

THE DOOMGRINDER

Session 41 9-2-01 & 12-2-01 Into the Depths

Next Session ADMIN 19-2-01 or 20-2-01 At G&D.

Into the Valley

Andrea activates Bladestar's strength ability as the party move into the valley in clockwise direction. They observe a large build-up of cloud and Avon remarks on the rumour that associates the Doomgrinder with lightning. As they proceed they are suddenly rocked by a seismic tremor that disturbs the whole valley until it subsides after about a minute. Zeppo makes his first suggestion that they assemble the weapon but is overruled by the others as the sound of howling wolves breaks out to the North. They discuss what to do if they have to assemble the weapon. Andrea favours appointing an operator for the thing as Zeppo eloquently, "Alvin put the damn thing together!", attempts to persuade Alvin to assemble it right now. Alvin disables his Fire Traps and Avon is appointed to carry the pieces in a saddlebag over his shoulder. He agrees readily. Perhaps he realises what it might be worth. Just after sorting this out they are attacked by a small pack of wolves. The party finish them off reasonably efficiently apart from poor Natch who is rather badly mauled. Zeppo and Alvin cast CLWs allowing the Gnome to regain consciousness. Leaving the lupine corpses behind they continue on, spiralling inward toward the grim black tower that dominates the valley.

The Tower

They reach the southern side of the Valley without incident and deciding to throw caution to the winds they march right up to the thing. The 80ft high tower looms over them as they decide what to do. Andrea's Direction Sense notes that the sails are facing directly toward Greyhawk. "Shall we blast it now?" says Zeppo eagerly however he is overruled by the others. Hemegretham points out that their contract requires them to investigate the thing not just blow it up. Anyway how do we know that the weapon will blow it up? This continues for some time as they notice that the ground beneath their feet is vibrating slightly. This doesn't seem to bother the heroes and they proceed to circle the tower looking for entrances. As they hang around waiting for something to happen Andrea wonders whether the tower would absorb magical energy and asks Alvin to try a Magic Missile on it. After some contemplation the Priest of Rao agrees (obviously very bored by now) and a Magic Missile streaks toward the thing and is indeed absorbed by the strange black stone. "You've just shortened the time to destroy Greyhawk by five minutes!" says Avon who has decided that the tower is building up some sort of energy pool. Scowling, Andrea reaches out and touches the tower – nothing happens.

The Elves decide to circle the tower looking for secret doors as Zeppo precedes them with a Find Traps spell active. No secret entrances are found and by mid-afternoon they are again standing around wondering what to do. Avon decides to take a look at the large, Maltese Cross type sails. Joe ties two ropes together and fits them to a grappling hook. Andrea and Heme take turns to sling the hook into the air and after a couple of abortive attempts get the rope to catch. Avon is hauled up by the big fighter, but he is unable to find any sort of entrance. His thieves tools are also unable to mark the stone so he returns to the ground where Zeppo is arguing with the others. He seems to think that the Doomheart should be able to "Kick its Ass!" but Heme says they are here to destroy it not feed it. Avon sarcastically composes and sings a short ditty entitled "Zeppo was a Healer but he blew up Greyhawk instead!" proving that he can't sing to save his life but he is a sarcastic git. Zeppo points out that one of their sources of information about the Doomgrinder states that it could be harmed by weapons that are contained in the Star Cairns so "Let's kick its Ass!" However the others remain unconvinced, fearing that discharging the weapon might boost the Doomgrinder's power or even cause it to operate. Zeppo suggests using an Augury spell to determine whether it is a good idea to try to toast the tower with the Doomheart. The others think this is a great idea however neither Zeppo or Alvin currently have that spell memorised so they need to rest overnight to try it. They camp within sight of the Doomgrinder and spend an uneventful night apart from the occasional howls of Wolves.

Augury

Early next morning they rise and Zeppo and Alvin begin by casting CLW's on Natch who is now very much improved. Zeppo then casts Detect Evil and scans the area in a flat circle. "Nothing evil here" he says surprised that it didn't register on Avon. For good measure he scans the Doomheart as well also getting no reaction. They carefully construct a question and both Alvin and Zeppo cast their own Augury spells asking the question "Will firing this weapon at the tower benefit the party?" Zeppo's reply is "Joining Trithereon would be of great benefit to a mortal" and Alvin's is "Aggression does not profit" so they decide not to fire the thing just yet.

Meanwhile Andrea, kicking around the tower, bored by all this arcane lore notices some signs of a track. Using her skills as a tracker she determines that the trail is two or three days old. The tracks could have been made by Derro. She reports this to the others who have been trying figure out a way in, Avon by attempting to disbelieve the wall, which fails and Zeppo considering the use of a Stoneshape spell. They follow the tracks, which emerge directly from the Doomgrinder, arriving in a grove with several different herbs that are useful as foods and medicines according to Zeppo. "It's a very big herb garden" they conclude. As they walk back to the tower Avon asks the others how they opened doors in the Star Cairns. Andrea mentions that they touched magical items to them. She remembers one in particular that needed magical fire before it would open and they spend a long time discussing this as Zeppo sulks since he is unable to use the weapon. Avon thinks they should try touching it with a magical weapon before using magical fire on it as Alvin reminds them that the Doomheart components are powerful magical items. Avon takes the spear of the Doomheart and touches the black stone and instantly an oval portal appears. (DM note 1) It remains open for thirty seconds before disappearing. They decide to go for it and as Avon again opens the door they slip inside. After 30 seconds the portal closes and they are left to regard their strange surroundings.

Inside The Doomgrinder

They find themselves standing in a passage made entirely from the dark stone. An even half-light that casts no shadows emanates from walls covered in mysterious runes. They stand near a silver disc embedded in the floor near their point of entry. Andrea chalks the floor but the black stone does not easily take a mark. Still she can always spot the chalk dust. Heme takes a Read Magic scroll from his robe of useful things and hands it to Alvin. Alvin uses the scroll to read the runes but still can't make any sense of them. Avon has also never seen any script like it before. Moving cautiously round the passage they find an additional three silver discs at what they take to be the cardinal points (DM Note 2). Avon leaves some pebbles at the southern disc. They search for secret doors and try touching the spear to different parts of the structure. As they search they notice that the corridor ceiling appears to stretch right to the top of the tower, 80ft above them. Andrea notices a few leaves between the Northern and Eastern discs and takes this as evidence that a party has returned here with herbs. Avon wonders what sort of herb gathering party would be wielding the type of magical weapon needed to open the portal! Returning to their point of entry they decide to start playing with the discs. Zeppo stands on the North disc and the portal opens – to the relief of all. After 30 seconds it closes and they move onto the next disc. Standing around the Eastern disc they all face the inward wall, where they are convinced a portal will open, as behind them Zeppo steps onto the disc. Nothing happens until they notice that Zeppo isn't there anymore! A nervous group waits, huddled around the disc for the reappearance of their Cleric but after one minute there is no sign of him. After another minute they decide to follow their comrade to whatever unknown fate. One by one they step onto the disc immediately vanishing and appearing around an identical disc, where they discover Zeppo waiting rather nervously.

Down, down, deeper and down

They find themselves in a similar passage. (DM note 3) Black stone, rune-covered, dim light however this one is on a larger scale and it is possible to walk three abreast in this corridor. Again the ceiling is far above them. To their east is a wide corridor with a high ceiling that seems to stretch on forever! To the west is a more conventionally scaled corridor that seems to lead to a dead end. The whole structure conveys a sense of enormity - and sensed, rather than directly felt is the sensation of power throbbing deep inside the earth. There is an uncomfortable pause then Avon hisses a question to Natch. "How deep are we?" The Gnome Adventurer has gone pale and stutters his reply nervously. "Over a mile below the surface." Andrea, apparently having worked out how the teleport system functions boldly steps onto the Eastern disc and promptly vanishes. When she doesn't reappear, they

quickly follow her. If they thought their previous location was weird it is nothing in comparison to where they are currently standing, again around a silver disc. She explains that standing again on the same disc had no effect. They are in a vast room so huge that the walls and ceiling can barely be sensed. The same dark stone and the same runes cover the surfaces of this unbelievable structure that would contain all the cathedrals of Oerth in one corner. Natch trembles as he informs them that they are many miles below the surface, marvelling at the abilities of the beings that could construct such a place. Suddenly a huge bolt of lightning surges high above them in a strangely ordered fashion. They feel their skins crawl with some type of energy as it passes. "We are looking for an off switch" says Avon. Nervously they look around noticing another silver disc in the distance. Both Andrea and Zeppo try to determine direction but neither of them are able to orientate themselves in this place. They walk toward the next disc through an atmosphere heavy with the weight of energy when they are suddenly rocked by another seismic shock, quickly followed by a surge of lightning that is uncomfortably somewhat nearer. "Let's get out of here – this place makes me nervous" says Zeppo and the others quickly agree, picking up their pace to arrive at the next disc. They step onto the disc and find themselves at what they take to be the eastern most disc in the level above. Exploring the smaller corridor to the west they find it ends in a square shaft that contains a huge column in the centre. A cool breeze emerges from within. With Heme gripping her belt Andrea leans out for a better view and notices that the shaft stretches both above and below her out of sight. (DM note 4). She describes the amazing sight to the others as Avon takes the opportunity to drop a pebble down the shaft. After two minutes they give up listening for it.

Emerging from the corridor they head to the north around the curving passageway, noticing a break in the outside wall at about the two-o'clock position. It looks just as if a tunnel has broken out into the structure, as rubble is strewn around corridor. Natch takes a stealthy look down the tunnel and reports back that it inclines quite steeply downward. "Oh and there's something moving down there" he whispers. Andrea creeps to the tunnel entrance and disappears within. Fortunately she is not heard or spotted and returns to inform the others of what appear to be a group of three Derro apparently standing guard facing away from them. "Three's not many" growls Hemegretham reaching for his sword but they decide not to attack just yet. Avon suggests they press on and try to find this "off switch" that he keeps going on about. Retreating around the corridor away from the tunnel entrance they come to the southern silver disc, which has identical exits to its eastern equivalent.

They decide to explore the apparently infinite corridor to the south. As they move down the corridor they notice a sharp crackle of electrical energy and notice sparks and lighting play across the walls far ahead of them. Pressing on they notice more of this activity until suddenly a bolt of lightning leaps from the wall and strikes Andrea. Zeppo and Alvin quickly heal her and they return quickly to the disc. Andrea is of the opinion that Derro are nothing to do with this astonishing structure. Heme adds that fighting them might be more fun than all this exploring. They try the southern disc and are relieved to find themselves in the "windmill" tower again. They quickly walk around to the eastern disc and descend again to the infinite corridor level before using the eastern disc there to descend to the huge electrical room. As they try to explore this area they are hindered by seismic shocks that seem to trigger even more electrical activity and they begin to fear for their safety. They head as fast as possible to the second disc and teleport up to the higher level.

"What about them Derro then?"

...growls Heme, pointing in the direction of the break in tunnel. They move cautiously to the entrance as Avon slips noiselessly into the dark. Moving silently down the tunnel he spies two groups of Derro, numbering five and six, apparently guarding the complex. He returns and informs the others who begin to discuss a plan of attack when the sound of harsh voices and marching boots is heard from the tunnel. They seem to be coming up! The party back off fast, dragging a very reluctant Hemegretham away from the approaching noise and out of sight of the tunnel. A spine-chilling scream rends the air and dies away as the sound of marching feet disappears. Emerging from cover the heroes creep around the corridor, finding blood stains on the floor at the tunnel entrance. They find smears of blood on the floor further anti-clockwise and surmise that an injured captive has been brought this way. For some reason Avon is sure that this is a Derro being punished by his comrades, despite not having seen the group or heard any intelligible conversation. They follow the blood trail until it stops abruptly at the western disc. Exchanging solemn glances, one by one they step onto the disc.

The Summoning

They find themselves in a small room, of the usual black stone. There are columned arches leading to a large area beyond where flickering firelight can be seen. Approaching the columns they regard a scene of evil cruelty beyond compare. They see a huge auditorium shaped structure that extends to the south for 300ft spreading out from their relatively narrow viewpoint behind the arches. A huge obscene spiral structure, impossibly constructed from bones dominates the other end of the room. It is flanked by many large wooden frames to which are tied a wide assortment of creatures in dreadful torment, courtesy of the pack of fifty or so Derro that are delighting in torturing their victims. A large bonfire is used to heat instruments of torture, which are then cruelly used on the hapless prisoners. Before the bonfire cavorts a Derro priest leading the whole vile group in a dreadful chant that is almost drowned out by the screams of the suffering. Among the victims they are horrified to see Humans, Elves, and other surface dwellers but also a large number of strange creatures that they take as residents of the semi-mythical Underdark. The party witness sights that they would wish to forget but will be unable to. Natch trembles uncontrollably as bones are ripped from still living creatures and fed to great bone spiral, which seems to absorb each new offering into its structure. The chant increases in volume and Alvin's ears prick up as he identifies the word used as the basis for the chant - Tharizdun, Tharizdun, Tharizdun... (DM Note 5).

Through gritted teeth Andrea growls, "Bolt the weapon together!" "Destroy that spiral." whispers Zeppo. Avon takes the pieces of the weapon and begins to assemble them, carefully reversing the assembly instructions as Alvin, watching the room notices the huge stone column near them. Suddenly a flash of lightning bursts from the bone spiral toward the column and the earth below shakes as *the column begins to rotate!* Avon, blessing his high dexterity manages to assemble the Doomheart without incident noting the almost eager way each part slips into its appointed place. The ground begins to shake as the turning column grinds into the earth below and the chant builds to a hellish cacophony above the screams of the tortured.

Stepping boldly from their hiding place the group form up behind Avon who levels the weapon at the evil Priest and wills it to fire. He senses power building in the Doomheart but realises it will take a few moments to power up. The Derro Priest, seemingly supernaturally informed, whirls and screaming an incantation gestures toward the heroes. However Alvin's Magic Missiles are too fast for the Derro and strike him in a shower of incandescent sparks ruining his malign spell as finally the Doomheart speaks! They feel an immense surge of power around them as a pearl white wedge of energy lances out from the ancient weapon reaching for the hideous tableau. However the powers of darkness are not so easily conquered as the beam strikes an invisible barrier in front of the evil priest. Avon feels the Doomheart begin to vibrate as crazy patterns of runes flash over the soul section of the artefact. At the other end of the cavern the obscene bone spiral begins to rotate as the dark priest calls down the power of absolute decay to fuel his impenetrable barrier. The Derro laughs insanely as inconceivable forces battle for supremacy until finally the immovable object meets an irresistible force. With a dreadful silence the barrier falls and the beam winks out. Before them the whole cavern has been consumed – The crazed Derro, their tortured prisoners and the vile spiral disintegrated by the arcane power of the Doomheart. For one heartbeat there is silence before the ground begins to shake as large slabs of rock begin to fall from the unsupported ceiling. There is a terrible splintering sound behind them as they see the great column begin to splinter and collapse. Running back to the side room they try to use the disc to teleport but nothing happens! With the walls and ceiling crashing around them they run across the great hall desperately seeking escape until, Rao and Trithereon be blessed, they find another chamber with another silver disc. Barely keeping their footing they stagger to the disc and one-by-one depart the collapsing cavern.

Run Away! Run Away!

Up at the next level they appear around a disc and stagger across the lurching floor as a huge block of rock smashes to the ground striking Zeppo on the shoulder. He scrambles painfully to his feet as they make their way through crashing rock and wild lightning to the silver disc, appearing in the tower level, where the structure is yet sound but the ground bucks like a wild horse. Bursting from the tower into the daylight Avon finds the Doomheart growing colder and colder in his grasp as alarming patterns of red runes flash across the soul. Andrea is thrown to the ground as she tries to reach the panicking horses as Zeppo quickly cures his broken arm. Andrea scrambles to her feet and speeds to the horses to calm them. Behind them the Doomgrinder lurches to one side as the earth below it begins to collapse. Avon drops the now painfully cold Doomheart as they mount up with difficulty and urge their mounts onward away from the devastation. Riding like madmen they make the rim of the valley as

trees fall, entire hills disappear into the ground and the dark tower itself collapses with a huge crash. They ride crazily for three hours until finally they pull up their exhausted mounts as the colossal earth movement subsides.

Back at Fort Lehman Captain Narl is relieved to see that they escaped the great earthquake and they spend the night in their merchant's tent guarding their words. Early next morning the party depart on the road back to Greyhawk and despite the attentions of a group of mongrel Gnolls, which they diplomatically ignore, seven days later they arrive at the great City (still intact thanks to them).

Greyhawk

By the time they reach the Adventurer's Guild most of their nightmares have diminished somewhat though they all suspect that they will perhaps never be the same carefree souls that they were. They send a runner for Celdon Fallow and within the hour their employer is with them. They decide to tell all and for the next hour they recount their experiences at the Doomgrinder as Celdon makes copious notes. He somehow seems to know that their story is true and hands over the promised reward of 1450gp each. Celdon thanks them for their bravery and makes it clear that they have performed a great service, perhaps even preserving all of Oerth from a terrible fate. However this will only be known to a select few for as far as most people are concerned there has merely been a great earthquake in the far eastern Cairn Hills region. He advises the party not to speak too freely of their part in this particular mission.

He is rising to leave when Andrea points out that one of their comrades died in the mission to find the Doomheart, which of course was the artefact used to destroy the Doomgrinder. Would it be possible to have a Resurrection spell cast upon the remains of the unfortunate Astra. Fallow thinks for a moment and tells them that it may just be possible and to remain at the guild. Later in the day a note arrives requesting their presence at the temple of Correllon Larethellion the patron god of elves. They bring the remains to the temple and the Priests bear away the sorry little bundle for preparation. After a few hours the others are invited into a room, which has a great tree as its centrepiece. Rows of elven priests intone solemnly until a venerable elf wearily bends down to the bones and whispering a prayer briefly touches them. There is a moment of silence and suddenly in a bright glow of celestial power the bones straighten and form into shape. (DM Note 6) Within a second or two muscle and flesh begins to form and the miracle of Resurrection takes its course as a naked, bewildered Astra staggers to her feet mumbling something about a Demon. She is given a robe to cover herself and weak and confused is led to rejoin her comrades in arms. "What have we done?" they all think.

BLADESTAR – THE STAR CAIRNS - DOOMGRINDER - THE END -

Hit Point Situation

Full

Avon (17), Zeppo (26), Alvin (20), Heme (43), Andrea (41), Joe (23), Raven (25)

| Reason for XP | Andrea | Avon | Alvin | Hemegretham | Zeppo | Joe | Raven |
|---------------------------------------|--------|-------|-------|-------------|-------|------|-------|
| Opponents | 120 | 120 | | 120 | 120 | | |
| Spells | 10 | 10 | | | 60 | | |
| Proficiencies | 80 | 80 | | 60 | 70 | | |
| Ideas | 200 | 60 | | 40 | 50 | | |
| Problem Solving | | | | | | | |
| Role Play | 240 | 200 | | 240 | 280 | | |
| Treasure | 1450 | 1450 | 1450 | 1450 | 1450 | 1450 | |
| Finishing (end of campaign – for now) | 10000 | 10000 | 8000 | 10000 | 10000 | 8000 | |
| Fun Factor | 100 | 200 | | 100 | 340 | | |
| Bonuses | | | | | | | |
| Penalties | | | | | | | |

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|-----------------------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|--|
| Total (This session) | 12200 | 12120 | 9450 | 12010 | 12370 | 9450 | |
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|--|--------------|--|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|
| Grand Total (for this campaign) | 22320 | | 17540 | 19835 | 20810 | 15640 | 5010 |
|--|--------------|--|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|

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|---------------------|--|--------------|--|--|--|--|--|
| Career Total | | 22560 | | | | | |
|---------------------|--|--------------|--|--|--|--|--|

DM Notes

1. 22:45 and they finally got in!
2. Taking the point of entry as local North.
3. This point taken as local East.
4. Reality check – Andrea was waving around one of the continual light sources but she didn't need to since the shaft and column were made of the same black stone which emits its own light. She would have seen the thing extending to the perspective vanishing point both above and below.
5. During the ride back to Greyhawk Alvin was able to inform them of what he suspects they may have prevented. Tharizdun is one of the mightiest of the Gods. He stands for Darkness, Decay, Entropy, Malign Knowledge and Insanity. He was deemed so dangerous to all of existence that well over 1000 years ago he was imprisoned by a bizarre cooperation of all the other gods, both good and evil. Alvin suspects the Derro were trying to summon this appalling entity from its imprisonment. He shudders to think of the outcome should they have succeeded.
6. 65% chance. Andy rolled 17% – Wow!
7. XP Notes – No opponent XP for defeating the Derro group. This is covered within the successful finish XP. I have added successful Strength and Dexterity checks to the awards in proficiencies. Andrea gets a big idea bonus for asking for Astra's resurrection.
8. In future I am going to keep track of all character's career XP totals. This way should a character sheet get lost there is no argument about where the character should be.