

HEART OF NIGHTFANG SPIRE

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INTRODUCTION

[He] looked at that dry, dark springhead, the mouth of dust, the place where a dead soul, crawling into earth and darkness, was born again dead.

—Ursula K. LeGuin

Heart of Nightfang Spire is a DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® adventure for four 10th-level characters. Player characters (PCs) who survive the adventure should advance through 11th and 12th level, and, if completely successful, just reach 13th level.

PREPARATION

You need the *Player's Handbook*, the *DUNGEON MASTER'S Guide*, and the *Monster Manual* to run this adventure.

Text in shaded boxes is player information. Sidebars contain information for the DM. Monster statistics noted in each encounter are radically abbreviated, but provide the *Monster Manual* page number for full statistics of common monsters. Statistics for special monsters and nonplayer characters (NPCs) appear in the Appendix.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The vampire Gulthias was waylaid centuries past. He was staked to the earth in the bowels of a distant citadel. Sadly, evil is not so easily destroyed. Recently, Gulthias was freed and he walks again by night. A vampire lord of dread power, Gulthias serves a greater power still. To that end, Gulthias returned to Nightfang Spire.

Nightfang Spire is a stone tower far from civilized parts. It has long brooded silently in a shadowed defile. Once upon a time, Nightfang Spire was the main cult temple to ancient Ashardalon, a dragon of fell repute. Before Ashardalon quit this realm for higher spheres, Gulthias was the dragon's intermediary. Afterward, Gulthias was commanded to make ready for Ashardalon's return.

Realizing that the wait might be a long one, he and the other true believers magically prolonged their existence. Embracing undeath, Nightfang Spire was transformed from temple to mortuary: a massive, hollow tombstone marking Ashardalon's passing and eventual return. Their undead power was unassailable. If Gulthias had not been delayed, their power would have grown ever more terrible. When Gulthias disappeared, the spire fell into a dark sleep centuries long.

Now Gulthias is back, and he wakes those who have dreamed overlong.

Note: Also see Rhunad's illumination and interpretation of the adventure history under area 34.

Adventure Synopsis

Player characters are drawn to investigate a lonely tower in a barren land (see Character Hooks, below).

Gulthias: Gulthias and his servants harry the PCs throughout their exploration of Nightfang Spire.

Spire: The lesser undead cultists engage in mindless rituals while protecting the tower's vaultlike core against any who would interfere with Gulthias's "holy" work there. PCs learn that entry into the core requires the activation of special controls hidden in the subterranean catacombs.

Catacombs: Adventurers may choose to ally with the enslaved race of subterranean girallons against the awakened undead cultists, though the girallons may prove to be one more threat the PCs must overcome to access the core.

Core: Eventually, heroes can gain entry into the core by rotating it into proper alignment for entry by material beings. Within, they confront Gulthias, and the heart of Nightfang Spire.

CHARACTER HOOKS

The defile containing Nightfang Spire is easily placed in any number of remote locations in your game or campaign world. Refer to the Defile Map on the inside front cover. The PCs can be drawn to the dungeon via the following (mutually compatible) methods.

Dragon Hunting: Rumors tell of a young black dragon in the defile. Adventurers in search of a dragon hoard may enter the defile in pursuit of this tale.

Investigation: People have gone missing. They were last seen heading toward the defile. It may be that some of those missing people are in some way important to the PCs, or perhaps the PCs receive a contract to find a particular missing person.

Trailing Foes: PCs may have flushed foes during their previous adventures. The party may trail a particularly hated foe in the direction of the defile. The foe may be heading toward the defile by accident, or you can reverse-engineer a secret, previous connection between Gulthias and the foe being trailed by the PCs.

Rumors

The following rumors are available via a Gather Information check (DC 15) or through roleplaying in Drylake, a small city (see page 137 of the *DUNGEON MASTER'S Guide*) 65 miles away:

- No one uses the North Road because of the predations of a dragon lairing at the top of an old spire.
- Nightfang Spire is a haunted place. Supposedly, it is filled from tip to cellar with the dead remains of an ancient cult.
- A dark power grows in Nightfang Spire. That evil is responsible for the missing people from surrounding lands. Some say it is all connected somehow to ancient Ashardalon, a dragon of great and evil power.

NIGHTFANG SPIRE

*Crystal waters turn to dark,
When air upon them leaves its mark.
And boiling water pounds like drums,
When something wicked this way comes.*

—Ray Bradbury

The North Road is less a road and more a dry, sandy riverbed. Its ancient course cuts through bluffs and hillsides, creating steep canyon cliffs on either side. Sparse vegetation and thorny bushes top the highlands. The occasional standing rock high above, alone or in a small group of similar stones, is also visible from the road. (These pillar-like rocks are sometimes called menhirs.)

Except for occasional vegetation, the entire area seems virtually devoid of life. A Wilderness Lore check (DC 18) offers one interpretation: The area has been so thoroughly hunted that no animal life remains. Tracks, droppings, and other signs of animals are minimal and, if found at all, are a few years old.

In the immediate vicinity of the spire, the road drops so deeply into the earth that the cliff walls on either side block direct sunlight except during the noon hour. The overhanging cliffs, towering an impressive 1,600 feet, hide what shelters deep in the defile: Nightfang Spire. The spire stands equidistant from either canyon wall (500 feet from either wall, at the base). The spire reaches 300 feet from broad base to jagged tip, but is still shadowed by the massive cliffs on either side. The tower's diameter is a little over 100 feet at the base.

NIGHTFANG SPIRE KEYED ENTRIES

The following numbered entries refer to the locations noted on the maps.

0. Dim Defile

Player characters who arrive during daylight hours have a good view of the site, which is depicted on the nearby illustration. The defile is shown on both the Defile Map and the Spire Cross-Section Map.

A stony fang thrusts up from the canyon floor. Wider at the base, it slowly narrows toward its apex, where it terminates in jagged stone splinters. Though its tip must be at least 300 feet above the canyon floor, the cliffs on either side are five times as high, cloaking the spire in shadow. Its sides are carved with stone gargoyles, faces, porticos, ledges, and other baleful textures. A small stone structure abuts the spire.



The stone walls of the spire have no opening, except for a black vertical mouth at the spire's crown (not visible except from above the tower); see area 3. The carved sides of the tower are easily climbable (DC 10). PCs may also fly to the tower's top.

The low stone building is the ossuary (area 1).

Dungeon Features

The following features are true unless otherwise noted in a specific area description.

Nightfang Spire: The tower is 300 feet tall. The 100-foot base of the tower is nearly solid stone, except for the core and two small accessways. At a height of 50 feet, the exterior walls are 4-foot-thick carved stone (Climb DC 10) reinforced with internal vertical iron rods spaced 2 feet apart. (A dwarf's stonemasonry reveals the spire is ancient, but of superb, almost supernatural quality.) The core is stone with an inner lining of 6-inch-thick iron. The core is completely warded by an effect similar to *forbiddance* (see the Protected Core of Nightfang sidebar).

The covered endpoints of sliding pit traps (keyed to area 17) exit the tower at the height of 120 and 150 feet. These cannot be spotted from the ground, and can only be found with an arduous search of the 10-foot-square area where each is located (Search DC 36).

Doors: The doors in the dungeon are stone. Unless noted otherwise, all secret doors are equally difficult to find (Search DC 20). Standard doors are as follows:

◆ **Stone Doors:** 2 inches thick; hardness 8; hp 30; AC 5; break DC 26.

Standard doors have one-quarter-inch gaps between the bottom of the door and the dungeon floor. Standard doors open into a chamber from a corridor or larger chamber.

Light: Beyond area 2, darkness reigns complete, unless noted otherwise in an area's description. Characters without darkvision need to supply light sources to see.

Ceiling Height: Except when noted otherwise (as in the core), ceiling height is 20 feet.

Teleportation: Without at least a description of an area inside the spire, the *teleport* spell will not get player characters inside either the spire or the core, or move them to new areas once inside. PCs who want to "teleport 10 feet east and get past this (supposed) wall" are better off using *dimension door*. *Dimension door* allows the user to give exact distance and direction to be transferred, but spellcasters run the risk of being temporarily sent into the Astral Plane (see *dimension door*, page 195 of the *Player's Handbook*) if they would otherwise end up in solid matter or if they bounce against the *forbiddance* effect protecting the core.

Passwall: A *passwall* spell works normally through stone, even stone with iron bars running vertically through it at 2-foot intervals (such as in the outer wall of the spire). However, the iron bars remain an impediment to movement, and must be bent aside with a **Strength check** (DC 24) for normal movement. The solid iron core does not allow the use of *passwall*.

Gaseous Form: Using *gaseous form* or similar effects allows PCs to penetrate most areas of the spire with ease, unless noted otherwise. The core is mostly sealed against gaseous penetration, except for specifically noted areas, such as area 74.

Ethereal Travel: *Ethereal jaunt* and similar powers can easily move an individual into the spire; the *forbiddance* effect protecting the core prevents an ethereal traveler from getting that far, though.

1. Ossuary (EL 5)

The ossuary is shown on the Spire Cross-Section Map.

A low, dry-mortared building squats against the west side of the spire. The single-story structure is obviously quite old, but does not share the quality stonework of the tower. A single dark opening provides access on the building's western side.

The ossuary was a broken-down empty shell until Gulthias's return.

A glance into the shadowed interior reveals several humanoid forms (a total of fourteen, if anyone specifically counts them) lying facedown in the loose earth, as well as two coyotes, three vultures, and numerous small vermin. A sharp charnel reek strongly hints at the truth: These forms lie so still because they are dead. The scent is accompanied by a dim melody, impossible to place, that haunts the ossuary's interior. Moving even one step into the building brings the melody into sharper focus for a listener, revealing it as a threat.

Trap: Insidious growth, called blightvine, grows like ivy along the ground and on the walls. Blightvine emanates a wordless music that puts any living creature that hears it (and fails its save) into a deep sleep. Blightvine appeared in the ossuary soon after Gulthias returned to Nightfang Spire, and was likely planted by him to dissuade the curious. When victims are overcome, a rootlike tuber grows up through the soil and parasitically attaches to its new host. Sleeping victims lose 10% of their total hit points each hour unless they are torn loose or the blightvine is destroyed. A patch of blightvine is easily destroyed with 1d4 rounds of energetic hoeing (daggers do in a pinch). If a blightvine cutting is removed from the ossuary, it ceases to exhibit its "musical" abilities.

↗ **Blightvine Music:** CR 5; music causes all creatures in a 10-ft. radius to fall into unawake sleep while in radius of effect; Will save (DC 20) each round to avoid effect; Search check (DC 25) to notice something

Undead in Nightfang Spire

Most of the undead in the spire once followed long-departed Ashardalon. The memories of those dead so long have degraded. Except for specially named and described undead, average undead encountered are almost mindless beasts. If they are somehow interrogated, common undead know only that they serve "fear." In fact, they serve Gulthias directly, but revere Ashardalon, though they won't name that ancient creature.

Undead wear rags, but an observant PC may note faded designs showing various draconic themes. Unless specific instructions are given, assume turned undead return to harass the party or follow them when a turning effect has ended.

strange about the vines from a distance; Disable Device (n/a).

Development: The oldest body has been dead only seven to nine months, and a few are relatively recent. Unless the DM has more involved plans, PCs may discover one or more of the “missing” people noted under Character Hooks here, or even a foe (or the cohort or follower of a foe) the PCs have been trailing (also from Character Hooks).

Treasure: The bodies lie where they fell. One figure, a recently dead elf of wild appearance, possesses ten +1 arrows, a *cloak of elvenkind*, and 23 pp and 10 gp in a small pouch. The pouch holds a folded parchment with only the words “Flee, fool, lest the Cuckoo take you” written on it.

2. Top-Down View (EL 12)

This is the apex of Nightfang Spire, as shown on the Spire Cross-Section Map. PCs must climb, levitate, fly, or otherwise use extraordinary means to reach it.

The spire reaches 300 feet high, and it is open at the top. Jagged stone shards line the hollow apex. The fang-like stone shards all point straight up, varying in height between 5 and 15 feet, encircling a gap some 40 feet across. Darkness fills the void within.

The most straightforward entrance to Nightfang Spire is its open top. Unfortunately, a terrible monster haunts the hollow tip, as PCs soon discover.

Creature: A mooncalf hangs by two of its tentacles just below the lip of the opening, shrouded in darkness (Spot check DC 40 to see it from the ground). Unless PCs are hiding or invisible, the mooncalf notes their approach down the defile. The mooncalf’s keen senses (see the Appendix) make it difficult to hide from.

➔ **Mooncalf:** hp 184; see the Appendix.

Tactics: If the mooncalf becomes aware of the PCs, it casts *control weather* with an eye toward eventually casting *call lightning*. It also casts *protection from elements (fire)* and *resist elements (lightning)*. It continues to wait in hiding inside the spire’s hollow crown for at least an hour, watching the PCs. When a target comes within 30 feet of it, the mooncalf takes its free partial action because of surprise to lash out with one of its long tentacles. A struck victim is pulled back into the hollow crown (the mooncalf has the Improved Grab and Constrict feats), where the creature attempts to make short work of her before the victim’s companions can help. If more than one PC manages to make it to the apex, the mooncalf takes wing to increase its options for spell use or melee. If the PCs persist in ignoring the apex altogether, the mooncalf uses its *call lightning* ability to bring down a 9d10 lightning bolt from the clouds, while it continues to hide in order to get off an ambush, if possible. Finally, don’t forget that a creature with damage reduction hits other creatures (or PCs) with its natural

attacks as if with a weapon of equal enhancement (+1 in the case of the mooncalf). See Damage Reduction, page 9 of the *Monster Manual*, for details.

Development: If the mooncalf drives off the PCs, it telepathically follows their retreat with laughter and the message “You flee before me—how did you think to best Gulthias, back from his long absence? Let the world weep!” If the PCs defeat the mooncalf, its last telepathic thought is “Though I have failed to ward the door, Gulthias knows you have come, and makes ready his revenge. Let the world weep at his return!”

Ad Hoc XP Adjustment: If the party defeats the mooncalf in its home, double the XP award.

3. Dragon, We Hardly Knew Ye (EL 6)

The top of the spire is hollow. The stench of rotting meat suffuses the area, apparently wafting from the half-eaten body of a gruesomely slain, winged reptilian lying across the bottom of the hollow. The body lies atop a mound of glinting coins, although it looks as if some of the coins have fallen away into the darkness of a rough-hewn hole. The hole appears to have been made by great heat or acid.

Rumors of a dragon haunting the top of Nightfang Spire were true, at least until Gulthias returned. A dead black dragon, slain by the mooncalf, lies rotting atop its looted hoard. Much of the body is obviously eaten away by the mooncalf’s beak, but bite marks made by someone or something the size of a human are also ominously present.

The gaping hole leads 20 feet down to area 4.

Creatures: Crazy cultists, recently granted unlife as wights, burrow through the remaining coins, searching through the treasure for other heirlooms of Ashardalon stolen by the black dragon. They don’t bother the mooncalf, but attack invading PCs.

➔ **Wights (3):** hp 26 each; see *Monster Manual* page 183.

Treasure: The remaining treasure includes 4,234 sp, 450 gp, three 50-gp gems, a *potion of invisibility*, a *potion of neutralize poison*, and a water-blue ring inscribed with a foot suspended over a wavelike line (a *ring of water walking*). Hidden amid the coins is a bone plaque, apparently ripped off some sarcophagus or mausoleum door. Inscribed on the plaque in draconic is the message “The Vow: With my brothers and sisters, I abide the centuries, until such time as Gulthias awakens the relic at the core, and we rise together into unlife.”

Clearing an Area

If the PCs destroy all the monsters in a particular area, do other monsters reinforce the fallen? Once a unique, named monster is destroyed, it does not return. However, unnamed monsters may reinforce a cleared area. Assume that a cleared area remains that way for one day. After that time, new monsters (of the same type the PCs initially killed) are raised by Gulthias (using the *heart*) equal to half the original number of creature. After two days, a number of creatures equal to one-quarter the original number join those from the previous day; the area now has 75% of its original contingent of monsters. After three days, a cleared area is completely (100%) reinforced, until Gulthias and the *heart* are dealt with.

Of course, you are free to make whatever alterations to a given area seem reasonable, given the passage of time.

Development: Calling upon an old pact, Gulthias summoned the mooncalf from some dark outer plane. The mooncalf dealt with the dragon squatting atop Gulthias's ancient home. Previously, the black dragon managed to melt its way into the crypt levels below, where it liberated quite a bit of loot for its hoard. However, much of the hoard has now been returned to the undead. PCs who somehow communicate with the wights may learn these basic facts.

6. Destroyed Shrine (EL 7)

Metallic vault doors lie melted and cast aside, as do their stone mounts, revealing a triangular chamber. Cracked and broken redstone tiles litter the room. A vault carved vaguely in the shape of a red dragon stands open in the center of the northwestern wall. A chest is visible within.

This is one of many shrines the cultists kept in Ashardalon's honor. The black dragon from area 3 looted it, but undead cultists retain just enough of their minds to restock it from the dragon's hoard after it was slain by the mooncalf.

Creatures: Three vampire spawn spend much of their time in this room (when not "resting" in area 7) arranging and rearranging the items within the shrine. (They are not quite right in the head.) They do not take well to the PCs' presence, and attack.

The spawn are not terribly interested in talking, though one says, "Gulthias is hungry, and you will slake his thirst, after we have tasted!" As implied, these and all vampire spawn in the Nightfang Spire are spawn of Gulthias. Some were created recently, others centuries ago.

➤ **Vampire Spawn (3):** hp 40, 41, 42; see *Monster Manual* page 182; they may have used a *wand of mage armor*.

Tactics: If the spawn have prepared an ambush (see area 5), they all use the *wand of mage armor*. A further possible ambush tactic is to assume gaseous form and hang around the floor of this chamber like low mist. In order for the PCs to know that the mist is not normal, they must make a Spot check against DC 26 (which is the result of the spawn's Hide check). If PCs disregard or fail to notice the mist, the spawn trail the PCs, waiting for an opportunity to attack them while they are dealing with another threat. If combat occurs here or elsewhere, those spawn forced into gaseous form flee to area 7.

Treasure: The open, freestanding vault holds a small locked chest (Open Lock DC 25) with 50 pp, two 50-gp bloodstone gems, and a flat, narrow metal statue of a suit of armor (a *wand of mage armor*, 27 charges).

Development: The three remaining vampire spawn in area 7 may reinforce those here at your option after 2 rounds of combat (if combat occurs here), slipping in through the secret door.

7. Home, Be It Ever So Dismal (EL 7)

Six stone sarcophagi recline in silent splendor on a floor of tiled obsidian. The ominous stone coffin lids are all slightly ajar.

Unless they were previously drawn out, three vampire spawn inhabit this chamber.

Creatures: It's possible that the three spawn here have heard the PCs in a nearby chamber (see area 5 for details on hearing nearby PCs). If so, they prepare an ambush.

➤ **Vampire Spawn (3):** hp 42, 43, 43 (wears *ring of protection* +2); see *Monster Manual* page 182.

Wandering Monsters

In areas 3 through 74, monsters wander Nightfang Spire. For every 4 hours the PCs spend in the dungeon, roll d% on the following table while the PCs are in an accessible hallway or room. (Characters who have locked themselves in a room or secret area are immune from wandering encounters.) On a roll of 41 or higher, no encounter occurs. On a roll of 01–40, read the result on the table and apply the suggested encounter. Statistics for special monsters are in the Appendix; common monsters are detailed in the *Monster Manual*.

d%	Monster (#)	MM EL	MM Page
01–02	Vampire spawn (4)	8	182
03–06	Wights (3)	5	183
07–13	Flesh golem (1)	7	108
14–24	Girallon slaves (4)	9	104
25–33	Spectres (3)	10	169
34–38	Mohrg (1)	8	137
39–40	Tombstone golem (1)*	9	—
41+	No encounter	—	—

*Tombstone golems are described under area 58. Also, once the tombstone golem is encountered, cross off that entry from the list.

4. Bottom of the Hole

Entries 4 through 14 are keyed to areas on the Level 1 Map.

Cobblestones pave this circular area that opens up beneath a 10-foot-wide hole in the ceiling. Shattered stone statuary litters the floor, and much larger chunks of stone wall mark the destruction of half the northern wall. Silence hangs heavy over all.

A successful Wilderness Lore check (DC 20) reveals dozens of tracks going in all directions. Most tracks seem to be made by bare-footed humanoids with exceptionally long toenails (various ghouls, wights, and other still-material cultists); however, several very large bare humanoid prints can also be discerned (made by a few flesh golems that roam Nightfang Spire).

5. Dragon's Path

The walls of this room are shattered, making this area and nearby rooms open to one another. The floor is covered in loose chunks of stone, broken sculpture, and other debris. Tracks of a very large reptile wend through the destruction.

Nothing of any value remains in these generally smashed chambers. Relics valuable to the cult once kept in these rooms were looted by the dragon. When the dragon was bested, this treasure was redistributed to other lower levels of the tower and catacombs.

Development: PCs in this chamber (who are not attempting to move silently) alert the vampire spawn in area 6 to their presence if any of the vampires there make a Listen check (DC 5); the PCs' unshielded light source, if any, automatically alerts the vampire spawn.

If the vampire spawn become aware of the PCs, they lay an ambush, or stealthily move to follow PCs who bypass their room in order to ambush them at some later point in the dungeon.