

Context

Over a hundred dwarves worked under the Light Collector's direction. They were the least magical of his various construction forces, and the most essential. Several of them died during the construction of the facilities beneath Mount Smaggaroth.

Dwarven labor contracts always include a clause for the death of the dwarf—an extensive tomb is always mandatory. Dwarves value their tombs more than their houses (and they value incentives for their employers to keep them alive).

Every dwarf lives and dies in debt. (It is shameful not to.) When they die, they are given a Letter of Indefinite Extension, which frees them from repayment and lowers their interest rate.

Dwarves are always buried with gold. (It is shameful not to be.) Their creditor can legally enter their tomb and claim their gold, but they need the Dwarven King's authority to do so. The king—as the ultimate debtholder in dwarven society—will only authorize this usage when calling in his own loans. Money then flows from the crypts to the intermediate moneylenders to the royal coffers.

Because of this system, dwarven tombs almost function as the kingdom's emergency fund.

In dwarven cities, the tombs are guarded by royal banks and by taboo. Outside of their homelands, dwarven tombs must be protected by traps.

Overview

The Builders' Tomb is a trap dungeon—there are few monsters. *Because of this*, it risks being especially lethal, since no amount of leveling up can help you survive a 500 foot fall. (It's level-agnostic in that way, and is suitable for parties of all levels.)

In addition to regular puzzle-solving skills, solving the Builders' Tomb will also require a party to be aware of dwarven racial abilities and dwarven culture. Print out the *Common*

Common Knowledge About Dwarves

- Dwarves are short-statured, long-lived, and have great beards.
- They love digging, and revere deep places.
- A common Dwarven insult is “lazy bird”, because birds don’t *do anything*.
- Labor gives them purpose. They love hard work above all else.
- Dwarves think that humans:
 - ... have no purpose.
 - ... overanalyze everything.
 - ... should stop trying to be clever, and just put in some hard work.
- Dwarves have unique senses.
 - They can “see” the temperature of objects, a form of weak heat vision.
 - They can tell at a glance if a floor has a slight slope or a wall is uneven.

[illegible]

Dungeon

Dwarven Design

All lines are straight, all corners are square corners. All of the walls and floors are cut into squares, so all the floors appear sort of tiled. The surfaces are usually ingrained with small, repetitive patterns of squares and/or grids. Nearly all squares are one beard long on each side.

The tomb is pitch black and the ceiling is 12' high in most rooms.

Getting Stuck

If the players get stuck, there are a couple of ways to get unstuck.

First, any of the doors can be destroyed. Three people can accomplish this in 6 hours (2 working, 1 resting). They require a sledgehammer, a crowbar, and three iron spikes. The iron spikes are destroyed in this process, being blunted beyond usage.

Second, there is a clue-giving ghost in 18 FOURTH TOMB.

Reaching the Tomb

The Builders' Tomb is accessed through a door on the rock wall, near the top of the Caldera Descent.

If the party ever rides the birdcage up to the Caldera Stockpile, they will probably notice it near the top of their trip. The easiest way to reach the door is to rappel 20' down to it from the lowest available ledge.

There is no place to stand in front of the door. Your ropes will have to support your weight while you figure out how to open it.

1 ENTRANCE

Above the door is a huge stone panel, 5' square. A warning is carved onto it in both Dwarvish, Gospeltongue (Common), and Urshekka.

“Know that the great works that you now travel were built by 4,381,620 hours of glorious labor by the First Union of Smaggaroth under the wages of the Light Collector who is Tireless. May He Always Be Effective.

We welcome you, worthy dwarves, on the day that lawful claim is made of our debts. Bring your torch near the door, fellows, and find the entrance with great discernment.

To robbers, humans, undermen, and those without purpose: begone. Here you will know only death.”

At the bottom is a shorter inscription in Orcish. The nearest translation is:

“Fuck off and die.”

The door is covered by a 5x4 grid of metal buttons that appear identical.

Around the left and right sides of the doorframe are vertical rows of holes, ten to a side, each one about 1” in diameter. If a torch is held up to these holes, you can see the visible tip of a spear inside each one, ready to thrust forward when triggered.

[Solution] Press the button that is different from the others. All of the buttons are iron, except for one that is made of iridium. The iridium button heats up much slower than the iron buttons. If a torch is used to heat the buttons, this will be obvious to any dwarf.

Humans still need a way to figure out which button is different, though, so their options include:

- Heating up the buttons then touching them by hand.
- Pouring acid on them. (Iridium corrodes uniquely.)
- Scratching them. (Iron is softer.)
- Brute force—press all the buttons, trigger all the traps.

[Punishment] The first time the trap is triggered, spears stab out from the twenty holes, dealing 3d6 damage to anyone within 5' of the door (Def or Dex for half).

The second time the trap is triggered, the stone slab falls forward from above the door. A new panel is revealed that says “Fly then, birds.” Anyone in the area 5' in front of the door takes 2d6 damage (no save) and must save vs. rope breakage. (2-in-6 for common hemp rope.) The slab falls 800' and eventually shatters in the Mushroom Garden, where the Mostly Hag will use them as plates when she serves mushroom cakes.

The third time the trap is triggered, it is identical to the first. The fourth time the trap is triggered, the spears slide out at a snail's pace while internal springs whine, then become locked in an extended position.

[Discussion] A few things make this puzzle much easier than it looks.

First, it is possible to brute-force a solution, just through trial-and-error. A party that does this might not learn the importance of dwarven racial abilities, but they will perhaps appreciate the difficulty and lethality of what awaits inside.

Second, the spear trap is exceedingly obvious. The spears only stab things that are within the 5' area directly in front of the door. There are many ways that a party can mash buttons without risk. The falling slab isn't much deadlier—it mostly just serves to illustrate how ingenious the dwarves can be when it comes to their traps.

Thirdly, I urge the DM to be generous in their clue giving. If the player holds a torch up to the buttons and then touches them, tell them *clearly* that one of the buttons doesn't seem to heat up.

2 FIRST CRYPT

Like all dwarven construction, nearly everything is carved into **squares**. You stand on a grid. The sides of each square are exactly one beard in length.

A 10' **statue of a wizard** looms in the back of this room. It is made from white marble. Although the statue has a stave resting against his shoulder, both of its hands rest on a mattock. A little brass mole figurine (worth 10s) sits on top of his right hand, and an ant is painted on top of his left. If the brass mole figurine is picked up, a keyhole is revealed in the statue's hand.

A **stone sarcophagus** sits in the center of the room, its lid carved with a dwarf in repose. Close inspection reveals that his mouth is hinged (like a nutcracker) and his stone-carved belt has stone-carved studs. From left to right, they form the pattern of **!▲!▲!▲▲!**.

If the sarcophagus is opened, a dwarven corpse can be found inside. Arrayed around him are **dwarven work clothes**, **boots**, a **lunchbox**, and a **pickaxe** wrapped in wax paper (all brand new and of good quality). Around his neck is a **cloth bag** containing a **golden cube** (worth 600s), a letter of indefinite extension, and a note. The note was written by two different hands.

I AM SNORLA COALTOP OF THE FIRST OF THE NINTH OF THE SEVENTH CITADEL. I GIVE THANKS TO THE LIGHT COLLECTOR FOR MY LABOR AND MY PURPOSE. MAY MY GOLD BRING STRENGTH TO OUR CITIES. ALTHOUGH I SLUMBER NOW I WILL PATIENTLY AWAIT THE DAY WHEN I AM CALLED AGAIN TO TOIL. GOODNIGHT.

Tunnel-maker ninth class. Died 19th Year in the Age of Embers. Tunnel collapsed while excavating the third mile of the alchemy lab water supply tunnel. Home citadel rendered Ownership of standing obligations rendered to Citadel 1st of 9th of 7th. Determined to be Not At Fault: no penalties accrued.

Note: it is currently the 85th Year in the Age of Embers.

[Solution] The stone studs on the belt can be removed. If the last two studs are removed and switched, the mouth of the graven dwarf pops open to reveal a key. (The backs of the studs have a unique arrangements of pins, making them a sort of key on their own.) If any studs are removed except these two, see Punishment below.

If the key is inserted into the belt of the statue and turned, the floor in front of the statue falls down forming a ramp. Anyone standing directly in front of the statue will slide down harmlessly, tumbling into 3 INTERSECTION.

[Punishment] The hollow lid of the sarcophagus contains a deadly poison gas. (The interior of the sarcophagus is safe, and only contains a corpse.) The poison gas spurts out whenever an incorrect belt stud is removed, or if any part of the lid is damaged. All creatures within 5' are exposed to poison gas (1d6/round, Con save ends).

[Discussion] The belt puzzle is easy, but it is meant to instruct. There are many puzzles in the dungeon where the solution can be found by identifying a pattern, and then correcting the pattern.

This room has a second lesson: not all puzzles will tell you that they are puzzles. Most players will pick up the brass mole and notice the keyhole, and this will clue them into the idea that (1) they need to move objects and investigate, and (2) sometimes puzzle rooms don't tell you that they are puzzle rooms.

And when a player tells you that they want to look at the sarcophagus, mention the belt stud pattern in your first glob of description. Give them more information earlier. (This room is also meant to train you, not just the players.)

3 INTERSECTION

On the east wall, a decorative painting of a tree. See Handout XX.

[**Secret**] The painting of a tree is actually a map of the dungeon. Each leaf indicates a tomb where a dwarf is buried. The mottled leaf is the disgraced dwarf XX. The leaf with two tips indicates two burials in one tomb. And the greyed leaf indicates the position of the fourth tomb and its disgraced inhabitant.

In addition to pointing out secret areas, the tree painting is also used to solve 34 FINAL PUZZLE.

[**Discussion**] Your players are unlikely to realize the significance of this tree until much later. This is fine. Just make sure they don't forget that it exists. When they leave the dungeon make sure you throw in a line about "... and you go past the tree mural before going up the ramp. ...".

4 STATUES

Back wall: a **sealed door**, **three number-tumblers**, and a **lever**. These tumblers are featured in many rooms, and they are all the same. Each tumbler is huge, about 4' tall, and can be rotated to display any numeral from 0-9. Enter a 3-digit number and pull the lever. If the correct combination is entered, the door opens. If the combination is incorrect, refer to the Punishment section below.

The walls are covered in **hundreds of single digit numbers**, without any pattern.

Left side: a **statue of a dwarf** with gemstone eyes (made from carved stone, not real gemstones). His raised arm holds a regular oil lantern, his curled finger serving as a hook.

Right side: **three dwarven soldier statues**, their empty hands posed as if they were holding a pole or something similar. Behind them is a **long chest**.

- The first soldier has one badge that depicts a diamond.
- The second soldier has two badges, each depicting a crescent moon.
- The third soldier has three badges, each depicting a circle.

Inside the chest there is a **spear** (6' long), a crescent-bladed **bardiche** (5' long), and a **sledgehammer** (4' long). The head of the sledgehammer is an odd metal—a little softer and shinier than the others. (Note: the sledgehammer is actually a magnet and can be used to easily solve a much later puzzle in 25 BALLS.)

[Solution] Match the weapons with the soldiers and light the torch.

- The spear matches with the diamond (the speartip has a diamond cross-section).
- The crescent moon matches with the bardiche.
- The circle matches with the sledgehammer (the head has a circular cross-section).

The light from the torch casts shadows. The shadows point at the correct numbers on the wall. If those numbers are entered into the tumbler and the lever pulled, the door will open.

The combination can be anything you want, but let's just say it's 3-9-8.

[Punishment] The dwarven statues perform three rapid spins. The person pulling the lever is safe, but if the statues are armed, anyone else near the middle of the room is subject to a Level 3 attack that does 1d8 damage on a hit. This trap only triggers once.

[Discussion] This is a training puzzle, so be *very clear* with your descriptions. Your players cannot solve anything if they can't picture the correct room layout.

The first time they see the statues, tell them *explicitly* that the statues seem to be ready to hold a pole-like object—don't wait for them to say "I investigate the statues". Make sure that they understand that the statue is holding an actual oil lantern, not a stone version of a lantern. Be sure that you describe the crescent-bladed bardiche as "*crescent-bladed*". Matching the weapons to the statues is supposed to be easy.

Having said that, this is a very simple puzzle. All you have to do is (1) match the things, and (2) interact with the objects that have obvious functions. Zelda games have honed these skills in most players.

The primary purpose of this room is to teach players how the three-digit tumblers are used.

5 STORM

Back wall: a **sealed door**, **three number-tumblers**, and a **lever**.

On the right wall is a **painted wall panel**: an underground scene in front of a dwarven citadel. Five dwarves are leading a goat, a pig, and an elephant.

On the left wall is a **painted wall panel**. It depicts a colossal storm, with winds strong enough to uproot trees. In the sky, seven birds are being torn apart by the wind and hail.

In the middle of the painting, animals await their turn to enter the safety of the caves. There are three goats, half a dozen pigs, and a pair of naked humans (who look as panicked as all the other animals).

In the bottom right, huge waves as the world begins to flood.

[**Solution**] The three-digit tumbler tells us that we need to find a 3 digit number somehow. The three animals on the ramp are the key, instructing you to count those same animals on the other painting.

On the left painting, there are 3 goats, 6 pigs, and 0 elephants. The combination is 3-6-0.

[**Punishment**] Every time an incorrect answer is entered, increasingly menacing mechanical sounds come from behind the wall. Nothing actually happens, though.

[**Discussion**] This is a training puzzle. There are few extraneous details, so that players will have an easier time figuring out what is being asked of them here. This type of puzzle (“figure out how to extract three numbers out of something that doesn’t seem to have numbers”) is very common in this dungeon.

6 DIORAMA

Back wall: a **sealed door**.

In the center of the room is a **huge diorama**. It depicts a cutaway view of Mt. Smaggaroth, showing the area from the caldera down to the conjunction. Dwarf miniatures (2" tall) are scattered throughout the diorama, hard at work. The machinery of the diorama is visible—it seems to be missing 3 cogs.

On the side of the diorama is a **hand-wheel**. Turning the wheel has no effect.

Inspecting the diorama:

- Most of the figurines are attached to tiny mechanisms. It looks like they animate when the diorama is turned on.
- There are ten miners, with tiny pickaxes. Most of them are inspecting a tiny boulder.
- There are ten carpenters, with tiny axes. Most of them are building a house underground—a miniature mansion.
- There are ten blacksmiths, crafting a heap of cogs.
- There is one white-haired dwarf with a cane, who seems to be speaking to a 4-armed gargoyle.

[Solution] There are three cogs hidden in the diorama, each one a slightly different size.

- Most of the blacksmiths' cogs are faulty, warped, or incomplete. Cog #1 is hidden among the useless cogs.
- The roof of the mansion can be lifted up. Inside is a black-haired woman sitting over a spinning wheel, made from around Cog #2.
- The boulder is made from fired clay. If it is smashed, you'll find Cog #3 inside.

Fit all three cogs into their places and turn the wheel. The diorama will animate. The miners will mine ("*tink tink*"), the carpenters will chop ("*chop chop*"), and the blacksmiths will hammer ("*bam bam*"). All in all, it makes a repetitive *tink-chop-tink-chop-bam-bam-bam* pattern.

It will repeat that pattern three times, faster and faster, then the door will open and the machine slams to a halt. (You can turn the wheel to replay the diorama, but the door remains open throughout.)

[Punishment] What appears to be a miniature pit lord appears with a puff of smoke. He attacks with a flaming sword (2" long) and tiny flaming whip. This is Faklak, and he is a *glamoured imp*. He targets the person nearest the diorama, and if they are within 5', he attacks with surprise.

Faklak the Imp

Lvl 1 (HP 1) Def as dragon (high agility) **Sword/Whip** 1d4/1d3

Move as bird **Int** as child **Dis** cowardly, but bound to his oath

If captured, he begs for his life. He can talk about how he was summoned by the Light Collector and another demon with lots of faces full of teeth (this is Shinedown). The big demon was scary, but the wizard was much scarier. Then he was given to a weird old dwarf with a cane, who was also pretty mean to him. Then he was bound into the diorama and they didn't give him any books to read or anything.

Faklak vanishes as soon as the puzzle is solved or he is killed. His duty is complete, much to his delight.

[Discussion] The players can conceivably break the diorama and lock themselves out of the rest of the dungeon. Be sure to give them a "are you sure you want to smash it?" before you let them destroy it.

The imp mostly just for fun. He relays useful information that can also be learned elsewhere, so it's no loss if the players don't interact with him.

Be sure to say the *tink-chop-tink-chop-bam-bam-bam* pattern out loud. The players will need it later.

7 SECOND CRYPT

A simple room with a **sarcophagus** in the middle.

On the left wall: **three hooks**, each holding a 50' coil of waxed rope. In good condition.

On the right wall: **an alcove** holding a dwarven mining helmet (masterwork). It can be filled with oil and used as a regular oil lamp.

Inside the sarcophagus:

- A dwarven corpse, wrapped in linens.
- Boots
- Lunchbox
- 100' of string connected a plumb bob (lead weight) with knots at half-beard increments (about 1.3 feet)
- A magnetic compass in a clamshell case
- A cloth bag around his neck containing
 - A gold cube (worth 700s)
 - A letter of indefinite extension
 - A handwritten note, written by two different hands:

I AM CHEORGIE ARCHIRON OF THE FIRST OF THE NINTH OF THE SEVENTH CITADEL. I GUESS I'M DEAD NOW SO I MIGHT AS WELL SAY THAT MOST OF YOU WERE PROPER ASSHOLES MOST OF THE TIME ESPECIALLY SHATTERLY AND I HOPE I DIDN'T DIE BECAUSE HE IS SO SHIT AT MAYNTAYNING THE ROPES BUT IF I DIDN'T DIE FROM A SHITTY ROPE I PROBABLY DIED FROM IRONBLOOMS SHITTY COOKING. IT ALWAYS TASTED LIKE RAT EVEN WHEN WE WEREN'T HAVING RAT AND I DON'T KNOW HOW YOU MAKE SUCH HORRIBLE SHIT IRONBLOOM, YOU MUST BE SOME SORT OF GEENYUS AT MAKING THINGS TASTE LIKE A RAT'S ASSHOLE BUT NOW THAT I'M GETTING TO THE END OF MY NOTE I GUESS MOST OF YOU WEREN'T SO BAD AND MAYBE I'LL MISS YOU BOYS AFTER ALL.

Surveyor Fourth-class. Died 26th Year in the Age of Embers. Entangled in machinery when laying pilings for reactor basin. Ownership of standing obligations rendered to Citadel 1st of 9th of 7th. Determined to be Not At Fault: no penalties accrued.

Note: it is currently the 85th Year in the Age of Embers.

8 NUMBERS

Back wall: a **sealed door**, **three number-tumblers**, and a **lever**. Above each of the tumblers there is a set of symbols.

- First tumbler: ☾ (*crescent*)
- Second tumbler: ●●● (*circle-circle-circle*)
- Third tumbler: ● ☾ ◆ (*circle-crescent-diamond*)

An inscription above the door says:

“If you are lost, arm thyself.”

On the floor is a single **line of numbers** that stretches from wall to wall. The first “number” is not a number, but is instead some sort of thick vertical line. The room is 20 feet across, and each tile is 1 foot across, so there are 20 tiles across the room.

	7	1	2	8	9	1	0	7	1	9	4	5	3	1	9	7	0	6	5
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[**Solution**] You’ll need the weapons from a different room to solve this puzzle. In 4 STATUES, there is a sledgehammer (4’ long, circular cross-section), a crescent-moon bardiche (5’ long), and a spear (6’ long, circular cross-section).

These weapons will be used as measuring sticks. The first tumbler (*crescent moon*) requires the 5’ bardiche to be used once. A player who measures 5’ from the starting line will arrive at 9. All three numbers are generated similarly.

The combination is 9-5-9.

[**Punishment**] If the lever is pulled with an incorrect answer on the tumbler, it becomes temporarily electrified and makes only a small *bzz* sound. If the puller is wearing leather gloves, they won’t even notice this.

If the puller is ungloved, or using something conductive, they are electrocuted. They are paralyzed and smoke begins to rise from their skin. They take 1d6 damage immediately, which repeats every 3 seconds. If someone tries to pull them away with bare hands, they'll become electrocuted, too. (A safe solution is probably to just kick them off the lever.)

[**Discussion**] A simple training puzzle. It has two purposes. First, it teaches the players that sometimes they will need items from other rooms. This only applies to a few puzzles in this dungeon, but it's best to establish this fact early in the dungeon (as this might be the first tumbler puzzle room they enter). It's better than allowing them to get 10 puzzles in and then get stumped because "they didn't know they were allowed to use other rooms".

Second, it serves as a soft lock, requiring the players to explore the wings of the dungeon a bit before they progress deeper down the central hallway (where there are harder puzzles and bigger treasures). Rooms 19 and 23 are also soft locks.

The electrocution trap isn't too bad, but if everyone is hiding outside of the room where they think they'll be safe, it will take them longer to run over and save the lever puller before they fry to death. If the lever puller is alone when they get paralyzed, they'll die, and the rest of the party won't find out until they smell something cooking. Because you don't know what sort of trap will trigger when you enter an incorrect answer, the question of "where do we stand when a lever is pulled?" is also a type of emergent puzzle. Whenever a player tells you that they are pulling a lever, be sure to ask where everyone is standing.

9 DECAPITATION HALL

A long hallway. Like every room so far, the floor is covered with square-cut tiles. The walls have deep horizontal grooves every foot, wide enough to stick your finger in.

Halfway through the hallway, you must pass through a pair of dwarf statues. They each hold a spear vertically. Strung between them is a **banner** that reads:

"Stand tall and be proud, brothers. Give thanks that you are proportioned effectively."

[Trap] In the second half of the hallway, once past the statues, there are three hidden pressure plates in the floor. When triggered, blades fly out of the wall, decapitating anyone of human height within 5' of that pressure plate if they fail a Dex save. Creatures of dwarven height are safe.

[Discussion] The hallway looks trapped as fuck. Make sure you communicate to your players how suspicious this hallway is. If your players are especially new, feel free to add extra details, like how each tile makes a different *click* sound when you step on it.

The blades are potentially deadly, but the suspicious hallway combined with the suspicious instruction to “stand tall” should make this hallway pretty passable for most parties. Plus, everyone’s seen Indiana Jones, and knows a decapitation hallway when they see one.

There are a bunch of effective ways to protect yourself against the blades—even the traditional 10’ pole floor-tapping method works here. Allow any half-way reasonable idea to succeed.

The hallway reinforces the message that this dungeon is “easy for dwarves, deadly for humans”. The next room reinforces it even more.