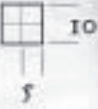


Den of Ruin

Scale in Feet

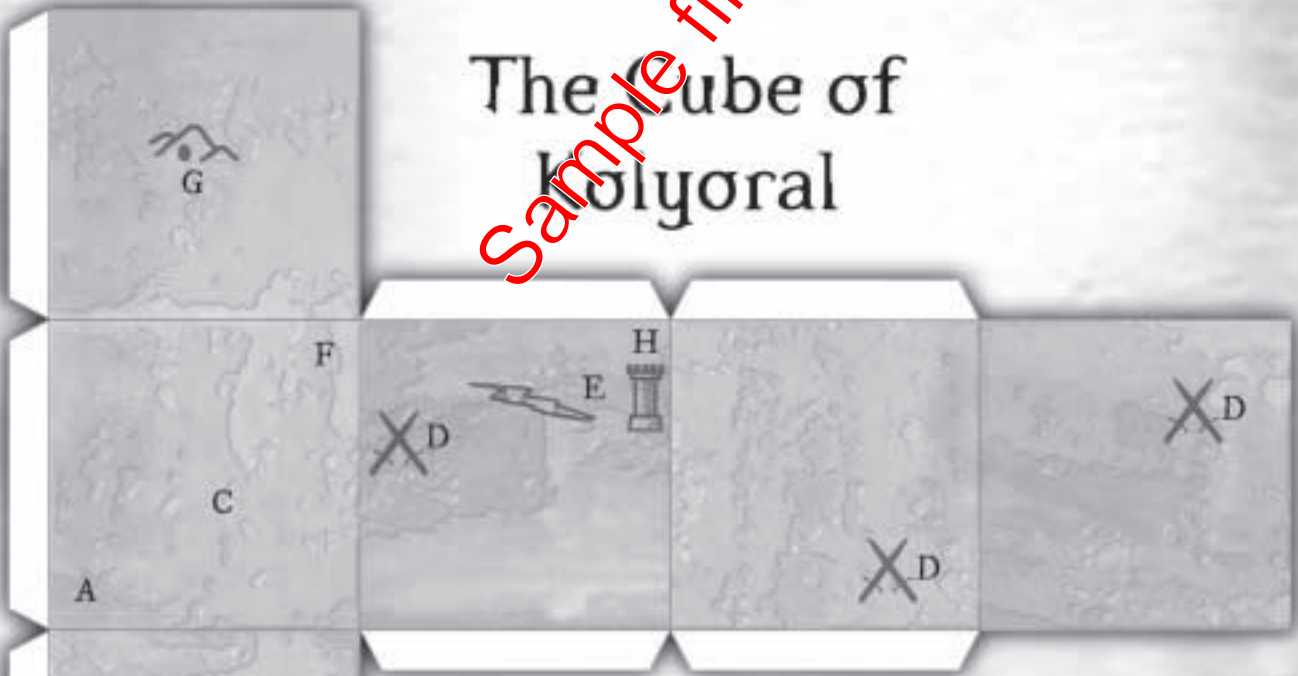






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The Cube of Holygoral

Sample file



-  Cave
-  Ancient Battlefields
-  Rift
-  Iron Fortress

0 50 75 100
Scale in Miles

Todd Gamble, Cartographer.



LORD OF THE IRON FORTRESS

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Based on the original DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® rules created by E. Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson and the new DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game designed by Jonathan Tweet, Monte Cook, Skip Williams, Richard Baker, and Peter Adkison.

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Sources include the *Manual of the Planes* by Jeff Grubb, Bruce R. Cordell, and David Noonan, the *Stronghold Builder's Guidebook* by Matt Forbeck and David Noonan, the *Planescape* campaign setting by David "Zeb" Cook, *Planes of Law* by Wolfgang Baur and Colin McComb, *Hellbound: The Blood War* by Monte Cook and Colin McComb, and *The Player's Primer to the Outlands* by Jeff Grubb. This adventure is dedicated to the fans of the PLANESCAPE® campaign setting.

Special thanks to Monte, for showing me how to do this, and to Gwendolyn, for giving me a reason to keep doing this every day.

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INTRODUCTION

“Fixed fortifications are monuments to the stupidity of man. . . . Anything built by man can eventually be destroyed by him.”

—General George S. Patton

In *Lord of the Iron Fortress*, player characters (PCs) travel to the Outer Planes to stop a half-dragon warlord bent on conquering entire worlds with the help of a reformed artifact of legend.

Encounter Levels: *Lord of the Iron Fortress* is designed for a party of four 15th-level D&D® characters who should advance through 16th level by mid-adventure and reach (or be near) 17th level by the end. As always, a good mix of PC classes and races works best, and though chaotic characters may find Acheron a bit unfriendly to their nature, it shouldn't significantly hamper their activities.

Because of the extraordinarily deadly nature of encounters at this level, Dungeon Masters with inexperienced or smaller groups may wish to modify some encounters to give PCs a better chance of survival. On the other hand, larger groups should be able to handle more difficult encounters, and the DM should have no qualms about adding a few monsters to encounters here and there.

PREPARATION

As Dungeon Master (DM), you need a copy of the three core D&D rulebooks to use this adventure: the *Player's Handbook*, the *DUNGEON MASTER'S Guide*, and the *Monster Manual*. If you want to expand the planar travels in this adventure, *Manual of the Planes* would be useful, but it is by no means required to run the adventure.

In the adventure itself, the shaded boxes provide player information for you to paraphrase or read aloud when appropriate. Sidebars contain important information for you, including special instructions. Information on nonplayer characters (NPCs) appears in abbreviated form in any encounter in which the PCs meet them; see Appendix I for full NPC statistics.

Adventure Background

Ages past, the sultan of the efreet wielded a mighty sword called the *Blade of Fiery Might*. This great artifact served him well in his wars against the djinn and other enemies of the City of Brass. Eventually a daring jann and his allies, a band of adventurers from the Material Plane, destroyed it, scattering the

shards of the blade across the planes—its powers lost for eternity.

Or so it was thought. Today, the *Blade of Fiery Might* is being reformed by the warlord, Imperagon. The son of a duergar prince and a mighty red dragon, Imperagon rules the Iron Fortress of Zandikar, a mighty stronghold built of scrap metal located on the Infernal Battlefield of Acheron. Here he has gathered the spirits of the greatest forgemasters of history, stealing their very spirits from across the planes. These slaves labor endlessly in the Pit of Toil, channeling their great skills through Imperagon himself in an attempt to recreate the blade.

Once completed, Imperagon plans to wield the *Blade of Fiery Might* at the head of a great army in an attempt to carve out a kingdom from the Material Plane. To this end, he has sought alliances with other powerful evil forces—including the drow, the illithid city of Ilkkool Rrem, certain natives of Acheron, and the hosts of Hell itself.

Now the blade nears completion, but Imperagon's need for slaves and materials grows ever stronger. His fears of discovery have grown, and he eagerly seeks the end of his preparations. Only a matter of weeks, perhaps days, separates him from his destiny.

ADVENTURE SUMMARY

The adventure begins when the PCs decide to investigate the strange events surrounding local craftsmen. Following the trail of these events leads the PCs to the gate-town of Rigus, front door to the Plane of Acheron. A bit of investigation in Rigus turns up references to the Iron Fortress of Zandikar, located on the layer of Acheron known as Avalas.

Once on Acheron, the PCs encounter a variety of foes and potential allies, including formian settlers from Mechanus, whose hive can serve as a base of operations for the characters during their assault on the Iron Fortress.

Golems and Imperagon's steel predator servants guard the Iron Fortress. Within its walls, the enslaved forgemasters toil endlessly under the watch of their azer overseers. Meanwhile, Imperagon entertains visitors from other worlds and planes who have heard of his path to power and contemplate alliance with the would-be warlord.

If successful, the characters can throw down the mighty Imperagon and destroy his works, preventing him from establishing himself as a power to be reckoned with on the planes. If unsuccessful, they may join the slaves in Imperagon's Pit of Toil.

CHARACTER HOOKS

As the DM, you know best how to involve your players and their characters in an adventure. Use these adventure hooks as suggestions or spurs to your imagination, modifying them as necessary to make them appropriate to the characters' interests.

- Dwarves attempting to raise a dead forgemaster slain by an orc assault can't locate his spirit. They might seek out the PCs to determine the cause of this problem (particularly if there is a dwarf among the PCs) or the PCs might simply hear of their plight.
- When the PCs try to have a magic weapon or suit of armor made or improved, they find that the creator/forgemaster they normally visit has been killed. His workshop is in shambles, but a Search or Wilderness Lore check (DC 26) can find week-old clawed animal prints (not unlike those of a great cat) on the floor. The tracks can't be followed out of the building due to the other foot traffic in the town or city. *Speak with dead* confirms that he was killed by a large cat-like creature that seemed to be made of metal.
- Imperagon's agents steal a shipment of adamantite ore due from the city of Rigus. The heroes might have been waiting for this ore to arrive for the construction of a weapon or suit of armor, or perhaps they simply overhear a merchant explaining to an angry smith why the ore hasn't arrived. Investigation reveals that the ore never left Rigus, and a guard who survived the attack on the shipment relates that just before he was knocked out, he caught a glimpse of a great metallic lion. A Knowledge (the planes) check (DC 20) reveals that the city Rigus can be found on the Outer Plane of the Concordant Domain of the Outlands.
- If any PC is a skilled weaponsmith (Craft [weapon-smithing] skill modifier +15 or higher), a steel predator attacks that hero in broad daylight.
- If your characters take part in the adventure *Deep Horizon* before playing this adventure, you might plant a clue in the salamander forge located in that adventure. Perhaps Imperagon's agents contacted the salamanders for assistance (or slaves), only to be rebuffed.

Ideally, you should strive to place this adventure into your campaign without the characters realizing that something significant is happening. Consider dropping a couple of the hooks into ongoing events without making much of them—perhaps a bard PC picks up a rumor about missing forgemasters or stolen ore a couple weeks before the PCs are attacked

by a steel predator. The more you can weave the adventure into your campaign's fabric, the more real it feels for the players (and the more involved in the plot they'll be).

PLANAR TRAVEL

In this adventure, the heroes travel from the Material Plane to the Outer Planes. While it's unlikely that this is the first time your PCs have ventured off the Material Plane, planar travel probably isn't something with which they're intimately familiar.

Some important basic differences exist between the Material Plane and the Outer Planes. The *Manual of the Planes* discusses these in detail—and if you plan to run extensive adventures on the planes, you'll definitely want to use this resource—but the product you now hold provides all you really need to know to run this adventure.

Both of the Outer Planes appearing in this adventure—the Concordant Domain of the Outlands and the Infernal Battlefield of Acheron—are relatively simple to use in your game. Neither requires any unusual protections to explore safely (although Acheron's environment slightly hampers chaotic characters). For specific information on the Outlands and Acheron, see Part One: Rigus and Part Two: Avalas.

Since the PCs won't be on their home plane, some spells that banish extraplanar beings don't function normally. For instance, *banishment* doesn't work (since it only forces extraplanar creatures out of your home plane), nor does *holy word* and its variants (*blasphemy*, *dictum*, *word of chaos*) banish such creatures (for the same reason). *Dismissal* functions normally, as do *dispel chaos/evil/good/law*, since they don't depend on you being on your home plane.

BEGINNING THE ADVENTURE

At some point, the PCs assemble the clues provided to them (including those detailed in the Character Hooks, above). They probably turn to divination spells to assist them (see *Powerful Divinations*, below) and should be able to determine that the trail leads to the Plane of Acheron. A Knowledge (the planes) check (DC 20) reveals that the most reliable path to Acheron goes through the Outlands gate-town of Rigus. A simple *plane shift* gets the PCs within 5 to 500

(5d%) miles of Rigus, and from there the PCs can use flight or teleportation to shorten the overland journey. This adventure doesn't present any encounters before the PCs reach Rigus, though you can develop and insert some if desired.

The PCs may think about plane shifting directly to Acheron; however, anyone knowledgeable about the Outer Planes (Knowledge [the planes] DC 15) knows of the danger of doing so, since the spell could easily bring you to a random location far from your destination, or even leave you stranded between the huge "cubes" that make up that plane. If the characters persist in this path, any *plane shift* that delivers them more than 100 miles from the destination should force them to spend significant time and effort tracking down Kolvor (their ultimate destination). See the section Adventuring on Acheron, in Part Two.

Other methods of reaching Rigus (and Acheron) also exist, including *portals* linking Rigus with the Material Plane or Acheron with other planar locations. If PCs prefer to explore alternative methods, don't make it too hard for them to reach their goal. The *gate* spell is an unreliable method, since Rigus lies in an area where 8th- and 9th-level spells don't always function. See the sidebar Adventuring on the Outlands, below.

POWERFUL DIVINATIONS

By 15th and 16th level, characters wield the most powerful information-gathering spells in the game. If they're smart—and by this point in their careers, most characters are—they can learn secrets about their enemies without leaving the comfort of their own living rooms, and they can easily bypass most hazards thanks to foreknowledge of the area. Left unchecked, the powers of divination can turn even the most exciting adventure into a routine excursion.

That said, don't punish PCs for using their powers, particularly newfound ones. It's only smart play to

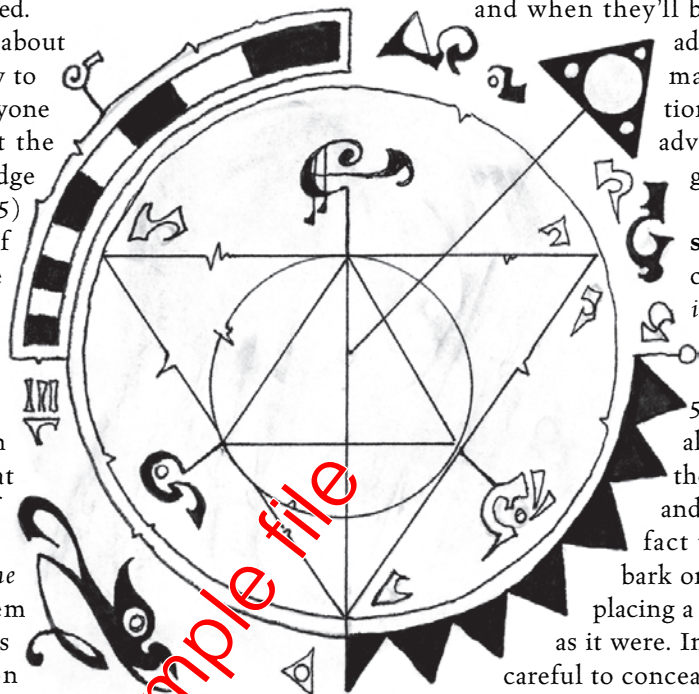
want to know about what you face before you open the door (or even put on your armor), and punishing smart play leads to unhappy players. Instead, know how the spells work, when they'll be helpful, and when they'll be useless. This section

addresses how most information-gathering divination spells function in this adventure, divided by category of effect:

Questions and Answers:

This category includes *augury* (Clr 2), *divination* (Clr 4), *commune* (Clr 5), and *contact other planes* (Brd 5, Sor/Wiz 5). Chances are you've already been dealing with these spells for some time and have gotten used to the fact that the PCs don't embark on any adventure without placing a few "calls to the deities," as it were. Imperagon has been very careful to conceal his activities from the deities and other powers. Thanks to some bargains with higher powers, as well as a carefully worded *wish* granted by the pit fiend Lydzin, there exists a 50% chance that any question asked with one of these spells about him, his fortress, his allies, or his plans will instead be intercepted by Lydzin, who answers it as she sees fit (probably twisting the truth just enough to set the PCs off the track, but without giving them reason to distrust the information gained).

General Information: Spells such as *commune with nature* (Drd 5), *legend lore* (Brd 4, Knowledge 7, Sor/Wiz 6) and *vision* (Sor/Wiz 7) fall into category of spells that instill information into the caster but fall short of answering specific questions. Lydzin's *wish* has no effect on these spells, though the casting time of *legend lore* (2d6 weeks unless the PCs somehow gain detailed information about the target) may be too long for them to wait (in which case they may rely on *vision*, though the information will be similarly vague). Vague information on the events surrounding this plot might include such phrases as "The dragon lord forges fire and woe within his ironclad citadel" or "Slaves toil at the fires of creation deep in the solitary fortress, hidden on a clashing cube." Despite the unusual setting, *commune with nature* functions normally on Acheron



(but not within Rigus or the Iron Fortress itself, just as you would expect).

Spying: The ultimate secret-busters *scrying* (Brd 3, Clr 5, Drd 4, Sor/Wiz 4) and *greater scrying* (Brd 6, Clr 7, Drd 7, Sor/Wiz 7) can ruin a well-plotted adventure in seconds. Even in a worst-case scenario (no knowledge), the DC to scry upon Imperagon or his minions is only 25 (or 20 if on Acheron), and it likely drops to 20 (or 15 if on Acheron) with some investigation. To thwart such spying, the conspirators have constructed a magic item called the *idol of false vision* that masks all residents of the fortress from scrying attempts (see Appendix III).

Finding Your Way: This category includes everything from the lowly *locate object* (Brd 2, Clr 3, Sor/Wiz 2, Travel 2) to its more potent cousin *locate creature* (Brd 4, Sor/Wiz 4) to the extraordinarily powerful *find the path* (Clr 6, Knowledge 6) and *discern location* (Clr 8, Knowledge 8, Sor/Wiz 8). The limited range, short duration, and knowledge requirement of the first two limit their usefulness outside the immediate vicinity of the Iron Fortress (and the lead-lined walls of the Pit of Toil hide its contents from *locate object*). *Find the path* lasts about 2 1/2 hours at this level, allowing flying characters to easily travel 30 to 45 miles—far enough to cover the distance between the *portal* from Rigus and the Iron Fortress with a few castings of the spell. However, while this may allow them to bypass some of the dangerous encounters on Avalas, it may also mean that they miss out on gaining valuable clues and potential allies. Finally, despite the power of *discern location* to find any creature or object regardless of where it is, the requirement that the PCs have seen the creature, possess an item belonging to it, or have touched the object, make it less valuable in this adventure (where the PCs have almost certainly had no contact with any target they'd want to track down with the spell). Of course, should the PCs gain such a resource, then all bets are off.

Bardic Knowledge: Though not a spell, bardic knowledge (or the lore class feature of a loremaster) can have a great impact on the adventurers' ability to know information about the events of this adventure. For instance, a bard might be able to connect a reference to "clashing cubes" with the plane of Acheron (DC 25) and might even know a tidbit or two about the *Blade of Fiery Might* (DC 30) once the characters have heard the name.

Knowledge Skills: Again, while not strictly magical, some characters will have Knowledge modifiers high enough to recognize clues in the adventure. For

instance, a Knowledge (the planes) check can recognize references to Acheron (DC 15) or Rigus (DC 20) and might even enable a character to remember reading a description of the steel predator (DC 30) that noted it as a native of Acheron. Later in the adventure, the heroes might be able to recall legends of the *Blade of Fiery Might* (DC 30).

MOVING THE ACTION ALONG

This adventure assumes that Imperagon is close to his goal of recreating the *Blade of Fiery Might*. But rather than setting a strict timeline (for instance, by saying the forgemasters finish in exactly eleven days), it is left to the DM to determine an appropriate timeline.

Since the adventure hooks alone might stretch over days, weeks, or even months, it's up to you to determine how soon after the PCs start following this plotline that Imperagon completes his work. If you know that your PCs tend to do a lot of legwork before adventuring, consider starting your timeline from the point they enter Acheron, or even when they reach Kolyoral.

Whatever you choose—from weeks to days to mere hours—you should play the adventure as if every second counts. Don't let the PCs just sit around talking about what to do next—push them forward with portents of danger or extra encounters. If they can't figure out where to start looking, give one of the divine spellcasters a horrible dream about endless hammering at an unholy forge, deep beneath a castle of steel. If they spend too much time investigating in Rigus, send some steel predators to hunt them down, or have Varachus point them in the direction of "something strange brewing in Acheron." If they waste time in the Hive, maybe the sounds of forgework begin to echo far beyond the walls of the fortress, suggesting that the warlord's power is growing. If they prefer to nickel-and-dime Imperagon's forces over the course of many short forays into the fortress, he won't stand for that, sending various allies (including steel predators, blue dragons, and any devils he can round up) searching for the PCs.

This isn't to say that you should punish the characters for being cautious, but ultimately, D&D is about adventuring, and there's nothing worse than a bunch of high-level adventurers sitting around thinking too much. After all, if your players' characters wanted to sit around, they wouldn't be adventurers, would they?