

THE MNESTIC CYSTS

AN ADVENTURE FOR CHARACTERS OF 7TH TO 9TH LEVEL



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THE MNESTIC CYSTS IS A FIFTH EDITION adventure for three to six characters of 7th to 9th level, optimized for a party of four 8th-level characters. Deep within the flooded caverns below the ruined settlement of Gweyir, an ancient aboleth named Vhil-Gaa suffers from a rare psychic affliction that calcifies its memories into physical, crystalline form. Its fraying mind projects hallucinations of ancient wars into reality, confusing friend for foe and turning its lair into an echo chamber of history. Can the party pierce the psychic turmoil to put the creature out of its misery, or will they attempt to barter for the forgotten secrets trapped within its growths? This adventure is set in the world of Cartosia, but can be easily adapted to any campaign setting featuring a flooded caverns location below old ruins.

BACKGROUND

Aboleths are cursed with perfect memory, inheriting the knowledge of every ancestor stretching back to the first moments of creation. Typically, this inheritance is a source of power, making them living libraries documenting the rise and fall of entire civilizations. For Vhil-Gaa, this ancestral gift has become a curse.

Three centuries ago, Vhil-Gaa captured a gynosphinx, whose hubris had brought it deep into Vhil-Gaa's territory. The aboleth, eager to drink of the divine creature, consumed the sphinx's mind in a ritual that took weeks to complete. It absorbed millennia of riddles, prophecies, and celestial secrets—knowledge it expected to deliver transcendence upon it. Instead, the cup of Vhil-Gaa's mind ranneth over, and the violent torrent of information promptly rent the aboleth's psyche.

Vhil-Gaa's ancestral memories, previously organized and accessible, crashed together with its present consciousness, its mind sublimating to chaos. It could no longer distinguish between events it had witnessed directly and those inherited from progenitors long dead. These fragmented memories then began manifesting physically. Jagged crystals of deep violet hue started growing from Vhil-Gaa's flesh. These were tangible, calcified fragments of history that soon spread throughout its lair beneath the ruined settlement of Gweyir, encrusting the walls and ceiling of its submerged caverns, transforming the chambers into a glittering tomb of displaced history.

These psychic geodes pulse with irregular light, projecting ghostly images onto the surrounding stone—armies of elementals locked in primordial warfare, prehistoric cities that crumbled before any humanoid took its first breath, creatures whose names have been forgotten by all but the gods. Vhil-Gaa floats through these phantoms in a state of perpetual and pained bewilderment, unable to anchor itself to the present moment.

The enslaved servants that the aboleth had captured over the years have fared no better. Their minds, extensions of their master's erratic will, have also been obliterated under the weight of alien memories that do not belong to them. Under Vhil-Gaa's command, many of them endlessly re-enact the sphynx's consumption ritual in a vain attempt to undo the mental chaos that has been unleashed. Left unchecked, the primordial creature's influence may continue to seep outward into the surrounding region.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

There are several reasons why the party might be compelled to descend into the flooded caverns beneath Gweyir's ruins. A few of these reasons are outlined below:

Calcified Secrets. An arcane collector has learned of the psychic geodes growing in the caverns beneath Gweyir. She believes these crystals contain preserved memories of civilizations predating recorded history, which would be invaluable to scholars and certain extraplanar entities. She offers the party 1000 gp to retrieve at least five pounds of crystal samples from the depths, warning them that something dangerous dwells in the caverns while admitting she doesn't know its exact nature.

The Silent Expedition. Three weeks ago, a small expedition of dwarven prospectors ventured toward the ruins of Gweyir seeking rumored mineral deposits in the caverns below and never returned. A dwarven merchant named Beldara Bitterbeard, sister to one of the missing prospectors, approaches the party with an offer: 500 gp for confirmation of the expedition's fate, and an additional 500 gp if any survivors can be brought back alive.

Dreams of Drowning. Residents of a nearby settlement have begun experiencing vivid nightmares of lightless depths and surveillance from the dark. Some have woken gasping for air, their lungs burning as if filled with water. A local priest believes something ancient has stirred beneath the earth and that its influence is spreading. The settlement's leaders pool their resources—250 gp and a ring of swimming—to hire the party to investigate the abandoned ruins of Gweyir, where the nightmares seem to originate, and end whatever is causing them.

GENERAL FEATURES

The ruins of Gweyir occupy a remote stretch of wilderness, far from any major settlement. Centuries ago, the site served as a small trading outpost built atop natural springs that provided access to subterranean waters—a convenient route for commerce with Underdepths communities until Vhil-Gaa claimed the aquifer below. The aboleth didn't

attack Gweyir directly; it simply waited, projecting dreams of wealth and forbidden knowledge into the minds of those who drew water from the wells. One by one, the settlers descended into the dark, never to return. Within a generation, Gweyir was abandoned, its true fate attributed to plague or misfortune by those who came after. Unless otherwise stated, the features of Gweyir and the caverns below are described as follows:

Ceilings, Walls, and Floors. The surface ruins are constructed of weathered stone, with most structures having partially or fully collapsed. Walls that remain standing reach 8 to 10 feet in height. The subterranean levels are natural caverns with rough stone walls and uneven floors. Ceilings in the flooded tunnels range from 10 to 15 feet, while the shrine level opens into larger chambers with ceilings reaching 20 feet or more. Floors are uneven but do not represent difficult terrain.

Light. The surface ruins receive natural light during the day. The subterranean levels are lit by bioluminescent growths clinging to the walls and by the irregular pulse of psychic geodes, providing dim light throughout.

Flooded Caverns. The tunnel and shrine levels are entirely submerged. Characters without a swimming speed or water breathing capabilities face significant challenges navigating these areas.

Psychic Geodes. Jagged crystals of deep violet hue grow throughout Gweyir and the caverns below—calcified fragments of Vhil-Gaa's fractured memories made tangible. These formations pulse with irregular light, occasionally projecting ghostly images onto nearby surfaces: armies locked in primordial warfare, cities that crumbled before humanoid civilization arose, and creatures whose names have been forgotten by all but the deepest memory. A creature that touches a geode directly must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or experience a vivid ancestral memory of the aboleth's, taking 3d6 psychic damage and being stunned until the end of their next turn. On a success, the creature glimpses something potentially useful—a partial layout of the caverns, a fragment of ancient knowledge, or a fleeting sense of Vhil-Gaa's current mental state (see "Aboleth Disposition", page X).

The following areas are keyed to the provided maps of Vhil-Gaa's lair:

I. FORSAKEN QUARTER

Three ruined structures are clustered here, their ceilings collapsed and their walls choked with overgrowth. Purple crystalline formations sprout between cracks in the stone, crawling up the facades and pulsing with faint light. Three corpses are sprawled amidst the rubble. The air is thick with must and brine.

These buildings served as residences before the outpost's abandonment. Little of value remains—rotted furnishings, corroded cookware, and the occasional glint of copper beneath the debris.

The Fallen Expedition. The three corpses belong to the dwarven prospectors from the expedition financed by Beldara Bitterbeard, who were slain by the sahuagin that lurk in the ruins. Their bodies bear deep lacerations consistent with clawed weapons. Two are folded nearly on top of each other, while the third body rests near the entrance to the northernmost building, as if struck down while fleeing. A character who examines the wounds and succeeds on a DC 12 Wisdom (Medicine) check determines the prospectors died approximately two weeks ago.

The expedition's supplies are scattered throughout the rubble. A character who makes a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check can find three climbing kits, two potions of superior healing, a waterproof satchel containing geological survey notes and 45 gp in assorted coinage, and a battered shield bearing the Bitterbeard family crest.

Encounter: Fractured Thralls. Four sahuagin **veterans** occupy the northernmost building, captured from an Underdepths community decades ago and reenslaved into Vhil-Gaa's service. Prolonged exposure to the aboleth's fractured psyche has shattered their minds—they perform repetitive motions endlessly, mending nets that rotted away years ago or gutting fish that exist only in their memories. They do not immediately attack intruders but react with sudden violence if their routines are disrupted or if the psychic geodes (see Area 3) are disturbed. They fight until death.

2. MERCHANT'S HALL

Waterlogged crates and corroded scales litter the interior of this structure. Dominating the center of the room is a broad pool of unnaturally still water, its surface reflecting the violet pulse of nearby crystals. In the shadows of a collapsed corner, a figure huddles motionless, knees drawn to chest.

This building served as Gweyir's commercial hub, where surface traders exchanged goods with Underdepths merchants who ascended through the caverns and tunnels beneath its surface long before they were flooded. The pool leads to the tunnels below. There is nothing of value to be found here.

Yorheath Bitterbeard. The huddled figure is Yorheath Bitterbeard (N he/him dwarf **scout**), the only survivor of the dwarven prospecting expedition. Three weeks ago, his party ventured to Gweyir seeking mineral deposits. After the sahuagin lurking nearby killed his three companions, Yorheath fled here and has remained paralyzed by terror ever since. Lacking other options, he has subsisted on water from the pool—water suffused with Vhil-Gaa's psychic influence. Yorheath's eyes are glassy and unfocused, and he mutters in fragments: half-remembered conversations with his dead companions, snippets of alien languages he shouldn't know, and occasional lucid moments where he begs for rescue before slipping back into confusion. If the party can restore Yorheath's lucidity through *lesser restoration*, *calm emotions*, or similar magic, he can share what little he observed before he succumbed to the waters: the crystals "show things that haven't happened yet—or happened too long ago to matter." Without magical intervention, Yorheath follows simple instructions but cannot provide useful information, and is unable to meaningfully participate in combat.

3. GEODE SPIRES

Towering formations of violet crystal rise from the earth amidst the ruins. The largest spire stands nearly twelve feet tall, its facets pulsing in slow, irregular rhythms. Ghostly images flicker across the crystals' surfaces—a robed figure with the head of a lion, cities of impossible geometry, and vast armies clashing beneath sunless skies.

These spires represent the densest concentration of psychic geodes on the surface level. The images projected here are more vivid and sustained than elsewhere: a gynosphinx appears repeatedly, its mouth forming words that produce no sound, its eyes tracking observers before the vision resets.

Hazard: Memory Cascade. The psychic geodes (see General Features section) are particularly potent here. Creatures that fail their saving throw against the geodes in this area take 6d6 psychic damage instead of 3d6, and on a success, they receive a clearer vision: a mental image of the lair's layout and occupants, or momentary telepathic connection with Vhil-Gaa, revealing the aboleth's location, its mental state,

and the possibility for non-combat resolutions (see "Aboleth Dispositions" on page X).

4. BLEACHED TREE

A solitary tree stands here, bone-white and stripped of bark, its branches reaching skyward like grasping fingers. The ground surrounding it is scattered with small skeletons of birds, rodents, and insects. Among the roots, partially buried by accumulated debris, a humanoid skeleton lies curled as if in sleep. One bony hand still clutches a leather satchel.

The tree's roots drew water from the corrupted aquifer for years, bleaching its wood and killing it slowly from within, same as the small animals and insects in the area. The humanoid skeleton belongs to a scholar named Ivulim Brade, who investigated Gweyir decades ago and never returned.

Treasure: Scholar's Notes. The leather satchel is waterproof and contains Brade's research journal, a potion of water breathing, and 35 gp in assorted coinage. The journal details Brade's theories about Vhil-Gaa: the aboleth consumed knowledge from "a creature of riddles" and has been unable to process the foreign memories, which now crystallize and project outward as the creature's mind continues to fracture. Brade speculated that destroying enough crystals might "relieve pressure" on the aboleth's psyche—or that harvesting them while leaving the creature alive would be "akin to draining blood from an open wound." The journal's final entry reads simply: "It knows I'm here. It's showing me things. I think it wants me to come down."

5. POOLS

Previous sinkholes amidst the ruins have since flooded, creating four pools. Each connects to the subsurface tunnels below.

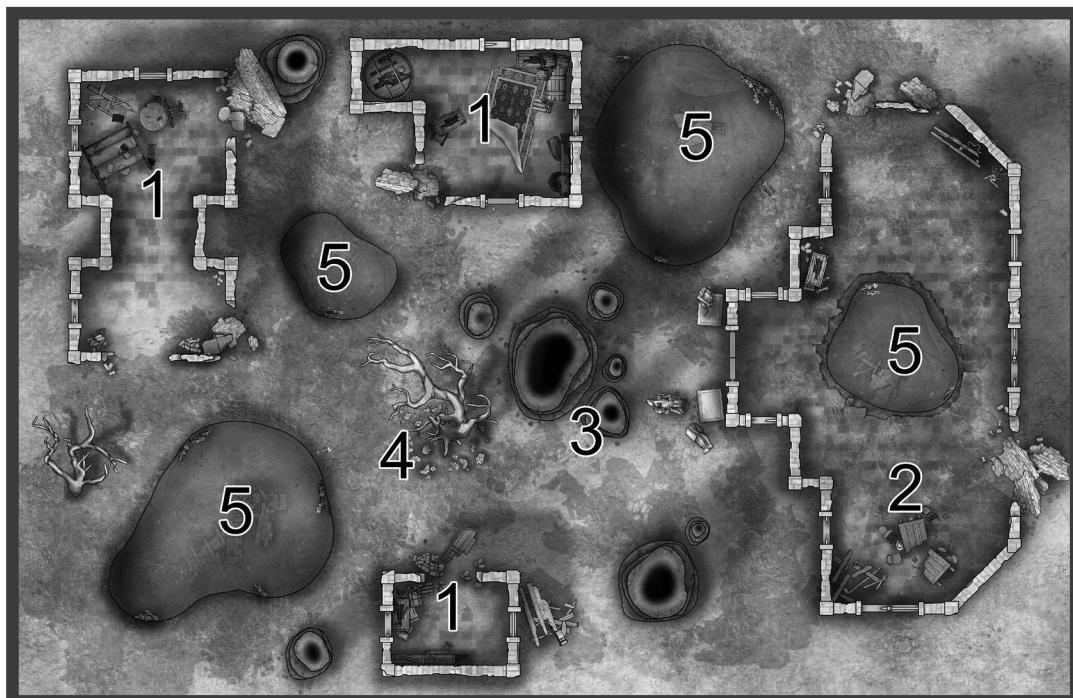
6. NORTHWEST PASSAGE

A spiralling pattern of fungi against the north wall of this chamber bathes the nearby waters in dim light, revealing a cloud of blood between two hulking, chitinoid creatures that occupy the space. Ominous clicking sounds emanate from their forms as they appear to tear into the flesh of a humanoid creature. Debris litters the floor of the passage—wreckage from the surface above, now rotted, waterlogged, and disintegrated.

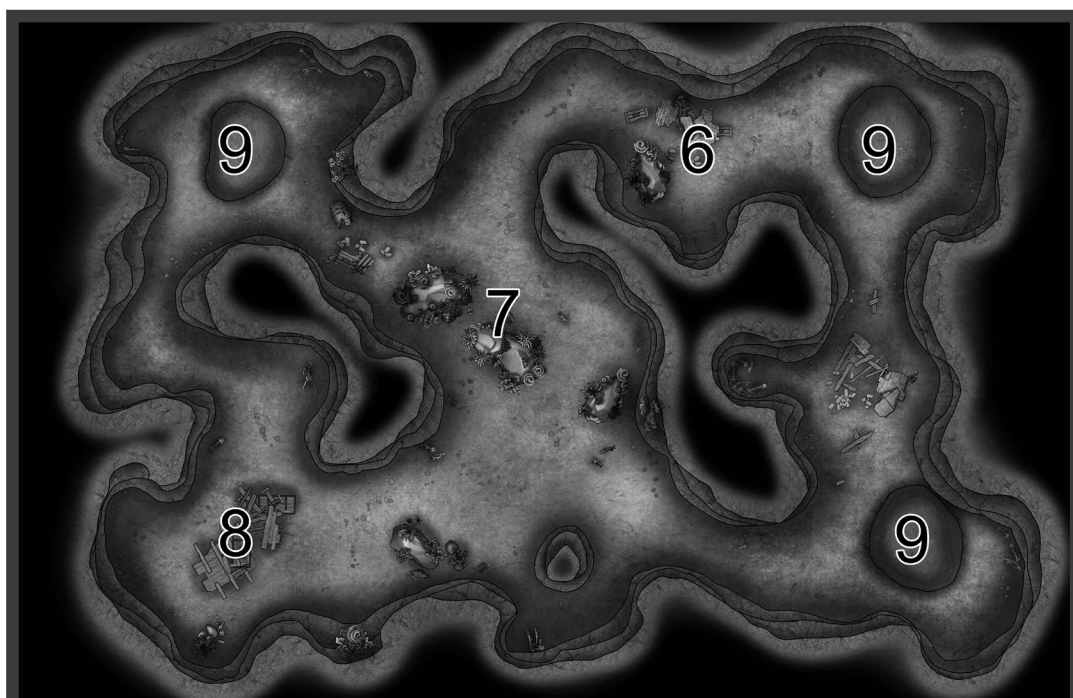
The debris in this area is of no value. A fissure in the floor at the east end of the passage opens into the lower level of the lair below.

Encounter: Chuuls. The creatures are two **chuuls**, brave enough to venture into the aboleth's lair given its disoriented state to feed on the enslaved sahuagin that reside within. They currently feed on one such sahuagin, after having isolated their victim from the rest of the group on the lower level of the lair. Unless the party is particularly conspicuous,

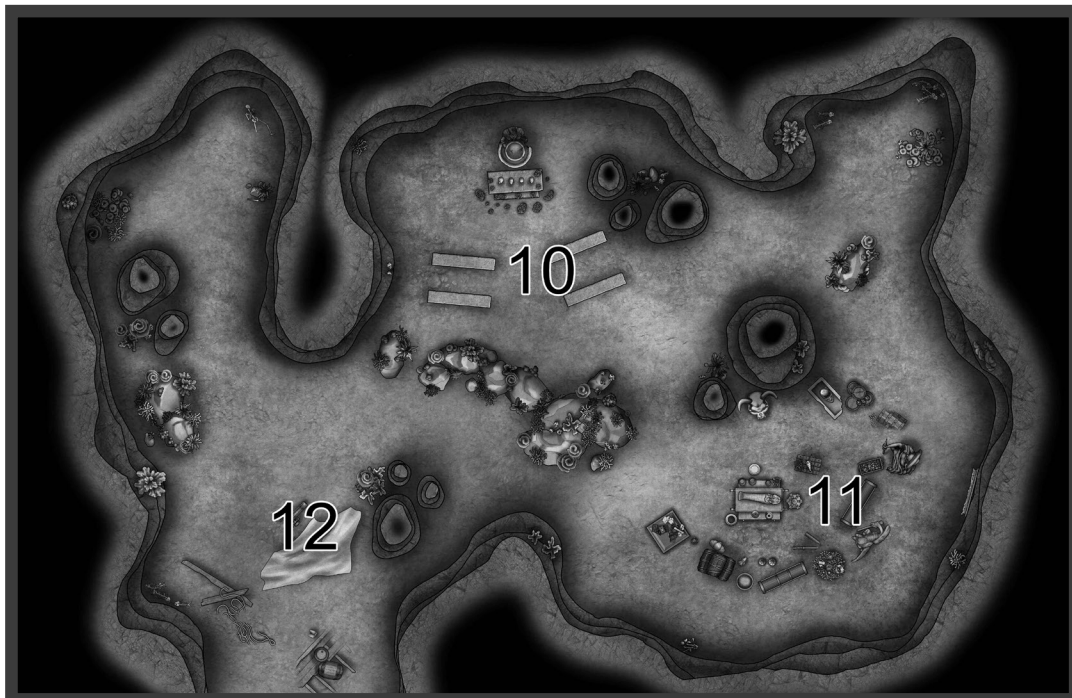
SURFACE LEVEL



SECOND LEVEL



SHRINE LEVEL



the chuuls remain distracted by their meal and uninterested in the party. If disturbed or attacked, however, the chuuls fight until reduced to one-quarter of their hit points or fewer, at which point they attempt to flee.

7. CENTRAL CHAMBER

Multiple clusters of geodes rise from the floor and walls of this chamber in dense formation. They pulse in synchronised rhythm, unlike the erratic patterns observed elsewhere in the area. Moving, continuous images are projected in a loop across every surface of the cavern, creating a disorienting visual display of clashing armies, destroyed cities, and winged figures wreathed in flame. Most prominent and repetitive among these visions is a sphynx—it faces you, its eyes boring into yours, its mouth forming soundless words of judgement.

This chamber holds the densest concentration of geodes within the lair. As a result, Vhil-Gaa's psychic residue is strongest here and the sphynx's consumed memories bleed through most clearly. Connecting passageways branch off in multiple directions.

Hazard: Memory Bleed. The concentration of psychic energy here is strong enough to threaten the mind of any present creatures, regardless of whether or not they touch any geodes. Creatures must make a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw for every minute they spend in this chamber. Failing this

save results in one level of exhaustion as foreign memories begin to crowd their own thoughts.

Boon: Imparted Knowledge. Though dangerous, the psychic energy here also offers power to characters brave or foolish enough to touch a geode. A creature that touches a geode directly is imparted with jumbled memories from the sphynx and must make a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw, taking 3d6 psychic damage upon failure. On a success, the creature learns of the sphynx's consumption by the aboleth and gains a morsel of its power—the permanent ability to cast the *lesser restoration* spell (regardless of class or spellcasting ability) once per day without the use of a spell slot.

8. EXCAVATION SITE

This chamber shows clear signs of purposeful labor—collapsed wooden scaffolding and support beams lean against the wall, which bears tool marks and deep cavities in its surface. Picks and chisels are scattered across the floor, mingling with rubble that has fallen in from the surface layer. Several humanoid skeletons are slumped amongst the debris.

Vhil-Gaa ordered the expansion of this chamber centuries ago, the reason for which is now lost in its jumble of memory. In the aftermath of the sphynx's consumption, it simply forgot about the initiative. It stopped issuing commands, stopped feeding the thralls here, and so the

enslaved workers continued digging until they expired by starvation and exhaustion. There are five bodies in total, and a successful DC 12 Wisdom (Medicine) check can confirm no signs of physical trauma to any of the bones.

Treasure: Corroded Strongbox. Characters who search the debris in this chamber and make a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check find a corroded strongbox wedged in the wreckage. Rust and water damage make it trivially easy to smash open; it contains 50 gp worth of old coinage.

9. VERTICAL PASSAGEWAYS

These passageways descend into the bottom level of the lair.

10. THE SHRINE

This spacious chamber is dominated by a prominent stone altar near its north wall, crusted in geodes. Four stone benches are arranged before the altar like pews for a congregation. The benches are occupied—a dozen sahuagin sit intently, their gazes fixed on the scene playing out before them. Six other sahuagin drift through the chamber in slow, deliberate movements, appearing to be performing a ritual or drama of some sort. One kneels at the altar, while others chant in garbled voices. Geode formations crowd around the altar, pulsing in time with the chorus of voices. The psychic projections in this chamber are consistent in displaying a single scene: a gynosphinx bound in chains of light, thrashing in agony.

Here, Vhil-Gaa has commanded its servants to endlessly re-enact its ritual consumption of the gynosphinx, in the hopes that its repetition may process or undo its psychic damage.

Thus far, the re-enactment has had no effect. If the party decides to observe the re-enactment for an extended period of time, they will notice that the roles remain consistent as it loops and repeats itself. One sahuagin plays the role of the sphinx, writhing in phantom agony at the climax of the performance.

Encounter: The Congregation. There are eighteen sahuagin in this chamber, preoccupied with their business of the ritual reenactment. Deeply entranced, they do not notice the party unless their ritual is interrupted via touching the altar, interfering with performers, or loud combat in the immediate vicinity. If roused, they attack with frenzied confusion and without surrender.

11. HOARD

Accumulated treasure, debris, and detritus fills the southeastern portion of this chamber. Chests lie scattered—some intact, others rotted, spilling their contents into the murk. Weapons and armor are corroded beyond use, piled senselessly. Personal effects can be seen mixed throughout: a child's doll, a scale, a rolling pin. An ornate sarcophagus rests prominently among the hoard, elevated slightly on a stone dais.

This room represents centuries of tribute from enslaved thralls and lured victims. Vhil-Gaa has no use for wealth; the accumulation here represents instinctual compulsion. The aboleth doesn't guard this space or even really care about its contents. The sarcophagus contains the soggy remains of a high priest who served the gynosphinx long before its capture. The priest's remains were stolen by the aboleth's servants as a mechanism to lure the sphinx itself towards Vhil-Gaa's territory.

Treasure: Aboleth's Hoard. There is a total value of approximately 2500 gp in mixed coinage, gems, and jewelry. Notable items among the pile of otherwise limited-value objects include a cloak of the manta ray, a +1 trident, and three potions of water breathing. Opening the sarcophagus requires a successful DC 10 Strength check. Inside, the mummified body wears a burial mask depicting a sphinx (worth 100 gp), and wears an amulet of proof against detection and location around its neck.

12. THE DESCENT

This passageway extends far into forlorn deeps, toward an underground sea connecting to the Underdepths. Vhil-Gaa retreats here when not drifting through these upper portions of its lair. The darkness of this passageway is oppressive, its waters noticeably colder. The voids and caverns to which this passageway leads hold no benefits or boons for any intrepid adventurers. It is from this passageway that Vhil-Gaa will eventually emerge to engage the party. When Vhil-Gaa emerges, read aloud:

A shape begins to form in the darkness, growing in size as it fast approaches. Light pierces the gloom; crystals

sprouting from veined, translucent flesh. Three glinting eyes on a serpentine body, each fixed on a different point—one on you, one on something unseen, and another half-closed, as if dreaming.

Vhil-Gaa's emergence can be triggered by prolonged presence on this level of the lair, disturbance at the shrine, loud combat, or at GM discretion.

Encounter: Vhil-Gaa. The **aboleth** is unstable and unpredictable. Its telepathic speech is overlapped with other voices, as the countless other conversations it has with itself bleed through to its engagement with the party. The following table describes its possible disposition when it greets the party, as well as other dispositions it may assume throughout the course of the encounter:

d4	Disposition	Behaviour
1	Barter	Vhil-Gaa offers knowledge in exchange for "eager thoughts"—it wants to be granted permission to rifle through a character's mind. In exchange, the character may be granted knowledge of new spells, new skill proficiencies, or a permanent boost to their Intelligence or Wisdom score. They risk losing foundational memories or taking 6d8 psychic damage on a failed DC 15 Wisdom saving throw. The trades are genuinely "fair", if invasive.
2	Mercy	Vhil-Gaa experiences a moment of anguished lucidity, recognizing its own condition and begging for the party to kill it. This clarity tends to fade as quickly as it arrives.
3	Delusion	Vhil-Gaa believes the party are enslaved servants, returning with tribute or reports. A DC 15 Charisma (Deception) check is sufficient to enforce this misunderstanding. The aboleth will issue confusing commands and expect obedience. Playing along allows safe passage or further opportunity for conversation.
4	Hostility	The party is perceived as ancient enemies. It attacks without negotiation.

GMs are encouraged to treat this section as an improvisation framework rather than a script. The aboleth's disposition can and likely should change throughout the encounter, based on actions the party takes or at GM discretion, representing the chaos of the creature's mind. For example, clumsily mentioning the gynosphinx is likely to enrage Vhil-Gaa and risks triggering hostility, while exposing sympathy or acknowledging its pain may prompt mercy. Acting subservient or confused may reinforce delusion.

Combat is triggered if the party destroys any geodes in the aboleth's presence, which causes it psychic pain. Failing a Deception check by 5 or more or refusing a barter command after agreeing to negotiate will also trigger combat. If any

sahuagin are present within the lair, they join the aboleth in combat. Vhil-Gaa fights until destroyed.

AFTERMATH

If Vhil-Gaa is destroyed, the psychic geodes begin to dim and crack over the following weeks, eventually crumbling to dust. The projected visions permanently fade, and the lair falls silent. Any surviving thralls regain some semblance of their former selves, but most are too broken to ever make full recoveries. Nightmares plaguing nearby settlements cease immediately. Scholars and collectors will pay premium prices for any geode samples harvested. If the party committed to recovering crystals for the collector, they will need to act quickly, for they will soon lose their potency.

If Vhil-Gaa survives, the aboleth's influence continues to spread. Geodes proliferate, nightmares worsen in frequency and intensity. If Yorheath was rescued and restored, he eventually makes a full recovery, and with his sister, the two become permanent friends and allies to the party. The party may find that Beldara is able to introduce them to powerful connections or bankroll future adventures.

REFERENCES

This work includes material taken from the System Reference Document 5.1 (“SRD 5.1”) by Wizards of the Coast LLC and available at <https://dnd.wizards.com/resources/systems-reference-document>. The SRD 5.1 is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode>.

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