The Lake of Monoliths

The Lake of Monoliths is an adventure scenario for 2nd to 4th level 5e-compatible characters set in the depths beneath the Endless Warrens in the mountains north of the City of Arches. It's intended to work with any existing flavor of 5e including D&D 2014, D&D 2024, *Level Up Advanced 5e*, *Tales of the Valiant*, or others. It can be easily modified to support other fantasy RPGs as well.

This scenario is one of a series of scenarios following the Key of Worlds campaign arc included in the City of Arches sourcebook beginning with the *Scroll of Akrave*. You can also modify it to run as a stand-alone adventure in any campaign or setting.

This Isn't a Typical Adventure

This adventure scenario isn't laid out like a traditional adventure. Instead, it presents ingredients to build your own adventure for your own group, campaign, and story. It gives you a scaffold around which to wrap your own adventure and story – focusing on the background, secrets and clues, notable NPCs, locations, and potential treasure.

You're encouraged to change these elements to fit your own game. Use these components to build your own adventure during prep and play.

Each section in this scenario suggests how to use these components during prep and play.

Adventure Summary

Having learned of the existence of the Blackfire Braziers and the artifacts able to alight them, the characters seek the locations of these three Blackfire Braziers. From the Scroll of Akrave, they learned that members of the that the locations of these braziers has been etched into ancient stones standing in a subterranean lake known as the Lake of Monoliths.

During this scenario, the characters travel from the City of Arches to the Lake of Monoliths, facing various situations and trials along the way, until the find the monoliths and reveal the locations of the three Blackfire Braziers.

Adventure Structure

Unlike typical dungeon-delving adventures, this adventure plays out in a series of scenes and locations the characters travel to as they make their journey to the Lake of Monoliths.

You decide how many of these scenes and situations the characters uncover as they travel through the Endless Warrens – even adding your own sidequests and adventures if you desire.

Adventure History

The standing stones dominating the Lake of Monoliths have existed since the days of the Age of Primordials hundreds of thousands of years ago. And, for all those years, a power resonated within them – an otherworldly connection said to touch the minds of mortals, sharing secrets hidden away across worlds. For thousands of years sentient beings found their way to the monoliths, placing their hands on the strange swirls and geometric shapes etched onto the stones' surface. They gave up a piece of themselves, a memory or secret and received one back in return.

Some creatures found the song of the stones so compelling they remained, their own minds shredded and replaced with memories of other worlds they have never seen before.

Several hundred years ago a sage and member of the Knights of the Black Flame named Orathe Graymane found his way to the monoliths and gave the stones his greatest secret – the location of the Blackfire Braziers. In return, he gained a secret so terrible it bound him to the monoliths forever.

Trapped with his terrible secret, Orathe has become a **specter** bound to the monoliths and seething to destroy any living being that comes too close.

Secrets of the Monoliths

Deliver the following secrets and clues as the characters explore the pathways to the Lake of Monoliths. Characters might discover these clues from fellow travelers along their path, lost journals from forgotten explorers, ancient carvings on cavern walls, whispers from beings long dead, or mushroom-induced prophecies.

It is not critical the characters discover every secret – think of them like information as treasure, uncovered as the characters explore the tomb.

- The titanic stones of the Lake of Monoliths have been there since the earliest days of the land – over one hundred thousand years.
- It's said the monoliths share secrets. You give it one of yours and it gives you one in return.
- Some beings have become so obsessed with the monoliths that they have never left – their minds interwoven with the song of the stones.
- The sage Orathe Graymane, a Knight of the Black Flame, planned to draw his greatest secret from his mind so he might live a life in peace. He gave his secret to the monoliths – the location of the three Blackfire Braziers.

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- Orathe gave his secret and in return he learned of a terrible life-destroying darkness known as Ourborin the Moon of Oblivion.
- The three braziers include the Brazier of the Nameless King, the Brazier of Grayon, and the Brazier of the Betrothed.
- The Brazier of the Nameless King resides in a hidden temple to the former ruler of the City of Arches deep within the Endless Warrens past a draconic graveyard known as Dragon's Reach.
- The Brazier of Grayon resides in a shattered keep in the depths of the ruins of Sunken Revvia.
- The Brazier of the Betrothed lies in the crypts hidden deep beneath the Theater of Whispers.
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Key NPCs

The following is a brief list of key NPCs for this adventure –living or dead. The characters may learn the history of dead NPCs or speak to their spirits directly.

- **Orathe Graymane** – Former elven sage and Knight of the Nameless King, Orathe came to the City of Arches through a portal from a faraway world of star-born elves. Orathe took the oath to protect the locations of the Blackfire Braziers. He decided to hide this secret at the stones of the Lake of Monoliths but lost his own sense of self and transformed into a **specter**. Even in this undead form, Orathe seeks to protect the secrets of the braziers.
- **Gratthak – Sahuagin Cult Fanatic Speaker of the Black Moon**– A sahuagin cult fanatic who has heard the whispering of the monoliths for decades and now welcomes the coming of the Moon of Oblivion. He leads a small band of fanatically loyal sahuagin who seek to sacrifice sentient beings to their dark lord through the monoliths.
- **Chase Wyrmwillow** – A halfling scout who travels the endless warrens seeking treasure and lost lore. She's familiar with the various passages of the endless warrens and shares such information for a price.

Adventure Start

As part of the Key of Worlds campaign path, this scenario takes place after the Scroll of Akrave and either before or after the characters seek out the artifacts required to light the Blackfire Braziers.

Use one of the following hooks to draw the characters into the scenario.

- From the Scroll of Akrave, the characters learn that the sage Orathe Graymane left the secret locations of the Blackfire Braziers on the giant stones of the Lake of Monoliths. The Archkeeper Garland Willowmane asks the characters to learn these locations so they might light the braziers and retrieve the key before the vault collapses or other entities acquire it first.
- The historian and mage of Kartan, Danvon of Duskwater, seeks adventurers willing to travel to the Lake of Monoliths and recover the secrets of Orathe Graymane. He will pay handsomely for the information but is too busy with his studies to do it himself.
- A character receives a curse – a piece of information trapped in their mind that must be drawn out. Only the ancient singing stones of the Lake of Monoliths can draw it out of them and save their mind before it's too late.

Pathways Through the Warrens

The Endless Warrens are built from thousands of different interconnected caverns weaving through the mountain and down deep underground. Here are ten different types of passages you can use to build your own interconnected path through the Endless Warrens as the characters travel from the City of Arches to the Lake of Monoliths.

1. Forgotten sewers
2. Ancient catacombs
3. Underground river
4. Tunnels carved by humanoid hands
5. Massive wormways
6. Pathway along a deep fissure
7. Tunnels sprouting phosphorescent fungi
8. Spiraling shaft
9. Abandoned mining tunnels
10. Primeval tunnels adorned with thousands of handprints
11. Smooth tunnels bored out with magic
12. Natural tunnel strewn with webs

Build Your Pointcrawl

Using the pathways above and the encounters below, you can build your own pointcrawl to suit the length and complexity of the adventure. Draw one point for the City of Arches and another point for the Lake of Monoliths. Draw one or two passages from the City of Arches such as "forgotten sewers" and "ancient catacombs". Connect these to encounters selected below – perhaps even the same encounter for a simpler pointcrawl. Add nodes and pathways as you choose, including potential secret paths to hidden nodes the characters might discover along the journey.

Such secret passages might include:

1. Underwater passage

2. Hidden passage covered with moss or webs
3. Collapsing sinkhole to a new tunnel
4. Carefully engineered secret rock door
5. Illusionary rock wall
6. Tiny passageway for small creatures

Encounters of the Endless Warrens

The following section includes ten encounters you can drop in as the characters travel through the winding passages of the Endless Warrens. The *City of Arches* sourcebook likewise includes encounters you can drop in as well. Choose whichever encounters spark your interest and whatever number best supports the adventure you want to run.

Forgotten Shrine of Vithra

In a natural cave alcove of the Endless Warrens stands a carved statue and altar to the serpent-god Vithra. The statue depicts a three-headed cobra with gemstone eyes and a rusted stain coats the gilded stone altar. A mist flows over the floor surrounding the altar. A golden cup forged with a stand of three interwoven serpents sits atop the altar as though placed there only recently.

When a creature drinks from the cup they become the recipient of the spell *gaseous form*. When taken away from the altar, the cup can only bestow this ability once.

Several cultists and a cult fanatic worshipper of Vithra have done so, lurking in the mists surrounding the altar. Should anyone touch or otherwise manipulate the cup, the cultists break out of their gaseous form and attack.

The Lost Celestial

The characters hear the commotion of battle down one hall. On investigating, they see a celestial **veteran** battling several **lemures**. The celestial veteran and lemures stepped out from a wartorn hellscape through a shining radiant archway whose glow slowly subsides.

If saved, the celestial veteran realizes they have no memory of their past or how they got here. They are confused and could become potentially agitated if pushed too hard. Wounded from their battle with the lemures, the celestial has no desire to travel with the characters but is thankful for directions back to the City of Arches where they might recuperate and learn more of their past.

Stone of the Hunger

Several cultists of the Hunger kneel, hands outstretched towards an inky black stone. Black tendrils flow out from the stone occasionally touching one of the cultists who cries out in elation before disintegrating into a pool of pulsing gray liquid – a gray ooze.

The cultists would very much like the characters to join them in their worship of the Hunter – saying that the beast itself resides in the depths of a lake to the north should they wish to visit it directly.

If the characters engage in any hostility, the cultists and the gray ooze attack. The stone is a focus of a *black tentacles* spell (DC 13).

Among the possessions of the cultist is a bag of six black sapphires worth 20 GP each and a set of *slippers of spider climbing*.

Columns of Vrys

Carved into the stone wall are a pair of columns, each depicting a deva with their hands over their eyes. A dwarf named Felda Redsong kneels in front of the columns, weeping. If approached, she tells the sad tale of the celestial Vrys who knew the love and warmth of the heavens but now is trapped here in this world. The tale and proximity to these pillars has overtaken Felda, causing her such grief that she hasn't eaten for days. If left on her own, she will starve to death. Characters who investigate the area find a magical aura surrounding the pillars that cause tremendous sadness. One might attempt to convince Felda to leave the proximity of the pillars or otherwise disable the magical effect on them to break their connection with the dwarf.

Ruined Keep of Karigulon

A hidden passage covered in blood along the caves of the Endless Warrens leads to a small ruined keep. Bloody humanoid bodies decorate the walls of the ruind keep. A band of gnoll worshippers of Karigulon the Dread Fang and their pet hyenas have taken possession of the keep and have captured several duergar and goblins from the city of Mountainhome who they plan to sacrifice and devour to their fell god.

The Dread Rift

The characters come across a rift splitting the path ahead of them 40 feet across and over a thousand feet deep. On the other side, an orc knight of Mountainhome named Kalys the Storm battles several shadows who seem to be getting the upper hand. Should the characters be able to save the knight, she relays that her scouting group came across a sinkhole nearby where a host of shadows

and skeletons burst forth and killed her compatriots. She asks the characters to find what had reanimated the dead in the sinkhole and destroy it. Should they follow through, the characters find a vampiric skull in a bubbling pool of black liquid that has called the undead towards it.

Tablets of the Spider Queen

In large hive-like chamber with several passages at different heights, several giant spiders and ettercaps have cocooned a group of bandits known as the Mottled Hood. who had defiled three massive stone tablets outlining the ancient history of Kazeka the Queen of Spiders – a supposed primordial of the ancient days. The spiders do the bidding of their ettercap masters. The ettercaps are suspicious of the characters but willing to bargain for the lives of the bandits – trading their lives for treasure or, ideally, a magic item they can leave as an offering to Kazeka.

The Sleeping Basilisk

In a large chamber surrounding a green glowing pond, a basilisk slumbers coiled around a dead tree adorned with hanging skulls – one of them shining with golden glyphs. Several statues of humanoids stand frozen in various states of fear.

Should anyone manipulate the tree, the skulls all begin to chatter, whispering of the deaths of the characters while the basilisk awakes and attacks. The gilded skull belongs to a long-dead wizard named Nevron who was slain, boiled, and cursed by a hag named Vemelda Longshadow. As an action, a character attuned to the skull can cast the spell *speak with dead*. This ability resets at the next dawn.

The Hag's Den

The **green hag** Vemelda Longshadow has a den hidden away in the Endless Warrens. When she desires it, wayward travelers find her den through the enticing aroma of baked goods and delicious meats. Vemelda is neither the wicked hag who poisons her visitors and puts them into a pot nor the good witch who grants all travelers their greatest wish after enjoying a tasty croissant. She believes in long-term beneficial relationships with her guests. She feeds off gossip, even for those people she has never heard of before. More than anything, Vemelda wishes for a brew made from the stinger of a purple worm – a deadly poison equally deadly to extract.

Velemda is served by a host of skeletons – some servants and some guardians – all of whom she says come from the most wicked sort.

The Dead Worm

In the deepest bowels of the Endless Warrens is a vast tunnel formed from the rotted carcass of a purple worm. Now the carcass is the home of **troglodytes** who treat the dead beast as a god, following the orders of their **troglodyte ogre cult fanatic** leader who they call Mother Stoneheart. Mother Stoneheart calls for the eviscerated organs of any who dare walk within the passage, keeping the strongest alive. For them Mother Stoneheart conducts a vile ceremony in which she pours the poison of the god-worm (purple worm poison) into their mouths from a blackened hollowed out skull. If they survive, they are venerated as an avatar of the worm-god.

The Lake of Monoliths

After their journey through the Endless Warrens, the characters come to the shores of the Lake of Monoliths. The lake itself is a mile across and the three huge black monoliths that give the lake its name stand clearly in the center. The lake is hundreds of feet deep, the monoliths rising from a shallow submerged island in the lake's center.

Several swamped boats in various states of repair line the shores of the lake should one travel around it. Some of these were used by explorers. Others by humanoid races who venerate the monoliths such as tribes of **troglodytes** or **grimlocks**.

Within the black waters swim **swarms of quippers** and a titanic octopus with twice the hit points of a **giant octopus** that can attack two different targets as part of its attack action.

Near the monoliths themselves swim several emaciated **sahuagin cultists** including Gratthak, the **sahuagin cult fanatic** speaker of the Black Moon. The power of the monoliths has given them extremely long-lives and they speak often of its song. They are not hostile but will suffer no sacrilege about their worship of the monoliths.

Sharing Secrets

When his name is spoken, Orathe Graymane flows together from wisps of fog surrounding the monoliths. Orathe is a **specter** with twice the normal hit points and able to attack twice as part of his attack action. Orathe barely remembers his former life but when he hears about the Key of Worlds, he must be convinced of the characters' good intentions to share his tale. He explains that he no longer knows where the braziers are, but the monoliths do. All that must be given up is one secret for each location of the monolith. Each character can only give up one secret to learn the location of each of the braziers.

Further Adventures

Once the characters learn the locations of the three Blackfire Braziers, they can follow the next steps in this series of scenarios.

If the characters do not yet have either the Staff of Servlyn or the Sword of Irixthius, they can travel to either the Tower of Therex for the staff or the Tomb of the War King for the sword.

If they already have either the Staff of Servlyn or the Sword of Irixthius, the characters should be 5th level and are now ready to choose which Brazier they wish to go to first. Each path contains a series of three adventure locations, each leading to the next. These include:

- The Theater of Whispers – the first part in the Brazier of the Betrothed.
- The Nest of the Longclaws – the first part in the path for the Brazier of the Nameless King.
- Descent into Sunken Revvia – the first part in the path for the Brazier of Grayon.