

Ruins of Ethium

Session 4 - The Duergar Outpost

Use this pack at the table. The aim is practical: read-aloud text, clear encounter flow, integrated monster stats, HP trackers, treasure, and choices. The correct map is Druegar_sm.png.

Where we start

The party has beaten the Otyugh in the collapsed lake cavern and pushed into worked stone passages leading towards a duergar-held district of ancient Ethium. The last session ended mid-fight against duergar and their quaggoth slaves.

Session goals

1. Finish the outpost fight.
2. Let the party discover the Ethium Viewing Dais.
3. Run the Assembly Hall combat.
4. Unleash the Grey Burrower mid-fight.
5. Have the duergar retreat behind their great doors.
6. Leave the party with a choice: troglodytes, Fallcrest, or deeper duergar city.

Campaign progress

- ✓ Goblin Ambush
- ✓ Goblin Cave and Mara
- ✓ Fallcrest and Blue Moon Brawl
- ✓ Hammers Manor
- ✓ Ethium Pool
- ✓ Deeper Ethium / Otyugh
- Duergar Outpost

Next: Troglodytes, Fallcrest return, or Duergar City

Big ideas to remember

- Ethium was once alive and beautiful.
- The duergar have occupied an ancient dwarven district beneath Ethium.
- The Viewing Dais has two sockets: one Ethium Stone for power, one relic for location.
- Every vision starts as the past, then glitches into the present: Memory Retrieved then Memory Updated.
- Garnel is safely at the Ethium Pool researching while the party explores.
- The grey natural tunnels were made by a predator, not by miners.

Likely session rhythm

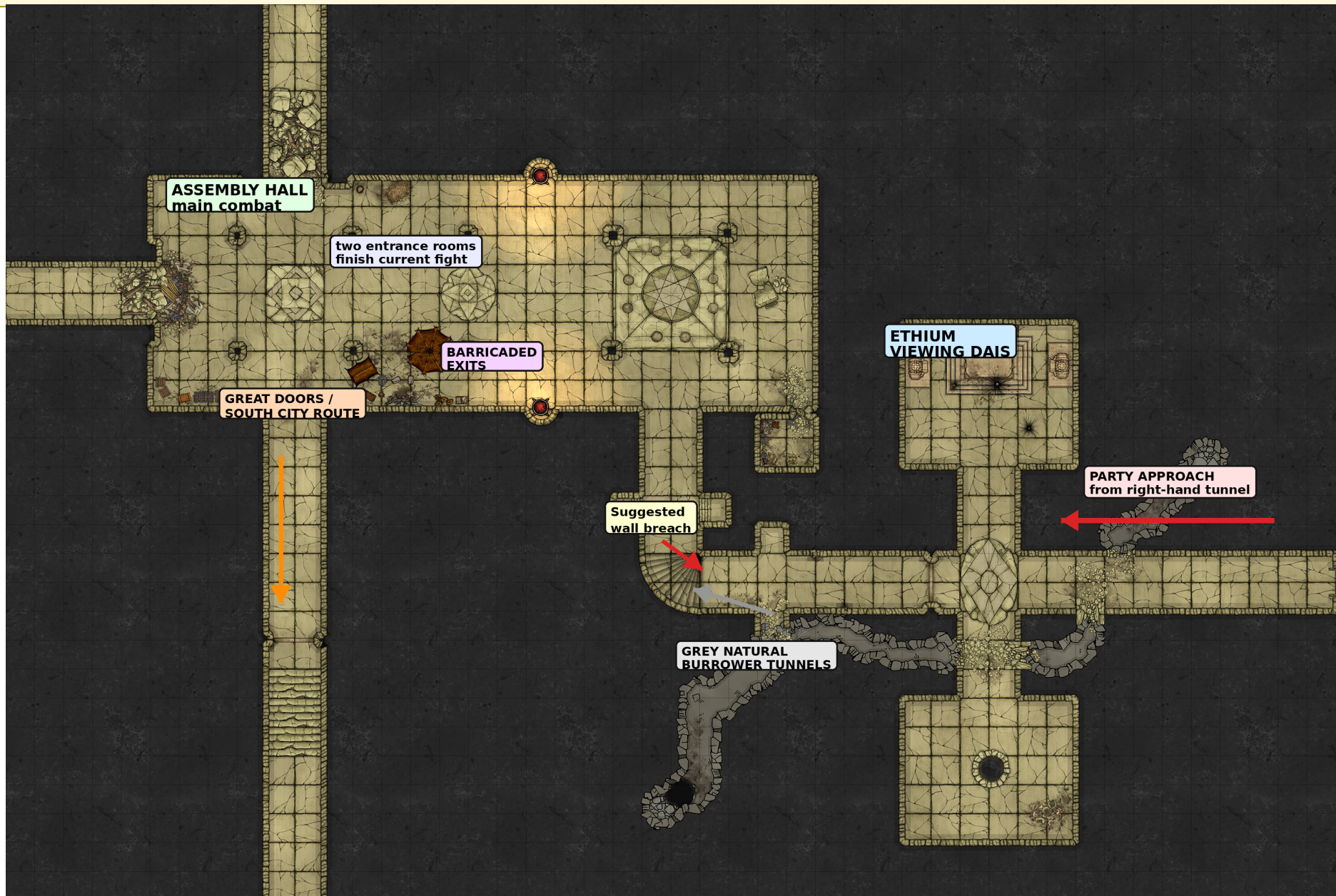
Fast start in combat -> short exploration -> powerful lore scene at the dais -> big tactical fight -> monster chaos -> duergar retreat -> player choice.

Tone

Combat heavy, tense, cinematic, still suitable for young players. Let them feel clever when they use terrain, relics, language words, or the burrower against the duergar.

Map - Druegar_sm: Duergar Outpost and Approach

Orientation: The party approaches from the right-hand tunnel. The grey natural passages are burrowed through the old stone by the Grey Burrower. The large hall to the left is the Assembly Hall. The raised room to the upper-right contains the Ethium Viewing Dais. The southern route/great doors lead towards the duergar-held city district. Some exits are barricaded or blocked by rubble.



Start Here - Resume in Initiative

Read Aloud

The last echoes of the Otyugh fight fade behind you, but the stink of the black lake still clings to your armour and clothes. Ahead, the rough cave gives way to old worked stone. The floor is cracked but carefully laid. The walls are carved with half-buried dwarven symbols and thin blue mineral veins.

Then steel rings in the chamber ahead. A duergar shouts in Dwarvish. The fight is not over.

DM reminder: Start immediately. Do not recap for too long. Ask where everyone is standing, then resume initiative. One duergar should try to flee south or shout a warning if the party gives them the chance.

Encounter 1 - The Outpost Rooms

This is the fight already underway in the two entrance rooms. The duergar are defending the approach to their claimed territory. The quaggoths are enslaved shock troops: hairy, brutal, and pushed into the front line.

Creature	AC	HP	Init	HP tracker / notes
Duergar Guard 1	16	26	—	[] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] Enlarge, Invisibility, War Pick
Duergar Guard 2	16	26	—	[] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] Tries to flee or warn the hall if bloodied
Quaggoth Slave 1	13	45	—	[] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] Wounded Fury below half HP
Quaggoth Slave 2	13	45	—	[] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] May be dragged away by Burrower later if left alive

Duergar Guard

AC 16 | HP 26 | Speed 25 ft

Attacks: War Pick +5 to hit, 1d8+3 piercing. Javelin +5 to hit, range 30/120, 1d6+3 piercing.

Traits: Enlarge (1/day): bonus action, becomes Large, +1d4 damage, advantage on STR checks/saves for 1 minute. Invisibility (1/day): action, ends when it attacks/casts.

Tactics: Fight disciplined. One tries to warn the Assembly Hall. They retreat rather than die pointlessly.

Quaggoth Slave

AC 13 | HP 45 | Speed 30 ft, climb 30 ft

Attacks: Multiattack: 2 Claws, +6 to hit, 2d4+4 slashing each.

Traits: Wounded Fury: while at half HP or lower, has advantage on melee attacks.

Tactics: Brutal and direct. Targets the closest PC unless a duergar orders otherwise. Quaggoths are slaves, not loyal allies.

After the fight: The party hears a heavy warning horn or shouted Dwarvish from further south. If a duergar escapes, the Assembly Hall is ready. If no one escapes, the hall is still alert because of the noise.

The Ethium Viewing Dais

Read Aloud

One of the smaller chambers is strangely untouched. Dust lies on the floor, but the centre of the room is clean, as if the stone itself refuses to age. A circular dais rises from the floor. It has two hollows: one perfectly shaped for an Ethium Stone, and a second shallow area marked with delicate lines where an object might be placed.

When the stone is set into the first socket, blue light spills through carved channels in the floor. Thin crystal pillars rise around the dais. Finally, a flawless crystal sphere emerges from the centre, held in place by the dais itself. It is beautiful, cold, and impossible to remove.

Core mechanic - two sockets

Socket 1: Ethium Stone - powers the dais.

Socket 2: Relic / item - selects the linked memory node.

The dais is not a treasure chest or a portable crystal ball. It is part of the Ethium network: an ancient memory and viewing system. Each relic is like an access key connected to a location, person, guild, home, or city function.

Memory Sequence - always use this structure

Stage	What happens	Table language
1. Power	Stone activates the dais. Sphere rises. Symbols glow.	"The sphere waits."
2. Relic placed	The item is accepted or rejected. If accepted, the sphere names the node in Ancient Ethium.	"Archive connected."
3. Memory Retrieved	Shows Ethium as it was: full of life, music, work, families, trade, and wonder.	"Memory Retrieved."
4. Glitch	Blue static, cracks of light, voices dropping out, time dragging forward.	"Memory updating..."
5. Memory Updated	Same place now: ruined, occupied, flooded, silent, or dangerous.	"Memory Updated."

Important: The present-day image is not just a replay. The network is damaged and still trying to update itself. It is showing old memory and current reality layered on top of each other. This makes Ethium feel alive, broken, and aware.

Language prompts

If the players experiment with words, use the Ethium language primer. Useful phrases: Velis Aethra = detect Ethium energy; Kaelith Vorn = bind/connect; Aethra Lumis = light. Reward creative combinations with flickers, partial views, or unstable effects rather than blocking play.

Unlocked Memories and Relics

The party may find or use the following relics. Each can be placed on the second socket of the dais. Keep these concise at the table: one strong image of the past, one strong image of the present.

Explorer's Compass

Item: A brass compass with a blue crystal needle. It does not point north. It turns towards the nearest Ethium Stone.

Node: Explorer's Guild

Memory Retrieved: Explorers in bright cloaks prepare expeditions. Maps cover tables. Children wave from balconies as a guildmaster places the compass into a young dwarf's hands: "May it always guide you home."

Memory Updated: The guild hall is shattered and occupied by duergar. Barracks have been built between broken statues. The display case for the compass is empty because the party now has it.

Game use: Permanent campaign item. Points towards nearest Ethium Stone. Unlocks Explorer's Guild memory.

Ethium Smith's Hammer

Item: A perfectly balanced masterwork hammer, small enough to carry but clearly made for serious craft.

Node: The Great Forge

Memory Retrieved: Blue Ethium fires burn in deep stone furnaces. Dwarven smiths shape impossible metal. Sparks rise like stars. Apprentices chant timing words while master smiths work in rhythm.

Memory Updated: The forge is now a duergar armoury. Smoke fills the chamber. Slaves work the bellows. Weapons are being made from scavenged Ethium metal.

Game use: Masterwork crafting tool. Unlocks Forge memory. Later useful for repairs, reforging, or convincing dwarven NPCs.

Child's Drawing

Item: A fragile scrap of old parchment showing a dwarf family, a pet dog, a home, and a glowing blue crystal. No gold value.

Node: Family Home

Memory Retrieved: A warm dwarven home. A child laughs while drawing at a low table. A dog sleeps by the hearth. Parents talk quietly. The blue crystal glows like a household lamp.

Memory Updated: The same room is collapsed and silent. No monsters. No treasure. Just dust, broken furniture, and one wall still bearing the faded outline of the child's drawing.

Game use: Emotional lore item. Reminds players Ethium was ordinary people, not just wizards and monsters.

Pool Node

Item: No relic needed if the sphere can still reach the Ethium Pool. The pool itself acts as a fixed node.

Node: Ethium Pool

Memory Retrieved: The pool in the ancient system, clean and ceremonial, attended by robed keepers.

Memory Updated: Garnel is visible beside the present-day pool, safely researching, muttering notes, and unaware the party can see him.

Game use: Confirms Garnel is alive and removes pressure to drag him through the dungeon.

Unknown / Deep Node

Item: Any damaged or unfamiliar relic may briefly connect to this.

Node: Deep Chamber

Memory Retrieved: Only a bright sealed door and a silhouette beyond it.

Memory Updated: The same silhouette seems to turn towards the sphere. The connection fails: "Node unstable. Connection lost."

Game use: Foreshadows deeper campaign mystery.

Encounter 2 - The Assembly Hall

Read Aloud

The corridor opens into a once-grand hall. Tall pillars line the cracked floor. Ancient dwarven carvings have been gouged, hammered, and overwritten with harsh duergar marks. Mining carts, weapon racks, and piles of broken stone turn the room into a battlefield.

At the far side, a duergar captain barks orders. Crossbowmen take cover above broken masonry. Quaggoths strain against chains, eager to be unleashed. The duergar are not surprised to see you. They were waiting.

Room feel: This is the first time the party sees that the duergar are not just monsters in a ruin. They are an organised occupation force, using ancient Ethium halls as barracks, armouries, and mining infrastructure.

Creature	AC	HP	Init	HP tracker / role
Duergar Captain	16	45	—	Commander. Enlarges immediately. Retreats if badly losing.
Duergar Soldier 1	16	26	—	Protects captain.
Duergar Soldier 2	16	26	—	Blocks melee route.
Duergar Soldier 3	16	26	—	May run to doors.
Crossbow Duergar 1	16	22	—	Raised cover / balcony / rubble.
Crossbow Duergar 2	16	22	—	Targets casters or wounded PCs.
Quaggoth Slave 1	13	45	—	Charges nearest.
Quaggoth Slave 2	13	45	—	Good target for Burrower demo.

Duergar Captain
AC 16 | HP 45 | Speed 25 ft
Attacks: War Pick +5, 1d8+3 piercing. If Enlarged: +1d4 extra damage. Javelin +5, range 30/120, 1d6+3.
Traits: Enlarge (1/day), Invisibility (1/day). Command: once per round, one duergar ally may move 10 ft or make a weapon attack with advantage if the captain uses his action to shout orders (optional, use only if fight needs pressure).
Tactics: Starts by Enlarging. Keeps soldiers between himself and Thorn/Derek. Orders crossbows to focus Dave/Nibbles. Will retreat if half the force is down.

Duergar Soldier
AC 16 | HP 26 | Speed 25 ft
Attacks: War Pick +5, 1d8+3 piercing. Javelin +5, 1d6+3.
Traits: Enlarge (1/day), Invisibility (1/day).
Tactics: Fight in formation. Use cover. One tries to bar the southern route when the retreat begins.

Duergar Crossbowman
AC 16 | HP 22 | Speed 25 ft
Attacks: Heavy Crossbow +4, range 100/400, 1d10+2 piercing. Dagger +4, 1d4+2.
Traits: Uses cover. Disadvantage if forced into melee.
Tactics: Stay back, shoot exposed targets, and use raised rubble. If threatened, disengage behind soldiers.

Quaggoth Slave
AC 13 | HP 45 | Speed 30 ft, climb 30 ft
Attacks: Multiattack: 2 Claws, +6, 2d4+4 slashing each.
Traits: Wounded Fury below half HP: advantage on melee attacks.
Tactics: Rush. Roar. Cause chaos. They are not tactical, but the duergar use them as living shields.

Assembly Hall Tactics

Round	Duergar plan	DM note
1	Captain enlarges. Soldiers form a line. Crossbows fire from cover. Quaggoths charge.	Let the players see the enemy are organised.
2	Duergar try to pin fighters and pressure casters.	Reward clever use of cover and movement.
3	The first scraping sound begins from the grey natural tunnels.	Do not explain it yet.
4	Cracks appear. Dust falls. Some duergar notice and panic.	The fight starts to become unstable.
5	Grey Burrower erupts.	Battle becomes three-way chaos.

Round 4 Event - The Grey Burrower

Set-up: The grey natural caves are not old mine tunnels. They were chewed or forced through the stone by a huge burrowing predator. The noise of duergar machinery, quaggoth roars, metal weapons and spells attracts it back.

Round 3 read aloud:

Somewhere beneath the stone, something scrapes. Not metal. Not claws. Something larger, dragging itself through rock.

Round 4 read aloud:

A crack races across the wall. Dust falls in a curtain from the ceiling. One of the duergar looks towards it and swears.

Round 5 read aloud:

The wall explodes inward. Grey stone and dust fill the hall. A huge pale worm-like shape erupts into the room, blind mouth opening in a ring of grinding teeth. It does not care who is duergar and who is not. It is hungry.

Grey Burrower	AC	HP	Init	HP tracker
Large monstrosity	15	68	—	0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100 0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

Grey Burrower

AC 15 | HP 68 | Speed 30 ft, burrow 30 ft

Attacks: Multiattack: one Bite and one Tail Slam. Bite +6, 2d10+4 piercing, target Grappled (escape DC13). Tail Slam +6, 2d8+4 bludgeoning, DC13 STR save or knocked Prone.

Traits: Tremorsense: knows where creatures touching the ground are. Burrow: instead of attacking, it disappears underground and emerges anywhere within 30 ft next round. Tunnel Collapse: when it emerges, creatures within 10 ft make DC12 DEX save or take 1d6 bludgeoning and the area becomes difficult terrain.

Tactics: Neutral predator. It attacks the nearest or loudest creature. If it grabs a quaggoth, drag it underground to show the danger.

How to run the chaos

- It is not allied to the duergar.
- It may attack a PC, duergar, crossbowman, or quaggoth.
- If the players use noise, food, spells, or movement to lure it, let that work.
- Duergar fear it. They know the grey tunnels mean danger.
- If the encounter is too hard, have it take a quaggoth and retreat.
- If the players are winning too easily, have it burrow and erupt again behind the casters.

Memorable moment: The first time it grapples a quaggoth, describe the quaggoth screaming, claws scraping lines across the floor, before it is dragged into the grey tunnel and gone. The table will understand the threat instantly.

Environmental Actions

Action	Check / effect
Push mining cart	STR DC12. Cart rolls 20 ft in a straight line. Creatures in path DEX DC12 or 1d6 bludgeoning and knocked prone.
Collapse loose rubble	Attack AC10 / 10 HP or STR DC13. Creates difficult terrain and may block a narrow route.
Leap onto raised rubble	DEX/Acrobatics DC12. Gain high ground / avoid tremorsense for one round if fully off the floor.
Lure the Burrower	Make noise, throw meat, cast vibration spell, or bang metal. No check if clever; otherwise DC12 Performance/Deception/Survival.

Aftermath - The Great Doors Close

Read Aloud

The surviving duergar fall back in good order. One shouts a command. Chains rattle somewhere in the walls. Ahead, enormous stone doors grind shut, ancient dwarven craft reinforced by duergar iron. Bar after bar drops into place with a sound like thunder.

Then silence.

Beyond those doors is no longer a dungeon. It is a city. Occupied. Defended. Waiting.

Outcome: The party should realise the duergar are retreating to an organised settlement built into ancient Ethium dwarven halls. The doors are too heavy to force right now unless you want a hard city-invasion session. They can return later with keys, allies, Garnel, or a plan.

What the players may do next

Player choice	What happens
Try to force the doors	DC very high or impossible for now. They hear locks and bars. Could reveal an Ethium Key slot or dwarven mechanism.
Use the Viewing Dais again	Let them test relics. The compass and hammer should work. Random mundane items give "Access denied" or tiny harmless glitches.
Go to troglodytes	Use the foul natural tunnel route. This becomes a swampy/reptile/prisoner session later.
Return to Fallcrest	Run the Waterfall Ambush contingency. Garnel remains at the Ethium Pool unless the party fetches him.
Find Garnel	The Pool Node shows him safely researching. If they physically return, he can translate more and explain the dais.
Capture a duergar	They know: the city is claimed by the duergar; ancient dwarves once lived here; the captain below wants more Ethium; goblins and the surface factions are not the only threat.

Treasure and Discoveries

Explorer's Compass

Small brass compass with a blue crystal needle. It points towards the nearest Ethium Stone rather than north. It unlocks the Explorer's Guild memory at the dais. This should feel like a campaign-defining item, not just loot.

Ethium Smith's Hammer

Perfectly preserved masterwork hammer. Unlocks the Great Forge memory. It can later help with repairing, reforging, or understanding Ethium metalwork.

Child's Drawing

A fragile drawing of a dwarf family, a dog, a home and a glowing blue crystal. No gold value. Unlocks the Family Home memory. Keep this quiet and emotional.

Optional minor finds

Captain's pouch: 25-40 gp, duergar token, old dwarven key fragment, orders in Dwarvish. These are useful flavour but not the core treasure.

Contingency - If the Party Returns to Fallcrest

If the party chooses to head back rather than continue into troglodyte tunnels or investigate the duergar city, run a challenging level 3 encounter at the waterfall. This mirrors the earlier waterfall climb, but now they are moving down while enemies hold the heights.

Read Aloud

The waterfall path is louder than you remember. Spray turns the stones slick. The old route down towards Fallcrest bends between wet rocks and broken ledges.

Then a horn sounds above you.

Goblin arrows clatter against the stones. A bugbear steps from behind a boulder. Below, blocking the narrow path, an ogre hefts a tree trunk like a club. Someone has been waiting for you.

Story: The Hobgoblin King in the old castle ruins has heard of the party. He is the dominant goblin power in Ethium. His forces avoid the lizardfolk in the swamps and the kobolds by the cliff, where rumours speak of a black dragon. This ambush is a warning: the goblins now treat the heroes as serious threats.

[illegible]

Ogre

AC 11 | HP 59 | Speed 40 ft

Attacks: Greatclub +6, 2d8+4 bludgeoning. Rock +6, range 30/120, 2d6+4 bludgeoning.

Traits: Large, loud, easy to hit but hits hard.

Tactics: Blocks the lower path. Attacks nearest or loudest. Can shove PCs towards water if you want danger.

Hobgoblin Captain

AC 17 | HP 39 | Speed 30 ft

Attacks: Longsword +4, 1d8+2 slashing. Longbow +4, 1d8+2 piercing.

Traits: Leadership: once per round, one ally within 30 ft adds +1d4 to an attack or save.

Tactics: Directs archers. Does not die foolishly. Sounds retreat below half HP or when ogre falls.

Bugbear

AC 16 | HP 27 | Speed 30 ft

Attacks: Morningstar +5, 2d8+2 piercing. Javelin +4, 2d6+2.

Traits: Ambusher: if it surprises a target, +2d6 damage on first hit.

Tactics: Hide behind rocks. Charge casters or wounded targets once the ogre blocks the path.

Goblin Archer

AC 13 | HP 10 | Speed 30 ft

Attacks: Shortbow +4, range 80/320, 1d6+2 piercing. Scimitar +4, 1d6+2.

Traits: Nimble Escape: disengage or hide as bonus action.

Tactics: Use ledges and cover. Flee if bugbears fall and captain retreats.

Quick Reference - Running Notes

Moment	Do not forget
Opening	Start in action. Finish the current outpost fight quickly and loudly.
Fleeing duergar	One tries to warn the hall or retreat south. Let the party stop them if they act fast.
Dais activation	Stone powers it. Relic selects it. Sphere cannot be removed.
Vision language	Always say: Memory Retrieved -> glitch -> Memory Updated.
Garnel	He is at the Ethium Pool researching. The Pool Node can show him safely.
Assembly Hall	Make it tactical: captain, crossbows, quaggoths, cover.
Grey Burrower	Round 3 scrape, Round 4 cracks, Round 5 eruption. It attacks everyone.
Duergar retreat	They do not fight to extinction. They seal the heavy doors.
Child's Drawing	Play it quietly. It should feel sad and human, not like treasure.
Future threat	The Hobgoblin King controls most goblins on Ethium. Black dragon remains only a rumour/foreshadow.

Ethium Archive Tracker

Relic	Node	Status	Notes
Explorer's Compass	Explorer's Guild	☐ Found / ☐ Viewed	Points to nearest Ethium Stone.
Smith's Hammer	Great Forge	☐ Found / ☐ Viewed	Shows dwarf old city now duergar armoury.
Child's Drawing	Family Home	☐ Found / ☐ Viewed	Quiet emotional memory.
Pool Node	Ethium Pool	☐ Viewed	Shows Garnel researching.
Unknown Relic	Deep Chamber	☐ Glimpsed	Silhouette / connection lost.
Future: Guard Badge	City Watch	☐	Could show prison or occupied watch house.
Future: Council Seal	Council Chamber	☐	Could show leadership and later corruption.

End state to aim for: The party has learned that Ethium was not just ruins. It was a living civilisation. The duergar are occupying an ancient dwarven district. The Ethium network can show memories and current reality. The city is larger than they imagined, and every relic may unlock another piece of the truth.