



THE SERPENT'S EMBRACE

PROTECT THE WORLD TREE FROM SINISTER FORCES THAT THREATEN ALL REALMS





BACKSTORY



The ancient World Tree serves as a nexus between the physical and spiritual realms. This colossal tree has long been protected by a great serpent, who maintains the health of the tree and the balance of the surrounding forest. However, the serpent's role as guardian has made it a target.

Recently, malevolent entities known as spirit-eaters have emerged from the ethereal plane. These beings of pure malevolence seek to prey on the serpent's spirit, hoping to weaken both it and the World Tree. By consuming the essence of this powerful guardian, the spirit-eaters aim to disrupt the natural order and expand their dark dominion.

The World Tree and its guardian serpent now face a pivotal struggle against these sinister adversaries. More than just strength and resilience will be required to overcome them; a deep understanding of the mystical forces at play is crucial. The fate of the connected realms hangs in the balance of this conflict. Its outcome will have consequences that resonate through both the visible world and the hidden facets of existence. The cosmic equilibrium is at stake.



PLOT HOOK



Deep within the whispers of the forest, a telepathic plea for help resonates in the party's minds, emanating from a great serpent guardian of the World Tree. Its spirit is under siege in the ethereal plane, and only they can navigate the mystical and perilous paths to save it.



ADVENTURE SUMMARY



The adventure opens in a tranquil forest, where the party receives a telepathic plea for help from the great serpent guardian of the World Tree. Investigating this call leads them to the weakened serpent, coiled at the tree's base. But first they must battle past the tree's guardians, twisted by the same sinister forces now devouring the serpent's spirit.

To aid the ailing guardian, the party must uncover which realm these enemies come from, and identify the creatures attacking the serpent. Their quest culminates in a fierce battle against the leader of these entities - a banished lich who long ago retreated to the ethereal plane. Victory over this foe frees the serpent's captured essence, restoring strength to both it and the World Tree. Grateful for having its spirit and duty restored, the serpent bestows boons upon the party as they return home.

CHAPTER 1: WORLD TREE CALLING

In which the party is called for aid.



NEARBY CRIES



GM NOTE: The beginning of this adventure takes place in a forest, wherefrom the party hears the serpent's proximity-based telepathic cries. As such, it is assumed the party is already en route to a different adventure or resides in the wilds. Alternatively, you can change the location the party finds themselves in for a more direct call to adventure.

If you are playing this adventure as a one-shot, this is a perfect time for the party to introduce their characters and describe themselves. Talk with your party about their relationships. Ask them about how long they've been working together, the type of jobs they usually take, perhaps even parts of their backstory, and other details you might deem important. Once they've all introduced themselves, you can proceed.

Read this:

"In the heart of a lush, verdant forest, where the whispers of nature sing tales of ancient magic, you feel a sudden, mysterious call. A voice, not heard but felt, resonates within your minds, a plea for help echoing from the depths of the forest. It speaks in images, an endless string of pain and horror, burning forests and crumbling terrain, bringing you to your knees with pain."

Each party member must make a **DC 18 Intelligence saving throw**, followed by a **DC 18 Intelligence (Arcana) or Wisdom (Insight) check**. On a failed save, a creature takes 5d10 psychic damage and will suffer drawbacks in later chapters, as it grapples with the pain and horror shown through the visions. Success on either check will allow a creature to comprehend the images as a telepathic message coming from a nearby creature, although they don't know the exact source of it. They must now investigate the vision and figure out its true meaning and origin.

GM NOTE: Tap into the potential creepiness of the message. Let the party panic and give them time to figure it out. They might want to investigate the surroundings, or they might focus entirely on the horrible, apocalyptic visions. Whatever they choose to focus on, give them a few minutes to find out more details.

GM NOTE: After their second vision, the party should feel subconsciously compelled to move in the direction of the vibrant woods. The reason for all the ambiguity is to keep the party on edge. This way, they'll constantly be looking over their shoulder, hoping they never become the target of some attack.

To investigate the visions, the party can do any of the following:

- The party can investigate the surroundings with a **DC 17 Intelligence (Nature) check** or a **DC 18 Wisdom (Survival) check**. On a successful check, they notice the trees in the immediate vicinity are much more vibrant, forming a pathway of bright colors in the general direction they were walking in.
- They can also investigate nearby magic with a **DC 17 Intelligence (Arcana) check** or a *detect magic* spell, finding obvious remnants of illusion, conjuration and necromantic magic on a success. The trees appear to be fueled by helpful magic, constantly feeding them.
- They can look at the trees with a **DC 17 Intelligence (Investigation) check**, finding signs of blight influence which is hidden underneath the illusions. Clearly, something is harming the nearby woods.
- They can make a **DC 22 Intelligence (Religion) check** to associate the received visions with some element of mythology. On a success, they realize the repeated imagery might have something to do with a guardian of nature of some sort.


Success on any of the various checks will grant the party additional rewards later in the adventure, alongside the information they receive now.

Once the party has had some time to investigate the visions, the party members who succeeded on the initial **Intelligence (Arcana) or Wisdom (Insight) check** will receive a second vision, this time much clearer, pleading for aid through imagery of destruction and dead animals. After receiving the second vision, each party member can make a **DC 18 Wisdom (Perception) check** to look around for a general direction to go in. If at least one party member succeeds, the party finds that the trees that look most vibrant seem to be the most harmed underneath the illusions. As such, that's the trail the party must follow. If no party member is successful, they must all roll a **DC 18 Intelligence saving throw**, taking 4d10 psychic damage on a failure, as the great serpent buries itself deeper into their minds in a desperate, almost threatening call for help. They do not, however, know what it is.

Once the party has either succeeded on the **Wisdom (Perception) check** or has figured out that they must go in the direction of the vibrant woods, ask the party for a marching order. The creature leading the marching order must then guide the group by making a **DC 19 Wisdom (Survival) check**. Additionally, if the party wishes to approach stealthily, they must make a collective **DC 17 Dexterity (Stealth) check**. If there are more successes than failures, the party is hidden.

If the party succeeds the **Wisdom (Survival) check**, they navigate the woods easily, finally stumbling upon a large body of water. On a failure, they instead stumble within the woods aimlessly before finally finding their way back. During this time, further traumatic visions are sent to the party. Each party member must make a successful **DC 18 Intelligence saving throw** or take 5d10 psychic damage.





Read this:

"As you traverse the dense foliage, the forest abruptly opens to reveal a vast, serene body of water. Its surface mirrors the sky above, a perfect canvas reflecting the drifting clouds and the gentle dance of fading sunlight. Along the edge, nestled among the reeds and lily pads, lies a small rowboat fashioned from smooth, dark treebark, as if grown from the forest itself. The boat seems to beckon to you, an unspoken invitation hanging in the air, compelling in its silent promise of passage. There's an otherworldly quality to it, a sense that stepping into this boat is not just a physical action, but a crossing into the unknown."

The party can choose whether to climb into the rowboat or destroy it. If the rowboat is destroyed, the party will feel a strong pulse of psychic energy. Each party member must make a successful **DC 20 Intelligence saving throw** or take 6d10 psychic damage. They must then proceed by swimming through the water, which requires each party member to make a **DC 14 Constitution saving throw** or suffer a point of exhaustion due to the extensive swimming they must do. If they climb into the boat, proceed normally.

GM NOTE: The boat (and general atmosphere) should give the party a sense of unease. The ancient druidic magic of the World Tree is beyond their understanding, reflected in how otherworldly its calls for help are.

Read this:

"As you set forth on the lake and gently push off from the shore, the waters around you begin to transform. They start to shimmer with a soft, ethereal glow, creating in a luminous aura. Gradually, the surface of the water changes, swirling with iridescent colors that delve into the realm of the surreal. Visions start to emerge within this glowing expanse, ephemeral and dreamlike, yet strikingly vivid. These are reflections of your pasts – moments of joy and sorrow, triumph and defeat, each memory playing out like a ghostly echo upon the water's surface. These scenes are deeply personal, resonating with a clarity that suggests the water itself is alive, aware, probing into the depths of each of your souls. As the visions dance around you, the water stirs more intensely. Luminous pseudopods, resembling arms made of light and liquid, slowly rise from the depths. They hover in the air, undulating gently, reaching out towards you."

These glowing appendages exude a sense of curiosity and invitation, as if waiting for you to make a choice – to reach out and touch them, to engage with the mysterious intelligence of the water, or to remain passive observers of these revealing visions."

If the party is on the boat, each party member can choose to touch a pseudopod. Upon touching one, they gain one of the following benefits, based on which check they succeeded in after receiving the initial vision:

- **Nature check or Survival:** The party member gains resistance to poison and necrotic damage until the end of the next encounter.
- **Arcana:** The party member has advantage on all saving throws until the end of the next encounter.
- **Investigation:** The party member has advantage on initiative checks until the end of the adventure.
- **Religion:** All attacks made against the party member are made at disadvantage until the end of the adventure.
- **No check:** The party member gains 2d10 temporary hit points.

GM NOTE: The choice of whether a creature touches a pseudopod or not should not seem so clear to the party, thus justifying the uncertainty from the earlier bits of the adventure and rewarding the party's trust.

Once the party has either touched the pseudopods or has gone past them, you can proceed to the next chapter.



APPROACH



Read this:

"As you glide across the mystical waters, the forest gradually gives way to a clearing where a gigantic tree stands proud, a colossal testament to the ancient magic of the world. Its immense trunk, wide enough to house entire cities, rises majestically before you, its towering branches reaching towards the heavens, piercing the very clouds. There's no doubt about it - this is the World Tree. The water's edge is just a stone's throw from this magnificent entity, and as you approach, the air around the tree thrums with a palpable energy. This sacred place, where the veil between worlds is thin, seems to welcome you, the essence of life and magic intertwining visibly in the shimmering air, beckoning you closer to the heart of its power."

From the distance, any party member with a **passive Perception of 15 or higher** notices the blights around the tree and can prepare for them before finally reaching the shore.

Read this:

"As you near the shore, a disturbing sight comes into view around the base of a gigantic World Tree. The ground, once verdant and teeming with life, is now marred by patches of decay and blight. All around the tree, you see creatures, once perhaps normal denizens of the forest, now twisted and corrupted. These blighted beings move with a frenzied hunger, gnawing and clawing at the massive roots of the World Tree. Their forms are grotesque, shadows of their natural selves, consumed by a malevolent force that drives them to devour the very essence of the tree. The air, charged with the energy of the World Tree, is now tainted with a palpable sense of despair and corruption, as these creatures continue their relentless assault on the heart of the forest's magic."

Show the party map 1. They approach it from area 1, seeing the enemies around the tree. The party must fight **1 blightthorn abomination**, **2 devilsnare blights**, and **5 twig blights** who are devouring the tree.

GM NOTE: If the party is having too easy of a time dispatching of the enemies, consider adding further blights to the battle.

When all enemies are defeated, read this:

"As the last of the blighted creatures falls, an eerie silence descends upon the area surrounding the World Tree. The air, once thick with the stench of corruption and decay, begins to clear, as if the forest itself is taking a long-awaited breath of relief. You stand amidst the aftermath, the once-menacing forms of the blights now nothing more than withered husks at your feet. The World Tree, though still standing tall and majestic, bears the scars of the relentless assault. Its roots, gnawed and scarred, ooze a sap that glows with a faint, otherworldly light. The ground around you seems to tremble with gratitude, and the tree's leaves rustle softly, a whispering chorus that fills the clearing with a sense of solemnity and reverence. Then, you hear a sudden, distant hiss."

The party can now investigate the map looking for clues.

AREA 1 - POINT OF ARRIVAL

The party arrives here.

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MAP 1



AREA 2 - ROOTS

Read this:

"The roots of the World Tree spread out like a vast, natural web, burrowing deep into the earth and stretching outwards. These colossal roots, thick as ancient towers, are covered in a patchwork of mosses and crawling vines, creating a labyrinthine network of natural tunnels and arches. Each root seems to pulse with the life force of the tree, a vibrant energy that resonates through the ground, tangible under your feet. The intertwining of these roots creates a sacred space, a testament to the enduring strength and ageless wisdom of the World Tree."

When a party member investigates the roots, they must make a **DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) check**. On a successful check, they notice the influence of the blight and retreat quickly enough not to be affected. On a failed check, the blight spreads to them, dealing 2d8 necrotic damage to them. Either way, it's clear that the roots are in danger.

AREA 3 - CAVE

Read this:

"Hidden beneath the sprawling roots of the World Tree, a cavernous opening beckons, cloaked in shadows and mystery. This cave, formed by the natural arching of the massive roots, holds within it what seems to be a giant, slumbering serpent. The air inside is cool and damp, the walls lined with luminescent fungi that cast an eerie glow. The cave feels alive, pulsating with the same ancient magic that courses through the tree above, a sanctum where the guardian serpent has made its home."

When a party member goes within the cave, you can proceed to the next chapter.

AREA 4 - TRUNK

Read this:

"Inside the trunk of the World Tree, the evidence of a struggle is carved into the very wood. The immense inner walls of the trunk bear scars and indentations, marks of something powerful thrashing against them from below. Each groove and splintered crack tells a story of pain and distress, suggesting the something's desperate attempts to escape or call for help. The wood around these marks is darker, as if stained by the anguish, and the air is heavy with a sense of foreboding, hinting at the turmoil that has disturbed an ancient guardian."

Upon seeing the harm inflicted upon the tree, the party can make a **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check** to look at the tree in more detail. They'll find parts of its sap flowing, which they can bottle to make up to three *potions of healing*.

CHAPTER 2: SERPENT'S STRUGGLES

In which the party finds the source of the cries.

THE SERPENT

Read this:

"As you venture into the shadowy depths of the cave beneath the World Tree, your eyes gradually adjust to the dim light. From the darkness, the great serpent emerges, its scales shimmering subtly in the faint glow of the luminescent fungi. Despite its weakened state, the serpent exudes a dignified aura, its eyes reflecting ancient wisdom and a deep-seated sorrow. It regards you with a gaze that pierces the soul, and in a voice that resonates not through the air but directly within your minds, it greets you with a mixture of gratitude and urgency. Syltharion, he introduces himself."

Show the party map 2. They now find themselves there and meet Syltharion (see Syltharion sidebar).



SYLTHARION

Information: Syltharion is wise, patient, and speaks in a calm, resonant voice that echoes in the minds of those it communicates with. It has a deep sense of duty to protect the World Tree and maintain the balance between the planes.

Roleplaying as Syltharion: Your tone should be wise and ancient, imbued with a sense of gravitas. Speak slowly and deliberately, as if every word carries the weight of centuries. Syltharion is not just a creature but a guardian of profound knowledge and power, weakened but still dignified. Convey a sense of deep sadness and urgency without resorting to desperation; this serpent is accustomed to command and respect. When describing its telepathic communication, emphasize that the words resonate directly in the minds of the characters, a profound experience that is both awe-inspiring and slightly unsettling.

After it introduces itself, Syltharion will apologize to the party for sending vague telepathic, and damaging messages. It'll explain that due to the blights draining its powers, there was no other way to get help. Then, Syltharion will explain the state they are in. An unknown corruption has spread to the creatures around. It speaks of its sacred duty to protect the World Tree and how its weakening state has begun to affect the balance between the material world and the ethereal realm. With a tone of solemn desperation, Syltharion implores the party for aid, if only they could find out what is happening.

Show the party map 2. They must now investigate it looking for clues. Once the party has investigated every area, proceed to the next subchapter.

AREA 1 - POINT OF ARRIVAL

The party arrives here.

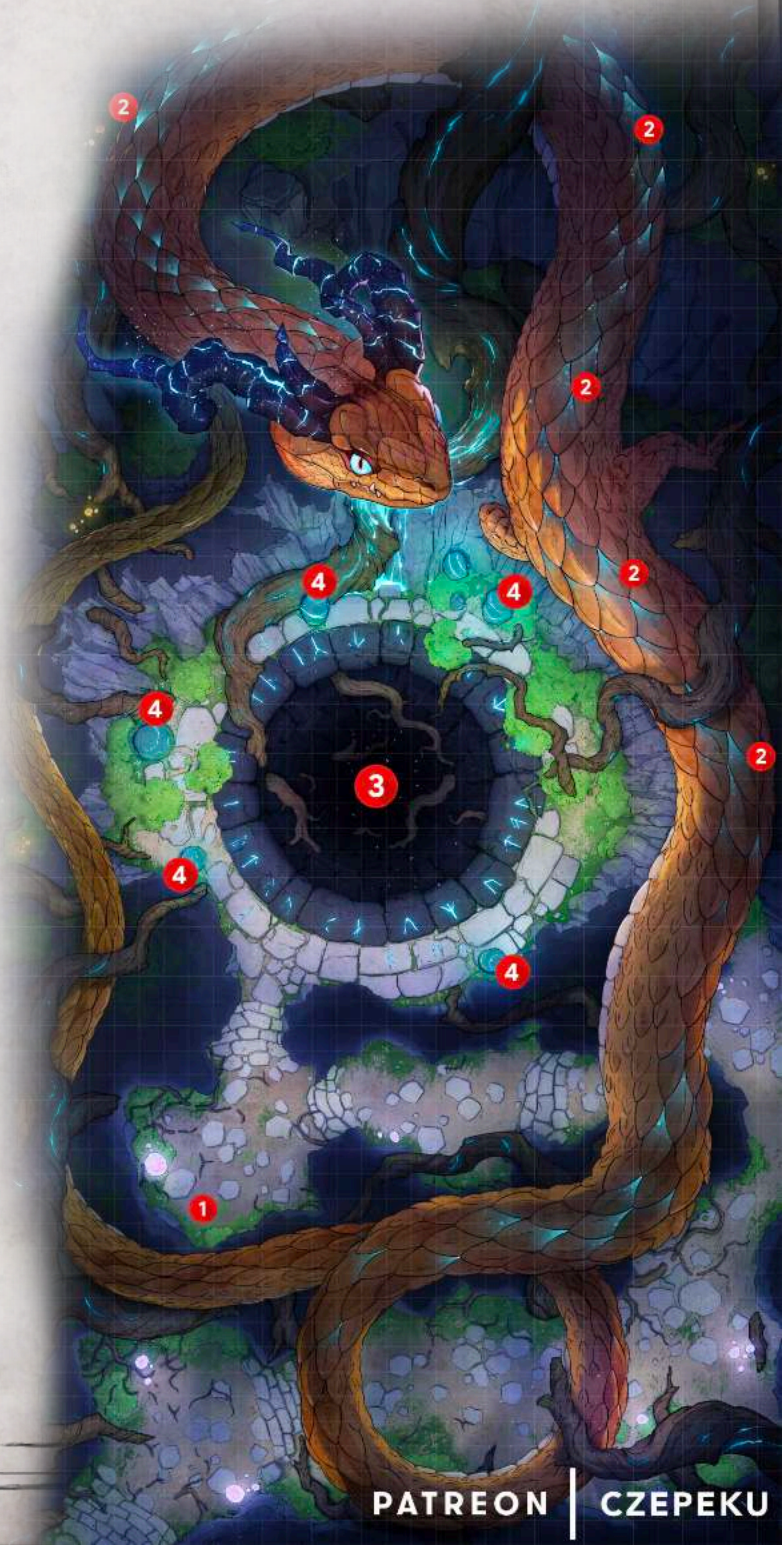
AREA 2 - SCALES OF SYLTHARION


Read this:

"Within the dimly lit confines of the serpent's cave, the scales of Syltharion glisten with an eerie beauty. Upon closer inspection, you notice that interspersed among the healthy sheen are scars unlike any seen on earthly creatures. These marks swirl across his scales in unnatural patterns, glowing faintly with an otherworldly light. They seem to pulse with a residual energy, remnants of the ethereal assaults he has endured. The scars are a tapestry of his battles, a visual testament to the serpent's struggle against forces beyond the material realm. Each scar tells a story of pain and resilience, a silent witness to the battles fought in the unseen planes."

Any party member can investigate the runes with an **Wisdom (Medicine) check**, gaining information based on the number rolled.

GM NOTE: For extra tension, roll these checks for your players behind the GM screen and don't tell them the results, only the information.





• **Below 10:** They believe these scars are simply signs of the serpent's old age and its long life in the forest, failing to recognize the true, otherworldly nature of the wounds. They must kill the snake if they wish to save the World Tree.

• **10-15:** The character realizes that these scars are not typical of natural injuries. They recognize that the scars have magical properties, possibly from a source not of this world. However, they are unable to identify the exact nature or origin of the magic involved.

• **16+:** The character correctly identifies that the scars are from attacks by entities of the ethereal plane. They realize that these scars carry residual ethereal energy that could be harnessed. By harnessing this energy, the character can cast the *blur* spell without requiring a spell slot.

AREA 3 - MAIN PORTAL

Read this:

"At the heart of the cave lies a striking sight: a circular portal, its edges lined with intricately inscribed runes that emit a soft, pulsating glow. These runes form a protective barrier, their arcane symbols etched deeply into the stone floor. They seem to vibrate with a powerful energy, creating a humming sound that resonates throughout the cave. The design of the runes suggests a deep magic, ancient and potent, likely set in place by Syltharion as a safeguard. The portal, while dormant, seems to be a gateway, possibly leading to the other planes where the serpent's spirit is tethered. The barrier runes, though protective, hint at the potential dangers that lie beyond, a passage that is both a doorway and a ward against the unknown."

Any party member can investigate the runes with an **Intelligence (Religion) check**, gaining information based on the number rolled.

• **Below 10:** The character misinterprets the runes as simple decorative elements of the cave, perhaps a cultural or religious symbol important to the serpent. They wrongly conclude that they have no practical function beyond their symbolic significance.

• **10-15:** The character understands that the runes are of religious significance and are related to the crossing of planes. They glean that they are likely a series of keys to another realm, but are uncertain about how each key is activated or its specific purpose.

• **16+:** The character discerns that the portal is a sacred gateway to the other planes, used for spiritual journeys or significant battles between planes. They also notice a rune that seems to be awry, broken down. Then, guided by Syltharion, they fix the rune.

AREA 4 - RUNESTONES

Read this:

"Scattered around the periphery of the cave are a series of runestones, each carved with symbols and glyphs that radiate magical energy. These stones are strategically placed, forming a protective circle around the entire area. Their presence creates a palpable sense of security and sanctity within the cave. The glow from each runestone casts dancing shadows on the walls, creating a mesmerizing display of light and movement. The runes on these stones correlate with protection, warding, and preservation, suggesting that their purpose is to shield the cave and its inhabitants from external threats. The careful arrangement of these runestones speaks to the serpent's foresight in fortifying his sanctuary against the encroaching darkness that threatens the World Tree and the balance of the planes."

Any party member can investigate the runes with an **Intelligence (Arcana) check**, gaining information based on the number rolled.

• **Below 10:** The character misunderstands the runes as basic enchantments for illumination. They fail to recognize the depth and complexity of the magic.

• **10-15:** The character recognizes that the runes are more complex than basic protection spells. They identify that these runes are specifically designed to ward off certain types of creatures or energies, though they are not entirely sure which ones.

• **16+:** The character comprehends the full scope of the runestones' magic. They realize these are advanced wards against incursions and are designed to stabilize the barrier between planes. Weirdly enough, the only creatures the portal is not guarded against are other plants. Perhaps that's why blights were sent this way.



TRAVEL THE PLANES

Read this:

"As you spend time within the confines of the cave, the air suddenly fills with a tension that makes your skin crawl. Without warning, Syltharion lets out a pained yelp, a sound that resonates through the cave and pierces your very being. The great serpent writhes in agony, its scales shimmering erratically. Through labored breaths, Syltharion reveals a harrowing truth: it is under attack in a different plane. Its soul, existing simultaneously across multiple planes, is vulnerable to assaults from realms unseen. The serpent's eyes implore you for immediate action; you must traverse the planes, seeking the right one where the attack is occurring. Once there, you must fend off the attackers, entities that threaten to sever the serpent's multiplanar existence. Time is of the essence, as each moment of inaction leads to further torment for the guardian of the World Tree."

The party must now choose a plane to travel to, switching planes until they find the correct one. Whenever the party travels to a different plane, if they did not fix the portal runes, they take 4d12 force damage.

The party must choose one of the planes below or go to a random plane.

Chosen Plane	Result
Plane of Fire	No Attack. The party hasn't found the attackers, but the heat is unbearable. Each party member must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or suffer 2 points of exhaustion.
Plane of Water	No Attack. The party hasn't found the attackers.
Plane of Air	No Attack. The party hasn't found the attackers.
Plane of Earth	No Attack. The party hasn't found the attackers.
Feylands	No Attack. The party hasn't found the attackers, but they are blessed by the feylands. Each party member is under the effects of the <i>heroism</i> spell until the end of the adventure.
Ethereal Plane	Under Attack. The party has found the correct plane. Proceed to the next chapter.





CHAPTER 3:



THE ETHEREAL PLANE

In which the party tries to save the serpent.

OTHERWORLDLY ATTACKER

Read this:

"As you step into the ethereal plane, reality shifts. The world around you is a ghostly mirror of the material realm, colors more vivid yet less substantial, and the air tinged with a surreal, dreamlike quality. You find yourself in a reflection of the cave, face to face with Syltharion's spirit and yet another creature next to you. Angrily staring you down is a ghostfaced undead creature. 'I had hoped my distraction would last long enough, but very well... I'll take you down, then finish freeing myself from this torment.' The creature grins, preparing its magic. Roll for initiative!"

Show the party map 3. They must now fight a **lich**, which has already expended its 9th level spell slot.

Alternatively, they can align with the **lich**, freeing it and killing Syltharion.

Once the party has either killed the **lich** or aligned themselves with it, you can proceed to the next subchapter.



THE END



The party's adventure has come to an end, reaching one of the conclusions below based on :

1. Restored Balance. The party kills the lich and thus saves Syltharion. The World Tree is saved and all goes by without issue.

2. Betrayal. The party aligns itself with the lich and kills Syltharion, starting the war of the worlds and bringing about the end of humanity.

The End.

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MAP 3



THANK YOU!

AN ADVENTURE BY [MONKEYDM](#) ON
PATREON.

COVER ART BY **GRAND FAILURE**, USED WITH
PERMISSION.

ART INSIDE ON ADOBE STOCK

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TAKE CARE!



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