a safe escape for himself. *PHB* p.392 has the rules for unconsciousness. Note that an unconscious creature automatically fails Dexterity saving throws and that a *sacred flame* would automatically cause a failed death save.

Running the encounter. Arjhan keeps a fairly close eye on the tunnel entrance. He has *alarm* cast on the approach to his chambers so that he can't be surprised. Arjhan is hostile, afraid, and evil. He likely attacks first.

Plated Scales

Arjhan's plated scales give him extra protection from piercing damage. Immunity to piercing damage may be extremely difficult for parties of 1st level adventurers who haven't had the opportunity to acquire a variety of weapons. A DM may decide to change the piercing immunity to piercing resistance.

Scaling the encounter. Arjhan is a single creature and the combined traits are designed to make him a **hard** encounter for up to eight PCs. If all the traits are used, it will likely be too much for a smaller party. Arjhan's hit points vary with the number of PCs.

#	Arjhan's HP
1	9 (2d8)
2	13 (3d8)
3	18 (4d8)
4	22 (5d8)
5	27 (6d8)
6	31 (7d8)
7-8	35 (8d8)

Arjhan (Cultist). MM 345

Medium humanoid (red dragonborn), chaotic evil

CHA 16 (+3)

1Saving Throws Wis +2, Cha +5

1Skills Acrobatics +3, Deception +2, Religion +2, Stealth +5

Damage Resistances fire

1Damage Immunities piercing

Condition Immunities surprised, 1unconscious

Challenge 1/8 (25 XP)

1Blast of Heat. As a bonus action, all creatures in a 15 ft. cone must succeed on a DC12 Constitution saving throw or suffer an increase in its exhaustion level.

1Spellcasting. Arjhan can cast the following spells.

Charisma is his spellcasting abilities.

Cantrips (at will): *light, minor illusion, sacred flame*

1st level (3 slots): *alarm, long strider, Tasha's Hideous Laughter*

Gear. *Goggles of night, 2 potions of healing.*

Actions

Fire Breath (1/day). Arjhan exhales a fiery blast in a 15 ft. cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC10 Dexterity saving throw taking 7 (2d6) fire damage on a failed save or half on a success.

1Scimitar. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 4 (1d6+1) slashing damage and the target must succeed on a DC13 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check or be rendered prone.

Concluding the encounter. If the PCs overcome Arjhan they must decide if they want to take him back to justice.

If Arjhan defeats the PCs, he likely eats them so that they are never found.

Arjhan as captive

If taken against his will, Arjhan will resist. If he can get a free hand, he will cast spells.

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Encounter 4: The Lost Companion

Encounter background. P'tha's quarters are at the end of a tunnel. He has placed a thin layer of webbing down the tunnels. He has an idyllic life and resents interruptions. He ventures out from time to time and drags back a poached deer or cow.

The winding passages vary irregularly between 5' to 7' in height, and 2 1/2 ' to 10' in width (with 5' width being most common). There are no light sources in the passages. The walls and ceiling have a thin layer of webbing covering them.

Running the encounter. The webbing makes it impossible to surprise P'tha because of his **web sense**. If the PCs take time to inspect the floor, it is easy to notice streaks of dried blood where P'tha has dragged his kills down the chamber.

Scaling the encounter. P'tha's hit points vary with the number of PCs.

#	P'tha's HP
1-2	11 (2d8+2)
3	16 (3d8+3)
4	22 (4d8+4)
5	27 (5d8+5)
6+	33 (6d8+6)

P'tha (Giant Wolf Spider). *MM* p.330

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)

INT 10 (+0)

Saving Throws Dex +5, Wis +3

Skills Athletics +3, Acrobatics +5, Perception +3, Stealth +7

Condition Immunities grapple, prone

Languages Common (Tuelon)

Challenge ¼ (50 XP)

Spit Poison. As a bonus action, a creature P'tha sees within 30 ft. must succeed on a DC12 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1 minute. A poisoned creature can attempt the saving throw again at the end of each of its turns.

1 Legendary Actions

P'tha can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. P'tha regains spent legendary action at the start of his turn.

Adjust. P'tha moves up to half his speed

Bath in Webbing. P'tha regains 1d8 hit points.

Tangle. A creature of P'tha's choice that he can see within 60 ft. must succeed on a DC12 Strength saving throw, or be restrained. A restrained creature can use an action to attempt to break free by making a DC12 Strength saving throw

Roleplaying

This is likely to be a combat encounter. It would be very difficult to convince P'tha toward a life path that doesn't involve the hedonism he has embraced since being awakened.

Concluding the encounter. P'tha has no interest in changing his lifestyle. It is almost a perfect situation for a giant wolf spider. However, if he has no choice he will move on to a different territory rather than be killed.

Crafting Magic Items

In the Dimgaard campaign, creating most significant magic items requires the sacrifice of a sentient creature and is a method of execution for criminals. For example, P'tha might be the sacrifice necessary to add +1d6 poison damage to a weapon, or Arjhan might be the sacrifice to add +1d6 fire damage to a weapon, or P'tha might be the sacrifice to create a ring that grants immunity to being rendered prone.

If P'tha overcomes the PCs, he likely eats them.

Treasure

P'tha has no treasure listed. However, he is a legendary creature in his lair, and it is appropriate for him to have a hoard (the valuables from his victims).

As noted earlier, the DM decides how much treasure she wants in her campaign. If she wants a richer campaign, she can provide a treasure hoard here. The *DMG's* chapter 7 has guidelines for randomly determining treasure hoards. Alternately, [this site](#) does a nice job of generating random treasure.

One thing to note, if P'tha has venom that can be harvested using the rules for poison (*DMG* p.258). The DM can decide how exactly poison works in her campaign. As written, poison harvested from venomous creatures can be very destabilizing. The Dimgaard Campaign Guide has a suggested rule variation from the poison rules.

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Encounter 5: The Shrine

Encounter background. The crusaders who routed the hobgoblins failed to neutralize the shrine to Maglubiyet. Its evil is what powers the zombies.

The passage is 5' wide, with no light. The smell of something rotting is still present, and seems to be getting stronger. The passage ends abruptly in a small chamber. Pieces of an ornate shrine are partially buried under stone from a collapsed wall. A gem is set as the center point of the shrine's decoration.

Running the encounter. This is a shrine to the goblinoid god Maglubiyet. It is common knowledge that evil shrines can produce the residual magic to animate corpses. As long as the shrine remains intact any corpse or skeleton within the tunnel complex will eventually become a **zombie** or **skeleton**. The shrine is trapped, and if any non-goblinoid touches the shrine, the trap will be

triggered. It will affect any PC within 20ft of the shrine when it is triggered.

Weekend Explosive Runes

Magical trap

A DC15 Investigation check to detect within 5'. *Dispel magic* or DC15 Intelligence (Arcana) check to disarm (on a failed check the trap triggers). 11 (2d10) thunder damage to all within 20 ft. when triggered (DC15 Dexterity saving throw for half damage).

Concluding the encounter: If the PCs destroy the shrine, there will be no more undead produced by the shrine. The DM can decide if the gem is valuable or just a decorative piece of glass.

XP for Traps and Disease

In 5th edition, PCs overcoming the challenges of traps and diseases don't generally receive XP. Inspiration (*PHB* p.125) is the usual reward for these challenges.

Encounter 6: The Final Battle Scene

Encounter background. The final hobgoblins made a last stand here, but were killed by the crusaders.

The stench of rotting flesh increases dramatically at a point where the passage is 10' wide. There are obvious signs of a former battle; broken weapons and shields cover the floor. But most notable are three bodies that are clearly the source of the horrible smell.

Running the encounter. The dead hobgoblins have been infected with the disease *rot pox*. Any PCs entering the room is exposed. Rot pox is a fast incubating disease that affects humanoid. To avoid contracting the disease, a humanoid exposed to it must succeed on a

DC12 Constitution saving throw. If the humanoid fails in 11-20 rounds (10+1d10) pox will appear on the victims face and she suffers 1 necrotic damage. Until cured the infected humanoid must make a DC12 Constitution saving throw every minute (10 rounds). On a failed save, the victim suffers 1 necrotic damage and must succeed on another DC12 Constitution saving throw or suffer an increase in exhaustion level. If the humanoid receives any healing that cures at least one hit point, it ends the disease, but the exhaustion levels remain until cleared by other means.

Concluding the encounter. There is nothing of value left at this scene. Only death and disease remain.

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Concluding the Adventure

If the PCs prevail they are heroes in the surrounding communities, and on their way to becoming legends. Grant them XP by totaling the creatures they defeated.

Depending on the circumstances that launched the adventure, and how things resolve the PCs may be in the favor of influential people who sent them on the mission. Such favors should be noted on the character sheet for future game play.

Depending on how things resolve with Arjhan, the PCs may have the **Enmity of the Red Dragon Cult**, and should also be noted on the character sheet.

If the PCs were killed their bodies are unrecoverable. The baboons, spider and zombie will eat them. Arjhan will dispose of the body so that it can never be found.

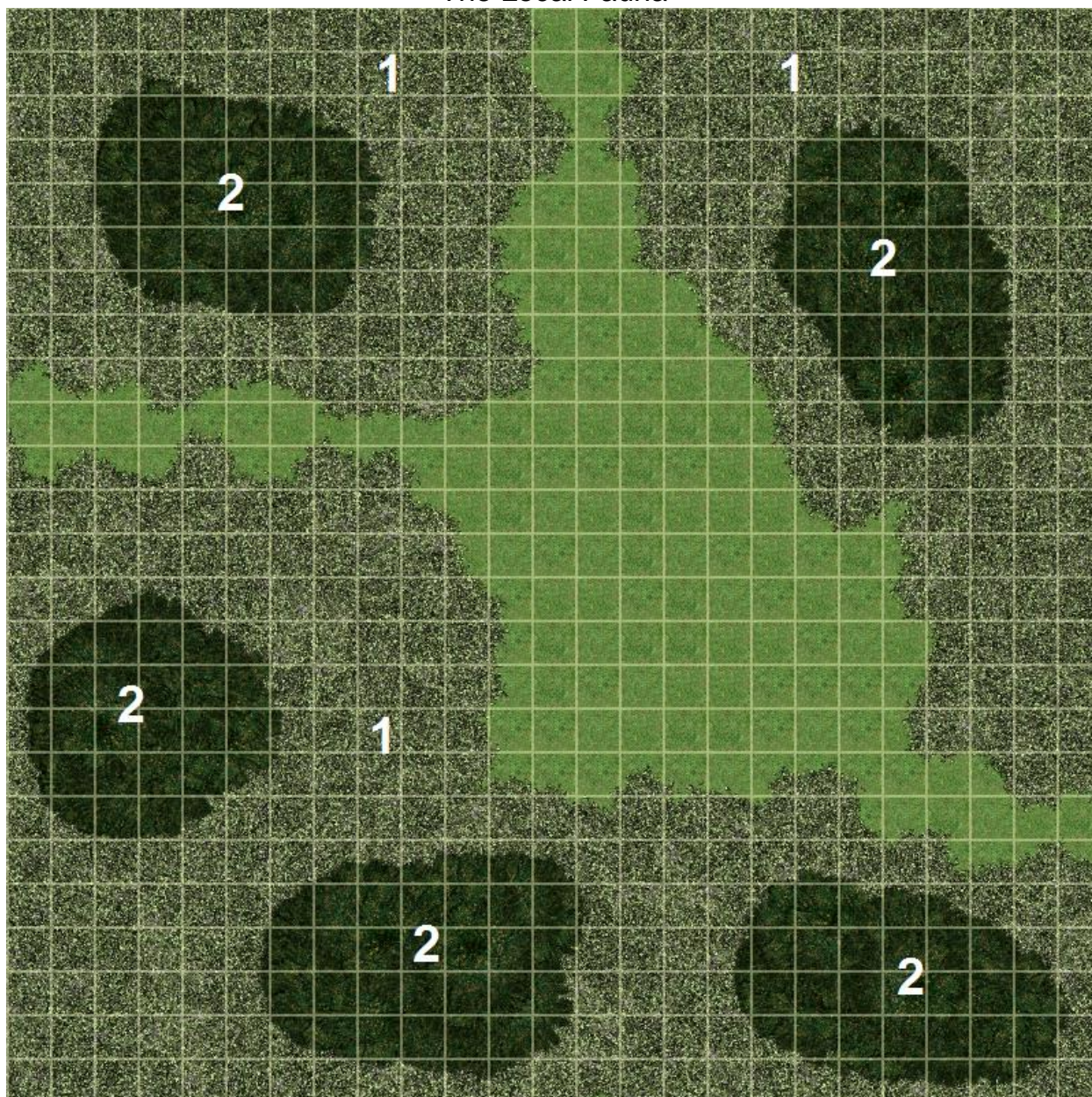
Treasure Summary

The range of treasure the PCs collect on a successful adventure depends on the DM's plans for her campaign but to summarize the **possible** treasure:

- Reward from Earl Damose
- Reward from lead hunter in Tallywood
- *Goggles of night*
- Treasure hoard from P'tha
- Gem(s) from shrine

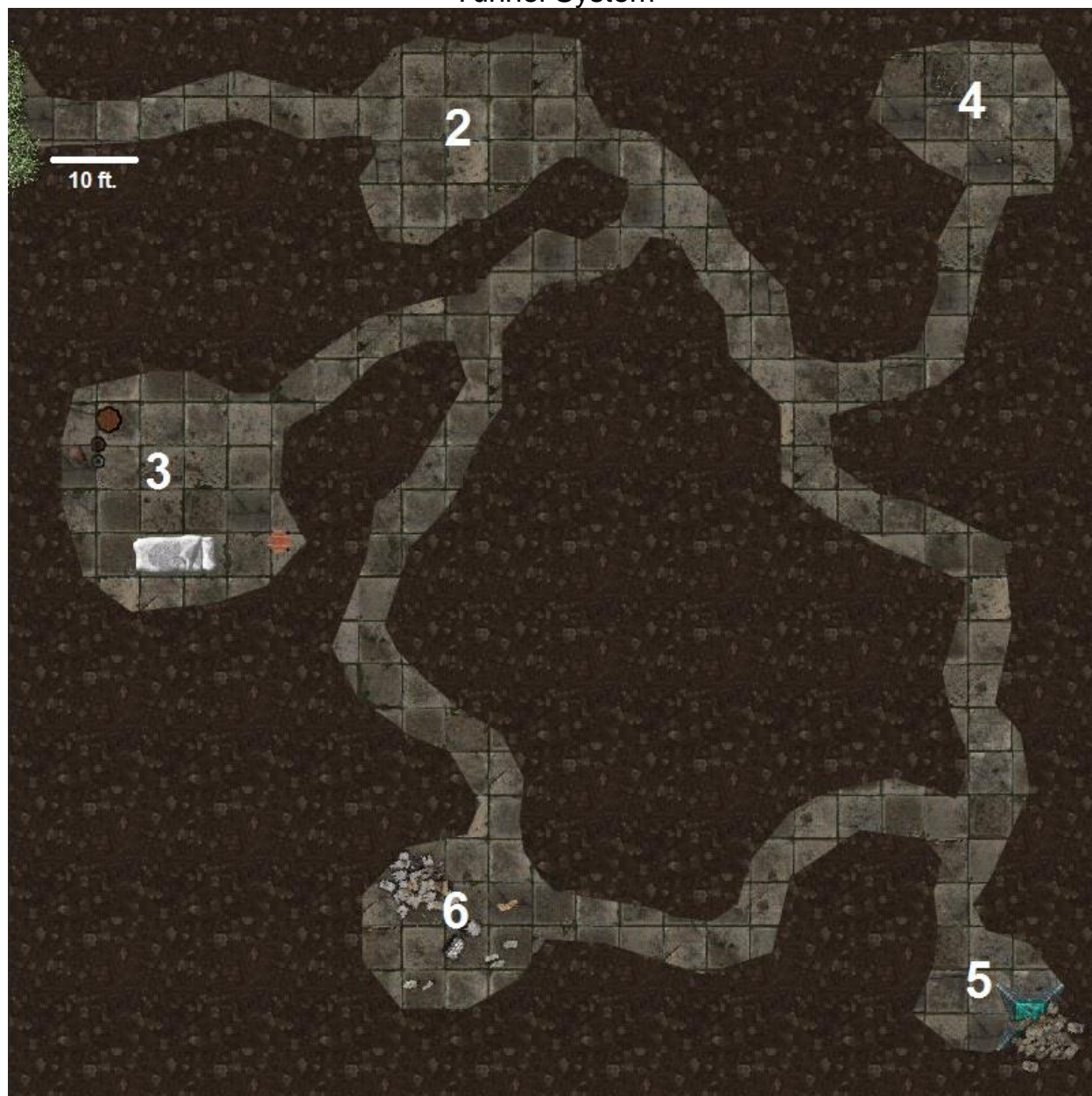
Appendix 1. DM Maps

The Local Fauna



1. Dense undergrowth. **Difficult terrain** and **lightly obscured** through 15 ft. past 15 ft. is **heavily obscured**.
2. Trees. Same as dense undergrowth but a creature can also claim **half cover**.

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Tunnel System



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Alshon Region

