
1.12 – The Doorway Below

Skill Challenge

The forest grows closer as you travel north, sun-dappled fields giving way to shadowed glens and quiet pine barrens. The barely visible road dwindles to a path, then a game trail, then finally into nothing and you start to realize just how much of the kingdom has returned to the wild as humanity huddles ever closer to the few safe places that remain. You make your camp that night, feeling farther from civilization than you have in a long time. You quietly discuss what towns might still be occupied in the area of the mine and come to the humbling conclusion that the answer might be “none.”

Keep in mind that the PCs will get to the mine first, no matter what they do, the only question is what shape they arrive in and how comfortable they feel about their lead.

Gold Rush
Level: 1
Complexity: 3 (8 successes before 3 failures)
Primary Skills: Endurance, History, Insight
<i>Athletics (DC 10):</i> The character leaps from rooftop to rooftop, shoulders aside doors or hurdles through windows.
<i>Perception (DC 10):</i> The PC hears patrols in time to avoid them or finds places for the party to hide.
<i>Stealth (DC 10):</i> The character hides everyone under the straw in a stable or helps camouflage the party.
Secondary Skills: Diplomacy, History, Insight
<i>Diplomacy (DC 13, maximum two successes):</i> The character asks for help or assistance.
<i>History (DC 15, maximum one success):</i> The PC remembers details about the city.
<i>Insight (DC 15):</i> The character figures out the most effective routes.
Victory & Defeat
<i>Successes Accrued</i>
0 – 3: The race to the wall is a grueling affair, ending in a frantic swim that leaves you gasping, bloody and exhausted. [Each character takes 2d6 damage and loses 2 healing surges.]
4 – 7: You find a partially burnt out arrow tower and gingerly make your way up to one of the slits. Although the jump is farther than you would like and you land hard, at least you are clear of the city. [Each character loses a healing surge.]
8+: Luck seems to be with you as you round a corner to find a large section of the outer wall brought down by an explosion. You scurry across the rubble and make your way into the forest. [See below for possible loot.]

After two weeks of rough marching, you enter the valley of the Silvergate mine. The stunted trees struggle to grow through the gravel dumped over the valley floor. The whole valley has a wrongness about it, as though everything were just slightly askew. You search for the entrance, and then realize that if the mine has been lost to a simple cave-in someone would have reclaimed it by now. Something more profound, something magical, must conceal the entrance.

Lacking roads, you are reduced to navigating by the stars and water. Four days north of Hornfels you pass Lake Ranhalla and realize that you have been curving a bit too much to the west. The village of Arnale once stood here, now the herons and blackbirds are all that remain. It has been forty years since the Elves put it to the torch. Fearful that you have lost too much time, you decide to push an extra hour before making camp.

Frustrated, you decide to take a break and sit down for a meal of hard bread and jerky, knowing that the Tieflings might be just behind you. You pass the map around, each person searching for something they might have missed, something that only has significance if you’re standing in the area. Suddenly you realize that the instructions do not lead to the symbol for the entrance, but to the hill behind it. Grabbing your packs, you scurry up the rocky slope.

Two hundred yards past the tree line you find a strange hole where the rain has washed away the soil, leaving a rocky chimney leading down into the darkness. There is a sense of wrongness here as well.