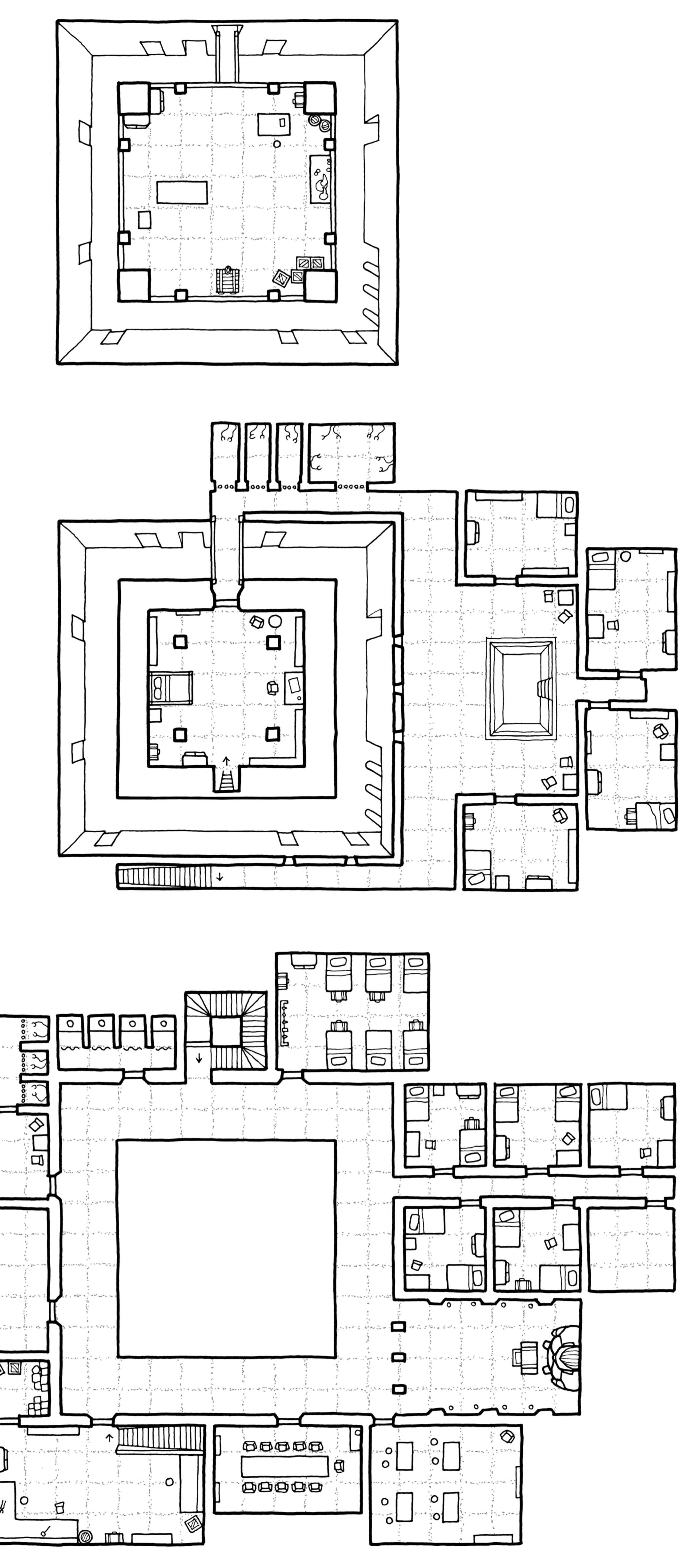
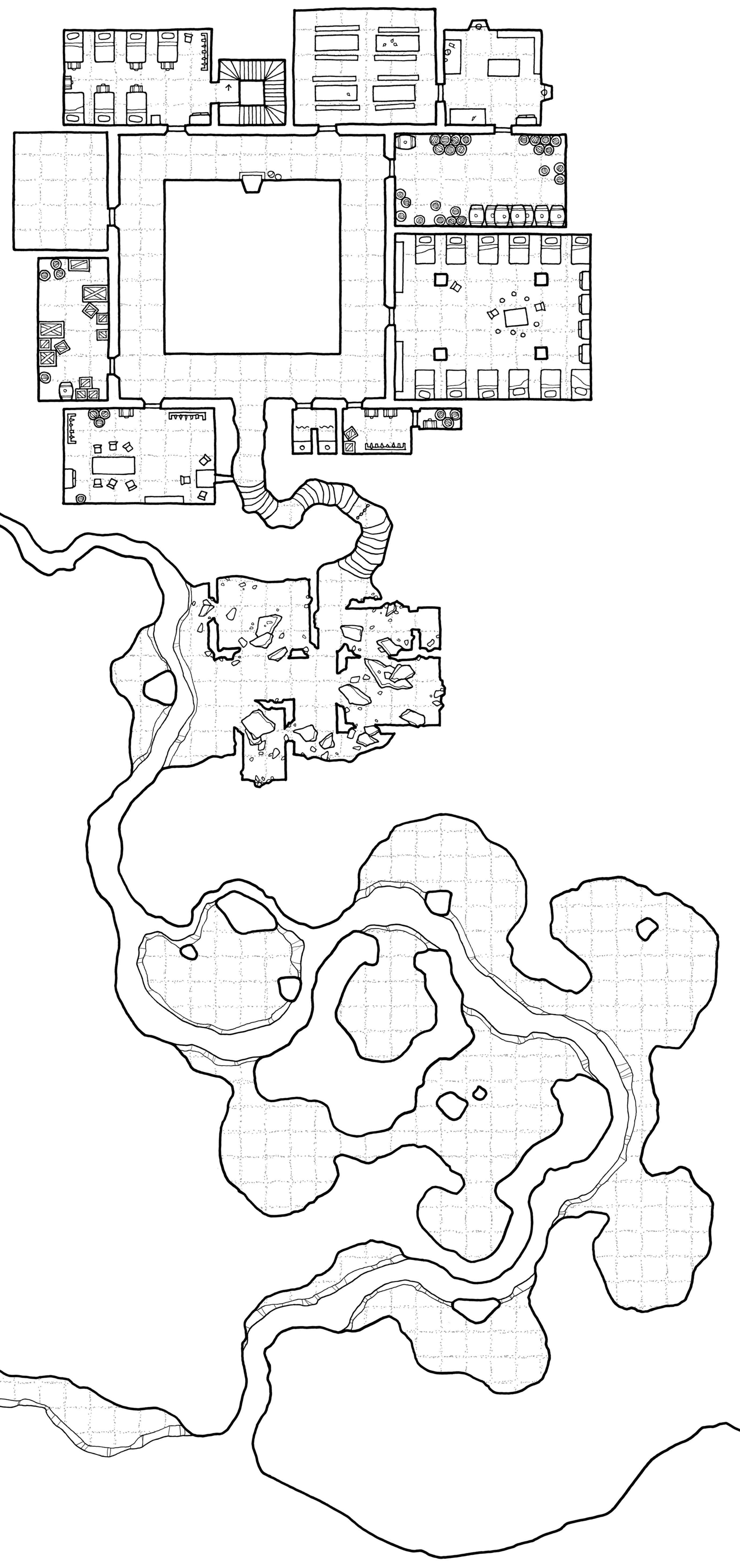


# 24 - Astali's Laboratory

- 23 Astali's Bedroom
- Cells
- Storeroom
- Prison
- 17 Awakened Quarters
- 16 Shrine (Deep Duerra)
- 15 Classroom
- 14 Private Dining Room
- 13 Workshop
- Storeroom
- Fountain
- Guards' Quarters
- Dining Hall
- Kitchen
- Food Stores
- 6 Laborers' Quarters
- 5 Armory
- Guard Room
- 2 Ancient Ruins
- Caverns







#### ABOUT

- •The Halls of the Awakened are the hidden lair of a cult known as the Architects of the Awakening. The entrance to the lair is hidden deep within a series of caverns. This map is a part of the Black Loch.
- \*An unfurnished version of this map is also available.
- •The story of the Architects is complicated, but, to summarize it very briefly, they are a duergar cult that intends to imbue their race with psionic abilities equalling those of the illithids. Their method of achieving this is so heinous that they must carry it out in secret. Even though the Architects' plan could result in duergar dominion over most of the world, even their own people would never accept the abominable acts that the Architects must commit to accomplish it.

## THE ARCHITECTS OF THE AWAKENING

•First, a bit about duergar history. The duergar were a clan of dwarves who were enslaved by mind flayers for several thousand years. They eventually rose up against their masters and won their freedom, but their hatred for the illithids never faded.

Some time later, a duergar queen named Duerra launched a war on an illithid city, capturing the residents and performing experiments on them to discover the secrets of their mental powers. She is said to have found the source of their psionic essence and to have infused it into her own people. This tale is more legend than history, but, for the purposes of this story, it is the truth.

It is indisputably true that the duergar possess more of a talent for psionics than most races, but, despite having the psionic essence of the illithids within them, their powers are nowhere near those of their former masters. The question of why this might be is one that the duergar have never really asked. But, about 100 years ago, a priestess named Astali, a follower of Deep Duerra- the aforementioned queen, who later became a goddess- started asking it. And she was determined to find an answer.

After ten years spent researching the matter and trying to commune with Duerra, Astali found something. The psionic essence of the illithids was not, on its own, the force that gave the flayers their power. There was something else in their blood that acted as a catalyst to set it off. The duergar had the fuel, but not the flame to ignite it. Astali believed she could change this.

The means of doing so, however, was an abomination- both to the duergar race and to Astali herself. The High Lords would kill her for it. She was hesitant, but ultimately decided to go ahead.

More than anything, Astali wished to see the duergar achieve greatness. As it stood, the duergar were the foremost power in the underdark. To empower them with the psionic gifts of the mind flayers would make them the only power in the underdark. Even the surfacers would bow to the grey dwarves. Astali's desire for this future abolished any other concerns she had.

After gathering a group of Duerra's faithful and establishing a base of operations far from her city, Astali began her work.

She and her followers began by launching raids on a small illithid settlement, returning with captive flayers and tadpoles.

At this point, I need to pause to briefly explain illithid reproduction, as it plays a role in this part of the story. Mind flayers are not born as humanoids. Rather, they are small,

tadpole-like creatures. These tadpoles are inserted into the ear of a humanoid host, whereupon they consume the brain and transform the body, reshaping them into illithids. While humans, elves and a number of other races can be used as hosts, dwarves cannot.

But, for Astali, awakening the psychic abilities of the duergar would require creating an illithid from a duergar host. Astali, a powerful psionicist, accomplished this using psionic surgery to manipulate the host in several ways, allowing it to better accommodate the illithid tadpole. She made a few other changes as well, preventing the transformation from removing the host's reproductive organs and protecting the host's brain from the tadpole, so that the duergar consciousness would not be replaced by an illithid one. This would be, in essence, a duergar mind with an illithid body.

After losing two followers in her early attempts at this experiment, the third was successful. Half-pleased and half-mortified at what she had created, Astali referred to the creature as a "hybrid" and kept it away from her other followers.

While the creature retained the host's mind and personality and gained the powerful psionic gifts of the mind flayers, it was not the future Astali foresaw for her people. This abomination was merely the first step.

Astali created three more hybrids and had them mate with several of her followers. The hybrids proved able to mate and reproduce with normal duergar, eventually bearing offspring. These children appeared as normal as any duergar, bearing none of the traits of their hybrid parents, except one: their potent psionic abilities.

This was exactly what Astali had dreamed of: pure, uncorrupted duergar with the innate psionic potency of the illithids. She referred to the children as "the Awakened" and her followers celebrated their achievement.

Unfortunately, these celebrations would turn out to be premature.

After creating several more Awakened over the next forty years, the first group became old enough to bear and father children. Once they did so, Astali discovered, to her horror, that the children of the Awakened did not inherit the gifts of their parents. This changed everything.

If her plan was to work, the Awakened would have to be able to pass on their power to the next generation. The hybrids could never become a part of duergar society. Even Astali herself would not accept that. She would have to find a way to let the Awakened pass down their gifts.

Here, the story turns from past to present. Astali has spent five years trying to find a way to solve this problem and she believes she has found a way. What she requires now is an aboleth. Aboleths have ancestral memories, passing down all their recollections to their offspring. Astali believes she can find the means by which the aboleths do this and adapt it to the psychic talents of the Awakened, finishing her task once and for all. But aboleths are difficult prey and Astali knows better than to underestimate one. So she and her followers are planning carefully before they make their next move. They have come too far to stumble at the last step.

### NOTES

•Due to their remote location and their deeply hidden lair, the Architects do not particularly worry about intruders. If anyone comes, they expect that it will be a duergar army sent to eradicate them. Since such an army would be more than capable of overwhelming any defenses they could erect, the cult simply focuses on remaining hidden and prays that no such army ever comes.

The caves at the entrance may be home to hostile creatures
of some kind. The Architects can psionically pacify the

beasts to allow their own people to pass through safely.

\*The Architects may have outposts elsewhere in the underdark, providing supplies and funding so the cultists here can continue their activities. PCs might discover the location of the Halls of the Awakened by following a supply ship from one of these other outposts.

 The ancient ruins inside the caves were an old hideout used by duergar rebels during their uprising against the illithids thousands of years ago.

•The "hybrids" are essentially mind flayers and would likely have the same statistics as normal ones. They are usually kept separate from the rest of the cult.

•The "Awakened" are powerful psionicists, but are also quite young—teenagers, by dwarven standards. You might consider giving them powerful abilities and low hit points to reflect this. As a sort of "glass cannon" enemy, their incredible powers will terrify your players, but will still result in a manageable encounter, since the PCs won't be exposed to them for long.

\*Astali is a powerful psionicist. While she had to learn her abilities the hard way, she has had hundreds of years to do so and is a devastating enemy in combat, even more so than the Awakened or the hybrids.

## PSIONICS

While psionicists were once a standard class in D&D, this is no longer the case in 5th edition. Still, there are a few options for inserting psionic powers into your game.
The first option is to use the rules for Mystics. These rules

 The first option is to use the rules for Mystics. These rules were created as Unearthed Arcana and can be found for free online.

•The second option is to create abilities for psionic NPCs without any particular system behind them. Simply treat these abilities as innate powers with whatever restrictions on usage you feel is appropriate. Here are a few suggestions for psionic powers that Astali and the Awakened might possess. Adjust the numbers to accommodate your party's

level if necessary:

\*BACKLASH - Unleashes a powerful surge of psionic energy in all directions. Any enemies within 40'(12m) of the caster are thrown back 20'(6m), suffering 6d6 damage, plus 2d6 more if they were thrown into something hard, such as a wall. If a victim succeeds on an Intelligence save, they suffer half damage and are only thrown back 5'(1.5m). SCREAM - Overwhelms enemies with psionic energy, causing any victim within 30'(10m) to succeed on a Wisdom save or become catatonic and unable to act on their next turn. Victims who succeed on their saving throws can act, but any rolls on their next turn are made with disadvantage. •VENT - A single target is hurled 100' (30m) away from the caster. If the victim hits a wall or other obstacle, they suffer 1d6 damage for every 10' (3m) of distance remaining after they came to a stop. For example, if a victim was thrown into a wall 30'(9m) behind them, they would suffer 7d6 damage, since there were 70'(21m) remaining from the original 100'(30m). The victim takes half damage with a successful Constitution save. If the victim does not hit a wall or obstacle, they are thrown the full 100'(30m) and do not take damage.



