DG1: Secrets in the Dark

by Dan Hass

A dungeon; a dragon (well, dragonish)... Away we go!!! Fortune (or fate) has brought together a fugitive dragon cultist, and an alien creature which has been terrorizing the surrounding communities. It is time for heroes to emerge to set the situation right. A Dungeons and Dragons 5th Edition Adventure for 1-6 first level characters.
Secrets in the Dark
by Dan Hass

Contents

Adventure Summary ........................................................................................................................................ 2
Preparing for the Adventure ...................................................................................................................... 2
Running the Adventure ............................................................................................................................... 2
Encounter Summary ................................................................................................................................... 3
Adventure Background ............................................................................................................................... 3
Starting the Adventure ............................................................................................................................... 3
Encounter 1: The Local Fauna ................................................................................................................... 4
Encounter 2: The Eternal Guardians ........................................................................................................ 5
Encounter 3: The Shrine .............................................................................................................................. 6
Encounter 4: The Final Battle Scene ........................................................................................................ 6
Encounter 5: The Dragon Cultist ............................................................................................................. 7
Encounter 6: The Lost Companion ........................................................................................................ 8
Concluding the Adventure ......................................................................................................................... 9
Appendix 1: DM Map .............................................................................................................................. 10
Secrets in the Dark
by Dan Hass

Adventure Summary

Secrets in the Dark is a Dungeons and Dragons 5th Edition adventure designed to be run with as few as a single 1st level character and the DM. However, it scales easily to a larger party. It is specifically designed to be shorter than usual to allow time for character creation prior to play. It requires the Player's Handbook, and the Dungeon Master's Basic Rules (DMBR, available as a free download at www.dnd.wizards.com) or Monster Manual. It could easily fit into most campaign settings.

Preparing for the Adventure

It is always a good idea for the DM to read through an adventure before running it. Secrets in the Dark is no different. It is a pretty straightforward adventure, but a read-through is still recommended.

A battlemat or dungeon tiles may be helpful, but not necessary.

Running the Adventure

Secrets in the Dark can be placed into any campaign where there is a forest nearby. The DM and each player should construct a reasonable backstory for the PC tying her to the region.

Secrets in the Dark is intended to allow a player(s) and DM to jump into a 5th Edition campaign without a lot of overhead. It is very much a "let's find a dungeon and fight a dragon!!!" adventure (well Dragonborn). It is deliberately straightforward. It is also deliberately short with optional encounters, so that it can be run in a session where the DM and players use the first half of a gaming session developing new characters and then run this abbreviated adventure.

If the PCs appears underpowered, the PCs should be encouraged to purchase a mastiff (PH307) as a guard dog. If the PCs don't have 25gp, with a small service (for example, delivering a package to another settlement) it is a DC15 Persuasion check to persuade the kennel master to extend credit to the PCs.

There are no DM maps for the wilderness outside the tunnels. The encounter there has sufficient description to run the encounter without a detailed map. If the DM feels that a map is conducive to play, there is enough description to draw up one on a battlemat or using dungeon tiles of the DM's preference. Appendix 1 has a map of the tunnel complex with the location of encounters 2-6 marked on the map.

In most cases the setting is described in boxed text. The DM may use this verbatim if the encounter unfolds as designed, however, if the PCs have done something unexpected, the boxed text may not accurately describe the set up. The DM should not feel constrained by the boxed text, and should describe the encounter as necessary for the particular circumstances of the adventure.
Secrets in the Dark
by Dan Hass

Encounter Summary

**Encounter 1: The Local Fauna** has the PCs facing a group of **baboons**.

**Encounter 2: The Eternal Guardians** has the PCs facing **zombies** in the entry chamber.

**Encounter 3: The Shrine** has the PCs facing a trapped evil shrine powering the undead.

**Encounter 4: The Final Battle Scene** has the PCs dealing with a **disease**.

**Encounter 5: The Dragon Cultist** has the PCs facing a dragonborn outlaw.

**Encounter 6: The Lost Companion** has the PCs facing an **awakened giant wolf spider**.

Adventure Background

The giant wolf spider, P'tha, was **awakened** by a benevolent druid in the hopes P'tha would be something of an adventuring companion. Alas, P'tha's temperament was towards evil, and he went his own way. He wandered into the deep forest and happened upon an overgrown entrance to a tunnel system.

To his pleasure he discovered that in the tunnel’s entry chamber lurked hobgoblin zombies - apparently left over vestiges of the previous inhabitants. He found what appeared to be a living chamber at the bottom of the tunnel, and took up residence. Since he could easily pass by his zombie de facto guards using his Stealth, he began to launch raids against settlements in the nearby communities preying upon their livestock at night.

Meanwhile, the dragonborn adept, Arjhan, was a part of a recently formed cell of the red dragon cult in a nearby town. Their first foray - an attempt to raid the town armory - went horribly wrong, Arjhan was the only survivor. He barely escaped with his life and fled to the forest.

He, too, stumbled upon the tunnel system, and using his **minor illusion** spell was able to sneak past the zombie. He found another living chamber at the top of the tunnel system and made himself comfortable.

P'tha knows about Arjhan, but is indifferent to him. As long as Arjhan doesn’t endanger his operation, P'tha is comfortable sharing the space with Arjhan.

Starting the Adventure

The DM is free to design her own “hook” based on the campaign region and character back stories, but here are suggestions.

1: The lord of the nearby settlement where the dragon cult attempted its raid puts out a call for aid. If using the Alshon region of the *Dimgaard Campaign* as a backdrop, Leischport would be the town. He offers a 10gp bounty on the cultist (Arjhan) who got away. He doesn’t want to commit members of his guard as he is afraid the attack may be a portent of further cult activity and needs to retain his full complement of men-at-arms to protect his fief.

2: The lead huntsman posts a 10gp reward for anyone who can find out what has been depleting game (P'tha) in the lord’s forest and attacking livestock at night. If using the Alshon region, Tallywood is the town for this hook. He has an example of a killed cow that he thinks was killed by the poacher.
Secrets in the Dark
by Dan Hass

The rewards suggested are based on a very conservative, low-wealth campaign. If the DM is running a more generous campaign, she should feel free to increase the reward offers to a number appropriate for her campaign.

Regardless of the hook, the PCs must find their way to the tunnel. It is a DC15 Wisdom(Survival) check to track Arjhan to the tunnel entrance. A DC15 Intelligence(History), Intelligence(Investigation), or Charisma (asking around) check will recall/reveal that about two months ago a clan of goblinoids took up residence in the tunnel complex, and that it would be a likely place for undesirables to hide out (it took a "crusade" by several surrounding fiefs to eradicate the clan). The location is said to be haunted and is avoided by the area residents. The DM and PCs may have some unexpected means of revealing the location and purpose of the tunnel.

The entrance to the tunnels lies 20 miles deep through a forest with thick undergrowth, which constitute difficult terrain. Without a ranger in the party, there is a likelihood that the PCs will be subject to the consequences of a forced march (PH181).

Assuming the PCs find a means of identifying the area of the tunnel complex, proceed to Encounter 1: The Local Fauna.

Encounter 1: The Local Fauna

The tunnel entrance lies in the hunting territory of a pack of baboons. As the PCs search for the entrance, the beasts move to defend their territory against an interloper (and get a tasty meal).

This is a deep, and thick part of the forest. With the heavy overgrowth, it is mostly dim light. There are numerous trees, and because of the dense undergrowth the area is difficult terrain. In the distance unknown birds screech regularly. Scents of alien flowers mix with those of decaying organic matter, and from the smell there may be the rotting remains of some animal nearby. Suddenly, the sound of something moving through the limbs and vines floods the scene.

Because there are numerous trees, a creature with a climb speed can use it unimpeded.

The baboons will use their climb speed to close with the PCs. To determine the distance at which the encounter starts, have the PCs roll a Perception check, and also each baboon. Take the highest Perception roll and multiply it by 3 ft to give the distance the encounter begins at.

Scaling the encounter: The number of baboons in the encounter depends on how many PCs are present according to this table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># PCs</th>
<th># baboons</th>
<th>XP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Copyright: Dan Hass Endeavors 2015
Baboon: hp 3; med beast; DMBR11 or MM318

Concluding the encounter: If the PCs win the encounter, they can continue searching unimpeded until they find the entrance to the tunnel system.

The party is in a dangerous wilderness. A short rest is possible before entering the tunnel system, but any long rest will be interrupted by harassment from other creatures moving in to take over their share of the baboons' territory. None of the interruptions are going to pose a significant risk - a lone wolf, a single blood hawk, biting insects, a snake crawling into the bedroll, etc. - and therefore wouldn't afford XP. They are enough to interrupt a long rest, though.

Encounter 2: The Eternal Guardians

The tunnel is 5ft wide with no light source. 40ft down the tunnel it opens into a roughly circular chamber 30 ft in diameter. The scent of decaying flesh seems stronger. The sounds of the jungle have faded so that only an occasional whoop or screech can be heard. There are two 5 ft wide openings to the chamber on opposite sides; the one leading to the surface, and one that leads deeper underground.

The chamber contains hobgoblin zombies which will attack immediately upon noticing any creature entering the room.

Scaling the encounter: The number of zombies in the encounter depends on how many PCs are present according to this table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># PCs</th>
<th># zombies</th>
<th>XP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Zombie: hp 22; med undead; NE; PH311 or DMBR52 or MM316

Concluding the encounter: The PCs are now able to enter and explore the (former) goblin tunnel system. The DM may either simply have the PCs explore the tunnel, and arrange encounters 3-6 as she sees fit (recommended), or actually have the PCs follow the map with the PCs choosing which directions they take at each point.

If the DM does as recommended, she first needs to decide how much challenge she wants to put upon the PCs considering the strength of the party and the time available. Encounter 3 is a trap & Encounter 4 is a disease, neither of which yield XP, but if the PCs seem overpowered for the challenges they are facing based on Encounters 1 & 2, these provide a mechanism for wearing down PCs and consuming resources.

If the DM doesn't want to include Encounters 3 & 4, she needs to decide the order in which she will present Encounters 5 & 6 based on what she wants the climactic encounter to be based on the unfolding story.

Copyright: Dan Hass Endeavors 2015
Again, the PCs are in a hostile environment rife with nuisances and real threats. A short rest is possible here, but a long rest will be interrupted by various dungeon vermin - centipedes, wasps, etc. which are not a significant enough threat to yield XP, but will interrupt a long rest.

**Encounter 3: The Shrine**

| The passage is 5’ wide, with no light source. The smell of something rotting is still present, and may be getting stronger. The passage ends abruptly and something ornate has been carved out of the living stone that is obviously a shrine of some sort. It has a gem as the center point of the shrine’s decoration. |
| This is a shrine to the goblinoid god Maglubiyet. It is common knowledge that evil shrines can produce the residual magic to animate corpses. As long as the shrine remains intact any corpse or skeleton within the tunnel complex will eventually become a zombie or skeleton. The shrine is trapped, and if any non-goblinoid touches the shrine, the trap will be triggered. It will affect any PC within 20ft of the shrine when it is triggered. |

*Weakened Explosive Runes:* DC14 Intelligence(Investigation) check to detect. *Dispel magic* to disarm. 2d10 thunder damage to all within 20’ when triggered. DC15 Dexterity save for half damage.

**Concluding the encounter:** If the PCs destroy the shrine, there will be no more undead produced by the shrine. With the shrine destroyed, the PCs are free to retrieve the 50gp gem. If the PCs have prevented the shrine from producing further undead, grant each PC 10XP.

**Encounter 4: The Final Battle Scene**

| The stench of rotting flesh increases dramatically at a point where the passage is 10’ wide. There are obvious signs of a former battle; there are broken weapons and shields. But most notably are three bodies that are clearly the source of the smell. |
| This is where the hobgoblins made their final stand, and the bodies are dead and rotting hobgoblins. They are infected with *rot pox*. Any PC who comes with 5’ of the rotting bodies stands the risk of contracting *rot pox*. *Rot pox* is a fast incubating disease that affects humanoids. To avoid contracting the disease, a humanoid exposed to it must make a DC12 Constitution save. If the humanoid fails in 11-20 rounds (10+1d10) rounds pox will appear on the victim’s face and she loses 1 hp. Until cured the humanoid must make a DC12 Constitution saving throw every minute (10 rounds). On a failed save, the victim suffers 1 hp loss and must make a second DC12 Constitution save or suffer an increase in exhaustion level. If the humanoid receives any healing that cures at least one hit point, it ends the disease, but the exhaustion level remains unchanged until cleared by means that normally reduce exhaustion levels. |

**Concluding the encounter:** There is nothing of value left at this scene. Only death and disease remain. There is no XP award for this encounter, but in the course of dealing with the disease one or more PCs may earn Inspiration.
The 5 ft tunnel opens to a 20 ft by 30 ft chamber with hewn walls. On the floor lies a hay-filled mattress, and several pieces of broken furniture clutter the room. There is no light source in the chamber. A partially eaten meal of wild fruits and berries sets on the ground beside the mattress.

This combat doesn't necessarily have to be a fight to the death. Arjhan isn't stupid. The PCs may be able to avoid a deadly combat. Maybe the PCs can convince Arjhan that his best course of action is turning himself in to an honorable lord of a nearby fief; pay a penalty; and then be free to rejoin society. Depending on the reasonableness of the proposition, the DM would set a DC of convincing Arjhan at somewhere between 15 (Medium) and (more likely) 20 (Hard).

**Scaling the encounter:** Arjhan can be a deadly encounter for a single PC. In the case of a single PC, the DM may allow the PC to retreat before this encounter and take a long rest if needed. With 3 or more PCs, Arjhan overhears the combat with the zombie's unless some extraordinary precautions are taken. In that case, Arjhan is never surprised, and if the PCs attempt to take a rest, he attacks; further assuming he hears the zombie combat he takes the actions listed in the table: Arjhan's Benefits.

Also, there is room within the Encounter CR to adjust Arjhan's hit points to alter the challenge of the encounter based on how effective the PCs are to this point. Without changing the CR and XP of the encounter, the DM may adjust Arjhan's hp to any value in the range of 7-35.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># PCs</th>
<th>Arjhan's Benefits (cumulative)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Arjhan does not have the <em>Blessed by Tiamat</em> trait.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3+</td>
<td>Arjhan has a vial of poison (<em>PH152</em>) and coats his daggers before combat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4+</td>
<td>Arjhan coats the 10’ leading into his chamber with oil. He casts his <em>bless</em> spell, and takes cover around the corner at the entrance to his chambers and opens with his breath weapon igniting the oil (<em>PH159</em>) for an extra 5 fire damage.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Tactics:** If Arjhan is aware of the PCs approach, and he hasn't fully prepared, he will attempt to stall by entering into negotiations with the PCs. During this time he will attempt to complete the preparations described in the benefits box using Sleight of Hand and Deception to cover his actions.

If/When combat ensues, Arjhan will open with his *breath weapon*, and attempt to take cover around the corner of the chamber entrance. Round 2 and 3, he will use his *guiding bolt* on the most threatening PCs. After round 3, Arjhan will try to decide if he is better off using his (possibly *poisoned*) dagger attack or casting *sacred flame*. As long as the fight is going well, Arjhan will continue attacking.

If the fight is going against him, Arjhan will attempt to negotiate safe passage. In such case, if a PC is unconscious, Arjhan will threaten to attack the unconscious PC with his dagger...
if he is adjacent to the unconscious PC, or with sacred flame if he is at range. Consult the unconscious condition (PH392) for the mechanics and effects of such an attack, and make sure the PCs understand it, too. Arjhan will use his action to ready such an attack if any PC tries to harm him.

**Arjhan:** med humanoid (dragonborn (red)); CE

| AC: 10; HP: 14; Speed: 30;  |
| S:12; D:10; C:10; I:10; W:14; Ch:12 |
| Skills: Medicine +4, Religion +4 |
| Damage Resistance: fire |
| Senses: darkvision 60’ (from goggles of night) passive Perception 12 |
| Languages: Common, Draconic |
| Challenge: 1/4 (50 XP) |
| Breath weapon: (1/day); 15’ cone; DC10 Dex for half; 2d6 fire. |
| Blessed by Tiamat: Arjhan is immune to the unconscious condition. So even when at 0 hp, he remains conscious. |
| Spellcasting: 1st level caster; DC 12; +4 to hit |

Cantrips (at will): gudance, resistance, sacred flame

1st level (3 slots): bless, cure wounds, guiding bolt

**Dagger (4): ranged:** +3 to hit; 20/60 ft; 1 targ; 1d4+1 piercing

**Dagger:** melee; +3 to hit; 5ft; 1 targ; 1d4+1 piercing

**Loot:** goggles of night, 10 gp.

**Concluding the encounter:** If the PCs prevail they can loot the goggles of night. If they apprehend Arjhan, and haven't yet confronted P'tha, then the PCs must decide what to do with Arjhan. If he is present during a fight with P'tha, and can get at least one hand free, he can cast both any remaining guiding bolts, or sacred flame (at will).

**Encounter 6: The Lost Companion**

P'tha's quarters are the final living chamber in the tunnel complex. Non-descript chambers and 100 feet of tunnel are between Arjhan’s room and P'tha's. However, P'tha does keep an eye on Arjhan, and if the PCs try to take a long rest, P'tha will discover them and attack them. A short rest is fine, though, as P'tha is too far away to hear combat with Arjhan or the zombies.

If the PCs continues searching the entire tunnel complex, they will eventually happen upon P'tha's chamber and P'tha will defend his domain.

**The winding passages vary irregularly between 5' and 7' in height, and 2 1/2 ' to 10' in width with 5' width being the standard. There are no light source in the passages. The walls and ceiling have a thin layer of webbing covering them.**

P'tha has light webbing spread across the 50’ leading to his quarters, and his websense will likely warn him of the PC's approach. He will engage the PC in the hall at a point where it is 5ft wide so he can deal with the PCs one at a time. He will attack from ambush if possible.

P'tha has an Intelligence of 10 as an awakened creature, so if the opportunity arises, negotiation is possible. P'tha is arrogant, and ego centric. It will be an extremely difficult task
(over DC20) to convince him to stop poaching the lord's game and preying on his livestock. He may promise to do so, only to resume his habit in a few days.

**Scaling the encounter:** P'tha's abilities improve as the number of PCs increases (his claws are sharper and he's healthier) according to this table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># PCs</th>
<th>HP</th>
<th>Bite dmg</th>
<th>CR</th>
<th>XP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1d6+2d6+1</td>
<td>1/4</td>
<td>50XP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>2d6+2d6+1</td>
<td>1/2</td>
<td>100XP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-6</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>3d6+2d6+1</td>
<td>1/2</td>
<td>100XP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**P'tha (giant wolf spider):** medium beast; NE; *DMBR*29 or *MM*330.

**Concluding the encounter:** P'tha has no treasure, however, if the PCs have killed P'tha (at the DM's discretion) the PCs may attempt to harvest poison from P'tha. It is a DC20 Wisdom(Survival) check to successfully harvest the 1d4 doses from the body. (If the attempt fails, the poison glands are ruined and no further attempts are possible.) The poison has a DC11 Constitution save and deals 2d6 poison damage; otherwise it conforms to the poison listed in *PH*144.

**Concluding the Adventure**

If the PCs prevail they are heroes in the surrounding communities, and on their way to becoming legends. Grant them XP by totaling the creatures they successfully overcame. Depending on the circumstances that launched the adventure, and how things resolve the PCs may be in the favor of influential people who sent them on the mission. Such favors should be noted on the character sheet for future game play.

Depending on how things resolve with Arjhan, the PCs may have the Enmity of the Red Dragon Cult, and should also be noted on the character sheet.

If the PCs were killed their bodies are unrecoverable. The baboons, spider and zombie will eat them. Arjhan will dispose of the body so that it can never be found.