
The Boneyard

After a night's rest, the heroes of Castle Gore broke camp and marched to their next challenge: an expansive wasteland known as the Boneyard.

Dimdar related what she knew of the Boneyard. In older times the city of Myr Tandor was the largest and most powerful of the drow cities. A young cleric named Nyrelda, unhappy with the inherent power limits involved in the service of Lolth, struck a bargain with the evil deity Incabulous to gain great power in exchange for starting a rift in the church of Lolth.

Nyrelda's scheme worked brilliantly. The schism within the church of Lolth bubbled over into a civil war. Nyrelda and her followers took control of the city and ravaged the country side, leveling any settlement that opposed her. The drow of Lolth regrouped, combining the forces of three cities to retake Myr Tandor.

In the end the city was destroyed rather than conquered. Nyrelda escaped death by becoming a lich and the ruins of her realm became known as the Boneyard. For almost two thousand years the Boneyard has been a barren land populated by undead and hostile to any drow, and many non-drow, who attempt to cross it.

For the Guardians of Gore the Boneyard lay between them and their objective, Sheoloth. Nazir knew that a secret tunnel into Sheoloth existed with its mouth in the crypts of Nyrelda. After weighing their options, the group chose to seek out the lich queen and gain the use of the tunnel.

The first obstacle to confront the party was the Bridge of Skulls. A long, narrow stone path spanned a 60-foot drop to a rushing river. The group started across the bridge single file.

When the party reached the halfway mark on the bridge, four gargoyles dove at them from their perches on the far side. The creatures employed a dangerous tactic, making diving attacks and overrunning the bridge, hoping to knock the heroes off the narrow pass and into the waters below.

A gargoyle seized Bullseye and carried him aloft, seeking to drop him into the river, but Bullseye was ready. He used his Spider Climb gloves to hold on to the monster, then climbed onto its back and held on. The party quickly ran for the platforms at either side of the bridge, eliminating the gargoyle's most dangerous attack form, and drew their ranged weapons. Pyroh *polymorphed* himself into a brass dragon and took to the air himself, engaging two gargoyles with his claws and in the process providing still targets for the archers.

Atop his unwilling mount, Bullseye drew his kukri and struck a vital spot. The creature convulsed and died, plummeting toward the river below. The gargoyle's body cushioned the fall for Bullseye but he still found himself in the icy water getting carried away at a rapid pace.

Pyroh broke off his combat to pursue the halfling, using the superior speed of his dragon form to pluck Bullseye from the water before he could be carried under by the current. The archers felled two more gargoyles and caused the fourth to flee.

The party regrouped at the entrance to the Boneyard, an ornate iron gate decorated with eerie sculptures of drow being slaughtered and tormented. Bullseye picked the lock and the party entered the wasteland.

An hour or so into the barren plain, the heroes encountered what looked to be four frozen drow, dead and huddled around an apparent dead fire pit. A strong chill reached out toward them. As the party approached, however, the "corpses" rose and staggered toward them. The chill grew stronger, as if sucking the heat from their bodies. The creatures were bleakborn, undead who feed off the body heat of living creatures.

The party entered combat. The fighters soon realized this would be a difficult challenge; the bleakborn had a high armor class and were able to use the party's own body heat to grow stronger with each round. Pyroh hit one with a *shocking grasp* but took cold damage himself from contact with the creature. Gilead attempted to damage another with a fire-based *dragon breath* spell, only to see it grow stronger. Elayna held out her holy symbol and turned one, leaving three more still in combat. Nimbus tried his new spell, *defenestrating sphere*, with success.

Cori and Pyroh tried to protect themselves with *resist cold* spells but this did not prevent the bleakborn from feeding on their body heat. Gilead used *fly* to rise above the fray and out of the creatures' leeching range. Elayna tried a new spell, *undeath to death*, and destroyed the remaining bleakborn with one casting of the spell.

The party collected three more Drow house medallions (Sushona, a minor but respectable house) from the bodies of the destroyed bleakborn. At the end of the battle, a spectre appeared before them. "You have passed the challenge," it said, and asked the party's business in Nyrelda's realm.

After a short parley, the spectre agreed to conduct the party to an audience with the lich queen. It led them through the crypt to a throne room where Nyrelda waited. She was no ordinary lich; rather than an emaciated skeleton in rotting robes, Nyrelda appeared to them as a beautiful young drow woman with jet black eyes. She was attended by two mummy lord aides and a disturbing figure off to the side: an alhoon, or mind flayer lich.

Dimdar, wearing Pyroh's Cloak of Charisma +4, spoke for the party. Her diplomacy skills impressed the queen and gained her permission to use the secret tunnel. She told them that the tunnel was created before her time; in case of emergency, the High Priestess of Myr Tandar could use it to escape to the safety of a small settlement called Sheoloth.

Part of the passage had been flooded by a tributary of an underground river, she warned, but the tunnel was usable provided the party could arrange the ability to breathe under water. Nyrelda also suggested that the party use the tunnel to return from Sheoloth, saying that she was very interested in seeing the Staff of the Spider Queen again.

Dimdar asked about the Obsidian Dragon and hit pay dirt again. Nyrelda confirmed that the dragon had been summoned by powerful magic and was compelled to defend the temple and its contents, but not any drow in particular. The reigning High Priestess carries a talisman made from one of the dragon's scales that gives her the ability to communicate with the dragon and give it instructions, though the dragon is not necessarily bound to obey. The dragon is known to have two breath weapons: one cone of negative energy mist and one line of petrifying gas. Finally, Nyrelda provided the name of a contact the party could use in Sheoloth when they arrived.

The heroes entered the secret tunnel, the mouth of which was guarded by a tombstone golem. They followed the rough-hewn passage for two hours and then found the way flooded. Elayna cast *water breathing* and the party continued into the murky, flooded pool. Visibility was extremely limited due to silt and dirt suspended in the water.

A thousand feet or so into the pond, a steady current took hold and carried the murkiness away. The party continued on, struggling to hold their balance against the sidesweeping current.

Midway through the water, a gargantuan worm charged them from downstream. It tried to grab Groop in its eight-foot maw but missed, ingesting a large stone instead. The party stabbed at it with spears and tridents, having little difficulty hitting the massive creature, while the spellcasters brought *magic missiles* to bear. Elayna unleashed a *harm* spell that devastated the creature and caused it to convulse in pain. It lived long enough to swallow Nimbus but perished seconds later after a blow from Groop.

Nimbus cut himself free from the creature's gizzard and found eight large rough diamonds inside it. The party pocketed these and completed their trek through the water, setting up camp on dry land inside the passage. Sheoloth was at most a day away.

<MR>