



CAVES OF ANCIENT SECRETS

A Return to the Temple of Elemental Evil

Web Enhancement by Monte Cook

Return to the Temple of Elemental Evil offers an epic adventure that takes characters from 4th to 14th levels. *Caves of Ancient Secrets*, contains additional encounters designed to be played with that adventure. This small section of caverns, older than The Temple of All-Consumption (see Part 2 of *Return to the Temple*) is played during Chapter 5: The Crater Ridge Mines. It climaxes in a meeting with the half-fiend aboleth who took over the role of the Master from the current Second of the Triad (see Chapter 6: The Inner and Outer Fanes).

The bonus material in the *Caves of Ancient Secrets* web enhancement adds to the background and theme of the entire *Return to the Temple of Elemental Evil* adventure. It's exclusive to the Wizards of the Coast website: www.wizards.com/dnd.

BACKGROUND

One of the reasons Mount Stalagos was chosen as the center of the Tharizdun cult years ago was because it was so near an ancient colony of aboleths and their kuo-toan allies—all servants of Tharizdun. The aboleths beneath Stalagos are keepers of truly vile and dark secrets.

All the kuo-toas in the Crater Ridge mines know about this area, as do any non-kuo-toan Water Priests and the Triad. The Second of the Triad once lived here, before the creation of the Temple of All-Consumption.

MAP KEY

About 50 feet from the beginning of the secret passage in Area 193 (see Chapter 5 of *Return to the Temple*), there is a chamber with a 15-foot-diameter shaft going down. This shaft leads to an area beneath Mount Stalagos—beneath the lake that bears the mountain's name—where a small but ancient enclave of aboleths and their servants dwells. A map of these caves appears on page 3.

This portion of the adventure assumes that the PCs find some means to descend down the shaft (Climb DC 20).

1. The Plunge

Read or paraphrase the following aloud:

The shaft plunges down at least 300 feet. The sides are slick and the air feels cool and damp. The walls of the last 20 feet of the shaft are lined with iron. The bottom of the shaft is a metal grate, and level with the grate, in the north portion of the wall, stands an iron door.

These metal walls are carved with disturbing images of fish and fish-like humanoids torturing humans, elves, dwarves, and halflings before a misshapen, tentacled horror.

The door is not locked. Below the grate lies a huge reservoir of water. When the lever at the spot on the map marked "A" is pulled, water pressure increases below, pushing water up the shaft to fully submerge it. This allows the inhabitants of the areas down here to swim up and down to the Crater Ridge Mines when needed. Normally, however, the water level remains low to make it difficult to get down to this level.

2. Guard Post (EL 7)

Read or paraphrase the following aloud:

This large cave smells of fish. The damp walls are crusted with lime, forming strange, alien shapes on the walls.

This cave is empty except for the guards stationed here. **Creatures.** Six kuo-toas have been commanded to wait here and attack any non-authorized creatures that enter the complex.

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Kuo-toas (6): hp 9, 11, 15, 8, 10, 11; see *Monster Manual* page 125.

Tactics. These creatures throw spears, then dive into close combat with a religious fervor. They believe they are invincible here (since they've never faced defeat).

Development. These guards come into Area 1 to investigate the sounds of anyone moving around. If they hear fighting elsewhere or cries for help (in Kuo-Toa), they move to assist.

General Information

The caverns in this area are, for the most part, natural and not a part of the Crater Ridge Mines. In fact, the dwarves that created the mines never came here.

Unlike those above, the kuo-toas and other creatures here do not bear any symbols—even of the Elder Elemental Eye. A few have obex symbols of Tharizdun, but those are mentioned specifically in the various locations.

Remember to make Listen checks for guards and other creatures—to make this easy, however, assume that they all roll a 0. The whips in Area 5, for example, will hear a fight in Area 4 since the whips have Listen check bonuses of +8, and the DC to hear a pitched battle is –10 modified by +1 per 10 feet of distance, +5 per closed door (for a final DC of 0)

All ceilings are about 15 feet high unless otherwise noted, and doors are stone (Hardness 8, 60 hp, Break DC 28 if locked).

The inhabitants of Areas 1 to 22 know the layout of these areas and the general floor plan of the whole temple complex above (they know there's a lake in the middle of the crater and three bridges that go out to an island where the masters of the place reside), and that's about it. The aboleths and 1 in 6 kuo-toas know about Areas 177 and 197 of the Crater Ridge Mines (the Water Temple) in detail.

See "The Effects of Water" sidebar on page 5 for important rules that will come up as you play through encounters in these submerged caves.

Kuo-toas (4): hp 11, 13, 10, 12; see *Monster Manual* page 125.

Treasure: The finely crafted conch-shell horn is worth 120 gp.

3. Empty Cave

Read or paraphrase the following:

A small, lime-filled pool lies in the north portion of this cave, next to a column of rock rising from floor to ceiling.

4. Kuo-Toan Complex Entrance (EL 8)

Read or paraphrase the following:

The walls and floor here are smooth, worked stone. Each stone has ancient images carved upon it—grotesqueries of kuo-toan depravity. A large conch-shell horn rests on a wooden stand next to the entrance from the north.

Standard procedure is to pick up the horn and blow it, announcing yourself as one of the faithful.

There are peepholes from areas marked 4A, where guards are stationed. Finding the secret doors to these areas requires a Search check (DC 20).

Creatures. Four kuo-toas wait in each of the guard areas, one watching through the peephole at all times. If they see trouble, they come out through the secret doors and attack.

Kuo-toas (4): hp 11, 13, 10, 12; see

Monster Manual page 125.

Treasure: The finely crafted conch-shell horn is worth 120 gp.

5. Chamber of the Whip (EL 7)

There are two of these chambers. The description below suits either one.

This cold room is painted black with a thick pitch. Even the ceiling and floor are black. A purple mat of woven seaweed lies in the middle of the floor, just big enough for a person to kneel upon.

These rooms remain virtually empty, for better meditation upon the Dark God.

Creatures. A whip meditates in each of these rooms. If disturbed by the sounds of combat or alarm, they come out to defend the shrine (Area 6). If disturbed by the sound of the blowing horn, they come to escort the worshippers.

Drapood and Jopaarg (whips): Male kuo-toas Clr5; CR 7; Medium-size monstrous humanoid (6 ft. tall); HD 2d8+2 plus 5d8+5; hp 41 and 43; Init +0; Spd 20 ft., swim 50 ft.; AC 18, touch 10, flat-footed 20; Atk +6 melee (1d10+1, pincer staff), +1 melee (1d4, bite); SA Pincer staff; SQ Insanity, slippery, adhesive, immunities, electricity resistance 30, light blindness, amphibious; AL NE; SV Fort +7, Ref +4, Will +8; Str 13, Dex 10, Con 13, Int 13, Wis 14, Cha 8.

Skills and Feats: Concentration +6, Escape Artist +18*, Heal +6, Knowledge (religion) +6, Listen +8, Move Silently +3, Search +10*, Spellcraft +6, Spot +10*, Alertness, Great Fortitude, Exotic Weapon (pincer staff), Scribe Scroll.

* An asterisk indicates a +15 racial bonus to Escape Artist and +4 racial bonus to Spot and Search.

Insanity: Adds +1 to DC of spells cast. –1 to all Wisdom checks.

Pincer Staff (Ex): A pincer staff deals 1d10 points of bludgeoning damage, threatens a critical hit on a 20, and deals double damage on a critical hit. It has a 10-foot reach and cannot be used against an adjacent opponent. A wielder that hits an opponent of at least Small but no greater than Large size attempts to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If the wielder gets a hold, the staff grabs the opponent and deals 1d10 points of damage each round the hold is maintained.

Keen Sight (Ex): Can spot a moving object or creature even if it is invisible, ethereal, or astral. Only by remaining perfectly still can such objects or creatures avoid notice.

Slippery (Ex): Webs, magic or otherwise, don't affect kuo-toa, and they usually can wriggle free from most other forms of confinement.

Adhesive (Ex): Anyone who makes an *unsuccessful* melee attack against a kuo-toa must succeed at a Reflex save (DC 14), or the attacker's weapon sticks to the shield and is yanked out of the wielder's grip. Creatures using natural weapons are automatically grappled if they get stuck.

Immunities (Ex): Kuo-toa are immune to poison and paralysis. The various *hold* spells also have no effect on them, and their keen sight automatically detects figments for what they are.

Light Blindness (Ex): Abrupt exposure to bright light (such as sunlight or a *daylight* spell) blinds kuo-toa for 1 round. In addition, they suffer a -1 circumstance penalty to all attack rolls, saves, and checks while operating in bright light.

Possessions (Drapood): wand of darkness (48 charges), scrolls of *magic vestment*, *wall of stone*, large shield, pincer staff, 14 pp, obex symbol.

Possessions (Jopaarg): pearl of power (3rd level), potion of *invisibility*, large shield, pincer staff, 11 pp, obex symbol.

Spells Prepared (5/4+1/3+1/2+1): 0—*cure minor wounds*, *detect magic*, *read magic*, *resistance* (2); 1st—*command* (2), *cure light wounds*, *obscuring mist**, *protection from good*; 2nd—*bull's strength*, *endurance*, *hold person*, *Tharizdun's touch**; 3rd—*cure serious wounds*, *dispel magic*, *rage**.

*Domain Spells. Deity: Tharizdun. Domains: Madness (Use Insanity penalty to Wisdom as a bonus to Wisdom once per day); Water (turn or destroy fire creatures, rebuke or command water creatures).

Tactics: Drapood and Jopaarg fight best when they are together. Both are usually encountered with *bull's strength* and *endurance* already in effect. Typically, Drapood uses *rage* while Jopaarg offers support with *command* spells and healing after becoming *invisible* with his potion.

6. Shrine (EL varies)

Read or paraphrase the following aloud:

This large area is cold. The walls are black and carved in an elaborate relief that gives the impression of writhing tentacles or snakes (or both). The floor is covered in a woven mat of dried, purple seaweed that is occasionally stained with reddish-brown splotches. Hovering in the air, a nimbus of black energy 10 feet across fluctuates menacingly.

This entire area is unholy, as described in the spell *unhallow*. In addition to the *protection from good* effect, and the -4 to turning undead attempts (+4 to rebuke undead attempts), the *unhallow* continually grants all evil beings an *aid* spell as cast by an 10th-level caster while they remain in this room.

Any creature of good alignment that touches the black energy suffers 10d6 points of damage (no save). Any creature of good alignment that even enters this room draws a pulse of the black energy that summons a wraith from the darkness.

The kuo-toa treat the blackness as an altar of sorts, praying to the Dark God through it. It is a direct extension of his power.

Creatures. These wraiths attack good creatures immediately.

Wraiths (varies): hp 82; see *Monster Manual* page 185.

7. Common Pool.

Read or paraphrase the following aloud:

This chamber is filled with a fairly shallow pool 30 feet long and 25 feet wide. A narrow ledge on either side connects the east and west halves of the room.

The pool measures 4 feet deep. This is where the kuo-toa congregate when not on duty.

8. Monitor's Quarters (EL 10)

Read or paraphrase the following aloud:

A 6-foot-long, 3-foot-wide, 3-foot-high wooden basin filled with water occupies the center of this spartan room. Long strands of seashells entwined in string dangle from the ceiling throughout the chamber.

This chamber belongs to the leader of the complex. Vuoor sleeps in the basin.

Creatures. Vuoor the monitor and his shield guardian are here. The shield guardian (a gift from the Inner Fane long ago to win the favor of these creatures) is made from stone, coral and fishbones as well as iron. It has a *fireball* spell (cast at 10th level) stored within it, which it casts if ever Vuoor is killed.

Shield guardian: hp 82; see *Monster Manual* page 163.

Vuoor (monitor): Male kuo-toa Mnk6; CR 8; Medium-size monstrous humanoid (aquatic); HD 2d8+2 (kuo-toa) plus 6d8+6 (Mnk); hp 46; Init +0 (Dex); Spd 50 ft., swim 50 ft.; AC 24, touch 16, flat-footed 20; Atk +6/+3 melee (1d8+1, unarmed attack) or +9 melee (1d8+2/x3, +1 *longspear*) or +9 ranged (1d8+2/x3, +1 *longspear*); SA stunning attack, improved trip; SQ dodge, deflect arrows, evasion, still mind, slow fall, keen sight, slippery, immunities, light blindness; AL NE; SV Fort +8, Ref +10, Will +9; Str 13, Dex 14, Con 13, Int 10, Wis 16, Cha 10.

Skills and Feats: Balance +6, Climb +3, Escape Artist +20, Knowledge (religion) +5, Jump +5, Listen +12, Move Silently +11, Search +9, Spot +12, Tumble +8; Alertness, Deflect Arrows, Dodge, Great Fortitude, Improved Trip, Weapon Finesse (unarmed attack).

Keen Sight (Ex): Kuo-toas spot a moving object or creature even if invisible, ethereal, or astral.

Slippery (Ex): Skin secretions make kuo-toas immune to webs and grant a bonus to Escape Artist checks.

Immunities (Ex): Immune to poison, paralyzation, *hold*, illusions, and natural diseases.

Light Blindness (Ex): Abrupt exposure to light (such as a *daylight* spell) blinds kuo-toas for 1 round. In addition, they suffer a -1 circumstance penalty to all attack rolls, saves, and checks while operating in bright light.

Possessions: *amulet of natural armor* +2, +1 *longspear*, *shield guardian amulet*, conch-shell horn.

Tactics: Vuoor lets the shield guardian take the brunt of all attacks, using his *longspear* at 10-foot reach length as long as possible.

Treasure: Vuoor keeps a small stash of treasure for emergencies hidden in his basin. This hoard consists of a burlap bag with 154 pp and three 100 gp garnets in an even smaller leather bag.

Development: If he hears fighting elsewhere, Vuoor comes to investigate with the shield guardian. If attacked himself, he uses his conch-shell horn to attempt to summon aid (such as from Area 10).

9. Barracks

There are two of these chambers; the text below applies to both of them.

This chamber contains 10 nestlike beds of weeds and woven cloth, as well as the occasional bag, box, or piece of equipment lying amid them. Dark war banners painted on sewn sheets of scaly flesh adorn the walls. They depict purple kuo-toan pincher staffs gripping skulls.

A careful search (DC 20) of these rooms produces 3d10 pp hidden amid the beds, as well as 1d4 large steel shields, 1d6 halfspears, and a random minor potion.

10. Spawning Pool. (EL 7)

Read or paraphrase the following aloud:

A 25-foot-square pool fills this room. It appears to be quite deep. Tiny creatures swim about in the water. Images of fish, crustaceans, frogs, and things far more bizarre cavort on the walls above and below the water.

A number of (harmless) kuo-toan spawn swim around this room. The pool is 20 feet deep.

Creatures. Four kuo-toan fighters are currently here, preparing to spawn.

Kuo-toa fighters: Male & female kuo-toa Ftr1; CR 3; Medium-size monstrous humanoid (aquatic); HD 2d8+2 (kuo-toa) plus 1d10+1 (Ftr); hp 18, 20, 21; Init +0 (Dex); Spd 20 ft., swim 50 ft.; AC 18, touch 10, flat-footed 18; Atk +6 melee (1d6+1/x3, halfspear) and -1 melee (1d4, bite) or +4 ranged (1d6+1/x3, halfspear); SQ Keen sight, slippery, adhesive, immunities, light blindness; AL NE; SV Fort +5, Ref +3, Will +5; Str 13, Dex 10, Con 13, Int 13, Wis 14, Cha 8.

Skills and Feats: Escape Artist +18, Knowledge (religion) +6, Listen +10, Move Silently +3, Search +10, Spot +11; Alertness, Great Fortitude, Weapon Finesse (halfspear).

Keen Sight (Ex): Kuo-toas spot a moving object or creature even if invisible, ethereal, or astral.

Slippery (Ex): Skin secretions make kuo-toas immune to webs and grant a bonus to Escape Artist checks.

Adhesive (Ex): Anyone who makes an unsuccessful melee attack against a kuo-toa must succeed at Reflex save (DC 14), or the attacker's weapon sticks to the kuo-toa's shield and is yanked out of the wielder's grip. Creatures using natural weapons are automatically grappled if they get stuck.

Immunities (Ex): Immune to poison, paralyzation, *hold*, and illusions.

Light Blindness (Ex): Abrupt exposure to light (such as a *daylight* spell) blinds kuo-toas for 1 round. In addition, they suffer a -1 circumstance penalty to all attack rolls, saves, and checks while operating in bright light.

Possessions: *potion of cure moderate wounds*, *potion of cat's*

grace, potion of bull's strength; masterwork spear, pouch with 50 gp, leather armor, large shield.

11. Desecrated Temple

Read or paraphrase the following aloud:

A huge pool stretches across this room. It appears to be at least 20 feet deep and filled with fish of various sizes. At the center of the pool is a raised square dais, upon which sits a bizarre statue of a human female with lobster claws for hands and a crustacean's head. Something appears to be caked over much of the statue.

The pool actually measures 30 feet deep. Close examination reveals that the statue has been defaced with cuts, crude carvings, and feces. This was once a shrine to Blibdoolpoolp, the traditional kuo-toan deity. The goddess was overthrown in favor of Tharizdun long ago by these particular kuo-toas, however.

The fish in the pool are all harmless, kept by the kuo-toas to harvest as food from time to time.

12. Prison

The door into this chamber is locked by a large iron lock (DC 30 to open). Only the whips and the monitor have keys.

Rusted iron manacles are bolted all along the walls in pairs here. It smells of waste and sweat. Two figures languish in the chains, barely recognizing your presence.

The kuo-toas keep this room as a prison. It was once used for sacrifices to Blibdoolpoolp, but now they are meant for Tharizdun.

Creatures. The prisoners, doomed to be sacrificed in Area 6 eventually, are weak, dehydrated, and starving. The first is a human named Terrin, who was hired to work in the Crater Ridge Mines for the temple, but eventually had a change of heart; he was caught trying to slip away. The other is a troglodyte secretly captured from the Earth Temple. The kuo-toas hate the trogs and want them all dead.

Rischak (troglodyte): hp 2 (max 12); see *Monster Manual* page 179.

Terrin: Male human War1; CR 1; Medium-size humanoid; HD 1d8+2; hp 3 (max 9); Init +1 (Dex); Spd 20 ft.; AC 18, touch 11, flat-footed 17; Atk +5 melee (1d10+2/19–20/x2, bastard sword), +2 ranged (1d8/19–20/x2, longbow); AL NE; SV Fort +2+1 Con, Ref +0+1 Dex, Will +0+1 Wis; Str 15, Dex 13, Con 14, Int 11, Wis 12, Cha 8.

Skills and Feats: Climb +4, Intimidate +4, Jump +4; Exotic Weapon Proficiency (bastard sword), Weapon Focus (bastard sword).

13. Storage

The door to this room is locked by a large iron lock (DC 25 to open). Only the whips and the monitor have keys.

Crates, barrels, and miscellaneous equipment half-fill this room. Nets, digging tools, stonemasonry tools, leatherworking tools, rope, and a large collection of shells appear among the clutter.

All of the materiel in this chamber is nonmagical.

14. Skum Lair (EL 8)

Read or paraphrase the following aloud:

Covering the walls of this dark cave are crude paintings showing scenes of battle, bloodlust, and inhuman depravity. Near the middle of the south wall lies a pile of small bones—many of them appear to be fish bones, but others belonged to larger beasts. The place smells particularly sour, and the splashing of water sounds in the near distance.

When the PCs arrive at this cave, the skum here are moving a large stone statue using ropes. The statue is of an aboleth with far more eyes and tentacles than even those horrible beasts are supposed to have. This is “The Guardian of Whispers,” an important figure in aboleth myth. They are dragging the statue from Area 15 to Area 22.

Creatures. Direct servants of the aboleths (as opposed to those subjugated by still semi-independent kuo-toa), the skum in this cave attack any intruders with hunger and savagery but retreat to Area 16 if more than four of them are slain.

Skum (8): hp: 11, 10, 12, 8, 9, 10, 15, 13; see *Monster Manual* page 166.

Liquid Ice

This oddly named concoction is made by aboleths and skum. It is a deep blue liquid that freezes upon contact with air. You can throw a flask of liquid ice as a grenadelike weapon (see the Grenadelike Weapon Attacks section in the *Player's Handbook*, page 138). It inflicts 1d6 points of cold damage in a direct hit, and 1 point on a splash.

On the round following a direct hit, the target suffers an additional 1d6 points of cold damage. Unlike alchemist's fire, to which it bears many similarities, there is no way to "extinguish" the ice. If sold, a flask of liquid ice is worth 30 gp.

Tactics. Each of the skum is armed with a flask of liquid ice (see sidebar) cinched around their waists on cords. They launch these grenadelike weapons before entering into melee with their claws and teeth.

Treasure: One of the skum wears a gold ring worth 95 gp.

15. Cave of Secrets (EL 8)

The entrance to this cave is trapped. The aboleths and kuo-toan clerics have devised a unique magical trap that activates only when a creature other than a skum, aboleth, or kuo-toa crosses the floor at the point marked "A" on the map.

When this happens, a *wall of fire* appears at the points marked "B" and "C" (20 feet apart), with the flames both focused toward point "A". This means that no matter where a character stands, he remains within 10 feet of one and within 20 feet of the other (thus suffering 3d4 points of fire damage). Anyone moving through one of the walls suffers 2d6+8 points of damage. The walls last for 10 rounds.

One round after the walls appear, two small vents in the floor begin issuing forth poison gas (Fortitude save DC 18, 1d4 points of temporary Dexterity damage and 1d4 more a minute later). A new save is required every round. Worst of all, however, the gas is flammable, increasing the damage suffered in between the walls by +1d6.

Wall of Fire/Poison Gas Trap: CR 6; As described above; Search (DC 30); Disable Device (DC 30).

Strange statuary fills this cave, and carved reliefs adorn its walls. These are images of horrible piscine creatures, tentacled beasts, and other, less identifiable things—creatures that one might see in a nightmare set in the dark ocean depths where no human has ever ventured and no ray of light has ever illuminated.

The central figure amid the statues is a creature half fish and half man with a wide, froglike head. It holds a bronze scroll tube, covered in verdigris, in its outstretched, finned hands.

If a character examines the carved images and statues and makes an Intelligence check (DC 15), she gathers from the strange pictures an idea of the story that they tell. She learns of a Dark God that was more like a force of destruction than a being (as we understand the idea) that came to the aboleths thousands of years ago and told them secrets of destruction and utter evil. The aboleths have worshiped this being ever since.

Anyone touching the scroll tube must make a Will saving throw (DC 17) or go insane (as described in the spell *insanity*).

Insanity Trap: CR 7; As described above; Search (DC 32); Disable Device (DC 32).

Inside, the tube holds *The Scroll of Written Whispers*, an ancient work inscribed upon mammal flesh (not human, for it is said to be magically preserved and predates humanity). It is written in the aboleth tongue and is a record of past events, horrible depravities, and vile secrets. This scroll would be worth up to 8,000 gp to the proper collector or historian.

16. Pool Cave (EL 8)

Read or paraphrase the following aloud:

The north half of this long cave is filled with water. At the water's edge, a squat stone statue of a froglike demon stares toward the southwest. The walls and floors feel very damp, and the place smells of fish.

The water is 10 feet deep, 15 near the north end.

Creatures. An aboleth and its four skum slaves dwell in the pool in this cave.

Aboleth: hp 78; see *Monster Manual* page 15.

Skum (4): hp: 10, 12, 10, 13; see *Monster Manual* page 166.

Tactics. In battle, the skum attack foes (even if it means climbing up onto dry land) while the aboleth stays back to use its psionic powers.

Development. The skum fight to the death, but at the first sign of real danger, the aboleth swims to Area 17.

Treasure: If anyone approaches the statue of the demon as says "Give me an elixir for the weak" in any language, a *potion of water breathing* appears in the demon's cupped hands. This can be used four times per day; the inhabitants here can occasionally bring air-breathing guests or prisoners to areas beyond. These special potions, made from aboleth mucus, become corrupt and impotent after sitting unused for one day.

17. Lair (EL 9)

Read or paraphrase the following aloud:

The water in this small cave looks darker and murkier than elsewhere. Strange and alien rock formations, with odd curves and spinelike growths, cover all surfaces.

The rock growths provide a +4 Hide bonus in this cave.

Creatures. Two aboleths call this cave home.

Aboleths (2): hp 70, 81; see *Monster Manual* page 15.

Tactics. The aboleths here use illusions and projected images to confuse opponents and mask their positions. If a few ensnare attempts fail, they begin hit-and-run tactics: One of them strikes foes in melee while the other uses illusions to confuse opponents, then they switch positions.

Development. The aboleth from Area 16 might also be here, if it retreated here following battle.

18. Empty Cave

Read or paraphrase the following aloud:

Steps descend down from the southwest into this cave, where the water level reaches the ceiling.

This cave is empty.

19. Kuo-Toa Cave (EL 8)

Read or paraphrase the following aloud:

The north end of this cave rises up and out of the water. A strange stone statue submerged in a natural alcove depicts a huge goggle-eyed fish man with a net and a long spear.

This is the dwelling place of the kuo-toa in charge of working directly with the aboleth masters of this complex. Although the aboleths subjugated the kuo-toa by force, the marine creatures are grateful to them for introducing them to the worship of the Dark God.

Creatures. The kuo-toa liaison with the aboleths is Uustra, a rogue/fighter.

Uustra: Female kuo-toa Rog4/Ftr2; CR 8; Medium-size monstrous humanoid (aquatic); HD 2d8+4 (kuo-

toa) plus 4d6+8 (Rog) plus 2d10+4 (Ftr); hp 52; Init +2 (Dex); Spd 20 ft., swim 50 ft.; AC 20, touch 12, flat-footed 18; Atk +10/+5 melee (1d6+3, +1 *halfspear*) and +1 melee (1d4+2, bite) or +10 ranged (1d6+3, +1 *halfspear*); SA Sneak attack +2d6; SQ Evasion, uncanny dodge, keen sight, slippery, adhesive, immunities, light blindness; AL NE; SV Fort +6, Ref +5, Will +5; Str 14, Dex 12, Con 14, Int 13, Wis 10, Cha 8.

Skills and Feats: Climb +5, Disable Device +3, Escape Artist +24, Knowledge (local) +5, Hide +7, Listen +11, Move Silently +10, Search +14, Sense Motive +4, Spot +13, Tumble +6; Alertness, Blind-fight, Cleave, Dodge, Iron Will, Power Attack.

Keen Sight (Ex): Kuo-toas spot a moving object or creature even if it is invisible, ethereal, or astral.

Slippery (Ex): Skin secretions make kuo-toas immune to webs and grant a bonus to Escape Artist checks.

Adhesive (Ex): Anyone who makes an unsuccessful melee attack against a kuo-toa must succeed at Reflex save (DC 14), or the attacker's weapon sticks to the kuo-toa's shield and is yanked out of the wielder's grip. Creatures using natural weapons are automatically grappled if they get stuck.

Immunities (Ex): Immune to poison, paralyzation, *hold*, and illusions.

Light Blindness (Ex): Abrupt exposure to light (such as a *daylight* spell) blinds kuo-toas for 1 round. In addition, they suffer a -1 circumstance penalty to all attack rolls, saves, and checks while operating in bright light.

Possessions: +1 *halfspear*, +1 *leather armor*, *potion of cure serious wounds*, large shield, pouch with 10 pp.

Tactics. If threatened, Uustra attempts to escape, hide, then attack later with her sneak attack bonus.

Development. Uustra does not leave this area except to flee if she has to. When retreating, she attempts to make it back to areas 4 through 13, where she has allies.

20. Dry Cave

Read or paraphrase the following aloud:

Bones litter the floor of this cave. Although the floor and walls feel damp, it is drier here than in the surrounding caves.

The passage to the west provides easy access down into the water. To the south, the drop-off is 10 feet.

The aboleths use this cave in a cruel sort of sacrifice: They put surface-dwelling captives here and let them starve to death slowly. Each day that prisoners remain here, the aboleths come and chant for an hour telepathically, dedicating the starving victims' souls to Tharizdun.

Treasure. Although the inhabitants of the caves usually try to take any valuables from their prisoners, a bone wand of *cure light wounds* (10 charges) lies amid the bones here (DC 30 to find with a Search check).

21. Underwater Gauntlet (EL 1)

Read or paraphrase the following aloud:

Long metal spikes protrude from all surfaces of this underwater cave. It appears extremely dangerous to attempt to swim through it.

Anyone trying to swim through this cave must make a Swim check (DC 25) or suffer 2d6 points of damage from the spikes. A natural swimmer (a creature with a natural swim movement rate) automatically makes the check.

22. Cavern of the Master (EL 9)

The hallway leading in from the south features grotesque carvings on the floor, walls, and ceiling. Most depict fish and tentacles devouring humans and other surface dwellers. The carvings in this hall are also rigged with a permanent arcane eyelike effect linked with the Master (see below). If he sees creatures approaching, he greets them with a *programmed image* of a cave-in, followed quickly with an *illusory wall*.

Use the following read-aloud text only if the PCs get past the above mentioned illusions.

This vast cavern is mostly filled with water. Massive stalactites droop from the ceiling, dripping moisture down into the huge pool. The effect created is like being in a light rainfall.

The pool measures 40 feet at its deepest point (in the center). The passage from the east lies 10 feet below the surface of the water.

Creatures. The Master, a half-demon/half aboleth, controls this entire complex. The current Master replaced his predecessor when he left to join the Inner Fane (to become the Second of the Triad).

The Master, half-fiend aboleth: CR 9; Huge aberration (aquatic) (20 ft. long); HD 8d8+48; hp 101; Init +3 (dex); Spd 10 ft. swim 60 ft fly 60 (average); AC 21, touch 11, flat-footed 18; Atk +14 melee (1d6+10 and transformation, 4 tentacles) and +9 melee (2d6+10 bite) and +9 melee (2d8+10 claws); Face/Reach 10 ft. × 20 ft./10 ft.; SA Transformation, psionics, spell-like abilities, enslave; SQ Mucus cloud, immune to poison, acid, cold, and electricity, and fire resistance 20; AL CE; SV Fort +7, Ref +5, Will +11; Str 30, Dex 16, Con 22, Int 19, Wis 17, Cha 19.

Skills and Feats: Concentration +17, Knowledge (arcane) +15, Knowledge (history) +15, Knowledge (religion) +15, Listen +16, Search +15, Sense Motive +15, Spellcraft +11, Spot +16; Alertness, Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes.

Transformation (Ex): A blow from an aboleth's tentacle can cause a terrible transformation. Affected creatures must succeed at a Fortitude save (DC 20) or begin to transform over the next 1d4+1 minutes, the skin gradually becoming a clear, slimy membrane. A transformed creature must remain moistened with cool, fresh water or suffer 1d12 points of damage every 10 minutes.

A *remove disease* spell cast before the transformation is complete will restore an afflicted creature to normal. Afterward, however, only a *heal* or *mass heal* spell can reverse the change.

Psionics (Sp): At will—*hypnotic pattern*, *illusory wall*, *mirage arcana*, *persistent image*, *programmed image*, *project image*, and *veil*. These effects are as the spells cast by a 16th-level sorcerer (save DCs, where applicable, are 14 + spell level).

Spell-Like Abilities (Sp): *Darkness* 3/day, *desecrate* 1/day, *unholy blight* 1/day, *poison* 3/day. All cast as if by an 8th-level caster.

Enslave (Su): Three times a day, an aboleth can attempt to enslave any one living creature within 30 feet. The target must succeed at a Will save (DC 18) or be affected as though by a *dominate person* spell cast by a 16th-level sorcerer. An enslaved creature obeys the aboleth's telepathic commands (but will not fight on its behalf) until freed by *remove curse* or *dispel magic*. A victim can attempt a new Will save every 24 hours to break free. The control is also broken if the aboleth dies or travels more than 1 mile from its slave.

Mucus Cloud (Ex): Underwater an aboleth surrounds itself with a viscous cloud of mucus roughly 1 foot thick. Any creature coming into contact with and

inhaling this substance must succeed at a Fortitude save (DC 20) or lose the ability to breathe air for the next three hours. The affected creature suffocates in 2d6 minutes if removed from the water. Renewed contact with the mucus cloud and failing another Fortitude save continues the effect for another three hours.

Possessions: +2 bracers of armor

Tactics. The Master uses *project image*, *unholy blight*, *mirage arcana*, and *darkness* to hurt and foil enemies as much as possible while they are on the shore, hiding in the water with *veil* to keep his location a secret even from scrying. If anyone enters the water, he uses his *poison* ability, then attacks. Keep in mind that, unlike other aboleths, he has two claws and a bite attack in addition to his tentacles (only the tentacles carry the transformation attack).

Treasure. The Master's hoard lies at the bottom of the pool, hidden amid a lime-encrusted rock formation (Search 25 to find) and a number of statues of aboleths. It consists of the following:

- A stone box with 876 gp, 234 pp, and *potions of remove poison, flying and firebreath*
- An obsidian urn worth 300 gp
- A coral box (worth 50 gp) containing a 1,000 gp necklace made of gold and small rubies
- A bone case with a steel *wand of magic missiles* (cast at 5th level, 45 charges)
- Stone tablets written in Aboleth that describe the history of the previous Master, now known as the Second of the Triad, as well as details concerning his abilities, magic items, and the strange "water sheath" that he travels within. (For more details, see Chapter 7: The Recovered Temple in *Return to the Temple of Elemental Evil*.)

ENDING THE ADVENTURE

Conquering this complex of caverns is not crucial to defeating the Cult of Tharizdun and the Temple of All-Consumption. However, it can add needed experience and treasure to help PCs getting ready to take on the Outer Fane. It also provides an interesting side adventure that still relates back to the original scenario.

Lastly, learning a few of the secrets of the Second may come in handy later.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Monte Cook started working professionally in the game industry in 1988. In the employ of Iron Crown Enterprises, he worked with the *Rolemaster* and *Champions* games as an editor, developer, and designer.

In 1994 Monte came to work at TSR as a game designer. As a senior game designer with Wizards of the Coast, he codesigned the new edition of *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS* and authored the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. His newest release is *Return to the Temple of Elemental Evil*.

A graduate of the Clarion West writer's workshop, Monte has also published short stories and two novels. In his spare time, he runs anywhere from one to three games per week, holds a yearly game convention at his house, builds vast dioramas out of LEGO building bricks, and reads a lot of comics.

Monte designed the July 2001 adventure, *The Ministry of Winds*, for the Official D&D Website. To read more of his recent d20 work, visit his home page at www.montecook.com.