

A Tomb in the Desert

A 5th Edition D&D Adventure for 3-4 level 9-10 characters.

This adventure is designed to be played as a stand-alone, one-shot adventure, but could be adapted to be a fairly quick (4-6 hour) stop along the way. This was designed to fit into the world of Alberon, in a desert just south of The Old City of Dungannon, but could occur in any desert in your setting. There are small hints at a community of wood elves that existed on The Somber Coast of Alberon; those oddly specific elvish writings have lore tie-in with the world. If you are using another setting, the strangely rigid elvish can simply be a result of the mindflayer forcing the elves it used to build this place.

Read In

You have been riding for about an hour and a half, lulled slightly by the steady sound of widemare hooves navigating the hot sands south of the Old City of Dungannon, and just north of the dangerous mesas of the Kua-tah Badlands. There are no windows in this coach, and although it's stayed warmer than expected, the temperature within is now no warmer than 60 degrees when the whole craft suddenly comes to a stop, the horses up front letting out slight whinnies that one of you can tell, is in relief.

Driver: "We have reached our destination! Please exit the vehicle, mind your step, and brace yourselves, this domicile reflects a lot of light!"

(Horses are Robert and Robert, they thought Robert was a girl and named him Roberta, but changed it when they figured out he was not.)

Who emerges first? (Allow the players to emerge and describe themselves.)

(After they emerge)

Driver: "Now it's about eight o'clock. I'll be back around six in the afternoon to collect survivors! Haha, just kidding, you'll do great, alright, be seeing you!"

He leaps up on the carriage and whips the reins "Robert, Robert, lets get moving!"

Entryway

A large door, carved of a tan, almost rust-colored sandstone, looms before you. It is differentiated from the huge, what appear to be polished, sandstone blocks that form the rest of this massive, nearly 250' high structure is a slight turret that rises out of the wall that faces you perhaps 70 feet up, and writing over the door blocks themselves. Inscribed over the door is a

symbol resembling a mobius strip stretched out width-wise, along with an inscription in elvish... (history check would show it is an odd form of elvish, associated most strongly with a collective of wood-elves who disappeared from The Somber Cape in 1,322 T.A. in it's strangely rigid structure.)

*“Woven through the stars, a path you shall see
But first bend the light, to MIND what you seek”*

And beneath that

“Waste your water to slake my thirst.”

(Pouring more than a cupful of water dumped into the sand will seep into small grates a foot beneath the sand, causing the doors to open)

Narrative Detail: Somber Cape Elvish Writing

The Somber Cape had the largest community of elves in Dominion, who disappeared almost overnight in 1,322 T.A. when they fell under the influence of an elder brain and the society/horde it had built up around itself. This odd, rigid elvish script reflects the writing of the abyssal language, performed by the bodies of those affected in the only language they could use, who did their best to resist in what ways they could. The emphasis on MIND is the first such warning.

Additionally, creatures such as a Sphinx and The Devil will both, in similar ways try to resist; this is the first clue in a string of similar details that might prepare the players for what lay ahead.

Foyer

The massive door leads into a smaller room, almost a sandstone cylinder that rises up to the height of the pyramid, stacks of bricks. Here, you see, is the source of the small protrusion over the door. It rises perhaps 75 feet, and the top fifteen or so feet are lined with layered shelves. Small tiles, like those that might constitute a mosaic, line them, in vast arrays of colors, textures, and material. Some glint with metallic splendor in this dim light, though none so brightly as a small mirror-finished tile near the top that is reflecting a single shaft of sunlight that provides most of the light in this space.

Below, and more immediately around you, there are two doors, one on the west wall, and another on the east. Each is a mighty contraption of metal, with a series of visible bolts, levers, cogs, and wheels machined into their construction. Each doorway is set in a sandstone frame carved with arcane glyphs.

(Western lens has “Iron” on it and will lead to The Track of the Righteous)

(Eastern lens has “Gold” written on it, and will lead to The Track of Folly.)

Redirecting the light at the top of the tall space to point into either lens will open the path to the first room in that Track.

Alternate Entrance: If your players decide they’re going to try to scale a polished marble pyramid, this would make an excellent reward for a fantastic athletics check or some other elaborate plan that allows them to reach the turret. They could climb through the space that allows the single ray of sun in.

Track of the Righteous

The Track of the Righteous was the owner of the Tomb’s design to find a perfect candidate to transfer his consciousness into. As a result, it heavily challenges the intellect of those who traverse it. This path has a puzzle within Room One, a Role Play opportunity (and possible encounter) in Room Two, and a large reward (and a sign of contempt from Zeistriess) in Room Three to promote a little bit of exploring, before finally leading to a confrontation with Zeistriess, the Alhoon.

Room One - Alchemist’s Gate

The room is small, and slightly L-shaped, with most of the room occupying a 15x10’ space. But with the final 5 feet on the long side being set into the wall slightly, allowing for built-in shelves of near-petrified timber. There are jars and clay pots on some of these shelves, others are broken, and tossed around.

There is a large wooden table, coated in dust, with a dark quartzite top. Upon this altar, there is a mortar and pestle, three small stone trays, and a single glass bottle.

A glass jar with shriveled up, crimson berries.	(Goodberries) Healing Properties
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An adobe clay pot with crumbling dirt in it.	(Grave Dirt) Necromantic properties.
Leather pouch with small bones in it.	(Ear bones) Increases sensory things
Dish of glass shards	(Glass) Will make you bleed, its glass
Jar of crystalized liquid	(Molasses) Slowing effects
Clay pot of what looks like glitter.	(Colored Mica) Enriching effect
Ash in a shallow pewter dish	(Ash of mistletoe and spruce) Stealth enhancing
Square glass bottle with a small fuzzy thing within	(cocoon) Promotes change
A glass box full of withered up, dry crickets	(cricket) Ups dexterity
A leather pouch of feathers.	(owl) Flying and knowing
A bottle of fireflies	(firefly) Fire protection (CRITICAL)
Spheres floating in jelly	(human and dragonborn eyes) Cursed!
Wooden box of guano flakes	(guano) Creates MORE fire
Canvas sachet of incense	(150gp of incense cones) Good for seeing the future or knowing things
Phosphorescent Moss in a glass and brass terrarium	(moss) Can be used to make a potion to resist Zeistress' darkness.
A tin of silver powder	(silver powder, 100gp) Seeing things (esp. invis.)
A flask of crystal	(Alchemist's Base) Essential for the creation of most potions

clear, cold water	
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There is a roaring wall of flame that bars the path ahead, making it difficult to even see the hall or room beyond, so fierce is the intensity. It is a magical fire, and cannot be dispelled by magical or non-magical means short of a wish spell. In regards to a dispel magic spell, this fire is considered a 6th level spell. This fire will continue to burn under water, creating a roiling, blinding rush of bubbles 10' around it. Spells can

This room provides several opportunities for players to not only pass through the alchemist's fire, but also potentially brew potions to help in rooms ahead! Attached are my recommendations, but feel free to add more ingredients or take some away, or allow combinations of your own!

Potion	Ingredients	Effect
Potion of Healing	Goodberry, glitter, alchemist's base	Upon being drunk, restore 3d4+4 HP.
Potion of Truesight	Incense, Feathers, Small Bones	Gain Truesight for 1 minute.
Potion of Radiance	Alchemist's base, phosphorescent moss, silver powder	Daylight spell cast centered on drinker for one minute.
Filter of Silence	Feathers, Cocoon, Ash	+10 to all stealth checks for 1 minute
Owlform Draught	Feathers, incense, glitter	The drinker Wild Shapes into an owl for one hour
Potion of The Phoenix	Any use of the firefly without the eye	Consuming this grants the drinker Immunity to fire for 1 minute.
CURSE	Any consumption of the eye	Consuming this grants all hostile creatures advantage on attacks made against the drinker for 1 hour. Remove curse or a similar spell/effect will end this effect.

An alchemy check with a fairly low DC (I would advise 14 for a level 10 party) can create the potion, or you can allow the potion to be made purely based on finding the ingredients. If you

are running this as part of a larger campaign, I would recommend having them make a check, as it will allow you to curtail players hoarding these items to mass-produce potions.

Continuity: One of the things I really enjoy is creating reliable consistency in my games. The ingredients above were chosen because they all constitute key components in a variety of spells related to the potion itself (excluding glass, that's just to tempt a little chaos in your party. One person will eat it, almost always.) This means that they can intuit that a cocoon that causes a shift in physical form from a potion, might mean that this scroll case, covered in a thin gauze of cocoon-like silk, might contain a scroll of polymorph, even if they can't identify it. It rewards players being observant, which I try to do as much as possible.

An incorrect potion will have the creature passing through take 3d6+4 fire damage, and get pulled into the Track of Folly within the middle of the Crypt.

Room Two - The Sphinx Auracastus

Walking through the fire leads to a wide, 20' by 60' hallway. The right side has many pots and planters with nothing but dirt and the withered remains of plant life long dead, mostly dust itself. The right side is recessed inward, and has six overstuffed navy and gold chairs, dusty but unfaded in the dark. There is a long shelf, though at a glance the shelves seem barren. On top of the shelf, which comes up to about three feet tall, there rests an open book, a small etching in the stone above it. Resting, across the open pages, there is a quill.

The plaque, in the same strange elvish, states "There is no shame in HELP, you may ask one question." (HELP again being a sign of this being written against the engraver's will.)

The corridor opens into a room beyond, but expands to the left out of site around the wall of the hallway.

Hallway of Helpfulness: Before, or after the Sphinx?

I placed the 20x60' "hallway of helpfulness" in front of the sphinx itself to tempt the players to "waste" a question on the book. The book itself is a way for Zeistriess, the Mindflayer at the deepest point of this pyramid, to flaunt superiority over those he is considering as candidates to house his consciousness: "I will give you an answer, if only you'd ask."

As you draw near, the room comes into full focus: a miniature pyramid, carved out so as to assume the shape of a massive throne dominates the tall but relatively close-quartered space. Seated across it, coated in dust, is a massive stone sphinx, its arms draped over the edge of the

throne, it's tail extending down and seeming to connect, as a support perhaps, with the floor. The floor here is sand.

As they enter, if they look up, they'll see a tattered leather cloak hanging about 30' above the door. (*Cloaker, Monster Manual pg.41*)

Auracastus will wake up if they address him, his massive, muscley lion-like form stirring dust as it does so, the wings stretching and fluttering, leaving behind trails. He is bound against his will, in great pain, to guard this doorway with three riddles. He uses what will he has to make the answers a warning. If they do attack him, for some reason, (*Gynosphinx, Monster Manual pg. 282*)

AURACASTUS: "Riddles I have for you... please, answer fast... to sleep is to dream, and to dream is to last..."

"You may change me often, but I'll always be yours/
I proceed your manners, and sleep when I'm bored/
What am I?" (ANSWER: A Mind)

"I fill a void, that tears away/
At that you've built, since your first day/
Consume, partake, and draw within/
To go without me will leave you thin/
What am I?" (ANSWER: Eating)

"I grow in fields, a honey'd cob/
Alone I stalk, in wind I bob/
I ring, I'm rung, I can be bent/
In duress, you'd like me leant/
What am I?" (ANSWER: Ear)

(The full series of rhymes is A MIND EAT EAR) If asked about this, as the dust drifts back up, and relief relaxes the tense facial structure of the sphinx, the sphinx will state:)

"What I am, binds those I hold/
To obey laws, they've been foretold/
An angel's kiss could break this spell/
But by normal means, this will not be quelled/
What... (Yawn...) am I...?" (Will fall back into it's more statuesque form at this point, it's face finally serene.

Success on all three riddles allows the party to continue on to the final room: the room of readiness. A failure drops them into the Deathknot Gauntlet.

Room Three - The Room of Readiness

You find yourselves faced with a massive wooden platform bathed in a shaft of sunlight. It rises in 20 seconds and drops in the same. After over 100 pounds is loaded it starts to move.

At the top, there is a 20' tall, 30'x10' room. There are small openings near the top that beam sunlight down, indicating you are near the top of the pyramid. Four shafts of light fall, one on the lift you took up, one on a thin mat of sage leaves (it will cast prestidigitation and clean their clothes as they walk on it, They must have stepped on it to activate the lift.)

Stepping on the final platform, itself spotless in this dusty environment, will bring them into The True Tomb of Zeistreiss.

Track of Folly

The Track of Folly is focused entirely on testing the body. It's designed to destroy trespassers and those who cannot at least offer flesh worthy of Zeistreiss.

Room One - The Crypt

Entering into the crypt through the doorway marked "Gold" will lead to a room with six large stone houses. They are large mausoleums with stone doors that will slam open to release the six mummies within. There is a tight latticework of stone on the back of the mausoleums, which would allow a careful investigator a glimpse of the mummy, though maybe no indication it is alive. Light shining upon the mummy will activate all of them.

(Mummies, Monster Manual pg. 228)

Room Two - The Deathknot Gauntlet

The second room in the Track of Folly is The Deathknot Gauntlet. It is a swerving hallway of traps, obstacles, and dangerous things designed to test the true athletic capability of those attempting passage to the final room.

Door of Strength

An iron door with a single, small handle at the bottom, near flush with the ground. Lifting the door with this handle would be hard, but certainly possible.

A 22+ on an athletics check will keep this door up. An athletics check of their raw strength score doubled will open it enough for them to go through and drop the door once more. For spells and other effects and abilities that regard weight, the door weighs about 500 pounds.

Either way, the door's handle and underside is barbed; a failure will yield 4d4+4 piercing damage. A success still yields 2d4+4 piercing damage.

Beyond this, there is a 10'x10' room.

Chaotic Pendulum

Suspended from the ceiling, slowly swinging back and forth, orbiting the room in something just more chaotic than a figure 8, is a huge metal pendulum. It's passage is with enough force that the ground below shakes, though it hangs about 1' above the ground. Passing straight through causes no issues, but attempting to pause here will take a DC: 12 acrobatics check or will take 6d6+4 bludgeoning damage and be knocked prone. To your left, 10' beyond, there is another hall.

Urgency: The pendulum in this space is less about the check, which has a very low DC, is to prevent the group from investigating the nature of the Glaiveway, possibly encouraging them to rush in.

Glaiveway

...and you see swinging at 5' intervals five glaives, swinging with a mighty WOOSH as the heavy blades cleave the air. The hallway is 30' long, with alternating squares between the glaives. Running through will require just a single acrobatics check, but the result determines how many glaives they get hit by.

>6	5d10+(10) slashing damage.
6-8	4d10+(8) slashing damage.
8-12	3d10+(6) slashing damage.
13-15	2d10+(4) slashing damage.
15-20	1d10+(2) slashing damage.
20+	Dodge ALL glaives.

Beyond this, there is a pair of sandstone columns that rise up just 3' and then terminate in a sort of built-in bowl that seems to hold about three gallons of water. One's bowl is crafted of iron, the other is made of gold. In each, the water glistens, as clear as if it had just been filled. Neither dust nor rust coats these inserts, and the feeling of magic tickles the back of your mind.

(Drinking from the gold one will provide a nice drink of water, and then the person will melt through the cracks in the floor. They will make a DC: 15 con check or take one point of exhaustion. They land prone in The Devil's Deal, nearly extinguishing the candles.)

(Drinking from the iron one will provide a sweet, almost perfumed water, like a too-strong rosewater drink. The user then becomes incorporeal, sinking through the cool sandstone, healing 6d4+4 HP and arrive in the first room of the final encounter.)

Review: This is a call-back to the beginning of the session for those who chose iron. It will see if they recognize that they had chosen an easier path previously, and also gives those who chose gold to show if they recognize it may have been a mistake.

Room Three - The Devil's Deal

The final room is a diamond-shaped space, 30' on a side, though in the middle, a series of small flames burn dimly amidst arcane runes. Within is a devil, seemingly trapped. The door ahead is locked, and he will confide that there is no safe way to open it. He will mention that being bound here prevents him from offering too much assistance, a true shame. He will say his purpose is his lord's to know, but will hint that freeing him would allow him to help them more.

The Devil is, like the sphinx, bound here against its will, laying dormant for decades. It is still sharp, though perhaps somewhat anxious as it does not know when it is (but should the date be mentioned, he would reveal, with some relief, that only four hundred years had passed. "Just a nap, then...")

The Devil is tasked with trying to dissuade the travelers to proceed, or to trick them into signing a contract. He might offer weapons of hellfire that are mere illusions that a DC:17 investigation check would reveal that they are not real. Otherwise, they seem to have real weight, and can be interacted with. These could be whatever weapons the DM wishes, but we recommend you use simple and/or martial melee weapons. Use the weapon's base damage, +1d6 necrotic damage, for the duration of time that this illusion is allowed. He might also offer them a greater treasure, should they free him. Freeing him will immediately start an encounter.

They will need to trick the devil somehow to get him to open the portal to the final encounter. This could be convincing him that they are planning to slay his master, which will set him free. They might also succeed on a DC:17 intimidation skill check.

If they do provoke it needlessly into combat, (*Horned Devil, Monster Manual pg. 74*)

Final Encounter

A shattered door assembles in front of you and opens. There is a tunnel of what looks like hundreds of shifting mirrors, strings of reflective material perhaps... and as your eyes focus in, you can see dozens, if not close to a hundred different threads of... you. You see slight variations, here and there, but these seem to be, perhaps, strands of different realities, splitting and tying together, some winking out of existence as others stretch forward on and out of sight, lost beyond the shifting portal about 30' beyond.

Stepping through, you are vaguely aware of walking straight, but at times it feels as if your steps are along a path that twists in on itself. As your eyes wander across the realities around you, it is impossible to maintain a peripheral view of anything. You could almost swear at times, it's as if you begin to walk up a curling path and upon the ceiling, but all at once, the door seems to loom up in front of you, and just as you fear stumbling into it, it swings open...

You emerge into a small room with a steel door in front. No sandstone here... these walls are a very odd form of steel. There is a sort of blue cast to the metal. Written in elvish you see the word "Silence."

Glancing to your right, you are aware of how much time has passed... assuming this odd, strung together clock of clay and metal, despite the years, despite being coated with dust, still ticks onward tirelessly. It reads: (Insert time here.) There is the slight drip of water nearby, and you notice a small bit of moisture dropping from the ceiling to the ground, causing a slight patch of moisture in a shallow pool within the sandstone, worn away over the decades, still holding no more than a cup of water.

(Silencing the clock and the water drops will make the door swing open.)

Five feet in front of you, the sandstone ends, and you see sand in a 10'x10' patch. On either side of the patch, steel walls extend out ten feet in either direction before transitioning abruptly from steel to stone for five more feet, and then bending into hallways on either side. Beyond the dirt, you see a huge, stone sarcophagus, though it is hard to make out detail from this vantage point. Beyond that, you see ten feet of space bathed in a surreal glow of galactic colors melding together in an inky, space-like fabric that seems to ruffle, as if in a breeze.

If they advance in a bit, down either hallway there are doors that can be unlocked with a DC:18 lockpicking check. The back right one is trapped with a DC: 15 dex save, 3d6 fire damage on a fail, half on a success.

By getting within 5' of the sarcophagus, the subtle eldritch runes will glow to life in a blazing red, and the top of the sarcophagus will SCCCHHHHTHUD to the ground, and rising, in roiling red energy that paints the otherwise dark room in stark shadows, his long fingers unfurling. A portion of the red energy dettaches and stretches into a physical form within the creature's

hand, becoming a staff of sandstone with a single, green-gold iron cylinder, used almost as a grip. A subtle, monastic pattern encircles it, almost invisible but vaguely holographic once seen.

Zeistriess The Alhoon will float inches from the top of the casket, the red light coalescing in a sort of haze around his feet. His voice reaches your ears, but seems to tickle the insides of the head as well.

ZEISTRIESS: "Ohh..... how good it feels to breathe once more..." slowly, he will float down, so that instead of hovering above the empty stone bed that held him, he is mere inches from the ground.)

He casts a blank gaze with large, alien eyes of pure inky black.

<p><i>Motivation:</i> Zeistriess wants to give up the form of temporarily undead mindflayer that is falling apart. Whichever character has the highest intelligence score will be his primary focus.</p>
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ZEISTRIESS: "Interesting. Which one of you bore passage here?"

ZEISTRIESS: "I require a physical form, this one is failing me, and my mission isn't complete. Even a boundless mind requires only one shell... by brawn or by brain you've made it to me... you are each a suitable host... so choose... and perhaps I will set the others free..."

Zeistriess CAN open a gate to allow the others to exit to safety. He wont until he has the body under his control, and even then will likely just slay the other two.

Zeistriess is a modified Alhoon (*Alhoon, Volos Guide to Monsters pg. 172*) with the following modifications:

Additional Spells: Zeistriess can cast Magic Jar, with a Spell Save DC of 18. Zeistriess also has access to Planeshift, which it will only use to flee.)

Legendary Actions: Zeistriess has three legendary actions. Only one legendary action may be used at the end of each enemy's turn. Zeistriess regains all legendary actions at the start of his turn.

Call Upon Stone (1/Day) - Zeistriess reaches out with his mind and activates an (*Earth Elemental, Monster Manual pg. 124*)

Shift - Zeistriess can utilize the swirling energy at his feet to move 5' in any direction that is not considered difficult terrain, and not occupied by another creature. This does not provoke an opportunity attack.

Cast Spell - (2 Legendary Actions) Zeistriess may cast a spell from his spell list with a casting time of Action, Reaction, or Bonus Action)

When Zeistriess dies, the temple will begin to fall apart. The pace is up to you... it may melt, the sand slowly drifting away in the wind as the blocks crumble and the party cautiously leaves, or all at once a catastrophic failure begins and it is a race against the clock to escape, but this is where this adventure ends, and your next adventure starts!

This was an original one-shot, designed as part of the Adventures in Alberon world. This one-shot was live-streamed, and can be seen at <https://youtu.be/hIN3wL0eEMo>

Watch Adventures in Alberon live every Friday at 8:30pm EST only on <https://www.twitch.tv/AlberonRPG>

This one-shot adventure is intended to be free to use, forever. This adventure may be used in part or in whole in streams, broadcasts, etc. so long as Adventures in Alberon is acknowledged. This adventure, along with other free content, will be available at www.AlberonRPG.com

Questions, concerns, feedback can all be directed to work@alberonrpg.com