

Ruins of Ethium - Session Module

Party: four level 2 characters. The Ethium pool can provide healing, so encounters can be punchy but should allow retreat, negotiation, or environmental play.

Core idea: the pool is not passive. It is a magnet and a catalyst. It draws people, creatures, and strange effects. It reacts to the stones and changes over time.

Likely paths: the party may rest at the pool, return to Fallcrest with stones for Tobbs, dig through the cave-in to deeper Ethium, or follow Garnel to another stone site - the Kruthik lair.

1. Ethium Pool - Safe Hub with Pressure

A still pool of faintly glowing blue liquid sits in a worked basin of stone. The light pulses gently, like a slow heartbeat. The air here is warm and unnervingly quiet.

The pool is a rest point, but not a neutral one. It heals, reacts to the stones, attracts danger, and hints that Ethium is changing the world around it.

Healing: once per rest, each character may use the pool to regain 1d6 HP. Drinking from it or lingering too long may cause whispers, dreamlike flashes, or a hidden corruption mark.

During combat: at initiative count 0, roll or choose a pulse: 1) all within 10 ft heal 1d4; 2) one random creature gains advantage on its next roll; 3) one random creature takes 1d6 force; 4) a 1 HP Ethium wisp appears and bursts for 1d4 if struck or touched.

Lore clue: the stonework around the pool is deliberate. It is not a natural spring. The pool is part of an older system, ritual, or wound in the ruin.

2. Encounter 1 - Night Ambush at the Pool

Enemies: 2 Hammer Bruisers, 2 Silent Knives, and the cloaked observer. Use the tracker for HP.

A faint scrape of stone. Then movement. Shapes peel away from the darkness, too late for comfort - the party is surrounded at the edge of the glowing pool.

What is happening: the Hammers and Silent Knives have followed the party down to the pool. The alliance is unstable, but they have been hired or directed to seize the stones. They do not all trust each other.

Hammers: loud, aggressive, frontal. They rush the obvious fighters, shove, grapple, and try to create space for a theft. One may be Ethium-sick, with faint blue veins and reckless behaviour.

Silent Knives: quiet flankers. They use darkness, ledges, and broken pillars. They prefer to hit an isolated character, then disengage. They are not here to die for the Hammers.

Stone theft goal: one attacker tries to grab a stone or pack and flee. This gives the fight an objective beyond killing all enemies.

Cloaked figure: visible at the back in the pool-light. He watches rather than fights. He escapes when two enemies fall, when a PC approaches, or when he is hit.

Cloaked escape: when threatened, he uses a pulse of mist or shadow, leaving an arcane trace, an unnatural footprint, or the faint smell of cold stone.

Lines to use: Hammer: "Grab the stones! That is what we are paid for!" Knife: "Too many variables. Finish it quickly." Cloaked figure: "Interesting... it responds to them."

Aftermath clues: different gang tokens, a shared payment mark, or a whispered dying line: "You do not understand... it calls to us... deeper... they are gathering."

3. Surface Travel - Between Sites

Broken stone structures jut from the ground at odd angles. What once lay buried is now rising, or being pushed up from below. The usual sounds of the wild seem distant.

Use this section if the party leaves the pool, searches the ruins above, follows tracks, or travels toward another Ethium site. The

goblin scouts and ogre encounter are overland encounters in surface ruins or natural settings.

Atmosphere: cracked paving under grass, collapsed archways, animal tracks crossing goblin tracks, brief blue glints in stone, distant chittering or rumbling.

Optional travel pressure: ask for one survival/perception style check. Success gives warning or positioning. Failure starts the next encounter with enemies in cover or the party surprised by movement.

4. Encounter 2 - Goblin Scouts in Surface Ruins

Enemies: 3 Goblin Skirmishers, 1 Goblin Warrior, 1 Bugbear. The bugbear may arrive in round 2 or start hidden.

You hear voices - sharp, nervous goblin voices - from somewhere beyond the broken walls. Then silence. Then the faint snap of a bowstring.

Scene: a broken road, ruined courtyard, fallen wall, or scrubby hillside with scattered masonry. Give the goblins cover and ways to retreat.

Goblins: they are scouts, not a warband. They shoot from cover, hide, and try to lure the party forward. They are nervous because an ogre has escaped from the goblin castle or camp.

Bugbear: the heavy hitter. It waits behind a collapsed pillar, tree trunk, or ruin edge, then charges a distracted character.

Run it dynamically: goblins should move, hide, and shout warnings. They are brave only while the bugbear is near. If the bugbear falls, the survivors may flee.

Clues: "The big one got loose!" "Boss will skin us!" "It broke the chains!" If captured, a goblin can point toward the ogre scene or mention that deeper ruins are making creatures restless.

5. Encounter 3 - Ogre Breakout

Enemies: 1 Ogre and 2 Goblin Handlers. This is a chaotic scene, not a simple balanced fight.

A massive shape lurches into view, dragging broken chains. Two goblins dart around it with spears and a dangling leg of mutton, shouting over each other as they try to keep it moving.

Scene: a woodland clearing, ruined yard, old road, stream bed, or stone archway. The ogre has escaped from the goblin castle/camp and is half-controlled by broken chains around its ankles.

Ogre behaviour: it is hungry, angry, and confused. It attacks whoever is closest, loudest, carrying food, or hurting it most. It may throw rocks, swing chains, or smash masonry.

Goblin handlers: they do not want to fight the party. They want to keep the ogre moving and alive. They use the mutton to coax it and spears to jab it away. Their big tactic is grabbing the chains to trip or slow it.

Chain trip: once per round, if both goblins are alive and near the chains, the ogre makes DC 12 STR or DEX save. On a fail it falls prone or loses its next move. A PC can help or interfere.

Player options: kill the ogre, help the goblins restrain it, use food or magic to lure it away, cut the chains, kill the goblins and face the enraged ogre, sneak around the whole scene.

Useful outcomes: a surviving goblin can give directions, warn about the goblin castle, or reveal that Ethium ruins are attracting dangerous creatures.

6. Garnel, Tobbs, and the Stones

If returning to Fallcrest: the party can bring stones to Tobbs. Word of the stones may spread. Factions may watch the streets, and Tobbs may be excited, worried, or tempted to keep them for study.

If Garnel examines writings: he can translate the dead wizard notes about the pool. Use fragments rather than a full exposition dump.

"The pool is not a source... it is a wound."

"We refined it. We thought we were perfecting ourselves."

"We became vessels."

"The deeper chambers were sealed, not to protect them, but to

contain what we had become."

Garnel hook to another site: Garnel can identify another stone location on the map. This points to the Kruthik lair, where stones have attracted a brood.

7. Digging Deeper - The Cave-in

The blocked tunnel breathes cold air through the cracks. Tools scrape stone. Somewhere beyond the rubble, something answers with a faint blue pulse.

If the party digs through the rubble near the pool, they find older chambers below Ethium. This should feel like entering the real buried city beneath the ruin.

Digging complications: unstable rubble, dust, faint whispers, tools vibrating, a glimpse of blue light through cracks. A failed check could cost time, cause noise, or minor damage, not stop progress entirely.

What lies beyond: two ancient grand halls with statues and Ethium stones, then a huge collapsed cavern and underground lake with an otyugh. Beyond that are routes toward later sessions: troglodyte caves or a duergar town occupying old Ethium ruins.

8. Ancient Grand Chambers - First True Ethium Hall

The tunnel opens into a hall far larger than expected. Tall statues line the walls. At first they seem human - elegant, calm, almost beautiful - but the longer you look, the less human they become.

Statue twist: the ancient Ethium residents look like tall elegant human-like people, but with unsettling changes: elongated limbs, too-smooth faces, hollow pupil-less eyes, long partially fused fingers, and geometric vein channels carved across skin and robes.

Interpretation: the statues are idealised portraits, ritual records, or warnings. They show people who were transformed by Ethium, becoming conduits or vessels rather than simply powerful wizards.

Exploration details: dry fountains, blue mineral seams, stone benches shaped for bodies slightly too tall, fragments of ritual writing, and two visible stones set into plinths or statue hands.

9. Encounter 4 - Echo Guardians Puzzle Combat

Enemies: 3 Echo Guardians/statues. They are slow, resilient, and tied to the room mechanism.

A low hum fills the chamber. Blue-white light begins to crawl through the carved veins of the statues. Stone fingers twitch. Heads turn. The hall remembers how to defend itself.

Trigger: bringing stones close to the dais, touching a statue, removing a stone, or making too much noise.

Core mechanic: each round, one statue or wall-vein pulses brightly. A PC can use an action to disrupt it with Arcana, Investigation, Religion, thieves tools, a targeted attack, or clever description.

Suggested DC: DC 12 to spot the active vein, DC 13 to disrupt it. A good physical plan can skip the roll or grant advantage.

Success: one guardian loses resistance, skips its next turn, or takes 1d8 force damage. **Failure:** the pulse lashes out for 1d4 force or the guardian acts normally.

Combat feel: not just hit points. Players should realise they can win faster by reading the room. This is the moment Ethium feels ancient, intelligent, and dangerous.

Vision reward: when a pulse is disrupted, a character briefly sees the ancient residents willingly standing in the hall as light flows into them. Their bodies become elegant, then wrong.

Treasure: 1-2 Ethium stones. Taking them should feel like interrupting something old rather than looting a chest.

10. Encounter 5 - Collapsed Lake and Otyugh

Enemy: 1 Otyugh, reduced to about 75 HP for level 2 characters. Use terrain and warning signs.

The worked stone gives way to a vast collapsed cavern. A black lake fills the broken floor. The smell hits first - rot, stagnant water, and something alive beneath the surface.

Scene: a huge cave collapse has opened the lower city to a filthy lake. Broken walkways and ledges circle the water. Refuse, bones, and old ruin debris gather near the shallows.

Warning signs: ripples moving against the water, old bones dragged into piles, a tentacle-shaped trail through slime, a floating pack from a previous explorer.

Terrain: water is difficult terrain; ledges are narrow; falling in gives the otyugh control. Let players use loose stones, rope, high ground, and the environment.

Purpose: after the elegant horror of the halls, this is gross survival horror. It also blocks deeper routes and suggests something has been feeding on explorers and cave denizens.

Beyond the lake: two routes can be seen or foreshadowed for later sessions: a foul tunnel toward troglodyte caves, and a worked passage with hammer marks toward a duergar settlement in old Ethium ruins.

11. Alternate Route - Garnel Stone Site: Kruthik Lair

Garnel can mark another place on the map where Ethium stones are likely to be found. The stones have attracted a Kruthik brood. This is a tight 3-room mini-dungeon with an Aliens feel: skittering movement, eggs, walls and ceilings, and a queen boss.

General Kruthik behaviour: they climb, burrow, attack in pairs, use pack tactics, and retreat through small tunnels. They are drawn to stones and nest around them.

12. Kruthik Room 1 - Swarm Tunnels

The walls are pocked with holes. Dust sifts from the ceiling. The ground twitches underfoot. Then something skitters fast across the wall.

Encounter: 6-8 Young Kruthiks total. Start with 5 on the board and bring 1-2 more in round 2 if needed.

Run it: this introduces the swarm. They should not stand in a line. They climb walls, attack in pairs, and emerge from cracks. Use sound and movement to make the party feel surrounded.

Balance: pack tactics can spike damage. Start lower and add reinforcements only if the party is handling it.

Clue: tunnels are only 2.5 ft wide, showing how the brood moves through stone and suggesting adults or the queen have made larger passages deeper in.

13. Kruthik Room 2 - Brood Chamber

Clusters of pale eggs cling to the stone in wet strands. Shadows move inside them. Larger chitin shapes crouch among the brood, watching.

Encounter: 2 Adult Kruthiks plus 3-4 Young Kruthiks. Optionally use 2 adults only if the party is worn down.

Adults: these are the defenders. They stay near eggs and young, use pack tactics, and skitter away when hit. They feel like intelligent predators even if they are animalistic.

Egg pressure: after 2 rounds, or when an area attack hits the eggs, 1d2 young hatch. A PC can destroy an egg cluster (AC 10, HP 5) to prevent a later hatch.

Tactical choice: focus the adults, burn actions destroying eggs, or risk a growing swarm. This keeps the fight interesting for combat-loving players.

14. Optional Side Room - Tombs and Dead Explorers

A side crack opens into a low chamber of old tombs. The stone coffins are broken, and newer bodies lie webbed among the ancient dead.

Use if pacing allows: this can be a treasure room, a quiet horror beat, or a small undead complication. It also explains where the treasure cards come from.

Undead option: 2-3 skeletons or a single stronger tomb guardian rise if the tombs are disturbed. Keep this optional so the lair does not become too long.

Fallen adventuring group: skeletal explorers caught by the brood. Their kit includes 2 healing potions, coins, the Stone of Echoing Vitality, and a journal scrap.

Journal fragment: "They were drawn to the stones like moths. We thought we could take them. We were wrong."

15. Kruthik Room 3 - Queen Chamber

A huge chamber opens around you. Egg clusters pulse among blue-lit stones. A massive chitinous shape clings to the far wall. Smaller creatures crawl over it. Then the queen begins to move.

Encounter: 1 Kruthik Queen/Elder plus 2 Young Kruthiks at the start. More young may hatch as drama requires.

Queen feel: this is the Aliens-style finale. She is a living nest: layered chitin, acid-wet mandibles, a splitting screech, and young moving around her body.

Abilities: multiattack, acid spit, brood spawn, terrifying chitter. Do not overuse every ability at once; escalate through phases.

Fight flow: Phase 1 - queen hangs back, uses spikes/acid while young engage. Phase 2 - brood spawn adds pressure. Phase 3 - queen closes, climbs, and multiattacks. Phase 4 at about 20 HP - final aggressive push.

Egg clusters: AC 10, HP 5. Destroying them reduces or prevents brood spawn. Removing stones from among eggs risks hatching young.

Reward: 2-3 Ethium stones in the egg mass. The brood has been attracted to them and partly nests around them.

16. Treasure Parcel - Dead Explorers

Found on the fallen adventurers: 2 potions of healing, 18 gp, 7 sp, rope or mundane expedition gear, a torn journal fragment, and one unusual magical item.

Healing potions: standard 2d4+2 healing. One may have a faint blue shimmer, hinting it has been close to Ethium too long.

Stone of Echoing Vitality: a small smooth blue stone, faintly warm. Once per day, as a bonus action, heal 1d6 HP and gain +1 to your next saving throw.

Hidden effect: each time it is used, secretly roll d6. On a 1, the user hears whispers or sees a brief distortion. No mechanical penalty yet - this plants the Ethium corruption thread.

17. Egg Chamber Stones - Risk and Reward

The stones are embedded among eggs and resin. Taking them should be tense, not automatic.

Extraction: DEX/Sleight of Hand DC 12, or a good careful plan. Failure causes cracking and may hatch 1 young. Removing multiple stones escalates: first safe, second cracks, third hatches a swarm or alerts the queen.

Player choices: grab fast and risk a swarm, extract carefully, destroy eggs first, or leave some stones behind.

18. Future Paths

Troglodyte caves: feral denizens living in the deeper stink-filled tunnels, possibly warped by old Ethium seepage.

Duergar town: a grim settlement occupying old Ethium ruins, mining or industrialising what the ancient city left behind.

Faction pressure: the Hammers, Silent Knives, Brotherhood, Valnaran family, Axirian agents, Tobbs, and Garnel can all pull the party toward different choices around the stones.

Core campaign question: are the stones treasure, tools, symptoms, or bait?